Policy reforms and unresolved educational challenges in Ethiopia: Implications for the University of Education

Berhanemeskel Tena (Ph.D.)

Assistant Professor of Education Management, Kotebe University of Education (KUE), Ethiopia

Fisseha Motuma (Ph.D.)

Assistant Professor of English Language Teaching, Kotebe University of Education (KUE), Ethiopia

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the education reform initiatives and ongoing educational challenges in Ethiopia, with a focus on the role of the country's university of education in addressing these challenges. Using a qualitative research approach, the study examined reform documents, research findings, and personal experiences as its primary sources of data. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 senior university instructors who were selected purposively. The results of the study revealed that Ethiopia's education system has undergone multiple reform initiatives, resulting in some visible improvements. Despite this, the study highlighted numerous challenges that persist in the country's education system. In light of this, the study emphasized the importance of evidence-based and innovative measures focusing on the quality, relevance, and efficiency agendas of education, mainly through the recently established university of education.

Introduction

Ethiopia, one of the oldest countries in the world, is renowned for its ancient history, civilization, and education system. The country's traditional education system, which includes indigenous and church education, has its origins in the 4th century A.D. (Bishaw & Lasser 2012; Negash, 1990, 2006). This system was primarily provided by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and was an integral part of the country's culture and religious practices. Islam and the European missionaries' education also play important roles before the introduction of modern education (Bishaw & Lasser 2012; Tefera, 2005).

In Ethiopia, modern (Western-type) education was introduced during the reign of Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913). Despite resistance from the clergy and nobility, Emperor Menelik II managed to open the first secular school in 1908 at Addis Ababa (Bishaw & Lasser 2012; Negash, 1990; 2006). With this, the Western-dominated education began to diffuse into the country, gradually sidelining Ethiopia's indigenous knowledge from its education system. This practice continued in the decades that followed.

Throughout the 20th century, Ethiopia's education system underwent several reforms. The socialist regime (1974-1991) introduced a new education reform influenced by the Marxist-Leninist ideology (Bishaw & Lasser 2012; Negash, 1990; 2006). Later, the EPRDF government (1991-2018) promulgated a new education and training policy in 1994, focusing on the long-standing educational problems of the country (Negash, 2006 TGE, 1994). One of the key focus areas of the education reforms during that time was expanding access to education for all children, especially for those in rural areas. For this purpose, the government had been working to build more schools to accommodate a growing number of students.

Teacher training has also been a priority in the education reforms of Ethiopia (Mekonnen, 2008; Semela, 2014). The country has been investing in training programs for teachers to improve their skills and knowledge. This includes providing professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their teaching methods and pedagogical approaches (Gemeda & Tynjälä, 2015; MOE, 2003). Besides, technical and vocational education has been emphasized as part of the education reforms. This reform aimed to provide students with practical skills relevant to the job market (Bishaw & Lasser 2012; MOE, 2010a). This includes establishing vocational training centers and partnerships with industries to offer hands-on training opportunities for students. Policy reforms have also been introduced to improve educational services in the pre-primary, higher education, and adult and non-formal sub-sectors (MOE, 2008, 2010a; MOSHE, 2020a).

In recent years, Ethiopia has been undergoing further educational reforms. These reforms aimed at addressing the various challenges that persist in the education system. Improving the quality, relevance, and efficiency of education, in particular, has been the prime focus of recent reforms (Tadesse & Melese, 2016; Nega, 2012). Curriculum reform, for instance, has been one important aspect of recent educational reforms. In this regard, the government has been revising the curriculum to make it more relevant to the needs of students and the demands of the modern world. This includes incorporating new subjects into the curriculum to better prepare students for the workforce (MOE, 2003). Likewise, quality assurance mechanisms have been put in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of education in Ethiopia. This includes conducting assessments and examinations to ensure that students are meeting learning objectives and standards set by the government (EAES, 2022; Molla & Tiruneh, 2023).

Generally, the education reforms in Ethiopia have been comprehensive and multifaceted aiming to address various challenges and improve the overall quality of education in the country. By expanding access, revising curriculum, enhancing teacher training, ensuring quality assurance, and emphasizing technical and vocational education, Ethiopia has been working towards building a stronger education system for its future generations.

Despite various reform attempts, the country's education system continues to suffer from various challenges (Gemeda & Tynjälä, 2015; Nega, 2012; Tadesse et al., 2022; Tadesse & Melese, 2016). These challenges are impacting the quality, relevance, and efficiency of education provided to students across the country.

This article, therefore, sought to examine some selected educational reform attempts in Ethiopia and the unresolved educational challenges that persist in the country. Most

importantly, the article attempts to highlight the implications of these educational challenges for the recently established national University of Education, i.e., Kotebe University of Education (KUE).

Methods

As indicated earlier, this study sought to examine recent educational reforms and unresolved challenges in Ethiopia. For this purpose, the study employed the qualitative research approach for its suitability to gain in-depth understanding from diverse perspectives (Creswell, 2007).

