

Ensuring the Quality of Ethiopian Higher Education in the Face of the Challenges of the 21st Century

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Abstract: Cognizant of the decisive role education plays to speed up the overall socio-economic progress of the country, the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has given a high priority to education in its strategy of capacity building and economic development. Since the issuance of the Education and Training Policy, efforts have been made to improve higher education in quality and accessibility. Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes have been strengthened and expanded. Student enrolment has increased in the nation as a result of the opening of four new government universities in various regional states. These activities and plans of actions by themselves should be seen optimistically. More important, however, is the contents' package. The contents and the nature of higher education curricula should be redefined within the context of the emerging local and global political, economic and social factors. It seems that at the dawn of the 21st century, more than ever before, the contemporary world history is being dramatically affected by demographic pressure, scientific and technological progress. This dramatic upheaval of resultant factors from all angles thus calls for Ethiopian educators to think about their higher education quality seriously. The aim of this paper is to provoke thinking on this admittedly complex area - ensuring quality of higher education curricula to meet the needs of the Ethiopian generation, contemporary, or beyond. By doing so, it might contribute to the enrichment of higher Education policies and capacity building programmes, which have been put in place by the Federal Government of Ethiopia. Drawing data from both primary and secondary sources, informed attempts are made to envisage the colour Ethiopian higher education have had in the century, especially the curricula. This in turn is believed to raise the awareness of the concerned parties to react in time.

General Background

The focus being given to education by the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) is extremely encouraging. It is part of the global resurgence of interest in education. The FDRE seems to have realised that education is the gateway to future economic prosperity in Ethiopia and the chosen instrument for combating unemployment. It is very well accentuated in many of the

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recent educational documents of the country that education is the sole driving force behind scientific and technological advance and an essential prerequisite for cultural vitality spearheading all forms of social progress and equality. Safeguarding democratic values and individual success all remain far-fetched dreams without education, which has always been the agent of self-regulation for an orderly, disciplined, conscientious, and ethical social community.

Many of these stated values of education, especially, of higher education, have been very well articulated in the overall capacity building programmes and policy documents of the country (MOE ESDP –2:2002/03-2004/05, plan: 2).

Since the issuance of the Education and Training Policy (ETP) in 1994, accompanied with educational sector development programmes, efforts have been made to improve higher education in quality and accessibility. Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes have been strengthened and expanded. Higher education overall student enrolment has increased in the nation. A total of 26898 students were enrolled in the government higher learning institutions while a total of 101,829 students were enrolled in all regular, evening and 'Kiremt' (Summer) government institution programmes in 1994 E.C (Education Statistics Annual abstract, 2001/02: 8). These figures are expected to rise soon as a result of the increase of the number of government universities from four to eight. A higher education capacity building programme has been mapped out. Proclamations for organising and establishing technical, vocational and higher education have been issued in the year 2003 and 2004. These higher education and training reform policies and capacity building programmes are expected to play a decisive role in the development efforts of the federal government, regional states, and the private sectors at large.

Consolidating the training capacity of higher learning institutions, improving their leadership and management and restructuring the system are some of the areas to be undertaken by the capacity

building programme of the country. In realizing these mainline objectives, the programme would carry out activities such as increasing enrolment in higher education, ensuring relevance of the education and training programmes, and improving institutional efficiency as stipulated in the plan document. It seems to be high time now, at a time when the government is taking commendable initiatives to bring about change in higher education in a fashion that would gear education towards solving social and economic problems, to examine these policy documents in academic studies whether they enable the country's higher education to stand on strong foundation in the face of challenges that are likely to arise in the immediate future. This predictive analysis study can perhaps contribute to higher education quality.

Objectives and Significance of the Study

The need for a redefinition and specification of curricula subscribes to the general axiom that education should continuously recognise the changing human needs and aspirations both from inside and outside.

With a view to this major target, the study attempts to survey and analyse major higher education documents such as policies, proclamations, and curricula, and predict rising local and international social, economic, and political factors that are likely to influence our current higher education planning and implementation. It envisages some general approaches in educational policy redefinition with a view to provide quality higher education. The study explores specific areas of focus Ethiopia's higher education policy and practice should incorporate for better addressing the needs of the country. It may motivate research and development issues in the area of higher education as an in-built mechanism into the system to always guarantee quality and relevance of the service the system provides.

Any predictive discussion on the futurity of higher education of this country should focus on societal factors that influence future educational thinking and practice. Education by its very nature is

dynamic and every country needs to reformulate and restate its educational policy and practice in line with particular needs.

