Tension Between Massification and Intensification Reforms and Implications for Teaching and Learning in Ethiopian Public Universities

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the context under which public universities are implementing series of predominantly government initiated and controlled reforms. Accordingly, it attempts to unpack those political, professional, and epistemological factors contributing to the decline of the quality of teaching and learning. Focus group discussions, official government documents and views, proclamations, pertinent national and international studies, informal discussions with university colleagues, and personal experiences have been used as sources of evidence to inform my analysis and discussion. The study revealed that the current educational environment in most public universities is messy and the quality of teaching and learning are at risk. Excessive intervention by the federal Ministry of Education and lack of autonomy seem the prime factors contributing to substandard outputs of the universities. A tension has been created between government's political desire for massification of higher education on one hand, and the inherent desire of the universities and their academic communities for quality education by way of academic intensification on the other hand. Accordingly, the quality of teaching and learning in Ethiopian public universities currently is at risk.

Résumé

Cet article examine d'un point de vue critique le contexte dans lequel les universités publiques mettent en œuvre des séries de réformes initiées et

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contrôlées principalement par le gouvernement. En conséquence, il essaie de décompresser ces facteurs politiques, professionnels et épistémologiques contribuant à la diminution de la qualité de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage. Des discussions de groupe formelles et informelles, des documents gouvernementaux, des textes relatifs à des études nationales et internationales et des expériences personnelles ont été utilisés en tant que sources de données probantes pour l'éclairage de l'analyse. L'étude a révélé que l'environnement éducatif, comme l'enseignement, sont en déclin dans la plupart des universités publiques. L'intervention excessive du ministère fédéral de l'éducation et le manque d'autonomie apparaissent comme les facteurs principaux de déclin des normes universitaires. Une tension est créée entre, d'une part la volonté de contrôle politique du gouvernement et d'autre part, la volonté des universités de préserver une éducation de qualité. En conséquence, la qualité de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage dans les universités publiques éthiopiennes cours le risque d'entrer en déclin.

Background

Higher Education in Ethiopia started with the founding of Addis Ababa University on March 20, 1950. With its several colleges in various regions Addis Ababa University remained the only higher learning institution in the country for over half a century. Over the last about ten years fundamental changes have been taking place in the area of higher education in Ethiopia. Accordingly, some of former colleges under Addis Ababa University were upgraded to full-fledged and independent universities, and other new universities established. This brings the total number of public universities in Ethiopia to 22. This number of universities is expected to be raised to 31 in the near future when the nine universities currently under construction are completed. As a result, enrolment in public universities in regular programmes has increased significantly. It reached 203,455 in the 2009/10 Academic Year. Similarly, the total annual intake capacity of public universities in regular programmes reached 78,822 in the 2010/11 Academic Year.

Higher education reform in Ethiopia went beyond upgrading and the creation of new government universities and the scaling up of tertiary student enrolment. The revision of the curricula, the development and launching of new programmes on one hand and the elevation of others on the other, the establishment of supportive institution such as Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) and the Higher Education Strategy Centre (HESC) could be considered the central achievements of the Ministry of Education. The establishment of these institutions seems to have been initiated and advised by external donors (World Bank 2004a), and then with the recommendations of the 2003 Higher Education Proclamation which was then repealed and replaced by the 2009 Higher Education Proclamation (Government of Ethiopia 2003, 2009; Solomon 2009).

In its review of the Sub-Saharan Higher Education policies and practices of universities, the World Bank in 1988 (cited in the World Bank 2004b:i) expressed its concern and warned educational policy makers that:

> Higher education's contribution to development is being threatened ... by ... interrelated weaknesses. First higher education is now producing relatively too many graduates of programs of dubious quality and relevance and generating too little knowledge and direct development support. Second, the quality of these outputs show unmistakable signs in many countries of having deteriorated so much that the fundamental effectiveness of the institutions is also in doubt.

In this regard, although long overdue, the Ethiopian Government claimed to have addressed the recommendations of the World Bank by way of improving quality, increasing efficiency, changing output mix, and introducing a cost sharing strategy. Nevertheless, the implementation and productivity of all claims seem dubious and questionable. Currently, there is a true concern among the public at large and among the academia in particular that tertiary education in Ethiopia has been overly politicized. It has also been needlessly influenced by the government. Consequently quality tertiary education has been left at risk. Unfortunately perspectives promoting quantity at the expense of quality seem to have been considered as innovative and productive among the relevant federal state authorities.

In March 2004, the Ministry of Education established a team of inquiry, Higher Education System Overhaul (HESO), to undertake research on the overall context and practice of higher learning institution in Ethiopia. One of the central problems the HESO team identified was that Higher Learning Institutions, Government and its agencies have not been preparing sufficiently for the kind of autonomy and accountability the Higher Education Proclamation No.351/2003 assured (HESO 2004:5-6). The HESO inquiry did not invest much in curriculum revision and/or development practices nor did it indicate specific reforms needed to overhaul the academic programmes. The team also seemed reluctant meaningfully to considering the teaching staffs as a prime source of information and hence hardly understood the teaching-learning context as well as the status of academic autonomy public universities.

