

Tracing the Genesis, Progress, and Legacy of the College of Education and Language Studies: Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of Addis Ababa University

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Abstract

This short communication commemorates the 75th anniversary of Addis Ababa University by tracing the evolution of the College of Education and Language Studies (CELS), formerly the College of Education and Behavioral Studies (CEBS). It explores the college's transformation from its origins within the Faculty of Arts into a dynamic academic entity that has significantly influenced Ethiopia's educational and social development. Through historical analysis and institutional reflection, the paper highlights key milestones, structural shifts, and the enduring impact of CELS on national capacity building and intellectual leadership.

Keywords: *academic legacy, faculty of education, institutional transformation, anniversary commemoration, education, development*

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Introduction

As Addis Ababa University (AAU) commemorates its 75th anniversary in 2025, the College of Education and Language Studies (CELS) stands as a vibrant reflection of the university's enduring commitment to intellectual leadership, social transformation, and national development. Originating from its early roots within the Faculty of Arts, CELS has evolved into a multidisciplinary center of excellence in education, behavioral sciences, and language studies. Over the decades, it has nurtured generations of educators, psychologists, linguists, and social scientists whose contributions continue to shape Ethiopia's academic and societal landscape.

This short communication traces the historical journey of the College that started with Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Education then elevated to be known as the College of Education and Behavioral Studies (CEBS). It highlights key milestones, structural transitions, academic advancements, and innovative practices that have defined the college's growth. Finally, it reflects on newly reorganized the College of Education and Language Studies' (CELS) dynamic role in Ethiopia's educational future and offers concluding insights.

The communication is intended to celebrate the 75 -year legacy of Addis Ababa University through the lens of CELS, showcase the college's contributions to educational reform and behavioral studies in Ethiopia, and inspire future scholarship and policy dialogue by reflecting on the college's role in shaping national development.

This brief review of the College's past is essentially based on documents regarding the history of the University which involve legislations, strategic plans, structural changes, programs and curricula, administrative records, research outputs and reports. The information thus obtained is organized chronologically and thematically along with occasional remarks and reflections.

Archival review: a thorough examination of Addis Ababa University's historical archives, strategic planning documents, administrative records, reports, and senate laws. These materials shed light on the structural changes from the Faculty of Arts to CEBS and finally to CELS, explaining the reasons behind key institutional shifts.

Document analysis: a detailed review of curricular frameworks, program catalogs, reports, and internal evaluations. This analysis shows the growth of academic offerings in education, vocational and behavioral sciences, and how these have addressed national priorities and global trends.

Research outputs and comparative analysis: a review of research outputs and scholarly publications. A comparison between colleges within Addis Ababa University helps to contextualize CELS's development in relation to other academic units and examine policy influence across different educational periods, as well as the contributions of faculty and students to Ethiopia's educational and social progress.

Thematic structuring: the findings are organized both chronologically and thematically to capture the layered evolution of the college's identity—from its early years to its current state.

The Genesis and the Journey towards Partaking in the Diamond Jubilee of the University

The story of higher education in Ethiopia begins in 1950, with the establishment of the University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA). Initially, UCAA offered two-year programs through its two founding divisions: the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Science. By 1954, it evolved into a fully-fledged four-year college under a formal charter (Negarit Gazeta, General Notice No. 185). Not long after, the first cohort of university graduates emerged, with 13 students' receiving degrees, including three who earned Bachelor of Arts in Education.

The College of Education and Behavioral Studies (CEBS) at Addis Ababa University (AAU) has its roots in 1952 when education courses were first introduced under the Faculty of Arts. A dedicated four-year teacher training program for secondary school educators was launched in 1955–56, followed by the formal establishment of the Department of Education in 1959 (Aklilu, 1961). In 1961, UCAA and other institutions were brought together under a single charter to form Haile Selassie I University (HSIU). By 1962, the Faculty of Education

was formally established (Aklilu, 1961; Teferi and Abdussamad, 2024). The University operated as Haile Selassie University from 1962 to 1974 which operated from 1962 to 1974.

Until 1974, Addis Ababa University (AAU) operated under a self-governance charter, with a Chancellor serving as its chief executive. In 1977, administrative oversight transitioned to the Higher Education Commission, and by 1993, the university came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education through a formal proclamation.