Data essential for the study were collected through reviewing various policy reform documents, research reports, and the researchers' first-hand experiences. In this regard, such reform documents of the Ethiopian government as the education and training policy of 1994 (TGE, 1994), the five Education Sector Development Programs (MOE, 1998, 2002, 2005, 2010a, 2015), the 2003 Teacher Education System Overhaul (MOE, 2003), and the Post-Graduate Diploma in Teaching (MOE, 2009) curriculum framework were critically reviewed. Similarly, the Earl Childhood Care and Education (MOE, 2010b), Adult and Non-Formal Education (MOE, 2008), and Special Needs and Inclusive Education (MOE, 2006) policy frameworks and strategies were examined. Moreover, the Ethiopian government's higher education policy and strategy (MOSHE, 2020a), higher education proclamation (FDRE, 2003), and national science policy and strategy (MOSHE, 2020b) documents were reviewed.

Likewise, various research reports that deal with different aspects of the Ethiopian education system were consulted. In this regard, studies conducted by prominent scholars, various governmental and non-governmental organizations, and multinational international organizations such as the World Bank were closely examined.

In addition to policy documents and research reports, qualitative data were also collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with 12 senior instructors of Kotebe University of Education. The purpose of the interview was to get more in-depth data, particularly about the current educational challenges in Ethiopia. The research participants were selected using the purposive sampling technique. Professional experience in the education system of Ethiopia and familiarity with national curricular and educational reforms were the criteria used to select the research participants.

As a qualitative study, this work also considers the professional experience of the researchers (Creswell, 2007). In this regard, the two researchers' rich experience of teaching in different educational institutions, leadership roles at various levels, and participation in various curricular and policy reform initiatives were reflected while discussing the study's results.

The data obtained through the above methods were analyzed using qualitative methods. In doing so, a thematic data analysis that reflects the purposes of the study was employed. To be specific, the study's analysis was structured under the following three major themes: review of major educational reforms in Ethiopia, unresolved educational challenges in Ethiopia, and the role of the university of education in alleviating the persistent educational challenges of Ethiopia.

Results and Discussion

A Glimpse of Educational Reforms in Ethiopia

As indicated in the introduction section, Ethiopia has been undergoing several reforms that aimed to address the educational challenges that the country has been suffering from. In this section, attempts are made to critically examine some of the major reforms introduced to the education system.

Reforms aimed at expanding educational access

Since, the introduction of the 1994 education and training policy, the Ethiopian governments have been implementing a series of educational reforms that aimed at expanding access to education for all citizens (TGE, 1994). In particular, through the implementation of the Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs), due emphasis has been given to educational access in the country (MOE, 1998, 2002, 2005, 2010a, 2015).

The reform on educational access has resulted in notable results. One of the key achievements, in this regard, is the expansion of formal education to previously underserved areas (MOE, 1998, 2002). The government invested in building new schools and hiring more teachers. This helped to increase the number of children attending school. As a result, enrolment rates have risen significantly, with more children now able to access a basic education (MOE, 1998, 2002, 2010a, 2015). This has had a positive impact on literacy rates and has helped to reduce the gap in educational attainment between urban and rural areas.

In addition to formal education, the government of Ethiopia also implemented policies aimed at increasing access to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and higher education (MOE, 1998, 2002, 2015; MOSHE, 2020a, 2020b). This includes the establishment of new universities, TVET centres, and colleges. These efforts resulted in an increase in the number of Ethiopians pursuing post-secondary education.

Reforms aimed at improving educational quality

The issue of quality has been one of the hot agendas in the education system of Ethiopia. In response to the challenges associated to education quality, the government has been introducing several reforms. One of such initiatives was the General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP). The GEQIP was a multi-donor funded program that the Ethiopian government, in collaboration with its partners, implemented since 2008 (MOE, 2010a, 2015).

One of the key objectives of the GEQIP was to enhance the quality and relevance of education by strengthening teacher training and professional development programs. This includes the provision of training for teachers on modern teaching methods and pedagogy, as well as resources and materials to support effective teaching in the classroom. By investing in teacher capacity building, the GEQIP sought to improve the overall quality of education and ensure that students in Ethiopia receive a high standard of learning (MOE, 2010a, 2015).

The GEQIP also focused on the improvement of infrastructure and facilities in schools. This includes the construction and renovation of classrooms, restrooms, and other

necessary facilities to provide a conducive learning environment for students (MOE, 2015). Through the GEQIP, attempts were also made to improve the availability of educational materials and textbooks in schools, ensuring that students have access to resources that support their learning and development (MOE, 2010a, 2015).

Reforms aimed at improving curriculum relevance

In recent years, Ethiopia has been making significant efforts to make the curriculum more relevant to the needs of students and the demands of the job market. This is part of the government's broader agenda to improve access to quality education and to equip Ethiopian youth with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in the 21st century (Melese & Tadege, 2019; Tadesse & Melese, 2016).

One of the key reforms aimed at improving curriculum relevance is the introduction of competency-based education (ESC, 2012). This reform focuses on developing the skills and competencies that students need to succeed in both academic and real-world settings. Instead of rote memorization and standardized testing, competency-based education emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration.