The other important findings of the HESO inquiry team were problems related to the quality of inputs, process, and outputs (HESO 2004:5). Certainly these problems are determinant factors of the overall goal of higher learning institution. Their depth and scope ranges from programme initiation and development, student recruitment and admission to programme implementation and the achievement of quality output. Unfortunately, the current status of the problems identified by the HESO inquiry team in most public universities is either unchanged or worse than before.

Massification, in the context of public universities in Ethiopia, refers to the maximum enrolment of students in public universities and programmes. It does not necessarily refer to the quality of the universities or their curricula. Massification neither shows the appropriateness and quality of enrolled students nor the capacity of the universities to undertake the purpose they were created for. It is a political decision, an exercise aimed at merely creating higher education access to citizens. Intensification on the other hand refers to the quality of the infrastructure and environment necessary to undertake quality education in public universities. Accordingly, it includes the quality of programmes, teaching staff profile, diversity and appropriateness of the curricula, the existence of institutional autonomy, and academic freedom to undertake teaching and learning activities.

This paper attempts to initiate discussions and calls for sense of urgency on some critical issues and practices in Ethiopian public universities. The issues and practices of curriculum initiation and development, student recruitment and admission, staff profile and development, autonomy and academic freedom, are contemporary and critical issues of public universities in Ethiopia and hence its focus.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed method of inquiry in that it used both qualitative as well as quantitative data collection and interpretation procedures. The study is descriptive in that it describes past and present practices and events in public universities. It is also interpretive because it interprets and looks for meanings derived from description. Hence, the study employed a descriptive-interpretive approach. Both primary and secondary sources have been used to generate appropriate data. Accordingly, interview, focus group discussion, official government documents and policies, international and local pertinent studies, informal observations and discussions with people working in public universities, and my personal experiences have been used as sources of information to inform my argument and discussion.

Data generated from transcriptions of interviews and focus group discussions are directly quoted. Primary as well as secondary data were blended by way of presenting a thick description of events and practices across universities. The study concludes by calling for imperative rethinking and action concerning the direction and consequence of the implementation of the reform agenda in Ethiopian public universities. The names of individuals participated in the study by way of providing primary data are purposely omitted so as to safeguard any possible personal and or institutional threat.

Framing higher education in Ethiopia

The Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation No.650/2009 Article 2 defines higher education, in the Ethiopian context to signify 'education in the arts and sciences offered to undergraduate and graduate students who attend degree programmes ...' Accordingly, the Ministry of Education (2010b:56) operationally defined higher education institutions in Ethiopia as 'institutions that are giving the three, four, five or six years undergraduate programmes, as well as those offering the two years Masters and the four years PhD programmes'. The higher education system in Ethiopia has rigid and strict entry as well as exit rules and regulations which start with entrance examination and end with exit examinations without much flexibility. Article 11, No.1 of the higher education proclamation (Government of Ethiopia 2009) has proclaimed that an institution is granted the name and status of a university by the Ministry of Education if:

(a) it has a minimum enrolment capacity of 2,000 students in regular undergraduate and graduate programmes in at least three academic units larger than departments, or it has a minimum enrolment capacity of 2,000 students in regular undergraduate programmes in at least four academic units larger than departments;

(b) it has a record of at least four consecutive classes of graduates in a degree programme if it has been rendering services of higher education after being accredited as a university college or institute;

(c) it undertakes research in different appropriate fields, has published its research products and has facilitated means of dissemination of the research findings to end-users;

(d) it has a curriculum that matches the national standards set by the Ministry, the necessary academic staff, institutional governing structure as provided for by [the] proclamation, teaching materials, classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and other appropriate discipline-related facilities.

However, contrary to this criterion, the same proclamation definitely gives unnecessary authority to the Ministry of Education to establish an institution with the name and status of a 'university' without necessarily fulfilling the requirements. This is apparent when Article 11, No.2 of the proclamation proclaims '... an institution may be established with the name and the status of a university if it is conceived as such and its resource provisions as well as its institutional plans and vision are such that it can, in the judgment of the Ministry, fulfil the requirements ... in an acceptable time'.

This is where the proclamation is too vague and lays down highly subjective standards for which the Ministry will look in establishing an institution as a 'university'. It suffices the Ministry to anticipate the potential and not necessarily the actual capacity of an individual institute to give it the name and status as a university.

According to a study conducted by Forum for Social Studies (2009), problems connected with the expansion of higher education and the proliferation of universities stem from a reluctance or bias in implementing the higher education proclamation regarding awarding an institution the status of a university. This is apparent when Forum for Social Studies (2009: xxi) tells us that:

> A number of the new institutions were launched as universities without fulfilling even some of the MoE's criteria for attaining a university status, such as research programmes and scholarly publication, and essential inputs well equipped libraries, laboratories, classrooms, and other teaching learning facilities.
>
> Although how many years it means by 'acceptable time' is still too vague, most public universities established in the past decade or so are still struggling retrospectively to qualify for the name and status they were granted in advance. No one knows whether or not there is a definite period of time allocated for them to fulfil the criterion they have bypassed. Clearly, a good number of Ethiopian public 'universities' in general and those relatively young ones in particular were established without really fulfilling most of the criterion set in the Higher Education Proclamation (Government of Ethiopia 2009).

