

Revamping Centers for Teacher Education and School Leadership Development in Ethiopia: A Pathway to Excellence

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Abstract

This article attempted to find out the what and how the center of excellence in teacher education and school leadership development scheme works to stimulate quality education and training in Ethiopia. The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Science and Higher Education, and higher education institutions are critical in the transition to enhance quality education and training in the sector. Realizing the quality challenges encountered, Ministry of Education has initiated a project, roadmap of 15 years for teachers and school leadership preparation and development. The integral piece of this transition is the presence of centers of excellence in teachers and school leadership development for learning and teaching excellence, research and community engagement, and make them operational. For the purpose, qualitative data were collected on the status and functioning of the center of excellence from review of survey reports of the five universities with center of excellence, and consultation of stakeholders during conference. The findings indicated that some of the centers of excellences (CoEs) had started training of teacher education without adequate preparation and fulfilling the minimum institutional basics as well as conditions that the centers supposed to meet. Based on the findings, it is concluded that the center of excellences operates in the same way as that of public universities and there are no major shifts in different areas to be center of excellence to attain the purpose. This is therefore to awake and steer discussion among the stakeholders in creating clarity and develop consensus on the roles and functioning of the CoEs in light of the preparation and support of teachers and school leaders in Ethiopia for the 21st century. Then get the support and in placement of the necessary basics for the implementation so as the centres' objectives will be realized, and consequently creating capacity to carry out research, developing professionalism, teachers and school leaders for the nation.

Key words: center of excellence, programs, capacity, organization and management, quality.

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Introduction

Educations play a critical role in the development, cohesion and wellbeing of society. Ethiopia has lagged behind for too long and the focus is now every child deserves a high-quality education. The vision to be a middle-income country by 2030 can be realized if the current education quality and efficiency challenges are significantly improved. The 2030 agenda for sustainable development puts education to the front as education is both an end in itself and a means for attaining most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNESCO, 2017).

In educational settings, teachers and school leadership are widely regarded as the two most important school related factors that significantly explain differences in students learning and school performance (Leithwood et al., 2006). Teachers are the real change agents in education. They are not just implementers of change, they generate it. Within schools, learning-teaching has the strongest impact on student achievement. Similarly, school principals have significant contribution to students' learning by impacting school conditions and supporting teachers' professional development and performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). As an approach in achieving educational excellence is, putting the best leaders at the heart of the school system with the support to thrive leading and developing great teachers. Producing more of the same education will not suffice to address the challenges of the future. Thus, we need to rethink many aspects of our education systems, specially the teachers and the school leadership such as: the quality of recruiting systems; the type of education and training recruits obtain before they start working; how they are monitored and what education and support they get; how their compensation is structured; how to improve performance of struggling teachers and enhance development among the best ones to transform schools and ensure quality.

In view of this, the FDRE MoE has prioritized teachers' and educational leaders' development programs as centerpieces of school transformation and indicated the need to establish centers of excellence in teachers and educational leaders' development in its second General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP) as a strategy to improve the quality of teachers and educational leaders. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education developed in 2015 terms of reference for establishing CoE in public universities with the following objectives:

- a) Identify, develop and share good practices to improve the quality of teacher and educational leaders training,
- b) Support teacher education institutes and establish viable links /networks to improve teacher and educational leaders program,
- c) Develop quality professional development models and establish model schools for observation and student practice teaching to serve as a benchmark for teacher education institutes and school collaboration,
- d) Assess, develop and disseminate state of the art/advanced technique in teacher education programs,
- e) Serve as resource center in managing knowledge in teacher and educational leaders training through developing and disseminating innovative pedagogy, instructional designs, instructional materials; including DVDs of exemplary teaching for distance learning with the support of ICT,
- f) Conduct demand driven / need based research to identify deep rooted challenges in teacher and educational leaders training thereby develop and disseminate appropriate strategies to improve teacher and educational leaders development,
- g) Provide technical support to the Ministry of Education in matters relating to teacher and educational leaders development based on research studies,
- h) Offer Masters and PhD in teacher and educational leader's education.

To meet these objectives, five Center of Excellence (CoEs) were established in five universities, namely; Addis Ababa University, Bahir Dar University, Jima, Hawassa, and Mekele University. Of the five CoEs, four of them have started offering training in teacher education program. The center at Addis Ababa University, which was lately included as a CoE is in the preparation phase.

The school leadership development program was not yet started until the end of 2020. The argument is that the centers can enter into operation and serve as a path to excellence if clarity is developed and consensus is reached, conducive policy environment is created, programs, and structure are in place in light of the expectations of CoEs. Thus, the purpose of this paper was to show the urgent need for collaboration among the policy makers, decision makers and other relevant stakeholders to close the gap by fulfilling the basics needed for the CoEs and ignite the operationalization.

Statement of the Problem

There is now an urgent need to promote high quality teaching and to raise the status of teaching as an advanced, knowledge-based profession. This need is necessitated by the presence of challenges such as poor learning achievements and low competencies

as reflected by the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), National Learning Assessment (NLA) and national examinations results, as well as, low completion rates, public dissatisfaction and the growing trend of unemployment.

