

The Internationalization Policy of Ethiopian Higher Education: A Comprehensive Analysis

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Abstract: In this article, we conducted a policy analysis of Ethiopia's higher education internationalization policy using the Policy Analysis Triangle Framework (Walt and Gilson, 1994) that integrates policy context, actors, process, and text to provide a comprehensive understanding of the policy. These elements supported the study in analyzing the process followed to develop the policy, who were involved in the process and how, the context for the policy, and how the interaction of these elements affected the inclusion and exclusion of policy content. The study employed a qualitative case study approach. Key sectoral documents, including the higher education internationalization policy, education policy, education roadmap, higher education proclamation, and education sector development program, were reviewed. In addition, key informant interviews with policymakers were also used to collect data. The analysis revealed that these documents recognized the need for internationalizing higher education with the Education Sector Development Program V, setting the goal for the policy's development. The policy agenda was set by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. The policymaking process followed a top-down approach, with limited input from relevant stakeholders. While policy formulation followed the necessary procedures, the process lacked proper context analysis at the global, local, and national levels, relying mainly on international experience. The policy adopted a definition that reflected comprehensive internationalization but overlooked the decolonizing aspect. The policy incorporated all four rationales of internationalization, where more emphasis was given to the academic and economic aspects. Not all dimensions of internationalization were adequately addressed in directions and strategies, and they failed to consider internationalization for society. Furthermore, strategies recommended for developing countries, such as regionalization, South-South cooperation, and intellectual diversity, that help to reduce dominance from the North, were not made mandatory in the policy. In conclusion, the development of the policy played a critical role in strategizing the ad hoc and disorganized efforts of the past. And yet, it had limitations in guiding the internationalization efforts of the country, implying that without contextual relevance and stakeholder involvement, the policy risks would be symbolic rather than transformative in practice.

Keywords: - Policy analysis framework, policy actors, policy development process, contextualized internationalization, intellectual diversity.

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Introduction

Global collaborations have played a significant role in shaping higher education development, with universities' international outlook emerging as a key defining characteristic of their identity (Altbach and De Wit 2015). Historically, student and staff mobility was central to these engagements (Kim, 2009). Now, the scope of internationalization has broadened to encompass a diverse range of activities – both at home and abroad – across the academic, research, and service missions of higher education institutions (Knight, 2004).

De Wit et al. define internationalization as:

The intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society. (De Wit et al. 2015)

There are several motivations for higher education internationalization. Initially, it was motivated by the pursuit of knowledge and experience, then targeting certain political goals, and later driven by economic imperatives. In the 21st century, factors such as massification, global knowledge economy, university reputations, rankings, and pursuit of excellence alongside shifting economic and political landscapes have significantly impacted the practice of internationalization (de Wit and Altbach, 2021). Through this process, internationalization has transitioned into a formalized and systematic practice. The imperative for the internationalization of higher education is grounded in four broad rationales: academic, economic, political, and social-cultural (Knight, 2004; de Wit et al., 2015). The academic rationale emphasizes the intrinsic goals and functions of higher education while the economic, political, and social-cultural rationales view internationalization as a

strategic means to realize multifaceted benefits at the institutional, national, or global levels (Knight, 2004).

In recent decades, internationalization has increasingly become a strategic and integral component of higher education institutions' overall strategies (de Wit and Altbach, 2021; de Wit and Merckx, 2022). There has been a marked shift towards more organized and intentional approaches to internationalization. As a result, these efforts are often made formal through the development of policies and strategies at institutional and national levels. This transition shows a growing recognition of the importance of internationalization for achieving the vision and missions of higher education institutions.

The concept and practice of internationalization, however, is not without controversy. A significant critique is that internationalization concepts and theories are predominantly shaped by Western perspectives (Sperduti, 2017; Teferra, 2008). Institutions in the South are coerced to integrate them into their higher education system, often without taking their local contexts into account (Teferra, 2008). Furthermore, it is viewed as a mechanism for incorporating knowledge, experiences, and practices from the Western into the non-Western contexts, often without proper contextual adaptation to local realities, thereby reflecting post-colonial dynamics (Sperduti, 2017; Teferra, 2008). Such a critique raises important points regarding the challenges faced in the development of indigenous knowledge systems and the little institutional autonomy in non-Western contexts in determining their own educational priorities.

Modern higher education in Ethiopia has incorporated elements of internationalization since its inception. This is manifested by the adoption of Western structural and governance models, being administered by foreign officials, and involvement of expat staff (Semela & Ayalew, 2008; Tefera, 2008; Woldegiorgis, 2017). Even though these practices are evolving, contemporary national, regional, and international developments continue to shape the Ethiopian higher education system. In line with global trends, several reforms have been introduced to the

Ethiopian higher education system. These include massive expansion, privatization, strategic prioritization, quality assurance, cost sharing, institutional autonomy, and government financial restructuring (Woldegiorgis, 2014). This evolution apparently impacted the higher education internationalization approaches and practices in Ethiopia.