Curriculum initiation and development

Curricular reforms which have been undertaken since 2003 in Ethiopian public universities remain a serious point of contention among the public in general and the academia in particular on one hand and Government on the other. For instance, all government universities were ordered to review their existing academic programmes and also to develop new undergraduate programmes during 2007 and 2008 Academic Years. A series of workshops were convened to harmonize and centralize the curricula reviewed and developed by individual universities. However, all the efforts and professional arguments aired by academics by way of justifying their rationale for the content and duration of programmes fail to meet prescriptions of the Ministry.

At this stage, it seems logical to pose questions regarding who is responsible in developing curricula for a university, what the academic autonomy of a university is regarding curricular issues, and what the role of the teaching staff is in the process of curriculum revision and development. As Baye (2008:21) correctly points out, teaching and research staff, directly and/or through their democratically elected representatives, should have the right to initiate, participate and determine academic programs of their institutions in accordance with the highest standards of education and basic principles. Regarding the

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issue of the curricula of public universities the Higher Education Proclamation No.650/2009 Article 21 has also laid down various prescriptions which include (Government of Ethiopia 2009):

   (a) Every institution shall guide curricular development by its academic units through appropriate learning outcomes;

   (b) The ministry may, without prejudice to the legitimate autonomy of the individual institution, coordinate curricula development common to public institutions;

   (c) The ministry may establish, whenever necessary, national panels, councils or bodies to coordinate and monitor curricula review, development and implementation.

Although current and antecedent proclamations recognize the power and duty of individual public universities and award the mandate and autonomy to determine and implement academic programme the reality, however, is inconsistent with the rhetoric. Public universities necessarily operate preferably under their own mission and objectives. The nature of their mission and objectives also determines the relevance and development of their curricula. Higher education institutions may have similar activities but their mission has to be unique to the individual institution. If all public institutions in Ethiopia are said to have the same mission then it means, to use Amare's (2009:79) words, 'none of the institutions has a mission or it doesn't know its unique mission' (translated from Amharic Language). To this end, currently all public universities in Ethiopia seem to have declared that their mission is generally teaching, research, and community service. These are the three traditionally known generic missions of virtually all higher learning institutions around the globe. According to Amare (2009), those three-dimensional missions of a university could be meaningful if and only if there is a clear order of priority among the three generic missions. Accordingly, the individual university must gear its programme and curriculum vis-à-vis the achievement of the prime and perhaps unique mission it has declared in such as way that it provides insight regarding the broader field of studies and research to which the university is dedicated.

   Hence, the so-called 'revised' and/or 'newly developed' programmes failed to acknowledge institutional peculiarities and were all uniformly determined by the federal ministry of education. This seems to have adversely affected the sense of ownership of the teaching staff. This is apparent when one of the institutional audit reports of HERQA (2008:39) reads 'Some members of staff were of the view that most of the curricula are designed through workshops conducted by the Ministry of Education and that individual instructors had no right to revise what has already been set'.

By implication, teachers are deliberately kept from touching what has been authoritatively laid down as their curricula. Accordingly, the implementation process of the reform programmes suffers from the tension created by the authoritarianism and/or politicization of educational development. And hence, teaching and learning in the Ethiopian public universities has become a difficult and unfriendly practice because both the nature of the curricula as well as the recruitment and admission of students are determined exclusively top-down. The academic communities in public universities seem to have been considered as technicians to do whatever they are ordered to do by the Ministry. This has made the quality of curriculum implementation questionable. The institutional audit report of HERQA (2008:32) which reads as follows substantiates this argument: '... several of the long established members of staff expressed the view that the increases in the number of students being admitted, coupled with the reduction in the length of most programmes, presented great challenge in terms of course coverage and standards... entrant students were not seen as good as once was the case'.

The HERQA report affirmed Saint William's (2004:109) observation that 'The recent disruptive shift from a four to a three year degree programme intensifies the challenges of maintaining (let alone increasing) educational quality' in Ethiopia. At present, it can safely be asserted that most teaching staff in the Ethiopian public universities are discouraged by a series of top-down prescriptions regarding curricula.

Although most universities proposed a four-year undergraduate degree programme, they were all forced to adjust and align their proposals with the three-year template the Ministry provided them. Finally the Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Education officially ordered all public universities to act according to what he called the 'Recommendations of the National Council for Higher Education on Curricula Review' (Ministry of Education 2008). All public universities were, therefore, prevented from launching a new programme or pursuing their existing curricula of more than three years duration without a special request to the federal ministry of education and permission from the same.

On the other hand, whenever government wishes to initiate a new academic programme, whatever its relevance and demand, it will automatically be affiliated to a selected university and be automatically launched without necessarily passing through the necessary process of curriculum development. It, therefore, came to be a normal and uncontested practice, in the Ethiopian public universities, to launch a programme before any checks are made on the sufficiency of the teaching staff, reference material and library, laboratory, and even without adequate preparation of classrooms and accommodation facilities. Furthermore, the rapidity of the implementation process of the reforms

added to the short life of most of the curricular reforms underlines the instability of curriculum reform in Ethiopian public universities. The ills of undergraduate curricula reforms now seem to have also infected the relatively stable curricula of postgraduate programmes. This is apparent when the Masters curricula of the Addis Ababa University was 're-engineered' top-down into modular curricula across the board and delivered through block teaching. This radical reform happened perhaps without the consensus of many of the owners of the academic programmes (Ayalew, Daneal, and Solomon 2011).