The contribution of schools to student learning most certainly depends on the motivations and capacities (qualities) of teachers and school leaders. Evidences suggest that a number of factors led to low quality of teachers and school leaders. According to the MoE (2009) and World Bank (2013), problems such as inadequate teachers' subject matter competence, lack of proper implementation of active learning methods in schools, lack of demonstration of professional commitment and work ethics to the desired degree, low interest of teachers to follow up and assist students were some of the key challenges affecting quality of education. Some examples of the leading problems with teachers preparation programs are: low expectations for who is accepted and who graduates, and lack of trainee motivation; the curricula are disconnected from the training institution and standards that teachers/leaders need to know, course work that is heavy on theory and lacks the practical skills; lack of quality control in choosing the supervising teachers who guide teacher/leaders' candidates during their clinical practice (MoE, 2003; MoE, 2019).

In general, the graduates of the existing programs are not effective in raising student achievement and transforming schools to be productive. Moreover, as the 2019 Education Roadmap indicates the inability of the training programs to address the content knowledge gaps of trainees and the pedagogical skills, admission of low-quality candidates (under performers), lack of motivation for the profession, lack of effective professional support on field are factors contributing to poor teacher's quality. Regarding school leadership, research suggests that it is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Leadership is widely viewed as a key factor in accounting for differences in the success with which schools foster the learning of their students. By school leadership the definitions have been broadened to include principals, vice-principals, teacher leaders, aspiring leaders and cluster/woreda leaders. Studies conducted around the globe indicate that the leadership lack skill, knowledge and motivation, the system of recruitment and selection was poor, and the training and development programs were also poor. Further, the training programs have failed to keep pace with the evolving principal's role (Butler, 2008; Duncan, Range, & Scherz, 2011; Fleck, 2008; Hernandez, Roberts, & Menchaca,

2012; Lynch, 2012; Miller, 2013; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Lynch, 2012; Mendels & Mitgang, 2013; Miller 2013; Reed & Kinsler, 2010; Sarah, Melissa and Daria, 2013; Zubnzycki, 2013).

Obviously, quality schools require quality leadership. Quality leadership cannot be assumed or acquired without a coherent, integrated and/or consequential systematic approach to leadership recruitment, retention, and development (Schleicher, 2012). The implication is that for quality of education to improve; it is important to address the design of the overall teachers and leaders education and training program. This includes system of teachers and leaders recruitment process, the monitoring of the training and development processes are and the support offered to education. In addition, how their compensation is structured; how to improve performance and enhance the development among the best ones is needed. Such issues and others pertaining to teachers' and school leaders' preparation should be effectively addressed by placing teachers and school leaders at the center of improving quality of education.

It is argued that with the traditional training institutions, existing norms and system, it is difficult to promote high quality teaching and raise the status of teaching as an advanced, knowledge-based profession. The question is what competencies do teachers need to effectively teach those skills that young generation demand and how can we prepare teachers needed in a 21st century? What are the roles and responsibilities of the 21st century school leaders and how do we succeed in developing these leaders? Thus, reforming the system of teacher education and school leadership development and establishing a specialized center become an important part of policy mix for realizing the sector goals.

Noting the quality challenges, the system encountered, five CoEs were identified and established. Consequently, all but A.A.U have started operation in teacher education However, the school leadership development programs has not been initiated. Thus, an assessment was made on the basis of the following research questions:

- 1) What are the evidences of institutional change along the lines of the design and principles of CoE in teachers and school leaders' preparation and development at these institutions?
- 2) What are the primary categories of change that are undertaken in each university?
- 3) What is the policy support in place?

The purpose of this paper was to provide information and analysis for policy makers, educators, higher education institutions, researchers and other stakeholders on models of teachers and school leadership preparation and development, and to indicate the missing institutional and policy supports to trigger the CoEs. That is to stimulate university-based teachers and educational leadership preparation programs, university leadership and state policy makers to begin an earnest conversation for the transformation of the centers. The past and existing practices focus on particular aspects of teachers and leadership preparation such as what the curriculum including the internship/practicum should look like, however this paper is distinctive in that it attempts to present the center of excellence as a holistic picture/path to excellence of what is needed to develop and support successful best teachers and school leaders for the country. These entails the management and organization of the centers, and the programs as well as policy implications that are aiming for quality improvement in schooling. It aims to describe the way centers are organized and managed, teachers and school leaders are recruited, trained and developed.

Center of Excellences: Why center of excellence?

Before describing the why of center of excellences, let us clarify three conceptually competing views: world-class, national flagship university, and center of excellence. It is common knowledge that universities have three core missions: learning-teaching, research, and community engagement. Excellence in higher education refers to all functions/areas: leadership, purposes and plans, beneficiaries and constituencies, programs and services, faculty/staff and workplace, assessment and information use, outcomes and achievements. In the context of academic quality and standards, excellence relates to the quality of teaching, research, community services, the capabilities of students, the scale of resource provision and the level of student achievement. According to Healey (2000), excellence implies a high level of competencies. Excellence applies to both management and service delivery as well as the experience of staff and students and the outputs from study and research. What is clear is that excellence is an expectation and a goal. It is important to note that while excellence refers to an outstanding high level of quality that distinguishes the best from the rest, quality suggests to quality assurance adherence to a minimum quality standard required for to be licensed to operate in the context of higher education. This puts the two concepts at center stage of the transformation of higher education.