Higher education institutions have embraced the concept of internationalization and incorporated it into their visions and missions. Semela and Ayalew (2008) examined the internationalization efforts in Ethiopia, highlighting activities such as joint and collaborative programs, cross-border education involving foreign institutions, staff and student mobility, and the use of English language as a medium of instruction. Despite these efforts, however, the practice remains unintentional and lacks a strategic and cohesive approach, often operating in an ad hoc and fragmented manner (Tamirat and Teferra, 2018; Gonfa et al., 2024).

To address these gaps, Ethiopia recently formulated a formal policy document on internationalization. This policy is meant to address national needs and enhance Ethiopia's regional and global competitiveness by ensuring high-quality internationalization (MoSHE, 2020). The policy sets objectives, guiding principles, rationales and strategies for internationalization. It also outlines the roles of actors in the internationalization process, such as public and private higher education institutions, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, and the Education and Training Authority (ETA), formerly known as the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (MoSHE, 2020).

The development of the policy is vital for advancing the internationalization processes in Ethiopia. And yet, it is crucial to study the policy development processes and how the policy addresses gaps in internationalization efforts. There are existing studies focusing on the practice of internationalization with a historical and contemporary framework. However, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study has undertaken a comprehensive examination of the nature and

development of the policy. This article analyzes the higher education internationalization policy, focusing on its formulation (i.e., the process and key actors involved) and its alignment with the contextual realities of the Ethiopian higher education landscape. In this regard, the article seeks to address the following key questions.

1. What contexts led to the development of higher education internationalization policy in Ethiopia?
2. What does the policymaking process look like?
3. How did stakeholders contribute to the development of the policy?
4. How well does the policy reflect the contexts and current realities of the Ethiopian higher education system?

Methods

This qualitative study employed a post-positivist paradigm, which allows drawing on established models to frame the inquiry (Creswell, 2007). The approach enables balancing the use of existing frameworks to guide the research with the flexibility to capture the specific realities of the situation on the ground.

Two main sources of data used to inform the inquiry are key informant interview and document analysis. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the policy development process and the various considerations thereof, semi-structured interviews were employed with two of the six members of the policymaking team. These two key informants were selected purposefully. The first informant was selected for her/his strong affiliation with the relevant Ministry and coordination role within the policy development process, both of which afforded her/him a comprehensive and detailed exposure to the process. The second informant had extensive experience in internationalization activities. Given the small size of the policy development team (n=6), interviews with these two key informants provided sufficient data for a

thorough exploration of the relevant aspects of the policy development process.

Document analysis was done primarily on the Higher Education Internationalization Policy of Ethiopia (2020). Among the elements incorporated in the policy, the vision, mission, principles, rationales, motivations, objectives, and activities outlined in the policy, as well as the operationalized definition of internationalization, were examined. The researchers analyzed both explicit and implicit aspects based on their perspective and the related literature.

In addition, key documents related to Ethiopia's higher education internationalization policy were analyzed. These included the Education Sector Development Plan V (ESDP V) (2015), the Education Roadmap (2018), the Higher Education Proclamation of Ethiopia 1152/2019 (2019), and the Education and Training Policy (2023). Among these, the Education Roadmap comprehensively examined the country's education system. The remaining three documents served as policy, regulatory, and planning frameworks. The analysis involved a thorough examination of these documents to identify and assess issues pertaining to the integration of internationalization within Ethiopia's higher education system. Additionally, scholarly research and relevant books by prominent experts on higher education internationalization in Ethiopia were reviewed to provide contextual understanding.

The documents were analyzed using thematic analysis. Deductive coding was employed, where the codes were developed in advance, drawing from scholarly literature in the area of internationalization of higher education. The research questions guided the selection of themes. Hence, the policy and other relevant documents were analyzed to explore the contextualization of the policy to the country's situation by focusing on why the policy was developed, and the rationales for internationalization and implementation strategies were designed to achieve these purposes.

The data analysis in this study was framed using the Policy Triangle Framework proposed by Walt and Gilson (1994). This framework identifies four critical issues for policy analysis: policy context, actors, development process, and policy text. These focal points, as outlined by Walt and Gilson, were used for data analysis.

The study's findings were interpreted through the lens of concepts and theories drawn from existing literature. Furthermore, as scholars and practitioners in the field of international and comparative education, our collective experiences informed the interpretations. The resulting conclusions relevant for policy review and implementation have been presented after the analysis.

Reflexivity

Our personal and professional experiences inevitably influenced our engagement with this research. We approached the study with a dedication to questioning overriding narratives and emphasizing sidelined viewpoints as proponents of fairness and collective benefit. Our academic background in international and comparative education, combined with our experience with critical theories like Southern Theory, made us sensitive to the limitations of universalized, Western-centric models of internationalization. We recognize that our positionality introduces subjectivity into the research process, and yet we believe that incorporating contextual insight and critical awareness into the interpretation of data helps deepen the analysis and makes it more contextualized to the realities on the ground. Moreover, throughout the process, we strived for a balance between critique and openness by remaining reflexive and actively interrogating our assumptions.