The educational policy and practices are driven by two types of perhaps complementary forces: the universal human needs and aspirations that are common everywhere and the regional and national contextual factors that are context-bound.

Education in Ethiopia -A Brief Overview

General Education

In order to gain a clear insight into the present status of education and higher education in Ethiopia, it seems sensible to go back for a while and capture highlights in the historical development of the country's education in general.

Ethiopia is well known for its church-related education, which is associated with the Orthodox Church. This traditional church education goes back to the 4th century A.D. at the height of the Aksumite civilization. It remained dominant from 13thc– 16th century giving rise to church literature. The indigenous church education system in particular may be divided into three phases. The three phases seem to parallel the Western-oriented education system. The primary schools, secondary schools, and the higher education in the Western – oriented education are more or less paralleled by what are called 'Qum tsehefet', 'Zema Bet', and "Quoine Bet" schools respectively in the Ethiopian indigenous church school system (Habtemariam, 1970).

The Orthodox Church and the Koran educational tradition have had an important place in the socio-cultural history of Ethiopia, with the former, according to Pankhurst, remaining powerful in Ethiopia for over 1000 years. Some of the impacts of the approaches to teaching and learning used in traditional education on contemporary state education are obedience to authority, heavy dependence on rote

learning, close relationship between learning and doing, and mastery of what is essentially a stable body of knowledge passed on through generations (Amare, 1967; Fulass, 1974). Especially, the close relationship between learning and doing as commendable legacy of the traditional education has been incorporated in the present Educational and Training Policy of Ethiopia.

Modern Western type education in Ethiopia is said to be 100 years old. Writers, for example, Markakis (1975), relate the introduction of modernization in Ethiopia in general and that of Western type of education in particular with Emperor Menelik II who ruled the country from 1836–1913. The driving forces behind expanding modern Western like secular education in Ethiopia were the need to preserve a modern centralized power and the need to run a modern bureaucracy on the part of the military governments. Prior to this, however, the traditional educational system had served the nobility to sustain political power for several decades (Gebremedhin, 1993).

The first minister of education in the country was appointed during the time of Lij EYassu (between 1913–1916) (Maaza, 1966), after which the opening of a number of primary schools followed. It was during the time of Emperor Haileselassie I (1930 –1974) that a significant development was registered in the education sector. The development was virtually in all aspects of education: educational structure, teacher training, educational management and co-operation. Ethiopian education after 1936 –1941 was generally modelled following the British education system. The syllabus, teaching materials and even teachers were all imported from England to prepare Ethiopian students for the General Certificate Examination of the University of London (Nuru, 2000).

The advent of Western-oriented secondary education in particular was characterized by the diversity of both types and purposes of schools. There were academic secondary schools opened only for girls. There were also academic secondary schools opened only for boys. Technical secondary schools catered for the service of training

students in some vocations. Secretaries, accountants, office managers, business administrators all graduated from a commercial secondary school, which was opened for boys and girls in 1945. Beside the government secondary schools, there were also Catholic and Protestant missionary schools.

It was at the start of the twentieth century that school curriculum was introduced to the Ethiopian schools. But uniform and standard curriculum for schools was lacking until 1974/1948. The first curriculum, issued in 1948/49 by the then Board of Education, had targeted to meet, following the advent of the British academic personnel, the requirements of the University of London General Certificate examination. Since then, secondary schools curricula were revised several times with the 1958/59 curriculum characterized by some sort of prior needs analysis based on the social, economic, and environmental realities of Ethiopia. This made it different from other curricula prior to it. Yet, with many Ethiopians' dissatisfaction with these curricula, the then Government, between October 1971 and August 1972, introduced the Education Sector Review Programme.

Influenced by Marxist Leninist Ideology, the curricula during the military regime were revised at least two times. These were the transitional curriculum for general education and the polytechnic education curriculum. Education during the military regime, in both curricula, was solely meant to promote Marxist-Leninist ideals.

The transitional curriculum did not follow any set of curriculum design. Academic, vocational, technical and ideological issues were its contents. On the other hand, the polytechnic based education curriculum focused on polytechnic education across primary, secondary and tertiary schools.

Education during the time of the military government in general seems to have given more emphasis to quantity than quality. The regime's socio-economic, political and educational policies gravely

failed to appreciate the realities on the ground (Gebremedhin, 1993; Nuru, 2000).

Many scholars welcomed the issuance of the present Education and Training Policy in 1994 for it addressed equity, efficiency, quality, and access for education. In this policy, the country's education was meant to be characterized both in its input and output by such features as democracy, professionalism, effectiveness, efficiency, coordination, and decentralization. In a bid to widen educational opportunities, the Government introduced The Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP) in 1996.

