Selection and Appointment of Higher Education Leaders in Ethiopia: An Assessment of Implementation

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Abstract: The Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation (No. 650/2009) states that public higher education institutions have the autonomy to nominate top-level leaders. However, until recently the university community was not involved in the nomination and appointment of top level-leaders. In 2017, the Ministry of Education endorsed a new participatory, transparent and 'merit-based' strategy for selecting and appointing higher education leaders. This study assessed the implementation of the new leadership selection and appointment process mainly based on the experiences of the university community. The study was conducted at Bahir Dar University, one of the public universities in Ethiopia. The participants of the study were members of the search and selection committee, candidates for different leadership positions, and staff representatives who participated in the selection process. Participants were selected using purposive sampling technique. Data were collected through interview and document review and analyzed using deductive thematic analysis. The study revealed that the selection process ensures equality of opportunity and it is transparent from the outset to the end. However, there were issues which created confusion among the community, including eligibility of applicants, terms of office of the search and selection committee, point allocation for experience based on different ranges, number of candidates considered to be sufficient to run the selection process, and the procedure that needs to be followed if there are no enough applicants for a post. The study also showed concerns and discontent of the University community regarding the selection practice including staff underrepresentation in the selection process, the weight given to staff evaluation, and the emphasis given to promote women participation in leadership. It is also understood that the Directive is a necessary but not sufficient condition to promote ethnic diversity given the politicization of ethnicity in the country. The study necessitates the need for early intervention to address discontents and confusions.

Keywords: Assessment, Ethiopia, Higher education, Leadership, Selection and appointment

INTRODUCTION

Education is vital to the prospects of any country. Nowadays, higher education is at the forefront of national development (Kohoutek, Pinheiro, Cabelkova, & Smidova, 2017). The government of Ethiopia has a strong trust on the contribution of education to the economic and social development of the country. This has been clearly indicated in its budget allocation

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to the education sector. The government allocates 24.2% of on-budget total national expenditure and 4.4% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the education sector in 2015/16. Higher education has the lion's share which is 48.1% (UNICEF, Ethiopia, 2017). This is happening in Ethiopia while the higher education environment in many parts of the world suffers from "resource reduction, increased stress and increased expectations" (Szekeres, 2006, p 141).

Ethiopia has to ensure greater prosperity and better lives for its people, as it advances from an agriculture-based to an industrial-based economy. At the same time, it is being confronted with significant challenges along this path and society's needs and expectations are growing at an ever faster pace. The government believes that quality higher education is crucial to addressing these challenges and ensuring the country's continued progress towards achieving its vision of becoming a middle-income industrial country by 2030 (Ministry of Education, 2015). The expansion of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Ethiopia plays significant role in achieving the national development plan, but only if they are determined to focus more on preparing highly skilled personnel rather than on academic concept of education for its own sake (Ross, 1973) and number of graduates. Moreover, HEIs have social responsibilities which they are entrusted. Their social responsibilities are essentially guided by the relevance of the services they offer to the priority needs of their respective society (UNESCO, 1991) including quality of education.

Enhancing quality of education, addressing social responsibilities and thereby contributing to the national development requires HEIs to have strong leadership, because effective leadership is central to a HEI's success (Hofmeyer, Sheingold, Klopper, & Warland, 2015; Braun et al., 2009). Therefore, leadership is one of the most important aspects that need to be taken into consideration for any institution's future (Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership, 2001).

Leading a HEI is becoming more and more demanding and challenging for many reasons, *inter alia*, the loosely couple character of higher education, the expansion of programs and student numbers and expectation of the society, and expectation to deal with not only national but also global issues (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Black 2015; Rumbley, Helms, Peterson, & Altbach, 2014; Gilmore, Hirschorn & Kelly, 1999). Informal discussions with colleagues and incumbent and former higher education leaders also indicate that the complexity of leadership role in the Ethiopian higher education has increased with increased complexity in the internal expansion, relationship with the government, and depth of core functions of higher education. In addition to these, addressing issues related to student catering, dormitory and health is becoming more and more challenging to higher education leaders and managers. Coping with such challenges and addressing demands of stakeholders require self-motivated, experienced and knowledgeable higher education leaders. This necessitates higher education leaders to have good knowledge, perspectives and skills and to be visionary but not be lone visionary. They rather need to create shared vision that should not leave out any stakeholders (Mrig & Sanaghan, 2017).