World-class university

World-class universities are sometimes referred to as global research universities, and have a worldwide reputation and in the top universities rank. *World-class university* as per Altbach (2004), top ranked university based on international standards of excellence, for Aula and Tienari (2011), the university that has a reputation internationally, for Nazarzadeh Zare et al. (2016), national and global leader in terms of teaching, research, innovation, and in producing graduates who become leaders in the public and private sectors, and others viewed as an ecology of institution with highly differentiated but tightly integrated visions. In general, *World-class universities* are academic institutions dedicated to creating and spreading knowledge in a range of disciplines and fields, delivering quality at all levels, strong commitment to excellence in the quality of inputs, processes, and outputs, and excellences in many fields, both academic and non-academic, serving national needs, and furthering international public interest. Scholars and institutional administrators define *world-class* as attaining the standard included in the lists of *world university rankings*, which focuses on quality of education, internationalization, research output, status, and impact.

The *World-class universities* have a number of basic features, such as highly qualified faculty (professors and researchers); excellence in research; quality teaching; high levels of government and nongovernment sources of funding; international and highly talented students academically gifted and successful; academic freedom; well-defined autonomous governance structures; and well-equipped facilities for teaching, research, administration, and student life (Altbach, 2004; Khoon et al., 2005; Niland, 2000, 2007). The *World-class universities* are the highest-ranked universities that make significant contributions to the advancement of knowledge through scientific research and some institutions rank on criteria like the number of noble prizes, and building internationalization and marketing (Buela-Casal et al., 2007). Although, the world-class university teach with the most innovative curricula and pedagogical methods under the most conducive circumstances, make research an integral component of teaching, and produce graduates who stand out, but there are also criticisms. The difference in thoughts of the university, making the criteria used in the assessment is also different. For example, Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) stressed that higher education is about scientific research and noble prize and not on teaching, community development, or contributions to local and global communities, and Times Higher Education Supplement (THES), stressed that higher education is about building reputation and on international marketing, and not on teaching, research and scholarship (Marginson, 2007; Ishikawa, 2009; Saisana et al., 2011).

National university/Flagship

According to Altbach (2007), the term flagship is frequently used in discussion at research University to refer to leading university in academic system of a country. *Flagship universities* are recognized to be as the best-known institutions in the state, age-wise, they are generally the first to be established and are frequently the largest and most selective, as well as the most research-intensive public universities. *Flagship universities* aspire to support regional and national socio-economic mobility and economic development, educating the societal and business leaders of the future and understanding and seeking a role in supporting other segments of a nation's education system. Such huge responsibilities and demands put the flagship universities in challenges to meet the expectations of the government that supports it, and other educational institutions, particularly public institutions of higher learning, and even the private sector, which assumes that new knowledge generated by the university can be passed on to industry. Some authorities also qualify and equate flagship universities as essentially, and world-class universities with a commitment to teaching top students, to providing top-level professional education and to a mission of civic engagement, outreach and economic development.

Center of excellences (CoEs)

CoEs can be described as organizational environments that strive to bring high standards of conduct in a field of research, innovation, or learning. According to Healey (2000), *Center of Excellence (CoE)* is a unit or product lines within an organization and has a leading-edge knowledge and competency in that area. It is comprised of highly-skilled individuals and experts, who disseminate knowledge in an organization and share best practices. Generally, a *Center of Excellence* is a place where the highest standards are maintained. The purpose of *Center of Excellence* is to become a successful institution and reaches goals efficiently. In literature different naming are given to the CoE such as competence center, capability center, outstanding performance and the quality of excelling center. Thus, excellence implies a high level of competencies (Healey, 2000). Excellence can be identified at the level of the institution, faculty, department or individual members of staff and can be applied in the context of the many different roles and functions of higher education institutions. It applies to both management and service delivery as well as the experience of staff and students and the outputs from study and research. Flagship universities are world class universities, both pursue excellence and competitiveness, that is, they share excellence in research outputs

and teaching learning, and top ranked. The establishment of center of Excellence in universities is a step in the right direction in making institutions of higher learning relevant to their social environments. Thus, the CoE in teacher education and school leadership development is a strategic approach with standards of excellence for research and teaching in the field of education.

For our purpose, the CoEs in Education possess the ability to absorb and generate new knowledge. Ideally, *Center of Excellence* would distribute and utilise this new knowledge in the form of new capacity in the field of education (teacher education, school leadership: learning-teaching, research, innovation). The CoE has a notion of quality (excellence) with an organizational dimension. According to Balderston (1995), excellence is present in an academic organization to the extent that it satisfies some conditions for long-term viability, preferably realized via a sound governance structure that ensures autonomy and self-direction and, a broadly accepted commitment to academic values. In this connection, the relevant issue is the reasons of establishing this specialist center for teacher education and school leadership development. According to experiences of others (Miller, 2013; Salmi & Froumin, 2013; Healey, 2000; Barber & Mourshed, 2007), the following reasons justify the establishment of CoE in Ethiopian context:

- a) raise standards and boost productivity in the sector, there is a need to develop expertise and standards in teachers and school leadership development,
- b) deliver niche training to justify general reorientation, there is a need for a new skill in the organization that must be developed organically through experiential,
- c) stimulate innovation and applied learning by co-locating learning with research and development,
- d) act as a positive role model for other education institutions in related fields,
- e) prepare a select group with recognized qualifications to facilitate competitiveness.