Conceptual Framework

The policy triangle framework by Walt and Gilson (1994) that incorporates actors, policy development process, the context, and the

substantive content of the policy was used as an analytical framework. The who and how of the actors involved, the academic, economic, social-cultural, and political context of the policy, and the process followed to develop it, and the interaction of the three elements influence the inclusion and exclusion of content in a policy and, ultimately, the policy outcome. Hence, in this research, an analysis was made on the context for the development of the policy, the stakeholders' (actors') involvement, the policymaking process, and their interaction in influencing what is included and left out as content of the policy.

Under the framework, each element was analyzed employing concepts from scholars in education. The analysis was made with the aim of examining if the approaches followed in the policy formulation process and the included policy content influence the creation of a policy cognizant of the country's and higher education institutions' contexts. The first three elements related to stages and procedures of the policy cycle were elaborated, drawing concepts from Henry et al. (2013), Freeman (2020), Ball (1998), Steiner-Khamsi (2012), and Knight (2004). According to these scholars, the cycle broadly covers agenda setting, policy formulation and decision making, implementation, and evaluation. The process is political and engages actors with different interests requiring discussion, reaching agreements on policy options, and resolving conflicts among them. In this article, the first two stages, covering agenda setting and policy formulation, and decision-making were employed as parts of the conceptual framework. Hence, the analysis covered how the agenda was set, policy options were analyzed, what policy instruments were used, and how policy actors were involved and decisions were made.

With respect to the fourth element, the policy text, concepts from scholars, including Knight (2004), de Wit (2001), Jooste (2006), Hudzik (2011), and de Wit et al. (2015) were employed. According to these scholars, internationalization has to be mainstreamed in all functions and engagements of the higher education system and ensure the intentional

integration of the intercultural, international, and global dimensions. This mainstreaming and incorporation of the three dimensions in all the functions of higher education reflects approaching internationalization in a strategic manner and striving to realize its full potential. Moreover, interpretations were made on whether the policy text provides for comprehensive and contextualized internationalization for a higher education system that exists in a developing country.

Interpretations were also made on how far the analysis of the context, the policy development process, and the involvement of actors might have influenced the comprehensiveness and contextualization of the policy. The data were critically interpreted considering the contextualization of the policy to the local situation of the country. The use of a critical perspective helps to understand matters from different positions (Thomson, 2017). The perspective has an evaluative element on whether justice and equity are served in a matter under study (Strunk and Betties, 2019). In this study, a critical perspective was employed to analyze how the policy and the policymaking process worked to address local contexts through reflecting the local reality in the identification of priorities and needs, entertaining local/indigenous knowledge, and taking regional and South-to-South collaborations as central strategies.

Lastly, a conclusion was made on the possible policy outcomes resulting from the interplay of the four elements of the policy triangle.

Data Analysis and Discussion

In this section, data analysis and interpretation were made following the Walt and Gilson (1994) policy triangle framework. Hence, the policy context, actors, development process, and content are presented in this section.

The Sectoral Context for the Policy

Modern higher education in Ethiopia was initiated with the establishment of the then University College of Addis Ababa (now Addis Ababa University) in 1950, having non-Ethiopian staff (Habte et al., 1963). It was established by a Canadian Jesuit assigned by Emperor Haile Selassie to organize and direct it (Hapte, 1961; Ahmed, 2006).

It was in 2003 that the first higher education proclamation was endorsed and provided directions on how higher education institutions should function, and for the establishment of organs to support, guide, and regulate the higher education provision in the country. These offices include the then Higher Education Strategy Center, and Education and Training Authority (the then Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency). The proclamation was revised twice in 2009 and 2019. Higher education expanded and enrolled more than 800,000 students (MoE, 2018) in its fifty public and more than 230 private HEIs currently. The country's gross enrolment is equal to the Sub-Saharan average (World Bank, 2024), and it indicates the drastic changes taking place in the last nearly 70 years, where the number of students was 21 at its commencement (Wagaw, 1990).

Like other higher education systems, especially those in developing countries, higher education in Ethiopia is internationalized from its commencement. It has an international dimension starting from its inception (Teferra, 2008) through mechanisms like models and expertise imported from the West, using foreign language, staff and student mobility (Tamirat, 2020). Yet the international dimension was predominantly practiced, where the intercultural and global dimensions were addressed to a lesser extent. Moreover, the Ministry and Higher Education Institutions had been implementing internationalization in an ad hoc and fragmented manner (Tamirat & Teferra, 2018; de Wit et al., 2019), and it has recently been incorporated in strategies and other documents.

The analysis made on the documents related to the higher education internationalization policy of Ethiopia indicates that some rationales and approaches to internationalization were incorporated in them. The table below presents the sectoral context of the policy as witnessed in the respective documents.