Higher education leaders and managers are expected to lead wisely which encompasses a balance between their philosophies, vision, knowledge, and exceed daily challenges and political tussles (Portugal, 2006). It may be difficult to exercise this kind of leadership in situations where effectiveness and efficiency of university operating system has no strong consequence and change has been often dictated by government. However, it is always good to select and appoint the best candidates for each leadership position in higher education.

The selection and appointment of higher education leaders differs from institution to institution and from country to country. For example, in Kenya, generally, the responsibility of appointment of Presidents, called Vice Chancellors, rests on the University Governing Council. However, "appointment of Vice-Chancellors in public universities is skewed towards six major tribes in Kenya, contrary to equal employment opportunities legislations enacted by parliament" (Siringi & Letting, 2016, p. 1). In Nigeria, the appointment of a Vice-Chancellor is the legal responsibility of the Governing Council of each University (Ogbonnaya, 2009). Universities follow predefined selection criteria and inform the outcome to the President of the country who has no direct role to play in such appointment. Here also studies indicate that appointment of vice chancellors and other principal officers of federal and state universities in Nigeria are politically, ethnically, religiously or sectionally influenced (Ogbonnaya, 2009; Akpakwu & Okwo, 2014). In the US and most European countries, the selection and appointment of university Presidents is the statute responsibility of the universities' highest governing body (Teker, Teker & Sayan, 2013).

In Ethiopia, since the establishment of the first higher education institution in 1950, the selection and appointment of Presidents and Vice Presidents had been the responsibility of the government. The 2003 Higher Education Proclamation (Proclamation No. 351/2003) clearly indicates that Presidents and Vice Presidents of public universities are appointed by the government upon recommendation of the University Board (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2003). However, the current Higher Education Proclamation (Proclamation No. 650/2009) states that public HEIs have the autonomy to nominate top-level leaders (President, Vice Presidents and members of the Board), and select and appoint mid and lower-level leaders (directors, deans and heads of departments) (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2009). However, until recently the University community had no hands-on the nomination and appointment of top level-leaders. Informal discussions with colleagues and some higher education leaders indicate that most of the University community even did not know whether there is criteria and procedure for nomination, selection and appointment of top-level leaders. Although some universities have developed guidelines for the selection and appointment of leaders including Vice Presidents, deans and head of departments, the implementation was not consistent, transparent and inclusive.

Trends in the last decade show that the higher education leadership appointment in Ethiopia became vindictive when the government embarked on using mainly ethnicity and locality for selecting university presidents. These criteria are not stated or written in any government directives or institutional guidelines. This simply shows government's focus which is more on leaders who often work to address its political mission than the actual missions of

universities. This kind of leadership appointment strategy overlooked academic leadership qualities which include "integrity, courage and passion, trustworthiness, consideration, responsiveness, adaptability, being able to adapt and change, to envision alternative futures, … to create a positive and collegial working atmosphere, … and being able to influence others positively" (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008 p.13). It also upended HEIs' autonomy and ignored the role of leadership in enhancing the provision of quality education and thereby contributing to the national development of the country.

The multifaceted problem associated with the selection and appointment of leaders in higher education in Ethiopia was heavily criticized by the higher education community and the society alike. The recent government self-critique which is reflected in different meetings with top-level university leaders also indicated the feebleness of the infamous leadership appointment strategy. Consequently, the Ministry of Education (now Ministry of Science and Higher Education) endorsed a new transparent, participatory and 'merit-based' strategy for selecting and appointing higher education leaders which is referred to as "Directive on selection and appointment of leaders and mangers in higher education institutions in Ethiopia 002/2017" (Ministry of Education, 2017). The Directive focuses only on two major leadership positions – the University Board and top-level university leaders (President and Vice Presidents).

It is now more than a year since HEIs have been using the Directive in selecting and appointing their leaders and mangers in HEIs in Ethiopia (hereafter the Directive). Thus, purpose of this study is to assess the implementation of the new leadership selection and appointment Directive mainly based on the experiences of university community. This in turn helps to further enrich the Directive based on experiences and evidences.

METHODOLOGY

The Directive applies to and governs all public HEIs which are operationally accountable to the Ministry of Education. Although many universities are now using the new Directive, this study focuses on its implementation in Bahir Dar University (BDU). BDU was selected mainly because (i) it is the first University to start using the Directive; (ii) it has more experience than other universities in implementing the Directive (i.e. it used the Directive in selecting its President, and four Vice Presidents); and (iii) it has been sharing implementation experiences to other universities which in a way enables to understand challenges faced by other universities as well.