Overall, the CoE is designed to drive innovation and improvements. It operates efficiently, effectively and innovatively in delivery of relevant, functional and quality programs in teachers and school leadership education, training, research and community engagement.

How to establish center of excellence?

Evidently, universities are striving to win the struggle for excellence, and are leveraging CoEs as tools to stay ahead. Setting up a CoE will indeed mark the beginning of university journey to excellence. To stand out, universities must make sure that they have the right ingredients to establish an effective and successful CoE.

There are various models used in the establishment of CoE. What is needed in setting up the CoE is a clarity of purpose and a roadmap. The CoE can be established within the education and training institution/university through the process of self-assessment; measure strength and areas of improvement (SWOT and PEST analysis), or peer review; help to identify area of focus/gap, or the process help to identify what the university as organisation does, or could do, to provide an excellent service or product to its customers, service users or stakeholders. Establishing a center of excellence within an institution/ university is the most common method due to the fact that existing facilities can be used, or new ones may be added, the institution can be elevated from *good* to *great* by providing expert trainers, researchers, facilities, and equipment and the new center to take advantage of the reputation and resources of an existing institution with a solid reputation. The other methods of establishing the CoE are as stand-alone independent center and as networks of excellences.

Center of excellence for teacher education and school leadership development

Initiatives for excellences

World-wide, there are number of initiatives aiming at pushing universities for excellences. Specifically, to develop quality and teaching excellence in higher education system. The excellence is not only to achieve specific indicators but to develop within the university a culture of self-development and change management. However, the majority of the initiatives do not have specific elements of the design to achieve this goal. Excellence-driven initiatives can be described as a large injection of funding by a national government for the development of world-class universities in an accelerated fashion. Such programs are very selective in terms of the number of beneficiary universities and the research focus of the upgrading efforts (Salmi and Froumin; 2013).

An example is the Norwegian Centers for Excellence in Education initiative (SFU) The initiative was born in the Norwegian policy context, as an explicit initiative for driving excellence in higher education in 2010, by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. The drive for the initiative was the desire to stimulate teaching and learning excellence through research and knowledge-based development of educational activities at bachelor and master degree levels in Norwegian higher education (NOKUT, 2019).

Since SFU is a prestigious initiative, institutions of the higher learning compete for the bid. An educational community that is awarded status as SFU must be excellent in terms of three core criteria: documented excellence in existing provision, center plan outlining plans for innovation and enhancement, and plans for dissemination, that is sharing knowledge and practices developed by the center. The SFU status is awarded for five years, with the possibility of renewal for another five years, subject to an interim evaluation. The Centers gaining this status receive up to NOK 8 million, annually to be matched from the center. In addition to receiving status and funding, the Centers cooperate closely with NOKUT, and constitute a national network of Centers for Excellence.

The SFU initiative was managed by NOKUT, an independent quality agency under the Ministry of Education and Research, and as of 2019, the management responsibility has changed to DIKU, the Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education. According to the evaluation reports, by Carlsten & Aamodt 2013; Carlsten & Vabo, 2015, 2016; MeId, 2016-2017, cited in NOKUT (2019), the Centers and the SFU initiative have played a major role in raising the esteem of the institutions and giving higher priority to education; enhancement at institutional level; and contributed to developing educational practices, to the content and development of education and institutional frameworks.

Best practices in teachers and school leadership development

Countries that have well-developed and h effective systems in place for recruiting, preparing, developing, and retaining teachers and school leaders were reviewed. Such countries have good results and they are among the highest-performing countries in international tests of student achievements. Such high performing countries (e.g. Finland, Canada, Singapore, Korea, Australia) have full range of policies that affect the development and support for teachers and school leaders (recruitment, preparation, induction, professional development, evaluation and career development, and retention). On top of this, several lines of research such as Ben, Phoebe and Anna (2017), Linda Darling and Robert, eds. (2011), Sarah, Melissa and Daria (2013), and Schleicher (2016), have identified the critical role of teachers and school leaders in recruiting, developing, and retaining on performance and productivity in creating a learning culture within the school; and supporting improvements in student learning.

One can learn from such best practices how to design effective systems to prepare and develop best teachers and school leaders for Ethiopian education sector as reflected by the following paragraphs.

Innovative recruitment and selection processes: candidates' commitment to the profession, capacity to work and academic ability as well as communication skills were considered in the assessments. Exemplary cases from Finland, Singapore and Korea which recruit and select only top graduates of high school were considered. According to Darling Hammond et al. (2007), for school leaders' criteria might include not only successful teaching experience, but also successful experience as an instructional leader were considered. Some authors pointed out that critical thinking, problem-solving skills, civic engagement, an orientation toward social justice, and a commitment to educational change as selection criteria (Bartee, 2012; McKenzie et al., 2008).