Admission to public universities

Public universities in Ethiopia have no control over the students they take in for their regular programmes. It is the federal ministry of education that recruits and determines the number of regular students to be admitted for study in various universities, including specific college or fields of studies. Nevertheless, the Education and Training Policy contains implicit statements with potential implications regarding recruitment of candidates for higher learning institutions. The requirement for an institution specific entrance examination, for instance, is apparent from the following policy statement: 'After the second cycle of secondary education, students will be required to sit for examination of relevant institutions for admission' (TGE 1994:19). On the other hand, the Higher Education Proclamation Article 39 states the following regarding the admission of students to public universities: 'The ministry shall administer the university entrance examination and decide on the eligibility for admission to any institution' (Government of Ethiopia 2009). Thus, it is not difficult to see an inconsistency between the Education and Training Policy and the Higher Education Proclamation No.650/ 2009.

There is consensus in academia, in virtually all universities, that currently, many students are assigned to public universities and colleges without an adequate academic background and accordingly are facing serious learning difficulties. The institutional audit report of HERQA on eight relatively senior public universities also indicates that many students entering university are seen by the staff as poorly prepared for higher education (HERQA 2008:5). One of the academic personnel who participated in the Focus Group Discussion expressed his view, which the others shared, that nicely depicts the severity of the impact of the current recruitment and admission practice on quality education:

> Many students who join or placed in faculty of education lack the minimum benchmark to be a university candidate. The fact that least achievers are deliberately placed to teaching stream has crippled all our effort and struggle to produce best achiever or superior teachers. So I feel radical change need to be done at the stage of recruiting and admitting candidates.

A good number of senior teachers in Ethiopian public universities are not only unhappy with the recruitment and admission policies that the Ministry has imposed on them, but are confused and frustrated in dealing with candidates who, according to their judgment, are very much below their expectation and below the aspiration of the Education and Training Policy as well. This is apparent when one of the informant Deans, for instance, has the following to say:

> The mess they [teachers] encountered in all terms particularly in dealing with students who virtually are not university materials and academically very weak and incapable to attend university level courses is enormous. Virtually, most teachers seem to be shocked and frustrated by the practice of the Ministry of Education in assigning students who did not properly complete their secondary education to university education...

At this stage it seems advisable to support the arguments here by presenting quantitative data as well. Accordingly, Table 1 depicts the contexts and practices during the last two Academic Years in admitting students to public universities.

Table 1: Admission to Public Universities during the last two Academic Years

Year	Total No. of grade 12 students who sat for Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination	Total No. of students who scored above 50%	Number of students to public Universities	No. of students who were admitted to public universities without scoring the minimum pass mark (50%) set by the policy
2008/ 09 (2001E.C)	86,238	31,934 (37.03%)	73,111 (84.8%)	41,117 (56.3%)
2009/ 10 (2002E.C)	85,610	38,901 (45.4%)	78,822 (92.0%)	39,921 (50.6%)

Source: Ministry of Education (2010a, 2010b).

The data presented in Table 1 are a good indication that many students now joining our public universities are ill-prepared to pursue higher studies and engage in research. However, it seems that the government has kept up the pressure for increased enrolments as well as for graduating students as if they are goals in themselves. The following table depicts the trend of enrolments and graduates of public universities in Ethiopia.

Table 2: Trends of Enrolments and Graduates in and from the regular programmes of Public Universities

Year	Enrolments			Graduates		
	Undergraduate Degree	Masters Degree	PhD Degree	Undergraduate Degree	Masters Degree	PhD Degree
2005/06	93689	6321	64	21,472	1381	7
2006/07	107,960	6935	122	23,367	2661	10
2007/08	127,033	7211	258	26,839	2645	19
2008/09	157,429	9436	325	31,926	3416	15
2009/10	190,043	12,621	791	38,174	4500	149

Source: Ministry of Education (2010b:137-138).

Out of those 190,043 undergraduate regular students 20,161 (10.6 %) of them are enrolled at Addis Ababa University. This is the highest enrolment in undergraduate degree programmes compared to all other government universities. Similarly, out of the 12,621 students enrolled in the Masters degree programmes 6,047 (47.9%) of them are housed at Addis Ababa University. Only three Government universities were running PhD programmes (Addis Ababa, Haromaya, and Gondar universities). Accordingly, out of the 791 PhD candidates 662 (83.7%) of them are at Addis Ababa University, 122 (15.4%) of them at Hromaya, and the rest (seven) of them at Gondar university (Ministry of Education 2010b:140).

There is no question that higher education in Ethiopia needs to expand even more if the country is ever to catch up with the other developing regions. The question, however, is finding the appropriate balance between massification and the quality of education and training.

Public universities, by and large, feel that they have little or no control regarding student admissions to their regular undergraduate programmes. The role left to them, they said, is just to place students in different academic departments and programmes.