The study employed phenomenological research design to describe experiences of the University community in relation to the selection and appointment of higher education leaders. Phenomenological research design is often used to describe how human beings experience a certain phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004). The data were generated from all groups involved in the selection process including nine academic staff, seven administrative staff, one search and selection committee, and seven candidates for different top-level leadership positions. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting participants who

"have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched" (Kruger, 1988 p. 150 cited in Groenewald, 2004). The data were collected after the University completed the selection and appointment process of five top-level leadership positions (President, Academic Vice President, Research and Community Service Vice President, Information and Strategic Communication Vice President, Administrative Affairs Vice President). Until the data for this study was collected, the Vice President for Research and Community Service position was not open for application because the term of the leader was not completed. This was according to the Directive which states that decision to continue should be made by vote of confidence of the Senate and Managing council until the current term expires.

The necessary data were mainly generated from participants using in-depth semi-structured interview. Data were also generated from the Directive using document review. These data were mainly used to substantiate the data generated through interview. The data were analyzed using deductive thematic analysis mainly not to miss themes which are important to the description of the phenomenon (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997).

RESULTS

Results are presented using themes mainly from the Directives including the University Board, Search and Selection Committee, University Leaders, Experience, Strategic plan, Diversity, Grievance and Transparency, Number of candidates, and Performance evaluation. Views from the participants obtained through in-depth interviews and analysis and reflection on the Directive relative to the aforementioned themes are presented in this section.

The University Board

The University Administrative Board is the supreme governing body of the institution (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2009). The 2009 higher education proclamation states that HEIs have the autonomy to nominate University Board members. However, according to the new Directive, it is the Minister (Ministry of Education) in consultation with relevant federal and regional authorities and the existing Board who selects University Board members. The president might be consulted in the selection of Board members other than the Board Chairperson. Although this eroded the universities autonomy to nominate Board members, participants did not complain on this because of two main reasons. First, though the Board is the supreme governing body of the University, they do not see its significant, actual and direct influence in the day-to-day activities of the University. Second, they thought that the appointment is fine as long as the Minister strictly follows the stated criteria for selecting Board members.

The Search and Selection Committee

The selection and appointment of Presidents and Vice Presidents requires the establishment of a Search and Selection Committee (SSC) which facilitates the process. The SSC has five members composed of individuals from the Board, Senate, academic staffs, student union, and the industry or the community. The composition of the SSC and the procedure for

selecting SSC members were considered good except some candidates questioned the knowledge and skills of a student union representative. The SSC and most candidates believe in the importance of student participation provided that they are well oriented about the selection process and what is expected of them.

The SSC has been acclaimed by candidates and the wider university community for its credibility in handling the selection process. However, one of the limitations observed with regard to the SSC is that its effort in searching for potential candidates has been found to be unsatisfactory. For example, the Vice President for Business and Development post was advertised three times because there were no enough applicants. This shows the less effort exerted by the SSC on searching potential candidates and motivating the University community to participate in nominating their future leaders. The SSC accepts this limitation but it argued that this is because of the experience it encountered in the process.

> We started our job with the selection of the President. At that time, we tried to approach some university staff to motivate and encourage potential candidates to apply for the position. …There are also cases where we were suspicious of nominations we received. We thought that it is an individual who submit this nomination with different envelops. Regardless of this experience, we still try to encourage staff to motivate their potential colleagues to apply for different leadership positions which they are good at. (SSCM)

The other issue which was not clear enough among participants was the terms of office of the SSC. The Directive indicates that "the terms of office of the search and selection committees end with the appointment of the posts needed" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 5). In practice, the same SSC, which is established to facilitate the Presidential selection process, also facilitated other posts announced even a year after its establishment. According to a member of the SSC, the duration of their terms of office was extended because of their trustworthiness and success.

> We are selected to facilitate the Presidential selection process. If you look at the composition of the members, it is really very good. We also have good acceptance by the University community. So, it was decided that we continue facilitating other posts which include the four Vice Presidents positions. (SSCM)

What BDU has done might be good and acceptable but that does not necessarily mean it is in line with what the Directive states. The Directive is not clear what does it mean by "the terms of office … end with the appointment of the posts needed". This is mainly because appointment will continue whenever there are vacant posts. Of course, if some vacant posts are announced together, the selection and appointment process may also end at the same time. In such cases, the terms of office of the SSC also ends at that point. However, the Directive does not clearly explain this. As a result, the SSC has continued its task regardless of a time frame or number of posts.