Higher Education

Following the advent of western education in Ethiopia, primary schools had been given priority in the expansion of the country's education sector. It was perhaps because of this that a training school had been opened in 1944/5 to train teachers for primary schools.

Later, however, the establishment of the University College of Addis Ababa in 1950 enabled the country to train secondary school teachers. The evolution of higher education in general in Ethiopia may be linked to Addis Ababa University (Bridges and Marew, 2000). A section of the then Faculty of Arts of AAU that developed into a Faculty of Education and still recently developed into a College of Education in 2003 was a starting point for teacher training in Ethiopia.

Prior to the 1952 university level professional teacher training, there were other institutions already established for primary school teacher training. A serious complaint, however, arose about the initial professional teacher training under the section in AAU and the teacher trainings in other previously opened institutions. The big gap between what the trainees were expected to teach in their target schools and the packages of the training institutions curricula (a problem that still seems to prevail in many higher education

institutions in Ethiopia) was the source of the complaint. The curricula of these training institutions usually gave emphasis to university or college academic courses.

Following the seizure of power by the Military Government, Addis Ababa University was not alone in carrying the responsibility of offering higher education in the country. Various branches of this University in various regions and other colleges and universities like the Alamaya University and the former Asmara University were also centres of higher education.

The opening of higher education institutions, public and private seems to have accelerated in Ethiopia since the issuance of the Education and Training Policy by the FDRE. Because one of the aims of the Policy is to ensure equity and fairness in education among beneficiaries, many colleges and universities have been opened all over the country. The number of universities in Ethiopia has now risen to eight. The Government has also strengthened the institutional capacity of the already established colleges and universities. One of the aims of the policy is to make education open to the private sector. As a result, many private colleges and universities are currently being opened. In fact, the agenda of higher education has become so important to the Government that it has very recently issued a proclamation providing for the establishment and systematisation of all forms of higher education in this country.

To conclude the discussion of the expansion of higher education, I would like to survey what other countries understand by the idea of higher education or colleges and universities or duration of higher education. This might have an implication on the duration of the programmes of our higher education and this in turn on the quality of higher education itself.

The duration of the study of higher education in many countries may be from four to seven years or more, depending upon the nature and complexity of the programs pursued. The institution providing higher

education may be either a college or university or a type of professional school. A junior college offers a 2-year program of general education and/or technical training that serves either as terminal schooling or as preparation for more specialized study in a 4-year college or university.

When the basic course of study is successfully completed, usually at the end of four years, the graduate receives a Bachelor's degree. He or she may continue for a Master's degree, generally requiring an additional year or two, and then for a Doctorate, which normally requires the candidate to submit a dissertation and to complete a minimum of two or three years of further studies.

Higher education, which usually includes some general education, is by definition a time for specialized study to qualify the individual for professional activity or for employment in higher positions in business, industry, and government. In recent years, especially in the U.S., the trend has been towards requiring a greater number of courses common to all students in order to counteract a growing tendency toward over-specialisation.

A college may form one major division of a university, offering programs in a specific academic field that leads to undergraduate or graduate degrees, or both. Colleges may also be independent of a university, offering four-year programs of general education that leads to a Bachelor's degree in the liberal arts and sciences. Some independent colleges offer a limited number of graduate programs, but usually their primary mission is to provide undergraduate education.

Analysis of Higher Education Policy and Documents of Ethiopia

The 1994 Education and Training Policy

Prior to the coming into power of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, which later evolved into the Government of the Federal

Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the education system of the country had been characterised, among many other problems, by limited size of access to the population, inequitable distribution of school services, problems of efficiency, lack of quality and relevance (The Education and Training Policy and Its Implementation (MoE, 2002: 9-13). Since it is absolutely unthinkable to introduce a democratic order in a country with such a system of backward education that has not been able to address the concrete problems of the country, it was necessary to issue the 1994 Education and Training Policy.

Since the issuance of this Policy, the progress of higher education has been quite commendable. Curriculum and teacher training systems have been dramatically transformed. The changes of curricula and teacher training schemes have been made in such a way that the country's education be able to solve the nation's problems. Areas of training in such disciplines like information technology, agro-industry, health-applied sciences, agro-economics, environmental sciences, textile engineering, etc have been expanded and new ones added in already existing colleges and universities and in the newly opened ones.

These advances in the improvement of curricula of higher education have been made in line with the various economic and national development policies the country has issued specially in line with the Agriculture Led Industrialisation (ADLI) development strategy.