Training program design: a substantial amount of the time spent in teacher education is in clinical practice in one of the *model schools* that partner with the university. In these schools, teachers are specially selected and trained to ensure that they can model effective practice and coach beginners. University courses also model strategies of cooperative and problem-based learning, reflective practice, and computer-supported education, encouraged by a higher education evaluation system that rewards effective, innovative university teaching practice.

As OECD (2010) and Schleicher (2012), stated the teacher education in Finland has four distinguishing qualities: research based, teacher candidates are required to write a research-based thesis; strong focus on developing pedagogical content knowledge; good training for all teachers in diagnosing students with learning difficulties and in adapting their instruction to the varying learning needs and styles of their students; and a very strong clinical component, within these model schools, student teachers participate in problem-solving groups that engage in a cycle of planning, action, and reflection/evaluation.

According to AITSL (2018), the most effective school leaders/principal preparation programs and experiences were those which deepen pedagogical expertise; increase capacity to lead teaching and learning to have a positive impact on student outcomes; strengthen interpersonal skills; develop management and leadership skills, including business and strategic acumen; effective recruitment and selection processes that

emphasis on actual behaviors and actions demonstrating application of personal qualities and impact on teaching and learning.

Schleicher (2012) stated the shared characteristics of exemplary programs of educational leadership by citing the source from Darling-Hammond, et al (2007) as follows: a comprehensive and coherent curriculum aligned with state and professional standards, and which emphasize instructional leadership; a philosophy and curriculum emphasizing instructional leadership and school improvement; active, student-centered instruction that integrates theory and practice and stimulates reflection, where the instructional strategies include problem-based learning, action research, field-based projects, journal writing, and portfolios that feature substantial use of feedback and assessment by peers, faculty, and the candidates themselves; faculty who are knowledgeable in their subject areas, including both university professors and practitioners experienced in school administration; social and professional support in the form of a cohort structure and formalized mentoring and advising by expert principals; vigorous, targeted recruitment and selection to seek out expert teachers with leadership potential; and well-designed and supervised administrative internships that allow candidates to engage in leadership responsibilities for substantial periods of time under the guidance of expert veterans.

Partnership; those best practices elucidate the partnership between the university and local education offices and schools are in place. Benefits of university-district partnerships include linking theory and practice, meeting specific needs of the partner district, combining expertise of university faculty and practicing administrators, and a maintaining a pipeline for successful school leadership (Brown-Ferrigno, 2011; Gooden et al., 2011; Simmons et al., 2007). In authentic partnerships the partners are considered equals, respect each other, assume a moral commitment to the partnership, and share accountability for the aspiring school leader's success.

Experience from Finland indicates that the teaching profession is attractive, many individuals want to join and stay in. In some respects, this attractiveness is a cultural phenomenon. Leaders have frequently expressed their belief that teachers are vital, and this has helped raise the status of the profession. Leaders have developed and implemented policies that make teaching attractive, and in addition adopted policies to improve teachers' working conditions and sense of professionalism, elevating teaching to the level of other top ranked professions.

Framework for the CoE

- From reviewed literature (AITSL, 2018; Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Healey, 2000; Miller, 2013; NOKUT, 2019; Salmi & Froumin, 2013; Stephen, John and Rachel, 2016), the framework CoE is built around the following core concepts and values A clear sense of purpose (mission) and aspirations (vision) broadly shared, understood, and valued (charter for the center; it clarifies the governance & strategy);
- Effective leadership and governance processes at all levels, including mechanisms for feedback and review;
- Strategic planning, plans, priorities, and goals to translate purposes and aspirations into specific programs/ services, and activities,
- High-quality programs and services, consistent with the established mission and aspirations, carefully designed, regularly evaluated, and continuously improved, Strong and mutually valued relationships with constituencies, particularly individuals and groups who benefit most directly from the programs and services offered,
- Information about the needs, expectations, and experiences of key constituencies, gathered and used for program and service development, review/improvement (for decision and resource allocation);
- Qualified and dedicated faculty and staff and a satisfying work environment, with ongoing review & improvement as priorities. Systematic review processes and the assessment of outcomes to determine how successful the institution is (success: fulfilling its mission, aspirations, goals).

According to European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2014), an institution that claim to be excellent would be expected to meet the following criteria: robust and progressive strategic governance and management; high standards of academic achievement; a strong track record in student destinations; an exceptional student experience; positive stakeholder satisfaction; high levels of student satisfaction; commitment to research and academic development; support for social, economic and cultural development; recognition of the social benefit of education; commitment to internationalisation; and promotion of equity and academic freedom. Thus, the CoE for teacher education and school leadership development in Ethiopia is expected to fulfil this framework reflected by global experience.

Methodology

Qualitative method was the major approach that was used in this study. Basically, conference meetings (organized by College of Education and Behavioural Studies/AAU on CoE in 2018 and 2019) participants responses, document analysis, secondary data collected for the CoE roadmap development were used. Discussion results with conference participants on the launching of AAU CoE pertaining to institutional changes and expectations major sources. The conference participants were Deans of colleges, CoE coordinators, vice presidents, senior faculty members who came from five universities and experts from Ministry of Education, and other stakeholders. They reflected on institutional changes and preparation made including the policy support in place Extensive critical reviews of best experiences in the area and reports from visits to international benchmarking and an extensive literature review and investigation of institutional documentation at both national and international levels were used.