University Leaders (Presidents and Vice Presidents)

The Directive provides opportunities for individuals who are competent and have the requisite qualifications, skills, experience, and behavior to hold the leadership positions (Ministry of Education, 2017). This opportunity has been given believing that potential candidates know that becoming a leader of an institution is a privilege that comes with certain responsibilities and accountabilities (Miller, 2006), and they are morally and professionally obliged to serve the institution and its community rather than their own self-interests (Miller, 2006; Mintzberg, 2004).

In case of presidential selection process, the SSC is responsible for screening presidential candidates and submit five candidates' reports to the Board for review. The Board conducts evaluation of presidential candidates and recommend up to three nominees to the Minister in rank order. Formal confirmation of the selection of a President by a higher authority is common in many African and European countries. However, the level of formality of the confirmation by a higher authority varies from country to country. In Ethiopia, although the Minster may not make use of it frequently, the Directive seems to provide the veto power to the Minister to approve and appoint the candidate based on the ranking (which reflects the Board's suggestion) or appoint one of the other two candidates. Participants agreed on this procedure which gives an opportunity to the Minister to appoint a candidate whom he/she thinks is good to work with him/her as well.

In case of Vice Presidents selection process, the SSC is responsible for screening candidates and submit reports of candidates to the president for review. The president reviews the SSC report and gathers additional information on the candidates and presents the two top ranking candidates to the Board for approval and appointment. In practice, as Senate/Board member the President is also involved in evaluating Vice Presidents based on the given criteria. Thus, it is not clear why the President is involved in evaluation as a Senate/Board member if he/she has an opportunity to review the SSC report and gather additional information on the candidates before sending two top ranking candidates to the Board.

As discussed above, the SSC submits five shortlisted presidential candidates' reports to the Board for review. However, the Directive does not specify how many shortlisted Vice President Candidates' report should be sent to the President for review. Moreover, in case of Vice-Presidential candidates, the Directive states that it is "only those scoring above 70% of the specified criteria can be appointed as Vice Presidents"; however, it does not put any required percentage to be appointed as President.

Eligibility was also one of the issues which are not clear among the University community. Some participants understood that both internal and external applicants are eligible to apply for both President and Vice Presidents posts. On the other hand, there are participants who understood that it is only the president post which is open to both internal and external candidates. The Directive does not have a clear statement on this. It only states that to attract qualified applicants, the SSC openly announces the presidential position both internally and externally, and the Vice-Presidential positions internally to the University community. This

may imply and support the argument that it is only the presidential position which is open to both internal and external applicants.

The Directive has four major criteria for selecting a President. These include educational qualification (30%), experience (25%), strategic plan presentation (25%) and panel interview on leadership and management skills and competencies (20%). For Vice Presidents, the five selection criteria include educational qualification (25%), experience (25%), brief proposal on improving core functions (20%), interview/survey on leadership skills and competencies (15%) and Senate vote (15%).

The selection criteria *per se* are good, but the minimum educational qualifications/academic rank required for a President and Vice Presidents positions have been criticized. The Directive states that the minimum educational qualification required for a Vice President position is master's degree with the rank of assistant professor but for a President position it is only master's degree (Lecturer). This created confusion among potential candidates and forced the SSC to re-advertise a Vice President position because applicants with the rank of lecture also applied for the position assuming that the minimum educational qualification required for a Vice President position will not be higher than the requirement for a President position. This also happened because most candidates applied based on the information they got from the University, not from the Directive. It is also paradox that the Directive gives more weights for educational qualification/academic rank for President position (30%) than Vice President positions (25%) but the minimum educational qualification/academic rank required for Vice President positions (Master's degree with the rank of assistant professor) is higher than a President position (Master's degree/lecturer).

The participatory nature of the whole selection process has been highly appreciated by all groups of participants. However, candidates and staff are not happy about the representation of academic and administrative staff in the selection process (i.e. their participation in evaluating candidates).