Table 1: Summary of internationalization rationales and approaches covered by national documents

No	Document	Rationale	Approach
1	ESDP V (2015)	Advancement of breadth and quality of programs and research, exchange of social and cultural experiences	Development of national policy and strategy, establishment of national office, development of a strategy for attracting foreign students, collaboration and partnership to strengthen working relationships and share resources for joint programs, hiring of expat staff, staff exposure visits, and student exchange
2	The Education Road Map (2018)	Quality, meeting international standards, income generation, and multiculturalism	Staff and student mobility, attracting foreign students and research grants, internationalizing teaching and research, and partnerships
3	Higher Education Proclamation 1152/2019	Making HEIs meet international standards, and producing graduates who make the country internationally competent	Joint academic programs, research, and community service with national and international partners; permits foreign HEIs to function in the country as private HEIs
4	Education and Training Policy (2023)	Quality and relevance to ensure graduates' competence internationally, making the country internationally competent through its graduates	Collaboration and partnership, and the use of English as a medium of instruction in higher education

The rationales articulated in the respective documents include quality education provision, meeting international standards by HEIs, internationalization as a tool to make the country internationally competent, as a source of income, and a way to share social and cultural experiences. With regard to its approach, ESDP V has stipulated the

strategic direction for practicing internationalization. This is by emphasizing the development of a national-level policy and establishment of an office for the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the effort. It has also discussed how it would be approached by emphasizing the need for collaboration with the South and integration of indigenous knowledge. The Higher Education Proclamation addresses the regulation of activities suggested. Activities are also included in all four documents, collaboration and partnership, and student and staff mobility are mentioned repeatedly. Hence, there was a favorable environment for the development of internationalization policy for higher education.

Policy Makers/Actors

The policy development was organized by the then Ministry of Science and Higher Education, currently merged with the Ministry of Education. At the time, it formed a committee of six members, of whom the chairperson and one member were advisors to the Minister. Another member became an Internationalization Office Head at the Ministry, while the fourth one was assigned as an Internationalization Office Director of AAU. The remaining two were from two private HEIs, one having rich experience and publications in the area, and the other being the former Director of the Education and Training Authority (MoSHE, 2020).

According to a participant in the study, the committee members were selected and assigned based on their publications on internationalization and work experience in higher education institutions, and in the Quality Agency. Most of them possessed academic experience. However, only a few had experience related to internationalization.

The Minister approved the members as proposed by the Internationalization Office Director. The Internationalization Office was established when the then Ministry of Science and Higher Education was

instituted in 2018. Before the establishment of MOSHE, it was under the Higher Education State Minister in the Ministry of Education. The main duty of the Office was coordinating student and staff mobility by facilitating scholarships to students from neighboring African countries and sending university staff abroad, especially in fields that were not available in the country. The Office coordinated the development of the internationalization policy, and the Director served as a secretary of the committee.

Actors from HEIs, including Presidents, Vice Presidents, and those responsible for internationalization at higher education institutions, reviewed the draft document and provided comments at the meeting organized by the committee. Through personal contact with committee members, two eminent experts from a US institution reviewed the document. The involvement of the two scholars was not institutionalized and remained informal throughout the process.

The policy mandates higher education institutions (HEIs), research institutions, other ministries, and all relevant stakeholders for its implementation. However, critical stakeholders from both the education sector and beyond, such as the Education and Training Authority (ETA), research institutions, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that play pivotal roles in the internationalization process, were excluded from the policymaking process. Moreover, different-level actors from the regional and international institutions were not engaged in the process. Knight (2008) listed excluded actors such as educational institutions and providers, government and non-governmental organizations, conventions and treaties with missions that included policy making, regulating, and advocacy at national, bilateral, regional, interregional, and international levels. To ensure policy relevance, Mitchel et al. (1997) contend that the salience of the actors to policymaking has to be analyzed, and their engagement needs to be ensured in line with the extent of their influence.

The need for collaborative policymaking among relevant stakeholders working in different areas and levels is critical for policy implementation effectiveness (Henry et al., 2013; Hudson et al., 2019). According to Henry et al. (2013) and Ansell et al. (in Hudson et al. 2019), stakeholders need to work with each other, share their views and context, reconcile differences of any kind, and achieve a common ground at the policymaking stage. Otherwise, it will create a disconnection and might lead to conflicts over policy legitimacy and other aspects. Moreover, the fact that policies interact with other sector policies requires the involvement of stakeholders outside of the education sector for the practicality of the policy (Henry et al., 2013). This is not evident in the selection and involvement of actors for IHE policy formulation in Ethiopia.

The Policymaking Process

The formulation of the policy adhered to the following steps. Its development was part of the efforts of strengthening the higher education sector in the country as stipulated in ESDP V (2015). The same document incorporated the development of policy and strategy as one activity of internationalization, and MoSHE spearheaded its development (IBID).

One of the participants narrated that at the start of the policy formulation process, the committee diligently reviewed a guiding document prepared by MoSHE, which outlined key issues to be included in all higher education-related policies, including providing background, vision, and mission of the policy and activities.

Once the committee agreed on the necessary inclusions, each member took responsibility for different sections of the document. They then engaged in an extensive review of national, regional, and international research and documents, presenting their findings during committee meetings. Through a serious and repeated deliberations, the draft policy gradually took shape.