Teaching staff profile

The concept of 'academic staff' in the Ethiopian context is rather vague. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between 'proper' teaching and/or research staff and other supporting members of the academic community. It may be that a member of the academic community of individual university is awarded the status of academic staff by the authority. This is apparent when the Ethiopian

higher education proclamation No.650/ 2009 Article 2 defines academic staff
as 'members of an institution employed in the capacity of teaching and/or
research, and any other professional of the institution who shall be recognized
so by senate statutes' (Government of Ethiopia 2009). This definition is less
explicit and vaguer than the definition of 'academic staff' given by the
proclamation No.351/2003 (Government of Ethiopia 2003). Article 30 of the
higher education proclamation No. 650/2009 also vaguely indicates the
necessary qualification and professional ranks for academic staff at higher
learning institutions when it proclaims:

- Any institution may have the following academic staff: professors,
  associate professors, assistant professors, lecturers, assistant lecturers
  and, under unique circumstances or conditions of transition, graduate
  assistants employed for teaching and/or research;
- …graduates with bachelor degrees may be employed as regular
  academic staff in government institutions only on the basis of directives
  to be issued by the Ministry;
- Every institution shall ensure adequate supply of academic staff in quality
  as well as in numbers;
- The Ministry shall issue, from time to time, minimum academic staff
  ratios with regard to educational qualifications and professional ranks,
  which shall be complied with by every institution.

The number of academic staff in Government universities has leaped from
5,788 in 2005/06 (1998E.C) to 14,126 in 2009/10 (2002 E.C) with around 950
(6.7%) comprised of expatriates (Ministry of Education 2010b). The number
and qualification mix of teaching staff are highly heterogeneous and
disproportionate. It seems as if there is no need for clear academic standards
to be followed regarding the qualifications of university academic staff. It also
seems that the issue of academic qualifications required to teach at public
universities is curiously omitted from explicit definition in the higher education
proclamation No.650/2009. However, the Higher Education Relevance and
Quality Agency (HERQA 2008:27) recommended a qualification profile for
university academic staff: less than 20 percent first degree holders, about 50
percent Masters Degree holders, and about 30 percent terminal degree (PhD)
holders. Not only at a university level, but this proportion of staff mix is expected
to be fulfilled at faculty as well as at each department level. At present there are
virtually three sets of public universities in Ethiopia (universities with a
comparatively low staff profile, an average staff profile, and a high staff profile).

Table 3: Teaching staff in universities with low staff profile 2009/10

Universities	Staffs	PhD Degree	Masters Degree	MD/ DVM	Undergraduate Degree	Diploma and Others
			Level of Qualification			
Axum University	413	6	81(19.61%)	5	320(77.48)	1
Debre Birhan University	257	4	91(35.40%)	0	162(63.03)	-
DebreMarkos University	261	8	128(49.04%)	0	121(46.36)	4
Dire Dawa University	375	4	105(28.00%)	0	266(70.93)	-
Jijiga University	384	4	86(22.39%)	10	279(72.65)	5
MedaWolabuUniversity	222	1	140(63.06%)	0	80(36.03)	1
Mizan Tepi University	404	6	134(33.16%)	1	232(57.42)	31
Semera University						
Wolaita SodoUniversity	211	5	58(27.48%)	0	135(63.98)	13
Wollega University	528	7	204(38.63%)	14	303(57.38)	-
Wollo University	221	2	96(43.43%)	-	115(52.03)	8
Total	3276 (100)	47 (1.43%)	1123 (34.27%)	30 (0.9 %)	2013 (61.44%)	63 (1.92%)

Source: Ministry of Education (2010b:144-277).

The profile of the staff in this set of universities can only be said to be substandard even in the Ethiopian context. Most of the staff (61.44 %) does not qualify for the teaching position they are currently holding. As Firdissa (2006:29-30) clearly put it, 'At the heart of universities' mission lies the learning quality of the students in which case the teaching staffs are the key work forces. This is because those who are responsible for its implementation can only assure quality'. The profile of the teaching staff plays a major role towards ensuring quality education. The current profile of the teaching staff in almost all ten public universities listed in Table 3 is far below the Ministry's requirement and much of the teaching is done by first degree holders. The universities are staffed by three times as many first degree holders than the maximum recommended by the Federal Ministry of Education. Had this been the profile of private higher learning institutions, definitely accreditation would have been denied.

Although the staff profile of the second set of public universities is better than the first group, it is still far short of the requirements recommended by the Ministry. As can be seen in Table 4, about 41.9 percent of the staffs do not qualify for the teaching position they are holding.

Table 4: Teaching staff in universities with average profile in 2009/10

| Universities | Staffs | Level of Qualification | | | | |
		PhD Degree	Masters Degree	MD/ DVM	Undergraduate Degree	Diploma and Others
Adama University	776	53 (6.82%)	349 (44.9%)	15	359 (46.26)	-
Ambo University	345	30 (8.69%)	163 (47.24%)	1	144 (41.73)	7
Arbaminch University	789	41 (5.19%)	257 (32.57%)	5	484 (61.34)	2
Bahir Dar University	1027	64 (6.23%)	584 (58.85%)	34	345 (33.59)	-
Dilla University	528	16 (3.03%)	272 (51.51%)	14	173 (32.76)	53
Gondar University	906	31 (3.42%)	303 (33.44%)	74	440 (48.56)	58
Haromaya University	658	92 (13.98%)	239 (36.32%)	24	298 (45.28)	5
Hawassa University	1110	80 (7.20%)	486 (43.78%)	15	515 (46.39)	14
Jimma University	887	29 (3.26%)	313 (35.28%)	80	245 (27.62)	220
Mekelle University	912	103 (11.29%)	380 (41.66%)	0	326 (35.74)	103
Total	7938 (100)	539 (6.79%)	3346 (42.15%)	262 (3.3%)	3329 (41.93%)	462 (5.82%)

Source: Ministry of Education (2010b:144 - 227).