> As you know, we never had the opportunity to participate in the selection of leaders. Now we have the opportunity to participate in the selection of leaders whom we think have the knowledge, skills and attitude to be a good leader. I am not saying we are satisfied with our participation in terms of representation. I am just appreciating the intent. How could someone be happy when only one or two staff represents a college or a faculty? Honestly speaking, staff representation is poor, and it needs to be reconsidered. (SR2)

> First, I want to be frank that my comment on staff representation has nothing to do with my unsuccessfulness in the competition. I think a college should not be represented by one academic staff. There should be a mechanism where staff should have the opportunity to significantly participate in the selection of their leader. For example, representation can be at department level and the number is manageable. (CAN1)

The Directive does not state about number of staff representation and how staff representatives should be selected to participate in the selection process. The University also does not have a clear strategy on this, and thus the number of staff participating in the evaluation of candidates and how they should be selected were tentatively set by the SSC.

Participants also criticized the allocation of points to different criteria, mainly educational qualification/academic rank and the weight given to staff evaluation. They argued that education helps leaders to make rational and good decisions, but qualification does not necessarily show individuals' leadership quality. Thus, it should not deserve more points than the evaluation of the University community which he/she leads.

> I correctly understand the importance of education in leadership, but your qualification and academic rank mainly indicates that you are excellent researcher or teacher or both. So, candidates' educational qualification should not have more point than our [staff] collective voices. Even if we simply say he leads the institute, he is mainly leading the people because without the people the institute does not exist. Moreover, you know how these days some people get promoted [referring to publication on predatory journals]. So, it is not fair to see these people get more point from educational qualification than the voice of the people they potentially lead. This is crazy for me. (SR1)

> I am not sure what the Directive you mentioned says about our participation, but what we have seen in practice is very sad. I think our participation in the selection process should not be symbolic. We are not a side issue; we are at the center of the University. So, we should have a proper representation in the selection process and reasonable weight should have been given to our evaluation. (SR6)

However, experience from the Presidential selection process revealed unprofessional act of the University community in general which includes staff representatives.

> It is very embarrassing when you see some people give 20 to one candidate and zero to the other potential competitor. They are doing this after listening to their strategic plan. There is no way for someone to get zero after a presentation even if it is weak. The evaluation clearly shows the unprofessional act of some staff participating in the selection process. (SR7)

Such practice has been condemned by successful and unsuccessful candidates, SSC and the wider university community alike. One participant argued that asking for increasing the weight for staff evaluation in such cases does not make sense. However, most participants strongly argued that the current malpractice does not justify the properness of the principle which is allocating lower weight to the criterion related to staff evaluation. Moreover, they argued that unprofessional deeds have been improving and this has been seen in the Vice Presidents selection processes which are carried out afterwards.

Experience

Experience matters in good leadership (Brooks, 2018). However, some experiences matter more than others. The Directive identifies leadership and management experience and teaching and research experience as one of the criterion for the selection of leaders. Though it is not unique to this Directive, it is not fair to assume years of experience equals doing a great job. Participants argued that there should be a system which helps to understand the achievement of a leader in the years which he/she assumed leadership position; otherwise, even if he/she did nothing good in those years, he/she could benefit from such criterion.

> Staying a number of years in leadership position alone cannot make you a good leader. For example, let's assume that in your previous leadership positions you were doing nothing except making chaos, but you were not fired because of your political affiliation or you have a relative or someone at the top who likes you very much. Although you are the individual that no one wants as a leader, you still claim those years as experience in leadership. In such cases, your limitations and bad deeds will be in your favor and this is not fair. (SR2)

These implies that the number of years spent in a given leadership position should not be the focus rather what has been achieved (knowledge accumulated, expertise build, results obtained) in those years should matter most. Some candidates also thought that it will be good to have a strategy that provides more weight to previous relevant leadership experiences to the position than leadership experience which is general or not directly relevant to the position.

> Having experience as criterion is good but I think more weight should be given to relevant experience related to the position. For example, when people compete for academic Vice President position, I believe that more weight should be given to a person who has four years leadership experience as academic affairs executive director than a person who has ten years leadership experience in the military. (CAN3)

The distribution of points within experience has been also criticized. Participants argued that the range provided is not inclusive. For example, 15 points are allocated for a candidate who has 3-4 years leadership experience and 6-10 years teaching and research experience. However, it is not clear how much point to give for a candidate with 3-4 years leadership experience and over 10 years teaching and research experience. This is a practical problem that the SSC faced. Other public universities also faced this problem and asked BDU for clarification. The SSC tried to address this problem through discussion which resulted in favoring leadership experience than teaching and research experience. In this case, a candidate with 3-4 years leadership experience and over 10 years teaching and research experience gets equal points to a candidate with 3-4 years leadership experience and 6 years teaching and research experience.