In 2023, the Ethiopian government has taken a bold step toward higher education reform by promulgating legislation to grant autonomy to public universities, ensuring greater operational freedom and self-governance (FDRE, 2023). This shift was formalized through Proclamation No. 1294/2023 and the Addis Ababa University Establishment Council of Ministers Regulation No. 537/2023, which collectively marked a renewed commitment to institutional transformation. Addis Ababa University (AAU), Ethiopia's flagship institution of higher learning, has regained its autonomy after 49 years. This legal recognition empowered the university to independently manage its academic, financial, and administrative affairs—ushering in a new era of innovation, accountability, and strategic alignment with national development priorities.

As a result of autonomy proclamation, AAU underwent a comprehensive restructuring, leading to the merger and reorganization of academic units. This process culminated in the formation of seven colleges and a School of Law, including the newly established College of Education and Language Studies in 2025, reflecting the university's evolving academic vision and strategic priorities.

Within this historic milestone, the College of Education and Language Studies stands out as a pillar of intellectual leadership, social transformation, and national development. As a dynamic hub of educational and behavioral innovation, the college has shaped generations of educators, psychologists, and social scientists whose contributions continue to influence Ethiopia and extend far beyond its borders.

As part of this autonomy-driven transformation, the university restructured its academic framework, leading to the establishment of the College of Education and Language Studies (CELS) as a distinct academic pillar (Organizational Structure of Addis Ababa University, AAU Governing Board, 2024). CELS have since emerged as a dynamic force in

national education reform, contributing through research, policy development, and capacity building. Its graduate alumni now serve in leadership roles across ministries, universities, and international organizations.

In celebration of AAU's 75th anniversary, CELS is launching a series of legacy initiatives—including oral history archives, alumni spotlights, and public exhibitions. These projects aim to honor the college's rich heritage while inspiring future generations to pursue careers in education, behavioral sciences, and language studies. The autonomy granted to AAU has empowered CELS to innovate and tailor its programs to meet evolving national priorities. As one of seven colleges recognized during the Diamond Jubilee, CELS stands as a testament to AAU's enduring legacy in nation-building and educational excellence.

As AAU marks its 75th year, the legacy of CELS reflects a profound commitment to intellectual leadership, social transformation, and national development. From its origins in the Faculty of Arts to its current role as a hub of educational, behavioral, and linguistic innovation, the College has shaped generations of educators, psychologists, linguists, and social scientists whose contributions continue to influence Ethiopia and the global community.

Reform and Legacy

Structural Evolution and Reform

The Faculty of Education that was established in 1962 began with three pioneering departments: Elementary Education, Educational Psychology with emphasis on Guidance and Counseling, alongside Educational Administration, Research, and Services. Over the next decade, it grew to include Secondary Education, Library Science, Physical Education and Sports, and Technical Teacher Education laying the groundwork for comprehensive teacher preparation across major and minor subject areas.

A significant turning point came in 1963 with the launch of the Prince Bedemariam Laboratory School. This school became a vital source of skilled and enthusiastic teacher candidates, marking a transformative era in Ethiopia's educational scene and establishing AAU as a frontrunner in training educators.

In the early 1970s, the introduction of Bachelor of Education degrees, along with the expansion into postgraduate training and increased involvement in national curriculum reform and policy advising, took place. Even during the Derge regime, when Marxist-Leninist content was integrated into teacher training, AAU continued to be a key player in developing educational leadership.

After the 1974 revolution, the university adopted its current name, Addis Ababa University (AAU). During the Derg regime, the Faculty of Education aligned with socialist educational reforms, emphasizing mass education, national literacy campaigns, and ideological training. Despite the political constraints of the era, AAU remained a vital center for academic discourse and teacher preparation.

By 1978, the Faculty had streamlined into five departments: Elementary Education, Secondary Education, Psychology, Library Science, and Technical Teacher Education. That same year, it was restructured to add Business Education, Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Administration, Educational Psychology, and Technical Teacher Education—showing a clear shift towards more specialized academic programs.

In response to the 1994 Education and Training Policy, a series of strategic initiatives were launched, the most notable through the Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs), (MoE, 2002) to strengthen teacher preparation and leadership capacity. These reforms had profound implications for higher education in particular for Faculty of Education at AAU, prompting the university to expand its graduate programs in educational leadership and management, educational policy and planning, teacher education, and curriculum studies, positioning itself as a national leader in educator development and policy innovation.