Despite all these encouraging moves in the area of higher education by the Government, the participation of the private sector and the encouragement the government gives to it is still very limited. The Education and Training Policy should provide for more legal frameworks and encouragement packages for the private and non-government organisations for them to take a considerable share in the renovation of higher education in this country starting from the reformulation of the present Education and Training Policy itself.

The Higher Education Legislation Bill

The Council of Peoples' Representatives of the FDRE enacted a landmark higher education legislation in 2003, the first law in Ethiopian history designed to provide for the establishment of higher education institutions. Cognizant of the fact that Ethiopia has a dire need for quality manpower, the proclamation stipulates the objectives of higher education in the country. According to this Proclamation, (Proclamation No.351/2003:2237), higher education, among several other things, should produce skilled manpower in quantity and quality that will serve the country in different professions. It also aims to expand higher education services that are free from any discrimination on grounds of race, religion, sex, politics and other similar grounds, and lay down problem-solving educational and institutional system that enables to utilise potential resources of the country and undertake study and research. With reference to this same proclamation, again, education should provide higher education and social services that are compatible with the needs and development of the country and make efforts to develop and disseminate the culture of respect, tolerance, and living together among the peoples of the land.

The higher education proclamation provides provisions of law as to how to establish higher education institutions at various levels institute, college, university college, and university. The Proclamation grants autonomy for these higher education institutions in matters such as administrative, financial, and academic. The bill clearly stipulates the criteria of establishment of these institutions, their educational programmes and the nature of curriculum, and their powers and duties. According to the bill, the government, private individual investors, cooperatives, commercial enterprises, and non-profit organisations may offer higher education. It is stated in the proclamation that higher education institutions run by religious organisations whose objectives and curriculum are religious shall not be obliged by the decrees.

The higher education bill also has provisions with regard to accreditation of private higher education institutions at various levels and various statuses. Fulfilling the criteria set by the concerned body, institutions may apply to the Ministry of Education for pre-accreditation, accreditation, and renewal of accreditation permits. It is not, however, clearly put in the proclamation as to how to carry out accreditation procedures of the public institutions except that it is stated in the same that accreditation procedures may apply to government higher education institutions as well.

Moreover, the higher education proclamation provides for the establishment of a kind of accrediting agency called Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency and a kind of higher education strategy centre called Higher Education Strategy Centre both of which are accountable to the Minister of Education of Ethiopia. The aim of the former is to monitor the quality of higher education in Ethiopia through means such as accreditation, while the latter aims at undertaking research and development in the areas of higher education policy matters and educational issues in general so that the country's higher education shall always meet the needs of the public.

One of the strengths of the proclamation is that all higher education institutions are required by law to conduct research and development activities by earmarking some of their institutional budget for it. The proclamation also states that any individual or institution in the country must provide information necessary for carrying out research.

The proclamation, however, does not provide adequate legal provisions for the private sector to be engaged in the accreditation of educational institutions. In fact, it seems that the private higher education institutions are required to do much in the name of accreditation while little or none is required of the government institutions to do the same. Again in the name of accreditation, it seems that the government is involving too much with the internal affairs of the private institutions. Only one agency mentioned above

is to carry out the complex and heavy task of accreditation of all the higher education institutions of the country.

Proclamation for Organising Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Issued in 2004, Proclamation No. 391/2004 provides for the organisation of technical and vocational education and training system in Ethiopia. Prior to this proclamation, the country's technical and vocational education and training had been in a state of disorganisation where there were no structured mechanisms to monitor the overall quality and standard of technical and vocational education in the country. Again, prior to this proclamation, there were no clearly stated and identified responsibilities and duties of the regional and the federal government as to how to control and run technical and vocational education and training programmes.

Proclamation No.391/2004 provides clear provisions of law as to how to run three levels of technical and vocational education and training programmes: basic, junior, and middle-level. In the proclamation, it is stated that these programmes could be run by the government non-government organisations (NGOs), and private individuals. The proclamation has also clearly outlined the purpose of the three programmes, in terms of areas of training, criteria for admission, methods of teaching, duration of training, curriculum, etc.

The proclamation clearly specifies requirements for pre-accreditation license and accreditation certificate, accrediting powers, accreditation process, renewal of accreditation, and similar issues.

This proclamation, however, does not seem to be committed in broadening the participation of the private sector in identifying and also prioritising the needs of training of the public. It does not even imply, let alone express explicitly, the role of the private sector in the identification of areas of training and quality control mechanisms. It is in fact stated in the proclamation that these important areas of needs

analysis and quality control are all to be taken care of by the government both local and federal. The government seems to go to the extent of demanding that even private institutions keep books of accounts to be audited not by a neutral body but by the government itself.