Elaborating on the process, a participant noted that

During the development of the document, we conducted continuous meetings at the Ministry. Additionally, we retreated to Debre Zeit, A city located 40 Km from Addis Ababa. Each team member took different parts of the document to work on individually. We then presented our findings and collaboratively reviewed and refined the document repeatedly from start to finish, and this was how we developed the document. (Participant II, August 10, 2023)

Participants noted that, apart from reviewing documents and research reports, no empirical data from relevant stakeholders were collected nor a comprehensive analysis of the academic, economic, political, and socio-cultural contexts conducted during the preparation of the document. Moreover, no regional and global policies and regulations affecting internationalization, such as those of the African Union Agenda 2063, were reviewed and incorporated into the policy. The committee used only their knowledge and experience, conducted desk reviews of research on internationalization, and identified the requirements of the Ministry to decide on the issues the policy needed to cover.

Participant II said,

We have referred to the international and continental literature to design the rationales, principles, activities, and the like, and incorporated those that were common internationally. A publication produced by the Center for International Higher Education of Boston College, entitled “International Mapping of National Tertiary Education Internationalization Strategies and Plans,” was our major reference. The document elucidates the global experiences of selected countries regarding their internationalization policies, strategies, and plans. In addition, by reviewing relevant studies conducted locally and internationally,

we tried not to miss out on core issues of internationalization. (Participant II, August 10, 2023).

The participants raised time limitations as a reason for not carrying out the conventional policy context analysis. The committee was tasked with finalizing the policy within six months, which was insufficient given the extent of the tasks and other responsibilities that the committee members were engaged in alongside preparing the policy document.

The document articulates that the policy was designed to serve as a broad framework for planning, directing, supporting, and realizing internationalization in the country. A participant also noted that the policy was formulated to guide and support institutions, allowing them the leverage to develop their own strategies guided and supported by the framework rather than being strictly confined by it. This indicates that the policy was envisioned not as a rigid directive, but as a provision of various internationalization options, providing a ground for HEIs to conduct their own contextual analyses in the process of formulating their internationalization strategies. Although institutional autonomy is deemed necessary, it is equally important for policies to mandate practices that are based on empirical data reflecting current realities and attainable outcomes.

The importance of context analysis in policy formulation has been stressed by various scholars (Henry et al., 2013; Harris and Jones, 2018). Henry et al. (2013) discuss context as the antecedents and pressures that lead to the development of a specific policy. According to the authors, along with the analysis of economic, social, and political factors, context analysis also covers taking into account the influence of pressure groups and social movements that impact policy goals and strategies, the level of actor engagement in implementation, and eventually policy outcomes (Henry et al., 2013). Moreover, even when engaging in policy borrowing and lending, the role of local policy context analysis is critical as it facilitates the understanding of the reasons

behind policy borrowing and how it can be made feasible (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012).

Ball (1998) noted the tensions between local particularities and general patterns and particularities across localities in policy making. The Ethiopian higher education internationalization policymaking process indicated the inclination to the general patterns across localities by referring to international documents for its selection of rationales and strategies. Even though the analysis of the local politics, culture and tradition, and the contextualization of the general patterns is deemed critical for effective policy impact (Ball, 1998; de Wit, 2020), the policy exhibits gaps in this regard.

Moreover, contextualization is essential in developing countries such as those in Africa (Nyrere in Teferra, 2019) by selecting policy options that fit the context and reduce the negative consequences of internationalization. Context analysis also helps to gain a clear perspective on injustices within the higher education system, which emanates from the historical, academic, political, economic, and socio-cultural factors. According to scholars advocating critical perspectives, a clarified view on injustices helps to recognize the prevailing inequities and power imbalances and leads to the reconstruction of a reality that is just and reflective of the needs and interests of localities (Diem et al., 2019). The policy exhibits limitations in this respect.

After the policy draft was consolidated, it was sent to HEIs for comments. Following this, the committee arranged a virtual meeting with HEI representatives to solicit their comments, as it was difficult to hold in-person meetings because of COVID-19. The draft, after incorporating comments from the HEIs, was sent to the two prominent scholars from the United States for further review. After incorporating the reviewers' comments, the draft was submitted to the Ministry, and the policy was officially enacted in June 2020.

The higher education internationalization policy formulation predominantly followed a top-down approach. The involvement of policy implementers in the process was minimal. Even though policies formulated following a top-down approach facilitate the consistent dissemination of central decisions across various localities, their implementation faces significant challenges that emanate from inadequate communication with and little integration of the interests and capabilities of front-line actors (Henry et al., 2013).

Policy Content

Under this section of the policy analysis framework, the content of the internationalization policy is analyzed, segmenting it into four parts.