The other problem related to range-based point allocation is that it is unfair to some candidates. For example, a candidate with over 10 years teaching and research experience and 11 years leadership experience gets 25 points but a candidate with over 10 years teaching and research experience and 10 years leadership experience gets 20 points which is equal to a point given to a candidate with over 10 years teaching and research experience and five years

leadership experience. This implies that because of lack of one more year leadership experience the candidate will lose five points. Moreover, his/her other five years leadership experience has no additional value in terms of points because he/she anyways gets points equal to a candidate who has only five years leadership experience.

Some participants also noted that though leadership experience should be one of the criteria for selecting leaders, the weight given to experience should not be to the extent that it disfavors energetic and new blood staff who do not have previous leadership experience. Proponents of this idea argued that the selection criteria in some way should consider not only their previous experience but also their potential to be a good leader. On the other hand, opponents of this idea argued that it is difficult to entertain such a fascinating proposal in a merit-based approach.

Strategic plan

Higher education leaders need to examine the national and institutional context and come up with strategies that fit best the context (Black, 2015). Accordingly requiring candidates to prepare a strategic plan which they think is good for the improvement of the University is very important. Moreover, this criterion helps the Board, the Senate and the community to know more about candidates' vision, knowledge, skills and approaches to leadership. Candidates and other participants also noted the importance of preparing strategic plan. Most of them also indicated that the point allocated to this criterion is reasonable and acceptable.

> If you want to be a leader, you have to show your capacity to the University community, and I think the strategic plan is the best way to do it. Even if I am not successful, I have learnt a lot and it was an interesting exercise. …First, I thought the point allocated to strategic plan is too much, but when I know that it is a key part of the selection criteria in which people get to know you, your plan and also somehow your skills, I said the point is very reasonable. (CAN2)

Staff representatives thought that it would have been good to have the full strategic plan of candidates before the panel interview to know more about candidates' knowledge, skills and preparedness.

Diversity

In a country where public universities are often considered as mini-Ethiopia because of the diverse student population they have (Adamu, 2007; Adamu & Zellelew. 2007), the selection and appointment of leaders needs to consider issues of diversity. Study also indicates that "The association between diversity and leadership is synergistic because diversity promotes change as an emergent agent in the structuring of higher education, while leadership promotes practices that identify diversity as a nested context for achieving balance in the social relations between higher education and society" (Aguirre & Martinez, 2002, p.12). One of the objectives of the Directive is also to "ensure equality of opportunity and diversity are adhered to" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 3). Participants also indicated that the Directive

provides equal opportunities to individual regardless of their political affiliation and ethnic, religious and gender background.

> The procedure in which leaders have been appointed before and now is totally unparalleled. Previously we didn't know how university leaders have been appointed. We just see a letter of appointment on a notice Board and that is it. Now we do not only know the appointment procedure but also participate in the selection process which is open to all individuals who meet the minimum requirements. In principle, if I want to be a leader, I don't need to have a political affiliation or know someone at the ministry level or somewhere in high political leadership. I don't necessarily need also to be a person from that region or vicinity. (SR4)

> I have not seen the Directive but I can see that it is a good one because it gives opportunity to all staff as long as they have the necessary qualification, skills and experience. I think what we are experiencing now shows that political affiliation and ethnic orientation has no place in the selection process. Although I am not successful in my application, I have witnessed the equality of opportunity. (CAN5)

Although the Directive ensures equality of opportunity, practically it is not able to promote ethnic diversity which has been highly politicized for about three decades, even at the expense of national unity. It is understood that individuals from one ethnic group do not have the audacity to apply for leadership positions announced in universities which are located in regions other than 'their own'.

> The Directive is good in a sense that it gives equal opportunity but it does not have the power to attract candidates from different ethnic groups. The main reason for this is the issue of ethnicity is beyond the capacity of the Directive. The ethnic politics in Ethiopia is still a burning issue that needs to be addressed at national level. (SR7)

> If someone expects the Directive to attract candidates from different ethnic background, he must be foolish or he does not understand the problem that this country encountered as a result of ethnic politicization. Look at the candidates applied for leadership positions in different universities. It is always individuals from the ethnic group that is found in the region where the universities are located. It is very sad that it is becoming more and more difficult to work in different regional states. …It is only a political strategy that solves this problem not the Directive. (SR2)

The above excerpts indicate how politicization of ethnicity, which resulted from the ethnic-based political and administrative system, has affected the interest of people to work at and lead institutions that are located in a region other than 'their own'.