Discussions and results

In line with the purpose of the study and the basic questions, the following results and discussions were documented.

Institutional changes made towards the goals of the CoEs

Institutional changes entail the creation of shared vision, mutually valued relationships and information about the needs among stakeholders; roadmap and strategic plan; in placing high quality programs & services; adequacy of highly educated and professionally qualified faculties and competent staff; adequate facilities and student development programs; well selected students; and in placing governance and management structures. On top of these, indicators of institutional change include new policies and programs that reflect the design principles; organizational structures and/or staffing arrangements; partnerships/collaborations both on campus and off campus; teacher and leaders preparation pathways; sources of data feedback into the program to inform improvement and re-visioning; leadership and staff commitment to continual improvement based on evidence change appear to have become integrated into the programs, and commitment from faculty, administrators, schools, candidates; appropriate staffing and fiscal support; and commitment from the leadership of both the university and off campus key players in the enterprise.

In the broader sense of institutional changes, existence of shared CoE goals, innovative ideas and major shifts in different areas from the usual way public universities operate. Moreover, the presence of strategic orientations including organization and management,

curriculum related matters, research and development, quality management, resource capacity and sustainability issues as international experiences and literature reviews indicate are foundations to support CoE to enter into a full-fledged operation and to attain the grand missions sought. In this regard it is important to know the purpose and process CoEs selection and what were achieved.

In October 2015, the MoE invited 20 Public Universities that were offering training, Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) and Educational Leadership to compete in a bid to establish a *Center of Excellence* in teachers' and educational leaders' development with the purpose to introduce a state-of-the-art program in teachers' education and educational leaders' development program. The original intention was to select one university as a CoE. However, the Ministry first selected three universities and then added two and now there are five universities with the CoEs.

After the selection and award is given, it is a common practice to assess institutional preparation and readiness of the CoE to execute the objectives/mandate given. Basically the institutional changes in place are far from the conventional models of training to a long-term developmental mode that addresses real life challenges in the school system. Institutional change means more fundamental than individual action steps such as adjustments to curricula or degree requirements. Institutional change occurs when there is a transformation of practice that shifts a teacher education and school leadership development programs, organizational structure, culture, external relationships, or ways of assessing the outcomes of its work. The changes are in behaviour, outcomes, policies, procedures, influencing people to do things differently. Such changes are often based on research evidence, involves sustained partnerships with woredas/schools and personnel, establishes cross-college and cross-departmental pathways for work and communication, increases the quality and length of time that candidates spend in school settings, and assesses its candidates on their effectiveness in the classroom. Institutional change is a mission-driven effort to sharpen the teacher education and school leadership development programs focus on the effectiveness of its graduates. Therefore, preparation and readiness before embarking on the execution is necessary for success.

Organization and management of CoEs

The organization and management of a CoE is about the governance; organizational set up/ structure, leadership and management system, how the CoE function, strategic plan/transformational plan or the roadmap.

The CoEs have coordinators that are directly accountable to their university academic vice president bypassing their colleges. It is only AAU that structured the CoE within the College of Education and Behavioural Studies. Those CoEs that have started training in teacher education didn't host students. It was the colleges (social sciences, languages, sciences) that offer subjects to be taught who hosted the students. The programs were run under the various colleges. The program does not have clear ownership. The roles of the College of Education and Behavioural Studies or the Education Institutes were very minimal, and responsibly to deliver most likely limited courses and the pedagogy, they were not the focus and seems side lined, and have no control over the program as well as the students management. The implication is that the institutional changes and the preparation made such as the organizational set up, adequacy of facilities for teaching learning and student services, and sufficient faculty members to run the program were not in place. This is an indication of unmet minimum standard to be called a CoE. In the conference meeting, the participants have voted for the existence of autonomous structure inclusive of the College of Education within the university system.

Moreover, the conference participants argued that the CoE should be organized, functions and managed that allows autonomy to address the education sector's teachers and leadership needs and having an explicit remit to share knowledge and expertise to raise standards across other institutions including outside the university system such as regional education bureaus, woredas and schools. The CoE should be rewarded with suitably distinct structure from the management structure of the hosting institution to allow autonomy in addressing the sector needs and decision-making power and control over resources. It is believed that the autonomy to make decisions regarding student recruitment and selection, program and resources management is needed. Since the CoEs (5 universities) are geographically located in different regions, there is no structure for coordination in a network of co-operative partners. In the absence of networking system, visible structure/set up and governance, without clearly defined roles and responsibilities, the CoE will not excel.

Teaching-learning and training/Curriculum related

The CoEs are expected to suggest and develop framework for high quality programs/more advanced/specialized training based on the best practices and principles that guided the design, delivery and assessment of effective programs grounded in research and providing a clearer understanding of the knowledge, skills, beliefs and attributes that enable future teachers and leaders. The qualifications and training should also meet international rather than national standards.