The staff profile of Haromaya University shows a large variation among faculties and programmes of the university. The profile of the College of Agriculture, for instance, is very strong whereas in other faculties and programmes it is short of what is recommended by the Ministry of Education. There are programmes staffed entirely or largely by first degree holders. On the other hand, out of 41 teaching staff in the department of Plant Science, 25 are Professors and Associate Professors. But generally, there is a lack of proportionate competent and senior teaching staff among faculties and programmes at all levels. Some programmes in Bahir Dar University are run largely by first degree holders and graduate assistants are teaching high loads even on first assignment.

The third set of public universities (actually one institution) with comparatively senior and qualified teaching staffs is the Addis Ababa University as depicted in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Teaching staff at the Addis Ababa universities in 2009/10

| Total No. of Staffs | Level of Qualification | | | | |
	PhD Degree	Masters Degree	MD+ and DVM+	MD/ DVM	Undergraduate Degree
1869	530 28.36%	911 48.74%	107 5.72%	54 2.89%	267 14.29%

Source: Addis Ababa University (2011:27).

By 2010 Addis Ababa University had 1869 academic staff out of which seven percent were foreigners. Nearly half are Masters Degree holders, and about 28.4 percent have PhDs. Table 6 summarizes the profile of all teaching staffs in Ethiopian public universities by level of qualification and in comparison to Addis Ababa University.

Table 6: Summary of the teaching staffs in Ethiopian Public Universities in 2009/10

| | Staffs | Level of Qualification | | | | |
		PhD (Terminal) Degree	Masters Degree	MD+ and DVM+	MD/ DVM	Undergraduate Degree
21 Universities	11,214	586 (5.22%)	4,469 (39.8%)		292	5,342 (47.63%)
Addis Ababa University	1869	530 (28.36%)	911 (48.74%)	107 (5. %)	54 (2.89%)	267 (14.29%)
Total	13,083	1,116 (8.53%)	5,380 (41.12)		346 (2.64%)	5,609 (42.87%)

Source: Ministry of Education (2010a, 2010b); Addis Ababa University (2011).

The state of staff profiles particularly in the newly opened universities is clearly much inferior to the relatively senior ones. The current unsatisfactory profile of the teaching staff in public universities is strongly connected to the top-down reform which includes the reform regarding the hiring of teaching staff. One of the academic department heads, for instance, has the following to tell regarding the way universities claim and justify their right to hire teaching staff:

Previously, it was all the power of the respective universities and colleges especially in hiring staffs with first degree but now it is centralized by the Ministry of Education. As a result we are observing problems in relation to the maturity and quality of the staff. Because it is the university in general and the academic department in particular that know who is who on top of grades.

Institutional autonomy and academic freedom

The culture and practice of institutional autonomy and academic freedom are essential factors for the realization of the overall mission of higher learning institutions. Regarding the issue of institutional autonomy Article 17 of the Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009 proclaims that every public institution is granted the necessary autonomy in pursuit of its mission. This allows universities, among others, to 'develop and implement relevant curricula

and research programmes, select academic and other staff to be employed by
the institution, nominate the president, vice presidents, and members of the
Board, and select and appoint leaders of academic units and departments...'
(Government of Ethiopia 2009). Of course the Higher Education Proclamation
has formally allowed public higher education institutions a limited degree of
administrative as well as academic autonomy. Nevertheless it has been observed
that there is a gap between rhetoric and practice. One can say that most public
universities, especially those newly emerging ones, are ruled and operated under
uniform day-to-day instruction from the federal ministry of education as if
they all comprise a single university whose president is the Ministry of Education.

Historically there has always been competing views among scholars in
Ethiopia regarding academic autonomy in higher learning institutions. Yizengaw
(2003:3), for instance, attempted to compare and contrast the status of higher
education prior to 1994 with that of the current EPRDF government. He argued
for the superiority of the present context over the past in all measures including
institutional autonomy and academic freedom:

> Prior to 1994, due to the lack of any democratic right… little but critically
> scrutinized academic autonomy was practised by higher education institutions.
> This was expressed by top-down approach in areas such as curriculum
> development and adoption, staff recruitment… It was also the case that
> teaching staff were recruited/ appointed… by the government… [but currently
> under the EPRDF led Government]… the academic autonomy of institutions
> has been respected by the government and the regulatory body...

One cannot help but say that the message in this quotation is also a perfect
manifestation of the current context of public universities in Ethiopia as well.
Yizengaw (ibid:3) then went on to state his view that all public universities should
be under the financial and administrative control of the MoE, and that institutional
autonomy should be interpreted in relation to the party that controls resources.
By implication, he is saying that since the government owns and controls resources
it has the right to control and manipulate the activities of public universities. But
this is fallacious because unless public resources are allocated to a public institution
with the necessary autonomy and trust to achieve its mission, the allocation of
resources hardly leads to productivity. Autonomy is a necessary resource for
higher learning institutions if they are expected to contribute for nation
development. Yizengaw's (2003) conception of autonomy and academic
freedom is a 'macro'-level conception that reflects largely an African tradition.