Driving Forces for Change in Local and Global Higher Education

The description and analysis of the present situation of higher education in Ethiopia and various policy and related educational documents should be followed by a discussion of the factors, internal or external to education that sooner or later will make changes imperative in the sector of higher education at an international scale.

Two very important reasons may be considered here as the general driving forces that necessitate the introduction of change in higher education at an international scale. The first one is obviously the economic imperative.

It has been in the interest of many nations that educational reform has to be effected in a bid to bring about economic development – to enhance the contribution of education to employment and the economy (Delros, 1998). It is in fact the force and urgency with which educational reform is politically advocated that gives weight and dominance to the economic imperative in educational reform.

The other one is accountability. Accountability has increased in the effective use of resources within education itself. Governments check that resources are used effectively as educational institutions are largely public owned and public funded. Parents have also become more sensitive than ever before about the quality of their children's education in schools. What is more, employers have become more demanding about the quality of the workforce they employ.

The traditional monopoly educationists had on education is giving way to various pressure groups that seek education to be used as an

instrument in effecting their own agenda. It should also be noted that the influence of these pressure groups is not only felt in the area of educational accountability and allocation of resources but also on the structure of education systems, the organisation of schools, the content of curricula, and teaching methods. The economic argument of education following the tenets of a free-market philosophy based on choice and competition is becoming more serious than ever before. These factors coupled with the following issues have contributed a lot to the rise of new demands on education.

Global Expansion of Education

At an international scale vast increase in schools and university population, and explosion of vocational training for both adult and youngsters outside formal education institutions have constantly necessitated the introduction of pluralism in educational decision-making and broadening of the policy-making structures in collaboration with the new interest groups. This ensures coherence in the provision of education and co-ordination between, for example, youth and adult education, formal and non-formal education, education ministry and other ministries, public and private institutions.

Higher education in Ethiopia should respond to the following basic trends, which are, in one way or another, affecting the nature of the global higher education in the face of the challenges of the 21st century.

Growth of Knowledge and Information

Knowledge and information are the stuff of education. Behind any cultural or scientific advancement, we find the growth of knowledge and information. In the industrialised countries, these are seen as the essentials for economic vitality and competitiveness. Schools and students should know how to exploit the values of the abundant mass of information around them. Higher education institutions should

design structures that would help students make sense of the information around them.

Growth of knowledge and information would lead to ever-rising levels of specialisation. In some European universities, this has led to the organisation of the “knowledge –production industry”. Here there are two serious challenges: the first one is how to ensure that advances in knowledge are continuously incorporated into universities’ curricula. The second one is how to synthesize findings from various specialities to make the wider public beneficiary of the information.

Many of the problems the wider community seek to understand and find solution for are of interdisciplinary nature. But the problem is that existing faculty structures, career and reward systems in our higher education do not give emphasis to this.

Technological Change

Technological change is accelerating in all aspects of life especially with marked impact on economic restructuring. Our labour market is already witnessing some painful social consequences that are compounded by concomitant changes in the economy. Here three things should be taken note of. The first is that higher education should create a link between formal learning and enterprise-based training. Second, higher education in particular should help combat the new forms of functional illiteracy that will be created because of the alien technology. Third, because high levels of unemployment will persist continuously, the human resource role of education should continue to be important in life. The prospect of unemployment will affect young peoples’ attitude to the value of further study and will influence the choice of study of those enrolled already toward more vocationally oriented courses.

Increasingly, even less specialized jobs require some post-secondary education. The development of new technologies and the globalisation of the world economy have created high demand for

workers with computer, communications, and other occupational skills that can be acquired at colleges or universities. Employers increasingly seek out college graduates who have gained the critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary to adapt to changing economic conditions.

Interdependence among Countries

Countries worldwide are now assuming new relationships based on national interests and new world order of politics and economics. Market deregulation has become essential. This will entail spread of new information technologies. The globalisation of financial markets leads to economic and cultural interdependence among countries. Excellent examples at present are the integration of Europe through the European Union and the African countries through the African Union. The demise of communism followed by pacification of ideological conflicts and the Cold War has led countries to open up their frontiers and minds. In big metropolises and mega cities, multiculturalism shall dominate. Ethiopian higher education should behave in a way that should also strengthen inter and intra-country relationships.