Despite the provision of equal opportunity, some individuals with good leadership experience and wisdom are not also applying for different top-level leadership positions. Candidates and some staff stated that the quality of applicants for different leadership position is not up to

their expectation. They thought that there are more qualified applicants who did not apply for different reasons.

> I don't think that the candidates applying for different positions are the one that most people want or expected. Some of them are not known by the University community because they might have joined the University recently or they have not been seen serving the University in different leadership positions. I believe that there are people who have better experience and educational qualification and even who have studied something related to the leadership positions. (CAN2)

> I am not a doomster but I can say that except in case of presidential selection, the people whom I think are good for different leadership positions are not coming forward. I asked some of them and they told me that they don't trust the process. This might be because of lack of awareness about how the new strategy works. I also think there are people who are afraid of not winning the competition. I was surprised that some people felt that I have lost something, and they tried to console me. …There are also people who want to be called, consulted to apply and compete. (CAN3)

> There are good candidates who applied for different leadership positions, but for me most of them are not good enough to be a leader at that level. There are good people but they did not apply. I think this may be because of our culture which does not encourage people to nominate themselves and say I can be a good leader. It is often the case that these kinds of people want to be either nominated or called up and appointed. (SR3)

The excerpts indicate that several individuals with good leadership experience and great potential to win the competition are not applying for different reasons including lack of trust in the selection process, lack of self-nomination culture, and the culture of feeling humbled when he/she did not get the position.

The other diversity issue which is not addressed by the Directive is gender. The number of public universities in Ethiopia had increased from two to 46 in the last three decades. This is accompanied with a steady increase of female enrolments and employment in higher education. When we look at women in higher education leadership in Ethiopia, they are still very much underrepresented. In the 46 public universities in Ethiopia women assume less than 10% of the available top-level leadership positions. A study conducted on commonwealth universities also shows that women do not occupy leadership positions that enable them to be influential decision maker in their institution (Singh 2002 cited in Onsongo, 2004).

The government wants to empower women and enhance the role of women in leadership, and higher education is no exception. However, the Directive does not reflect this discourse and commitment. Aiming to ensure equality of opportunity and obeying diversity is good but not a sufficient condition to enhance women participation in leadership. This is one of the challenges that the selection process has faced with.

>The government, Ministry of Education and even the University talks about promoting gender diversity and brining more women to leadership. However, when you look at the practice that is not how it is. …There was one female candidate for the President position and she had competed like her male counterparts. Whenever the University updates us with the result, they tell us that the result does not include the point that will be given to the female candidate. Even in the final result, we have not seen that point. If there is a point to be added for female candidates, it should be clear from the very beginning and we all should know about that. (SR4)

From experience, the SSC took for granted that female candidates will have some points to be added when they compete for leadership positions. However, the Directive does not provide a clear strategy on this and that is why the SSC often makes open statement in relation to gender when it announces results at different stages of the selection process.

>We [SSC members] believe that there is a point to be added for female candidates but we are not sure how much that should be. So, we called to different offices at federal and regional levels and they were not also clear. They gave us different figures and we did not want to take risk by simply taking one of those figures. Sometimes, I personally feel that if something is not addressed in the Directive, then it should not be our mandate. However, what we practically did was whenever we announce results to the University community we leave this issue open. Still now we don't know what to do in relation to this. This is a problem which other universities are also faced. We came to know this because they asked us how we managed this issue. (SSCM)

The Directive does not clearly address issues related to enhancing women participation in leadership, and the number of women candidates for different leadership positions are negligible. Study indicates that limited number of women applying for top-level leadership positions (Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007) is associated with, *inter alia*, lack of women as role models in leadership in the higher education sector and insufficient support for women professional effectiveness and career development (Moodly & Toni, 2017).