However, the documents (reports and plans) reviewed and the discussion conducted in conference meeting during the launching of AAU's CoE indicated that only curriculum for teacher education was developed and under implementation. Some CoEs have been implementing since 2018. The curriculum was developed in the traditional way by pooling subject experts from universities that host CoEs. Although there is no evidence as whether the curriculum is based on best international experiences or research-based, the experts who were involved in its development used their experiences and attempted to address the needs. Moreover, the participants of the conference reported that the CoE should be able to design its own independent curriculum for each of its programs. The curriculum and programs of the CoE should be unique, relevant, innovative, up to date and practice oriented and research based. So far from the reviews and reports, it was noted that there was no curriculum framework that guide the teacher education and school leadership development programs.

The curriculum framework stipulates tight coherence *and integration* among courses, between courses and clinical work. It is the framework that guides the development of strong *core curriculum* and designing of extensive *and intensely supervised* clinical experiences. Moreover, it provides a *well-defined standards* and *explicit strategies* that guide and evaluate course work and clinical work and student learning. The development of *strong school-university partnerships, assessment based on professional standards* that evaluates teaching through demonstration of critical skills and abilities using performance assessments and portfolios are guided by the framework. The framework also guides the *recruitment and selection of candidates* that are competent and high academic performance, communication skill, interested, and committed.

Regarding the school leadership program, the reports from the CoEs and the conference participants indicated that the program was not yet started, there was no curriculum and framework developed. For school transformation, both effective school leaders and teachers are needed. Without any delay, the school leadership development program has to be developed using *innovative approaches* that address the broader roles and responsibilities of leaders and the purposes of schooling. The program *designed* to produce leaders who work to build student centred schools with the capacity for high performance and continuous improvement is expected to take a system-wide perspective so that the programs are aligned with the larger goals and processes of the system, a comprehensive and coherent curriculum aligned with state and professional

standard, instructional leadership and school improvement. The program to be designed should be aligned to license, continuous training and leadership development through *experiential learning* (problem based leaning, school-based project work, internships, shadowing, coaching and mentoring) and application-oriented method as key pedagogy to inform leadership preparation.

The *methods* that are employed for effective leadership-development programs often include networking among participants, foster collaborative problem-solving, instructional strategies embracing problem-based learning; action research; *field-based*, projects and portfolios that feature substantial use of feedback and assessment by peers, faculty, and the candidates themselves. The school leadership development programs should be *well-designed and include supervised administrative internships* that allow candidates to engage in leadership responsibilities for substantial periods of time under the tutelage of expert veterans.

Moreover, *coaching and mentoring* newly appointed school leaders is needed. *Faculty* who are knowledgeable in their subject areas, including both university professors and practitioners experienced in school administration are expected to be involved. Regarding *recruitment and selection*, the international experiences of best performing system indicates vigorous, targeted to seek out expert teachers with leadership potential (experienced, moral integrity, social trust, educational & administrative expertise) to be recruited and selected for school leadership programs.

Quality management

An excelling center needs to have strong internal quality assurance process and system, institutional and programs accreditations and adopt international standards through partnership with world-renowned institutions. The quality management comprises quality assurance, quality enhancement and quality control, and this covers the strategic management, process management, measurement of performances, and measuring-monitoring system which interact with each other for enabling the institutions to improve its system, process, results (outputs, outcome, impact).

Furthermore, to qualify as a CoE, the competencies of the training centers and the program quality to produce high standard teachers and school leaders are critical factors for success. From review reports and views of conference participants, there

were recognitions and understandings of the importance of strengthening quality assurance and relevance systems. There were colleges that have already established quality assurance office, most of them rely on quality assurance office at university level. In general, it is learnt that with the existing system, structure and program, it is difficult to deliver the expected results.

Reviews and reflection of conference participants indicated that innovative and research-based programs for teachers and school leadership preparation and development were not designed based on the best practices to fulfil the aspirations of the CoEs. It seems business as usual, and this will not transform the centers.

Review of reports show that the standards for CoEs faculties and resources to conduct training/teaching-learning, research and deliver services were not fulfilled. So far, the existing practice reflects, there were no national and international accreditations for teacher and educational leadership development programs. There are no well-defined procedures, system and supporting policy environment in place to recruit, select trainees, and on modalities of training. It seems the centers for teacher education and school leadership development were simply labelled as CoE, in reality beyond the ambition there was no practical actions and policy environment created to trigger the functioning of these centers.

It is a paradox, with no institutional changes in place that fit the CoE, jumping into operation by classic/traditional models will not solve the challenges of quality the system encountered and address the skill for the 21st century aspired. Obviously, excellence is a journey, every standard requirement may not be ready at the start, but commitment, shared understanding and supportive policies should have been granted.