New Social and Community Concerns

As desertification and environmental degradation will continue to threaten the global well being of people, concern for the environment will become a universal agenda for all. The task of higher education should then be to sensitise children and the young towards it. Health and drugs are also the crucial issues the 21st century should address. In order to address these newly emerging threats both nationally and internationally, our higher education curricula should incorporate courses about health, drugs, community relationships, and family patterns.

Changes in Attitudes

Some of the major impacts of democratisation and globalisation are the decentralisation of chained bureaucracy and local responsibility. These in turn call for changes in attitudes on the role of public policy and the way public services are administered. These issues may constitute our higher education curricula as many of the developing countries, including ours, are now in their earliest phases of exercising democracy.

Parameters for Redirecting Global Educational Policies

In the face of the accelerating changes and developments, education needs to assume a new, perhaps a comprehensive responsibility. Especially higher education should plan itself in such a way that coherent holistic mechanism should be devised to meet the innumerable needs from all walks of life, instead of a compartmentalized fashion that has always been the case. With such a view, therefore, one may consider the following issues as alternative parameters for the redefinition and redirection of educational policies and programmes of the Ethiopian higher learning institutions.

Expanding Learning Opportunities

Increased competition for economic interests following market deregulation of the new global order and the advance of science and technology creating a new order of science and technology have made the contemporary societies learning societies. It should also be noted that learning societies are likely to have of democratic, well-informed and discerning citizens. In the developing world, learning is the only way to bring about economic independence of individuals as well as nations. It may also be used for the pursuit of leisure and cultural activities of people. Learning is generally crucial to ensure quality of life and the environment.

Promoting life by learning should then become an essential motto of the Ethiopian higher education. This is especially very true in a higher

education where a first degree, especially in the social sciences and the humanities, is no longer an adequate passport to employment and has to be supplemented with further more vocationally oriented qualifications. In order to effect this, new strategies should be designed for life long learning. The obvious reason for this is that skills should constantly be renewed in the face of ever-changing technology. And the skills of the workforce are the ones that are to be primarily addressed by higher education. This calls for the development of new pedagogical provisions for adults in the higher learning institutions.

Ensuring Quality and Relevance

A brief survey of the literature in the area (Ebel, 1968) indicates that the focus of educational debate has changed across times. In the 1980's, quality of education was high on the agenda of educational debates. But for some time in the mid- 90's educational quality has not been as such a priority in educational discussions. But the turn of the 21st century seems to have given a far more serious emphasis for educational quality than any other times in educational history. Perhaps the reasons are in one way or another related to the issues discussed. Among perhaps several factors to be carefully examined three of them seem to be extremely important here to be mentioned as agents of securing Ethiopian higher education quality and relevance in the 21st century. These are curriculum, quality of teaching and pedagogical effectiveness and method of work. Three of them are quite interrelated.

The main issue when curricula of a higher learning institution are considered is whether these curricula should be responsive to the new social concerns, to issues such as computer literacy as one of the new basics in education without overloading the curriculum. The higher education curricula of Ethiopia should provide for courses, among many others, in the following areas of concern: women education, civic education, conservation education, ICT education, vocational education (entrepreneurship), agro-economic and

industrial education, peace education, water education and AIDS education.

Quality of Teaching and Pedagogical Software

With the rising of access to technology for the new generation, there emerges the need for individualised, self-learning opportunities. This in turn affects the curricula and specially the kind of classroom pedagogy and the way teachers do their job in general or the method of their work. The need for individualised, experiential learning or learning by doing along side cognitive learning may be met through two ways: by increasing the availability of pedagogically sound software to match the nearly daily changing hardware and by supplying the sector with well-trained and motivated teachers who are the most vital component of any high quality education. It is almost universal that well-trained and motivated teachers in education make a difference.

Besides the development of educational software and training of quality teachers fundamental rethinking of the traditional structures and organisation of classroom teaching is absolutely important. Classroom teaching should be reorganised in such a way that teachers and pupils would find teaching and learning more diversified and exciting. Constant research and development should be in-built into the system of higher education of Ethiopia to always be on guard to ensure that higher learning curricula, pedagogy and structures of learning are responding to the needs of the community.

Developing a Coherent Quality Ensuring Mechanism

The analyses of the situation of higher education in Ethiopia and the various related educational documents presuppose that Ethiopian higher education needs to devise a coherent mechanism whereby quality is maintained and guaranteed in the following decades with the following issues being central in starting to think over this mechanism.

Accreditation

Accreditation in education is the recognition given by an association or agency to institutions that satisfy specific standards of educational quality. It provides standards of excellence that help encourage educational institutions to improve their programs. It also assists prospective students in identifying quality institutions, facilitates the transfer of students from one institution to another, establishes criteria for certification in professions such as law and medicine, and provides public accountability for an institution's educational quality.