Policy Background and Problematization

This sub-section addresses the fertile grounds for internationalization practice as stipulated in the policy and presents how the need for the policy is problematized. The policy commences by acknowledging the historical, socio-cultural, and environmental contexts of the country as conducive to internationalization. These include the country being the cradle of mankind and home to ancient civilization and the existence of religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, as well as a traditional education system that spans more than 1700 years (MoSHE, 2020). According to the same source, these contexts are considered fertile grounds for the development of internationalization in disciplines such as history, anthropology, linguistics, agriculture, climatology, economics, sociology, geology, religion, diplomacy, and international relations. This recognition was a commendable beginning as it emphasizes the role of indigenous knowledge in diversifying knowledge production and dissemination, thereby minimizing the dominance of knowledge structures from the North (Singh 2024).

The necessity for the policy is framed around the imperative to transition the internationalization process from being unintentional to deliberate, and from fragmented and ad hoc activity to strategic and planned engagement. It also seeks to advance Ethiopia's endeavor to attain middle-income status by leveraging internationalization to enhance capacity building that meets international standards and to produce a well-educated workforce. How issues are problematized in policymaking affects the resultant policy formulated (Henry et al., 2013). The need for the policy is reasoned out to be making the internationalization practice strategic, and this problematization is commendable in the process. Moreover, the policy development also responds to the quest for strategic practice of internationalization highlighted in research conducted in Ethiopia, showing that the efforts are fragmented and ad hoc (Tamirat and Teferra, 2018; de Wit et al., 2019). Additionally, scholars advocate for strategizing internationalization efforts to achieve intentionally designed results (de Wit et al, 2015), and policy formulation is a crucial step in this regard.

Vision, Objective, and Principles of the Policy

The policy envisions "to see the Ethiopian higher education sector, meet its full potential to serve the national interest, and become a regionally and globally competitive system through a high-quality and multidimensional approach to internationalization." (MoSHE, 2020, pp. 7)

The vision emphasizes that higher education needs to serve the national interest and be competitive globally. It has overlooked the role of IHE in local, regional, and global imperatives. For instance, AU Agenda 2063 (AU, 2015) and World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century (UNESCO, 1998) highlighted the role of higher education regionally and globally, respectively. However, they were not reflected in the vision of the policy. The vision of the policy rather emphasized competition than cooperation as the goal of the IHE was to make the country competitive regionally and internationally. On the other hand,

ESDP V (2015) and the Education and Training Policy (2023) emphasized the role of collaboration in capacity building, resource sharing, improving quality and relevance, and strengthening working partnerships. Scholars in the area noted that competition rather than cooperation through internationalization is becoming the current reality (Knight and de Wit, 2018; de Wit and Altbach, 2021), which is also the case in the Ethiopian context. It is argued that the actions taken by developing countries, such as Ethiopia, to compete diminish the likelihood of success rather than enhance it (de Wit, 2016). This is attributed to their competition with fewer resources compared to the developed nations, resulting in an unequal footing that leaves them at a disadvantage.

Furthermore, in a developing country such as Ethiopia, cooperation plays a crucial role in capacity building and enhancing the quality of education provided by higher education institutions (de Wit, 2016). Consequently, an emphasis on competition proves to be rather challenging and unsuitable for the Ethiopian context.

The general objective of the policy was “to promote and enable the active participation of Ethiopian higher education institutions and their constituents in realizing the IHE vision, mission, and policy components in order to advance Ethiopia's national agenda and benefit stakeholders.”

The specific objectives cover the enhancement of quality, cultivation of collaborative research and publication opportunities, improvement of the curriculum by adopting and adapting international standards and intercultural elements, encouraging cross-border educational opportunities for people and institutions, enhancement of the reputation of HEIs, and increasing innovative discoveries and applied technologies through collaborative efforts.

The general objective advocates for IHE to be practiced by HEIs to advance the country's national agenda, where global and international commitments are omitted. The specific objectives address the inculcation of the strategies included in the policy and the resulting quality enhancement. The objectives entail both the process and the outcome of the processes. Furthermore, even though the teaching and learning and research missions have been addressed in the objectives, the community service mission was overlooked. Furthermore, one of the objectives set was realizing Ethiopia's ambition of becoming a middle-income country, which was not measurable at the sectoral level.

The policy principles encompassed quality, equity, accountability, and a priority focus on national interests. Additionally, the principles included academic freedom, legal compliance, ethics, mutuality and complementarity, value creation, funding (primarily as a means of generating supplementary income rather than commercialization), and strategies for mitigating brain drain to retain local talent and leverage the expertise of the Ethiopian diaspora.

The principles integrated are vast and important to guide internationalization efforts. Notably, risk mitigation on brain drain has been integrated as one principle that would reduce the negative consequences of internationalization in a developing country like Ethiopia. And yet, some vital issues such as local knowledge production, dissemination, and use, holistic approach to internationalization, interculturalism, fair partnerships, and solidarity and cooperation were not emphasized as principles. These principles have been underscored as pivotal in achieving demonstrable impacts of higher education internationalization (Mittelmeier et al., 2024; Gacel-Ávila, 2021).

Definition and Rationale

Among other definitions, the policy incorporated the definition of higher education internationalization provided by de Wit et al. (2015) to guide the internationalization effort in the country. The definition goes as:

The intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society.