In 2002, Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) reform was initiated and for its implementation, a new structural arrangement resulted the elevation of Faculty of Education to College of Education (2003), reflecting its expanded academic scope and student population. The college comprised thirteen departments across three divisions: (1) Educational Sciences: Business Education, Educational Planning & Management, Psychology, Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies (TECS), Physical Education & Sports, (2) Social Science & Language Studies: Ethiopian Languages & Literature Education,

English Language Education, Geography & Environmental Education, History Education, and (3) Science Education: Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, and Physics Education.

TESO aimed to improve the quality, relevance, and delivery of teacher education nationwide. In parallel, the Higher Education System Overhaul (HESO) was also introduced in 2003 to expand access, revise curricula, enhance quality and relevance and align higher education with national development goals. Despite its transformative intent, TESO faced challenges such as limited capacity, institutional resistance, and misalignment with existing practices—leading to its gradual phase-out by 2008. Around the same time, a new policy mandated that 70% of undergraduate admissions be allocated to science and engineering fields, while downsizing fields like social sciences and humanities to 30% (MoE, 2008a). This shift significantly impacted on faculties of education and social sciences through reduced enrollment and institutional support.

As part of a nationwide public sector reform initiative led by the government, Addis Ababa University (AAU) launched a Business Process Reengineering (BPR) effort in 2007, aimed at modernizing governance and enhancing institutional effectiveness (AAU BPR Report, 2009). The implementation of BPR brought significant changes across AAU's colleges and faculties, including structural reorganization and the elimination of program duplication. One major outcome was the renaming of the College of Education to the College of Education and Behavioral Studies (CEBS) in 2010. The CEBS included the School of Education and the Institute of Psychology. The School of Education housed departments such as Educational Planning and Management (EdPM), Curriculum and Instruction (C&I), Special Needs and Inclusive Education (SNIE), and Teacher Education- split into Social Sciences and Language Education, and Science and Mathematics Education.

In 2011, a university-wide study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of BPR implementation and the existing governance structure (AAU Change Management Office, 2011). The findings revealed that no fundamental changes had occurred; the university remained largely in its status quo, and the anticipated improvements in efficiency and effectiveness were not realized.

As a result, AAU undertook further restructuring in 2012, streamlining its governance into a three-tier system: central administration, colleges, and departments/schools/centers

(Reorganization of Structural Set-up and Governance System of the University, 2012). This reorganization affected CEBS directly: the Institute of Psychology was renamed the School of Psychology, and the Teacher Education departments were consolidated into two distinct units—Science and Mathematics Education and Social Science and Language Education. Additionally, staff specializing in teacher education were redeployed to subject-area academic units outside the college, and several programs were internally reorganized to align with the new structure.

As part of its broader strategy to enhance the quality, relevance, and innovation capacity of Ethiopia’s education system, the Ministry of Education initiated the establishment of Centers of Excellence dedicated to teacher education and school leadership development (MoE, 2015). In alignment with this initiative, the CEBS at Addis Ababa University (AAU) established its own Center of Excellence, reinforcing its role for the preparation of teachers, school leaders, educators and policy advancement.

In 2024, as part of university wide institutional autonomy initiative, the College of Education and Behavioral Studies (CEBS) underwent a significant restructuring to combine with language studies (AAU Governing Board Decision on Organizational Structure of the University and reorganization of the colleges). Today, CELS comprises eleven core departments: (1) Curriculum and Comparative Education, (2) Educational Planning and Management, (3) School of Psychology, (4) Special Needs and Inclusive Education, (5) Teacher Education, (6) Foreign Language and Literature (English), (7) Amharic, Literature & Folklore, (8) Afan Oromo, Literature & Folklore, (9) Linguistics and Philology, (10) Center for European and Asian Culture, and (11) Sport Science and Physical Education.

Contributions and Legacy

The College has played a pivotal role in shaping Ethiopia’s educational landscape. It pioneered teacher education programs that progressed from certificate-level training to diploma, bachelors, masters, and PhD degrees—establishing national standards for educator preparation. Over time, the College broadened its academic portfolio to include robust programs in education, psychology, curriculum studies, educational planning, and linguistics.

These offerings have produced thousands of highly qualified professionals—teachers, principals, supervisors, educators, behavioral scientists, and counselors—who continue to serve across Ethiopia’s urban and rural communities. The College’s graduates have become instrumental in driving educational reform, improving learning outcomes, and strengthening institutional capacity nationwide.