In the United States, accrediting agencies review the quality of education at primary, and secondary schools, colleges, and universities (Garten, 1994). These agencies establish basic standards designed to reflect the qualities of a sound educational program. The agencies then develop procedures to determine whether educational programs and institutions meet these standards.

Again, in the United States, most control over education rests with the various state governments. Each state has different laws and objectives for education, but the states generally permit schools and colleges to operate with considerable independence and autonomy. To maintain consistent standards of education, the U.S. Department of Education officially recognizes private accrediting agencies that it considers reliable in developing those standards and determining educational quality.

Most other countries like India rely primarily on governmental agencies to monitor the quality of education provided by their schools and colleges. In India, for example, where there are over 350 universities, 15000 colleges and 101 million higher education students (latest Figures from Indian Embassy), one can easily imagine how important accreditation is. That is why a Council called NAAC, National Assessment and Accreditation Council accountable to the Indian Government has been set up in 1994. In Canada, however, private educational associations increasingly work with

provincial governmental authorities to periodically assess the quality of schools, colleges, and universities.

There is, therefore, a great deal of lesson we can bring to Ethiopian higher education from all these experiences of several countries. First and foremost, we need some sort of accreditation for all forms of higher education in the country if we genuinely strive for ensuring the quality of our higher education. Second, that our policy of accreditation should be extremely liberal in the sense that it accommodates all sections of the community including the private sector and the international community. Third, accreditation should start now.

New Patterns of Cooperation among Universities

Accreditation is not the only issue we raise with regard to quality of Ethiopian higher education. Colleges and universities or higher education institutions all over the country should work in cooperation for the same objective of nation building.

A growing tendency is being felt among many colleges and universities worldwide to meet the pressure of rising student enrolments by sharing their resources in many places in the world. Almost all forms of trainings in almost all fields are now heading towards universities.

It seems that university training has become necessary on virtually any form of trade. This concept of bringing any form of training to universities is known as by some groups as 'universitisation'. Universitisation puts also heavy pressure on the limited resources of colleges and universities especially in a poor country such as ours. It is thus imperative for universities and colleges to come together. The concept of universitisation is also leading to the concept of massification. It seems a fashion of the day that universities and colleges are all going into merger so that they can be in a better position institutionally to be able to better address the needs of their

respective communities. With these trends, networking regional and federal level colleges and universities in Ethiopia becomes absolutely important in upgrading the quality of services these institutions offer to the public.

Introducing Active (task-based) Learning: a Missing Element in Ethiopian Higher Education

Silberman (1996) acknowledges Piaget, Montessori, and others for their influence in introducing what he called “active learning” in early childhood and elementary education. These scholars had a long time ago understood that the best way of teaching young children was through concrete, activity-based experiences. Silberman, however, argues that there is no reason (in fact there are good enough reasons) to base even adult higher education on activity-based experiences, which more or less equate with task-based teaching and learning.

One of the claims of the New Education and Training Policy is to rectify the Ethiopian education, which has for long failed to be problem solving in content and activity-based in methodology.

Two of the reasons Silberman (1996) provides for making education activity-based are the fast changing phenomena of the contemporary life, and the ever-widening diversity of students in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity in the present century. The introduction of active learning, he believes, would help educators and classroom practitioners to address the rising individual differences and multiple intelligences by way of respecting the learners and creating for them excitement in the learning process.

Active learning or task-based learning creates interest and prolongs the attention span of the learners as they are essentially the doers of the activities or tasks, far better than traditional lecture-based college classrooms where learners are not attentive for about 40% of the period. In traditional classes where most teachers speak about 100

to 200 words per minute (Silberman 1996:1), students are very unlikely to listen to and comprehend a good deal of the lesson they are taught.

Moreover, the students' variety of learning styles could not be addressed properly. Some learners are visual learners. They learn best by seeing someone else do it. Other learners are auditory. They learn by relying most on their ability to hear. Still there are other groups of learners who learn mainly by self-involvement in an activity. Though there are very few students who are exclusively one kind of learner, the great majority of them however (22 out of 30 students in a research conducted for example, Silberman 1996) could enjoy a blend of visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic activities, which are all the characteristic features of active learning.

Perhaps far more important than the above reasons in substantiating the relevance of task-based learning or active learning can be the socio-cultural aspects of learning. Bruner (1966) and Maslow (1968) have contributed extremely important concepts for the coming into being of what are usually termed as 'collaborative learning methods' in the sphere of education.