There are two logically contradictory views about academic freedom, the
'macro'-level and the 'micro'-level. 'Macro'-level principles emanate from
how state resources ought to be accountably used and accordingly entails that
academic freedom should be utilized solely for the sake of some concrete
public good such as social justice and social responsibility. This view, therefore,

entails that a government-funded academic's responsibility is to be 'responsive' or 'relevant' to his/her social context in the way he/she teaches and researches. On the other hand, 'micro'-level conceptions of academic freedom include the idea that it can be proper to use academic freedom in order to discover and impart knowledge that is unlikely to foster a concrete public good, however, broadly construed. This view entails that academics at public universities have a moral prerogative to pursue 'knowledge for its own sake' (Metz 2010). To this end, one could logically ask whether or not the right of academic freedom necessarily is tied to a duty to promote the public good in concrete ways. A more libertarian conception (micro-level conception) of academic freedom according to Metz (2010:534), generally is that of 'the freedom of an individual academic from interference in the selection of what and how to teach and research, without regard to any specific or "closed" purpose (perhaps other than abiding by academic norms)'. Accordingly, academic freedom is the freedom of higher learning institution in general and individual academics working in the institutions in particular, from external as well as internal interference and influence in matters related, but not limited to who shall teach, what shall be taught, how to teach, whom to teach, what to research, and how to research.

The 'social responsibility' view of higher education (the macro-level conception) cannot understand and define academic freedom in isolation from accountability. Accountability in the exercise of academic freedom suggests that it is possible for academic freedom to be used irresponsibly. Truly speaking, social responsibility is an obligation and professional responsibility of academics, not a prerequisite for the right to academic freedom. The two are not a necessarily mutually inclusive web of social obligations. However, in the context of Africa, there are many reasons to recognize the intimate link between academic freedom and social responsibility (Metz 2010). Accordingly, Zeleza (2003:151) argued that defining academic freedom in terms of institutional autonomy from external intervention especially by the state and individual autonomy of professors from university boards and administrators without accountability and social responsibility is simply a Western tradition and does not work in the African context. In other words, African traditions dictate the emphasis for both institutional autonomy and social responsibility.

Radhakrishnan (2008:184-185) also argued that 'Academic freedom cannot be universal so long as education systems are not universal, inclusive and robust... In discourse on academic freedom it is important to make a distinction between developed and developing countries'. But making a distinction between developing and developed countries has little importance in such discourse. Although there are multidimensional variations among countries around the globe, those unavoidable socioeconomic as well as political differences cannot not justify defining and exercising academic freedom vis-à-vis developing and

developed countries. A discourse on academic freedom deserves a comparable status as discourses on human rights. Academic freedom is not necessarily a political freedom. It is a freedom of higher learning institutions and their academic communities aimed at achieving the purpose for which they are established.

To this end, the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation No.650 /2009 Article 16 has the following to say about academic freedom: 'Every institution shall cultivate the culture of social responsibility in its academic community in the exercise of academic freedom' (Government of Ethiopia 2009). It is therefore apparent that this statement is in line with the macro-level conception of academic freedom and with African traditions.

There has been a tension between the desire of the Ministry of Education in Ethiopia to control public universities, and the reality that universities necessarily demand institutional autonomy and academic freedom to achieve their mission and objectives. This was apparent when the then Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Education, Yizengaw (2003:3), stated the following:

> From historical times the definition of autonomy has lent itself to diverse interpretations and, even today, it frustrates the systems' internal operation unnecessarily. With universities being public institutions, but seeking to free themselves from certain common orientation and guidelines, it has become increasingly difficult for the regulatory body [the Ministry] to monitor and supervise the institutions under its purview.

In contrast, Zeleza (2003:160) in his critical analysis of the status and challenges of academic freedom for African universities affirmed that the overthrow of the Derge dictatorship in Ethiopia in 1991 did not guarantee academic freedom for higher learning institutions in the country. To use Zeleza's words:

> In Ethiopia, the hopes that accompanied the overthrow of the Derg dictatorship and the end of the civil war in 1991, and the installation of new government were soon dashed. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) did not live up to its billing that it was guided by the principles of democracy, development, and minority rights. Assaults against academic freedom continued and, in fact, intensified.

Zeleza (2003:160-161) referred, among others, to the following two scenarios to validate his affirmation for the erosion of academic freedom in Ethiopia:

(a) Independent thought was stifled through the denial of university autonomy and government control of activities of campuses;

(b) The arbitrary dismissal of some 40 professors in 1993, the use of two-year contracts in faculty employment, the absence of tenure, the arrest of human rights activists, and the government's repeated failure to grant university autonomy through a charter (which it enjoyed when it was created in 1950 until 1974 revolution), and its control of all leadership positions, necessarily eroded academic freedom.