Over the past several decades, the College has demonstrated remarkable growth in both the scope and diversity of its academic programs. This expansion reflects a deliberate and strategic commitment to increasing access to higher education, responding to national development priorities, and amplifying its impact on Ethiopia’s human capital development.

The college’s contribution to the university’s academic landscape is significant across all levels of study: *Undergraduate Programs*, it offers 30% of the university’s total 66 undergraduate programs. *Master’s Programs*, it contributes 14.4% of the university’s 181 master’s programs. *PhD Programs*, it accounts for 16.1% of the university’s 118 doctoral programs.

Program Level	Total University Programs	College Programs	College Share (%)
Undergraduate	66	20	30.0%
Master’s	181	26	14.4%
PhD	118	19	16.1%

(Source: AAU Registrar 2024/25)

This distribution highlights the college’s evolving role as a key academic pillar within the university. The Strategic Implications are: *Academic Influence*, the College’s growing share enhances its influence on university-wide curriculum development and research priorities. *Resource Allocation*, the expansion may warrant increased investment in faculty, facilities, and student support services. *Future planning*, continued diversification could position the college as a leader in interdisciplinary and specialized education.

So far CELS is one of the larger colleges likely accounting for 12-15% of AAU’s graduate student population. In terms of graduate programs the CELS offers a diverse range of programs in education, psychology, curriculum studies, science and mathematics education, and educational planning and linguistics. It likely contributes more than 12-14% of AAU’s total graduate programs. The CELS has consistently produced significant number of

graduates annually, and the estimated contribution is about 10–12% of AAU's total graduates (AAU/Registrar data base. The CELS has a disproportionately high impact relative to its size due to its role in training educators and policymakers, shaping national curriculum and education reforms, and producing influential research in behavioral studies. The estimated impact proportion of CELS, though harder to quantify, CELS's influence on Ethiopia's education system suggests it contributes 15–20% of AAU's societal and policy impact. These estimates reflect CELS's strategic importance within AAU, especially in shaping Ethiopia's educational landscape.

Societal Impact and Public Engagement

The College of Education and Language Studies, as venerable as Addis Ababa University itself, stands as a cornerstone in shaping Ethiopia's educational trajectory and its influence extends beyond academia. Its legacy and impact span decades, deeply woven into the fabric of national progress. The College's enduring contributions manifest across three pivotal dimensions, each explored in detail below.

Policy Leadership and Influence: the College has played a strategic role in shaping education policy, center of gravity in educational policy making of the nation both in conducting policy research and in crafting the policy itself, serving as one of the major steering forces in national education reform and planning. The academic staff of the College have been the prime movers and contributors of two major scientific publications, namely the *Ethiopian Journal of Education* and the *Ethiopian Journal of Behavioral Studies* - journals that continue to shed light on many crucial matters that relate to educational policy and planning, curriculum design, teacher problems, educational measurement and assessment, student counseling, inclusive education and many others.

Its faculty and alumni have been instrumental in advising, drafting, and implementing key policies that guide Ethiopia's educational future. For instance; the 1974 revolution was a phenomenon that changed the country forever, including the education system (Paulston, 1977; Young & Levin, 1999) that made education reform highly political. The reform wasn't begun immediately, rather college instructors and students called for National Development Campaign for Cooperation and Work that aimed to educate the rural population. The

Education Sector Review (1972) of the Imperial Period, the Evaluative Research on the General Education System of Ethiopia (ERGESE, 1983), the Education and Training Policy (ETP, 1994), the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2017). The roadmap was designed with a view to guide the education sector and enable it to keep pace with the significant socio-economic and political reforms the country was undertaking (MoSHE, 2018).

Human Capital Development: the College of Education has long stood as a powerhouse in cultivating Ethiopia's educational workforce. It has produced a vast cadre of professionals—teachers, educators, researchers, and academic leaders—who have served across the nation, shaping learning environments at every level. With 43,366 undergraduate alumni, the College represents approximately 14.7% of Addis Ababa University's total graduates (AAU/Registrar data base), highlighting its pivotal role in national workforce development. Its leadership in graduate education is equally notable: 12.9% of AAU's 64,322 graduate-level alumni earned their advanced degrees from the College, underscoring its enduring impact on scholarship, innovation, and educational leadership.