The human need to safety takes primacy over the other need, which is the need to reach out, to explore or to grow, according to Maslow. One of the important ways to achieve safety and security is to tend to belong to a group. This thus creates a feeling of collaboration necessitating collaborative learning.

Bruner also believes in the very desire of human beings to work jointly with others towards meeting an objective, which he calls reciprocity. Through this reciprocity, Bruner believes, individuals learn and the socialization facilitates their learning. The argument then finally goes to the fact that it is the task-based methodology that creates the venue for entertaining such collaboration and reciprocity that would facilitate learning.

Setting our Own Agenda for Higher Education-Needs Analysis

The issue of needs analysis should be raised here in connection to securing quality in higher education. This refers to the setting of our own agenda in the teaching or research aspects of our own higher education.

Many writers relate the overall educational problems of the emerging nations to their failure to make adequate use of their human resources and to identify their own priority areas of needs based on their own objective realities.

Hanson (1969:343) states emphatically that “emergent nations appear caught in a vicious circle of poverty, disease, ignorance, and rigid social institutions and stratifications that kill initiative, banish hope, and stifle the urge to improve one’s condition.” The education sector of these nations, owing to the limited financial resources they have, has both social and cultural constraints. Obviously sharing some of the major problems the education of the developed nations faces, the education of the emergent nations severely suffer from inside also. Ethiopian higher education is one of those severely exposed to almost all these problems, and thus needs special consideration.

Even though Ethiopia has a large share of the problems of education of the Third World countries in general, it also has problems in its higher education that are distinctive only to its own context. Educators quite often have, for example, forwarded criticisms such as the fact that English is used as medium of instruction; that both teacher and students do not operate in it up to the level required for (in most cases, their proficiency is too low) and that they may not feel as comfortable as they are in their native language such as Amharic. Further criticisms include the mismatch between the prioritised needs of the country and the goals of the existing educational system and the existing research agenda (Gebremedhin, 1993), lack of stability in the political system of the country, which also seriously affects the educational system of the country, the country’s limited capacity to

provide the necessary funding to the ever-increasing number of higher education seekers as the population increases and, marginalisation of traditional, local knowledge and over emphasis on importing Western educational system into the higher education.

Conclusion

Most modern educators and most great intellectuals, academically and socially important people in Ethiopia, have a strong religious education background. The implication of this argument is that traditional education could lend importance to modern education by forwarding ideas higher education programmes should accommodate. Such a consideration seems to help resolve the kind of clash between traditional and modern views of educational practices students and staff of academic institutions have.

One of the severe conditions on African higher education in general and that of Ethiopian educational system in particular is lack of concern for educational traditions and indigenous system (Tekeste 1996; Bridges and Marew, 2000). Indigenous knowledge system or the local knowledge, as it is alternatively called, refers to the local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. It seems now an open secret to tell that the most important driving force behind the scientific development of countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Korea and Taiwan has been indigenous knowledge. One could, therefore, arguably expect that Ethiopia, which perhaps, different from many other countries, has a unique wealth of traditional education, can benefit a lot in promoting its modern higher education.

Gebremedhin (1993) very well underlines that the merging of efforts to promote and nurture one's social ideals and value system with the effort of applying Western educational civilization where necessary and useful would save a country's educational system from disillusion and vacuousness, which are obvious risks of merely importing Western educational system uncritically to a certain country.

A similar kind of argument goes also between the importance of formal and non-formal education. The argument that sometimes goes to the extreme that any kind of formal education is very unlikely to bring about development should be soberly examined. But on the other side, it seems also useful not to entirely rely on formal education. Tekeste (1996), for example, questions the assumption of the Ethiopian Ministry of Education that formal education is a key to national development. He argues that, instead, it is the non-formal educational sector that has to be given top priority for it is through this non-formal education that we are able to deepen our indigenous knowledge system towards effecting national development. Tekeste asserts that formal education has little to do with the needs of the rural population and in curbing the serious urban unemployment problem. Perhaps the direction of our higher education may be examined in relation to these trends as well.

By way of conclusion, it is crucial to emphasize that our higher education needs to strike a balance between what we import from outside and what we have. Some of the practices we had in traditional education may still be important to maintain the quality of our education. This does not mean, however, that we turn a deaf ear to changes that are taking place before our eyes. In fact, a number of issues raised in this paper that are related to the dramatic local and international social, political, and scientific changes are quite alerting that our higher education should give immediate response if we desire it to continue ensuring its quality and relevance to the community it stood for.

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