Baye (2008:57) critically compared and contrasted the practices of higher education during the Imperial, Derge, and EPRDF regimes, and concurs with Zeleza (2003) that the current system is no better than its predecessors as far as Addis Ababa University is concerned. He asserted that 'In all the three governments, the university [Addis Ababa University] has been viewed as a threat more than an intellectual ally. And a practical step taken by all three has always been keeping it at bay and silencing it whenever it get vocal with its thoughts, words of dissent, and practice'. He further added that:

> Surly, the Emperor had tolerated a level of dissent within the walls of the university, which the succeeding governments failed to uphold, they see no wall between the university and the rest of the public... In all three governments, it has always been the political centre, not the University, that has claimed national authorship on the socio-political developments of the country and on the collective consciousness of the people.

Time and again Governments in Ethiopia claim exclusive ownership of reform agendas. They value control over autonomy and despotism over freedom to achieve the missions and objectives of public universities. Case studies conducted in seven relatively senior public universities (Forum for Social Studies 2008) indicated the presence and practices of some grains of institutional autonomy and academic freedom, but largely concluded that true and meaningful institutional autonomy was absent. On the other hand, the universities' ability to protect themselves from threats to their autonomy as well as intellectual authority coming from any other source had been reported to be low, and altogether absent when the threat comes from the Government. To this end, Zeleza's (2003:170) observation about the African context seems true in the context of Ethiopian public universities as well:

> African universities have been characterized by authoritarianism, partly as a reflection of prevailing state authoritarianism itself and the fact that in many cases senior university administrators are state appointees, who in turn, appoint unit heads down the administrative hierarchy. University governance has often been characterized by a discretionary and top-down administrative structure, poor communication, and strained relations between administration and teaching faculty.

Wanna (2009:153) supported Zeleza's generalization and disclosed the absence of institutional autonomy and individual academic freedom in his case study report as follows:

> Teachers generally have little voice in policy/decision making process although they are one of the key stakeholders in higher education and among the principal actors in quality assurance. The erosion of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, as exemplified by the top-down approach on policy and even curricular issues, has contributed to the marginalization of the teaching personnel [Translated from Amharic Language].

As opposed to the international trend of improved autonomy of higher learning institutions, the practice of university governance in Ethiopia appears not very different from its political tradition. Hence, public universities have suffered too much from unnecessary government intervention. As reflected in the current higher education discourses and practices in Ethiopia, it can safely be asserted that Ministry of Education has been needlessly challenging the idea and practice of autonomy and academic freedom that should have been instrumental for the overall identity of its own universities. Such perspective and ideology neither help the existing political system nor facilitate the implementation of the Government initiated reform agenda, but simply enhances a proliferation of submissive and non-responsive public universities in Ethiopia.

Concluding remark

Any reform of higher learning institutions that does not centre around the way knowledge is produced and how it is used and disseminated through teaching, increased use of technology in teaching, institutional autonomy, and academic freedom is to say the least nominal and has little contribution to advancement of knowledge and thereby to development. It has now become clear that there has been a growing mismatch between the expansion of higher education and available resources and facilities, leading to declining standards in the quality of instruction and research in Ethiopian public universities. Series of top-down reforms simply turned public universities into corporate institutions that treat students as clients. Corporatization in university is just the adoption of business model for the organization and administration of universities. It reinforces a market ideology, and the practices of bureaucratic authoritarianism, which curtail the culture of collegiality and general education on one hand, while it encourages managerial efficiency, and accountability to government on the other (Aronowitz 2000). The alternative is that Ethiopian public universities should ensure that their key task is to play a major role in developing critical minds, rather than degenerating into knowledge factories.

The prime factor affecting the quality of reform implementation in Ethiopian public universities is the Ministry of Education's excessive intervention and control that emanates from sense of absolute ownership of the reform agenda. This in turn lessened support for the implementation of the reforms, instead of staff playing their roles in accelerating them. The implementation process also fostered uniformity at the expense of institutional diversity. The Ministry has become unnecessarily busy by involving itself in to the day-to-day routine activities of public universities.

The quality of many of the teaching staff and of most students admitted to universities is questionable when examined against the quality output to which society aspires. The lack of trust between government and academia, and a lack of a sense of ownership of the reform agenda, together with the politicization

of educational development, constitute severe bottlenecks for quality higher education in Ethiopia. There is an obvious gap between the aspiration of the government initiated reform agenda and the reality of their implementation.

It seems valid to state that the quality of higher education in Ethiopian public universities is in crisis. It is therefore a high time for Ethiopian citizens, educators and policy makers to rethink their higher education agenda and direction. As education is a public property, the larger public in Ethiopia must question the policy and philosophy of education in general and that of higher education in particular. The public has the right to receive not simply higher education, but also quality higher education. Quality higher education by and large is a function of quality inputs and institutional as well as academic autonomy. Academic freedom allows universities to meet their responsibilities to society: promoting progress and cultivating democratic citizenship. University autonomy and academic freedom are essential instruments for the production of the critical social knowledge that facilitates material and ethical advancement. Ethiopian intellectuals and institutions of higher learning can hardly make meaningful contributions to the advancement of knowledge as well as to their nation development without true institutional autonomy and individual academic freedom. Accordingly, state control and suppression shall be relaxed. State policy needs to shift from control of universities to facilitation and supervision, from concern with process to concern with product, and questions of appropriateness of outputs to meet market demand.

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