The Directive promotes merit-based selection and appointment strategy which is good, but the challenge with selecting and appointing on merit is that it assumes a level playing ground (Norah, 2015). In Ethiopia, women are not only teachers and researchers, but also mothers who have more responsibility than men in taking care of children and family. Their career development is potentially interrupted by pregnancy, birth and the like, which requires them more time than men to achieve the required educational qualification/academic rank and experience in leadership. This clearly shows lack of equal playground for women and men in Ethiopian higher education. Thus, in such situation selecting and appointing leaders only based on merit serves only confirming the status quo. Although the gender imbalance at top-level leadership in higher education is evident in most countries (Shepherd, 2017), the Directive may intensify the situation in Ethiopia, and this has been already noted when there are no women selected and appointed as a university leader since the implementation of the Directive.

Grievance and Transparency

The Directive provides opportunity for applicants to lodge their grievances. However, applicants are not clear about to which office or committee they should submit their complaints and who should handle the case. Some candidates thought that complaints are handled by the Board and the President office when the selection process refers to the President and Vice Presidents respectively. Some others thought that complaints are handled by the SSC by submitting either directly to the SSC or the office of the Vice President for information and strategic communication. It is not logical to assume grievance to be handled by the SSC because the grievance could be on fairness of the SSC itself. However, the SSC member noted that the committee is responsible for handling the case at initial stage, and if the case is difficult to address by the committee, it will be passed to the Board.

The confusion regarding grievance creates concern on the University's familiarity with the Directive and its guidance on grievance handling, because if they read the Directive in details this issue should have not been a problem. The Directive clearly states that the University Administrative Board handles grievances with the help of an independent committee established by the Board.

Until the end of the data collection for this study, there was only one grievance and it was submitted to and handled by the SSC. The absence of grievance might be associated with the transparent selection process which is much acclaimed by candidates, the University community, and the wider society. Some candidates and staff noted that the transparency of the selection process could be taken as a standard which other universities can refer to.

Number of candidates and Performance evaluation

The Directive does not indicate the number of candidates which is considered to be sufficient to run the selection process. It does not also indicate the procedure that needs to be followed if there are no enough applicants for a post. This problem has been practically faced when there are no enough applicants for the Business and Development Vice President position even after three advertisements through print and electronic media. In such cases, the university will be forced to appoint someone because it cannot keep the position open indefinitely. However, appointing a leader without clearly set strategy may obscure the open and transparent selection and appointment system.

The Directive states that both the President and Vice Presidents have the opportunity to continue for one more term if their performance has been rated very good or excellent by the Board and Ministry of Education (in case of President) and by the Board, Senate and President (in case of Vice Presidents). This is against the participatory nature of the Directive which denies the wider university community the opportunity for reflecting their satisfaction on the performance of their leaders through evaluation.

CONCLUSION

The selection process is very transparent from the outset to the end. This has been found to be one of the reasons for the trust among the University community on the selection process and absence of complaints from candidates. However, the performance evaluation is not inclusive. The study identifies different issues that create confusion among the community in the selection and appointment process. These include eligibility of applicants, minimum educational qualification/academic rank required for President and Vice Presidents positions, the terms of office of the SSC, number of shortlisted Vice President candidates to be sent to the President for review, point allocation for experience based on different ranges, number of candidates considered to be sufficient to run the selection process, and the procedure that needs to be followed if there are no enough applicants for a post. This implies the need for limiting terms of office of the SSC either to a defined number of posts or year(s). It also implies the need for a strategy for discounting ineffective and inefficient years of leadership as experience, and setting a clear point allocation strategy for experience which may include allocating points for each year of experience. It also necessitates the need for clear applicant eligibility criteria.

The result also provides important insights about concerns and discontents of the University community regarding the selection practice. These concerns and discontents include staff underrepresentation in the selection process, the less weight given to staff evaluation, the less emphasis given to promote women participation in leadership in higher education, and lack of participation on leaders' performance evaluation. This implies that either the Directive or universities need to develop a strategy for ensuring considerable staff representation, a procedure for selecting staff representatives and possible code of conducts for staff representatives. It also implies an urgent need for a strategy that promotes women participation in leadership and redresses the current gender imbalance in leadership; otherwise the selection process ends up in catching the same fish because that is what one gets when he/she is always fishing in the same pond. The selection and appointment process will also be considered as men's club where women are rarely invited.

The Directive promotes equal opportunity as one of its objectives. This is a necessary but not sufficient condition to promote ethnic diversity given the politicization of ethnicity in the country. This implies that if there is no political solution at national level or a daring strategy that promotes ethnic diversity in leadership in higher education, at least for a foreseeable future, individuals may not have the courage to apply for a leadership position in universities that are geographically located in "other" regional states.

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