Institutional Motherhood: it has served as the intellectual and structural foundation for the establishment of other education faculties and colleges across Ethiopia. Many of the country's higher learning institutions trace their academic lineage to the College of Education, making it a true "mother institution" in the national academic ecosystem. In 2015, as indicated in GEQIP II, the MoE has taken initiatives to establish center of excellence in teacher education and educational leadership in five universities (Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar, Hawassa, Jimma and Mekele) (2018). It was the College of Education and Behavioral Studies of AAU that stirred the development of a roadmap; outlining the strategic directions and goals of those centers of excellence to spearhead national efforts in reforming teacher education and school leadership in Ethiopia, and to nationally networked and evolve into a university of education with all the capabilities to spearhead all educational reform endeavors in this bigger nation of Ethiopia(Center of Excellence Roadmap, CEBS, 2020).Moreover, the college has been instrumental and driver for the establishment of at least

one Education University in the country (source; international and national education conferences proceedings).

Through community outreach, counseling services, and partnerships with schools and NGOs, the college has played a vital role in promoting behavioral health and educational equity. The college's work aligns with Ethiopia's broader goals for sustainable development, especially in areas related to quality education (SDG 4) and good health and well-being (SDG 3). Moreover, the college has increasingly emphasized research-based education, contributing to national policy reforms and pedagogical advancements.

Looking Ahead

As Addis Ababa University celebrates its 75th anniversary, the College of Education and Language Studies reflects on a legacy of excellence and envisions a future of deeper impact ; enters its next chapter embracing digital transformation, interdisciplinary research, behavioral analytics and educational technology, and strengthening partnerships, global collaboration with African and international institutions.

Building on AAU's autonomous status, CELS will refine its governance, enhance academic freedom, and cultivate a culture of innovation and accountability. The College will invest in faculty development, infrastructure, and student support systems to ensure excellence at every level.

The college remains a spread in supporting the on-going efforts in Ethiopia to make teaching a profession of choice; and professionalise educational leadership thereby focussing more on instructional leadership, committed to preparing educators, behavioral scientists and linguists and works to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world fostering inclusive, evidence-based education and behavioral practice that responds to the evolving needs of society.

Moreover, by way of addressing the challenges of quality education in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa University/College of Education and Language Studies can play a transformative role in strengthening the teacher education and educational leadership in Ethiopia by aligning its programs with national priorities and global best practices. The CELS will strengthen its role as a national think tank—producing actionable research that informs education policy,

curriculum reform, and language development. The College will prioritize evidence-based solutions to address challenges in equity, access, and quality.

For teacher education a competency based training strong at undergraduate in subject area combined with postgraduate diplomas. The Competency-Based Training, emphasize practical teaching skills; strong practicum partnerships with schools, classroom management, and inclusive education and integrate digital literacy and ICT tools for modern pedagogy. Specialized tracks such as Early Childhood Education, STEM Education (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics), Social Studies, inclusive and Special Needs Education, and Language and Literacy Development. Cross-cutting issues such as Environmental education, Gender equity and social inclusion, and Peace and citizenship education.

Similarly, the Focus for Educational Leadership Programs drawing from AAU's existing leadership programs and the national Education Sector Development Program VI (ESDP VI), training leaders to support teacher development and student learning outcomes, and focus on data-driven decision-making and curriculum leadership is necessary. Equipping leaders with skills in policy analysis, strategic planning, and educational reform, emphasize equity, access, and quality improvement, develop capacity for managing school resources, community engagement, and performance monitoring, prepare leaders for governance and innovation in universities and colleges, and include modules on academic quality assurance and institutional autonomy are essential.

Conclusion

The 75-year journey of the College of Education and Language Studies—from its origins in the Education Department within the Faculty of Arts to its current stature as a transformative academic institution—is far more than a chronicle of achievement. It is a living testament to the enduring power of education, the pursuit of knowledge, and the impact of visionary leadership and dedicated service in shaping a more just and enlightened society.

As Ethiopia continues to navigate complex educational and social challenges, CELS remains steadfast in its commitment to lead with wisdom, compassion, and innovation. Grounded in its legacy and propelled by its vision, the College stands poised to shape the

next generation of educators, scholars, and change-makers ensuring that the spirit of learning continues to illuminate the path toward national progress and global relevance.

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