The definition is an updated version of the working definition by Knight (1994) and is mostly used currently. The use of this definition in developing countries is criticized by scholars, arguing that it is framed as apolitical and detached from the realities of inequality, ethics, and other potentials for engaging with and across difference (Buckner and Stein in Heleta, 2022). Teferra (2019) also argues that internationalization in the South is a coerced process rather than intentional, whereas de Wit states that the definition highlights that internationalization must be an “intentional process” that takes into consideration the local, regional, and global contexts for the selection of its rationales, approaches, and implementation mechanisms (de Wit, 2019). The problem lies in situations where higher education systems mimic policies and strategies of higher education internationalization without carefully analyzing their contexts (de Wit et al., 2019). In any general frame, focusing on local priorities and needs to guide the why, what, and how of internationalization or any other policy will result in a practice reflecting localities (Ball, 1998; de Wit, 2019). The policymaking process is not approached in such a way, and what is reflected in the definition is not realized in the process of policy formulation. Although there is no coercion, the policy exhibits normative isomorphism, where policy makers adhere to international standards and norms when selecting policy options (DiMaggio and Powell, 2000).

Moreover, one of the primary rationales for formulating the internationalization policy of Ethiopia is to render internationalization an intentional process, and its development is commendable as the initial step towards intentional internationalization. However, as the document largely replicates the experiences of Northern countries and inadequately addresses context-specific issues such as the intercultural aspects of internationalization and integration of indigenous knowledge, it is difficult to assert that the policy is intentionally crafted for the Ethiopian context.

The four aspects of the rationale are included in the policy, including the academic, economic, political, and social-cultural aspects. The academic rationales emphasize the need for HEIs advancement in capacity, relevance, quality, performance, knowledge management and innovation; their reputability and competitiveness; staff and student competence; and knowledge and cultural exchange. The economic rationales emphasize the role of IHE in the preparation of capable HR for the economy and income generation. The political rationale noted the role of IHE for soft diplomacy. Lastly, the social/cultural component highlights creating mutual understanding among learners, staff, and the global community using internationalization as a means of addressing global challenges and the development of knowledge, skills, and values required to engage with the outside world.

In the policy, the four rationales were incorporated in line with the global experience (Knight, 2004; de Wit, 2001), whereas the academic and economic aspects were emphasized in the other documents analyzed. Additionally, the fragmented rationales in these documents were consolidated into a cohesive framework. However, whereas they cover the academic and research missions of HEIs, the need for IHE for service to society was not clearly stated. This lack of focus on internationalization for society and its systematic integration is the experience of many education systems (Brandenburg et al., 2019), and it hinders the fulfillment of internationalization outcomes in all three missions.

Moreover, the role of internationalization in creating intellectual diversity is not incorporated in the rationales. Connel (2007) argued that knowledge production is dominated by the North and the prevailing system of knowledge perpetuates inequalities (Connel, 2007). Montgomery and Trahar (2023) discuss how internationalization can contribute to minimizing this inequality, with decolonizing the knowledge production system being one of them. Through promoting intellectual diversity, the hidden potential of internationalization to reduce the dominance of the West in knowledge production and dissemination is asserted by scholars (Montgomery and Trahar, 2023). And yet, it is not given due emphasis in the rationales of the policy.

Directions and Strategies

The policy included six critical directions, four of which covered strategic activities. These activities are institution and program mobility, people mobility, internationalization of research and international cooperation, and internationalization at home. Requirements for inbound people mobility, recognition of foreign qualifications, and information and data management systems were also covered as directions and strategies.

Under institutional and program mobility, principles for institution and program mobility, including equal partnerships, mutual benefit, and promotion of access, quality, relevance, and equity were put forth. These principles are more or less similar to the ones stated in the principle section of the policy. It also discussed the process for inbound mobility of institutions and programs to be guided by relevant laws, regulations, and directives issued in Ethiopia and those from foreign programs to provide education comparable with standards offered in their parent institutions. Moreover, outgoing programs and institutions were required to get approval from ETA, which is the experience of many contexts, as quality is considered a shared responsibility of sending and host countries. The inbound institutions were required to present

accreditation of their programs or some kind of approval from their country's responsible organization.

People mobility focuses on creating opportunities for inbound and outbound student mobility, academic exchange of students and staff, and access to registered refugees. It highlights the contribution of foreign nationals and the Ethiopian diaspora to participate in capacity building, knowledge generation, and transfer. Moreover, it states the development and implementation of mechanisms to assist and enhance the success of outbound students. However, mechanisms to mitigate brain drain have not been addressed under this. Moreover, whereas the creation of access to refugees was stated, clear methods for inbound mobility related to tuition fees and scholarships were not discussed.