Research and development

In university system, the practice shows that there is academic unit responsible for the coordination of research and community services at college level, where the major research, community service and practicum as part of teaching learning tasks are the responsibility of individual faculty members. For the CoE, the work of research and development is broader and deeper than the conventional approach. The main thrust of *Center of Excellences* (CoEs) is an important part of the policy mix for realizing higher education/education and training and research. The reviewed literature and experiences

of best performing systems indicate that specialized institutes such as the CoE in some regards can serve as a sort of research and development arm where new methodology/technology and applications can be researched, tested and, if successful deployed at large scale. The CoE coordinate/facilitate and conduct need based research, action-oriented research and evaluation approach/investigative research to improve teacher education and school leadership program implementation and assess the program impact. The center creates a scientific base/generate knowledge for the development of a new learning and teaching culture and to ensure it is firmly rooted in education, distribute and utilize this new knowledge in the form of new capacity in their field, be it research results, innovation or talent. The CoE maintain partnership with local, national and international institutions to increase educational research, scholarship and dissemination. There are also model schools that are associated with the CoE for experimentation of interventions, incubate best practices, serving as laboratories, in developing and modeling innovative practices, and school-based transformations. In practice, the CoE are not designed and structured to handle the responsibility of research and development, which needs reconsideration to be successful.

Resource capacities (human, finance, materials)

The CoE is a specialized entity and the quality and scope of the work is branded. Review reports show that there was no set standard for resource capacities, almost all CoE were not capacitated and staffed with highly educated and professionally qualified faculties and competent staff relevant to the positions. From reports and conference meetings, it was noted that the key skills required in order to achieve the objectives laid for the centers should be identified and set for the centers. It was reported that the CoE should have access to the complete infrastructure. The facilities and infrastructure/spaces and classes need renovation and upgrading as well as injecting additional resources including educational technologies. For success, there is an agreement, all the center have to be supported with adequate and state of the art facilities and materials. The other important aspect of launching a CoE is the funding/grants. According to the reports and conference participants view, the major budget source is the government and partners (General Education Quality Improvement Program/GEQIP), which is so itemized, limited and inadequate to address the expectations of the CoEs. Badly designed CoEs can end up costing the business more money than they bring benefits, so it's important to pay attention to the funding structure of the center. In this connection, absence of the benefit packages for the staff, partnering institutions, and trainees erodes the motivation and success of the centers.

Sustainability

Establishing CoE is not an end by itself. There are goals to be attained. Excellence is a journey also closely connected with funding outcomes. The conference participants reflected that unless the resources allocated are appropriately used and a sustainable financing guaranteed that allows long-term planning is secured, the CoE cannot be sustained and successful. The roles of the CoEs are to continually support teacher education and school leadership development, disseminate and scale up good practices and innovations for the sector. Currently, the CoEs are at infant stage complemented with lack of focus, thus, much has to be worked out. This requires consensus building, developing capacity and diversifying the funding schemes for sustainability. Moreover, there was an agreement among the conference participants that establishing and maintaining a CoE roadmap as a beneficial because it enables to determine a future path and drive efforts towards accomplishing the goals set forth in the roadmap. Over time, the centers will evolve and become more formalized/self-standing or networked and reputable institution or evolve to University of Education.

Policy and Institutional Supports

Review of reports and discussions with conference participants indicated that the Centers of Excellence established lack policy and institutional supports to be operational and successful in meeting the desired goals. Accordingly, the following policy and institutional support missed were reported:

First, there is a need for national recognition of the university's teachers and school leadership preparation program. This includes policy support for student recruitment and selection, placement of trainers/educators to the centers, and new curriculum development for the training,

Second, creating conducive working conditions and environment. Elevate teaching to the level of other professions like medicine and law by improving its status, compensation that rewards performance and career development. Teaching is the profession upon which all others professions depend, improving the occupational prestige using communication strategies and build professionalism into the system.

Three, state level policy changes which include: incentives for the trainees and benefits of graduates of the program; benefits for teachers, mentors, model schools; professional development and career progression structures.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Education is the foundation for political, social and economic transformation of a society. . Since school education is the base, the most sustainable way of improving schools to ensure excellent education relies on quality of teachers and school leaders. Effective and efficient teachers and school leaders can be produced by best performing or exceling education and training institution. In Ethiopia, five centers of excellence (Addis Ababa University, Bahirdar University, Hawassa University, Jima University and Mekele University) were established for teacher education and school leadership development. These centers have to be operational as per the standards of CoE in order to realize their potential to make best practices and innovations in producing effective and efficient teachers and school leaders that can transform schools, influence schooling and student learning. However, the enabling conditions for the established center of excellences to be operational were not created. Although, the roadmap for the CoE that enables the centers to determine a future path and drive efforts towards accomplishing the goals set forth has been developed, authorization and operationalization has remained due to lack of consensus building on CoEs. The CoE needs autonomous organization and management setup, well defined curriculum framework and quality management system, and sustainable resource capacities.

It is suggested that there should be sharing of understanding the purposes of the CoE and how it functions, creating policy and supportive environment needed and guaranteeing commitment among university leadership hosting the CoE, MoE, MoSHE and other stakeholders. It is believed in supported autonomy; distinct structure, aligning fund, control, responsibility and accountability in one place, as close to the frontline as possible, and ensuring that institutions can collaborate and access the support they need to set them up for success. Working towards building a system which is responsive to need and performance, ensuring that institution respond to the changing needs are necessary. Moreover, there are policy issues to be considered at the national level pertaining to the functioning of the centers, trainees' recruitment and selection, trainers' placements, benefits packages and others. The fulfilment of the enabling conditions and policy issues are fundamental for revamping and triggering the centers to lead towards excellence.

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