Internationalization of research and international cooperation states that international research collaborations and cooperation shall take place in many forms, including joint research, publication, conference attendance, and other related activities. It is open for all kinds of engagements that provide a primary focus on national and institutional priorities. It states that, using longer-term partnerships, these activities shall facilitate the improvement of teaching and learning, development of the curricula, quality, funding, technology, use of international facilities and equipment, and broad connections with external entities. Moreover, it dictates the facilitation of access for international scientists and the involvement of the Ethiopian diaspora. These are areas that need to be strengthened as the attraction of international talent is vital to build the capacity of higher education systems in developing countries (Yahya, 2018) if it is planned and operationalized, taking the context into account.

The policy gives priority to the South-to-South cooperation if possible. The fact that this was put as an alternative rather than a principal direction might lead institutions to focus on the South-to-North relationship. The South-to-South partnerships are advocated for fostering mutual benefit and sustainable development, ensuring

symmetrical relationship between partners (Maringe and de Wit, 2016) and contribute to epistemic decolonization (Heleta and Jithoo, 2023).

The focus of Internationalization at Home (IaH) is incorporating globally focused content and perspectives into the curriculum, supported by other services aimed at enhancing the global competence of graduates. It is noted that intercultural learning opportunities need to be practiced at all levels of the HE system. Establishing mechanisms to align students' knowledge of their country and region with global perspectives was highlighted. The use of English as a medium of instruction and the establishment of units for foreign language training were also among the issues covered. Furthermore, the creation of platforms to facilitate interactions among local and foreign students and the work required by HEIs to ensure that inbound students and scholars feel welcomed and integrated into the local context were emphasized. Additionally, it was also noted that HEIs may facilitate internships for students outside of Ethiopia, where feasible and advisable. Provision of support for institutions and staff actively engaged in advancing IaH initiatives was also promulgated.

The Internationalization at Home (IaH) strategy describes its roles and goals and the activities necessary for achieving them. Although the strategy recognizes the importance of creating a supportive environment for international students and staff and is committed to international diversity and ensuring intercultural exchange, it fails to clearly discuss ways to achieve them; the lack of thorough coverage on internationalizing the support service is one of them. Moreover, the inclusion of indigenous knowledge into the curriculum was not adequately emphasized. The policy points out that the local context is conducive to the practice of internationalization in higher education. However, it does not sufficiently address how this contextual knowledge and experience can be brought effectively into the internationalization at home initiatives.

The directions and strategies outlined in the document reflect the global experience of higher education internationalization (Knight 2004; Marinoni and Pina Cardona, 2024). However, these strategies and directions were not prioritized based on the specific context of the higher education system. Moreover, the issues incorporated in them do not provide comprehensive guidance on their implementation.

In general, the strategies and directions do not fully align with the definition employed in the policy. For instance, the international dimension was mostly emphasized while the global and intercultural dimensions received less prominence. The development of local knowledge and its integration into the global knowledge domain was also overlooked. Additionally, the internationalization of the community service function was not integrated into the strategies.

The role of ICT as a supporting tool for internationalization was insufficiently emphasized and incorporated into the strategies and directions. This was despite the strong recommendations by scholars on ICT use to provide inclusive, accessible, and equitable higher education (Magzan and Aleksic-Maslac, 2009; de Wit, 2016).

Conclusion

The study elucidates the context, actors' involvement, and formulation process of the higher education internationalization policy of Ethiopia, alongside an analysis of the issues incorporated into the policy. The analysis was based on the Policy Triangle Framework by Galt and Wilson (1994), which asserts the significance of considering the context, process, and actors' involvement as critical factors influencing policy content and outcomes.

The Ethiopian higher education system has a history of more than 70 years, but is still supported by foreign countries, experts, and donors. This engagement with the West seriously affected the practice, making

it difficult to be aware of and understand the reality to meet the local needs together with the international ones. This long-lived practice needs to be unpacked to comprehend the local and global reality and create a self-dependent higher education system in the long run.

The formulation of the policy is a big step in strategizing the ad hoc, disorganized, and unsystematic internationalization practices of the past. The development of important elements—the rationale and strategies of internationalization—plays a key role in guiding institutional efforts and their coordination at the national level.

From the analysis made using the four elements of the policy triangle, it can be concluded that the policy inadequately addresses contextually relevant issues, such as giving emphasis to South-to-South collaboration, the development of local knowledge, and its integration into the global knowledge domain. Even though the need for the formulation of the policy was guided and supported by various national-level documents, the gap may be attributable to a lack of proper involvement of stakeholders and thorough analysis of the country's context during the policy formulation process. In the absence of deep investigation into the local needs and requirements and with limited participation of relevant actors, including government departments and agencies, non-governmental organizations, public and private HEIs, and conventions and treaties, it is likely that the policy has not fully captured and reflected the realities it intends to address. This is a global trend, especially in developing countries, where policies are borrowed from the North, following a top-down approach of policymaking that does not give enough attention to the local context and stakeholder input.

Addressing these shortcomings calls for a more inclusive and context-sensitive approach to policymaking where all relevant actors' voices are heard through discussions and consultations, and local situations are studied to impact policy provision. This inclusive and context-sensitive approach can be achieved through the selection and participation of

relevant stakeholders and following a process of policy formulation that emphasizes the importance of stakeholder perspectives and context-related data.

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