Another important reform in Ethiopia's education system is the revision of the national curriculum to align it with international standards and best practices (MOE, 2003, 2010a, 2015). This includes updating content, integrating new technologies, and incorporating global perspectives into the curriculum. Furthermore, the government has been working to strengthen partnerships with the private sector and industry in order to ensure that the curriculum is relevant to the needs of the job market. This includes developing vocational training programs and providing internships and apprenticeships to give students real-world experience and practical skills. By working closely with industry partners, attempts have been made to tailor the curriculum to meet the demands of employers, ultimately increasing the employability of its graduates (MOSHE, 2020a).

Reforms aimed to enhance teacher education effectiveness

As many scholars unanimously pointed out, the presence of competent teachers is one of the decisive factors to ensure the quality of education (Darling-Hammond, 2006). This implies that without an effective teacher education program, the quest for a quality teaching force and education system in general is less likely to be meet (Mekonnen, 2023).

Due to the crucial role of teacher education in ensuring high-quality education, the Ethiopian government implemented a series of policy reforms in its teacher education system. One of the notable reforms in this regard was the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO). TESO was a comprehensive reform initiative aimed at improving the quality and effectiveness of teacher education and ultimately enhancing the quality of education in the country (MOE, 2003). The TESO was launched in 2003 in response to the recognition of the critical role that teachers play in the education system and the need to address the challenges facing teacher education in Ethiopia.

One of the key components of the TESO reform was the revision of the teacher education curriculum. The curriculum was deemed outdated and inadequate in preparing

teachers for the challenges of the modern education system. In this reform, attempts were made to align the curriculum with international best practices and focus on developing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that teachers need to be effective in the classroom (MOE, 2003). It also emphasizes practical experience and hands-on training to ensure that teachers are well-prepared for the demands of teaching.

Another important aspect of the TESO was the improvement of teacher training institutions. The TESO seeks to strengthen the capacity of teacher training colleges and universities to deliver high-quality teacher education programs (MOE, 2003). This includes providing professional development opportunities for teacher educators, upgrading facilities and resources, and establishing partnerships with schools to ensure that teacher training is relevant and effective.

In addition to curriculum revision and institutional improvements, the TESO also includes measures aimed to enhance the selection and recruitment of teachers. In this regard, the importance of attracting the best and brightest candidates into the teaching profession through a rigorous selection criteria were given prominence (MOE, 2003). The TESO also aimed to improve the working conditions and professional development opportunities for teachers to ensure that they are motivated and supported in their roles (MOE, 2003).

After the failure of the TESO initiative, the Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) was introduced as a new teacher education reform. The PGDT is a specialized training program designed for teachers who have already completed their undergraduate studies in different school subject fields (MOE, 2009). The program aims to enhance the skills and knowledge of teachers, equipping them with the necessary tools to effectively teach students at the secondary school level.

The PGDT program consists of a combination of coursework, practical experiences, and research projects. The participants of the program are exposed to a wide range of topics, including curriculum development, classroom management, assessment and evaluation, educational psychology, and educational technology (MOE, 2009). Through these courses, teacher candidates are expected to deepen their understanding of educational theories and practices, ultimately improving their teaching competences.

One of the key goals of the PGDT program is to promote reflective teaching practices among educators (MOE, 2009). To achieve this goal, the program emphasizes the need to integrate theory and practice, as well as providing opportunities for student teachers to critically analyze their own teaching methods. By encouraging student teachers to reflect on their own practices, the program aims to help student teachers become more effective and responsive to the diverse needs of their students (MOE, 2009).

Reforms at the higher education level

Higher education in Ethiopia has been going through significant reforms in recent years. The government of Ethiopia has been implementing various strategies to improve the quality, accessibility, and relevance of higher education. A good example in this regard is the Higher education policy and strategy introduced in 2020 (MOSHE, 2020a).

The Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009 is another critical policy framework that guides the development of higher education in Ethiopia (FDRE, 2003; Nega,

2012). The proclamation emphasizes the need to strengthen the quality of higher education, promote research and innovation, and increase access to higher education for all citizens. The proclamation also introduced a new organizational structure for higher education institutions (HEIs) and established a regulatory body, the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA), to ensure quality and relevance in HEIs.

The government also developed other policies aimed at enhancing the quality of higher education. For instance, the Science and Technology Policy recognizes the importance of science and technology in economic development and encourages HEIs to prioritize research and innovation in these areas (MOSHE, 2020b).

In addition to policy reforms, several institutional reforms focusing on improving governance, management, and academic practices in higher education institutions were introduced. The government also introduced measures to promote academic excellence in HEIs. For instance, HEIs are required to develop research agendas that align with national development priorities (MOSHE, 2020a, 2020b). Moreover, HEIs are encouraged to collaborate with industries and other stakeholders to promote technology transfer and innovation.

Other educational reforms

The Ethiopian government has recently introduced other initiatives that aimed to enhance the quality and effectiveness of other educational sub-systems. This includes, reforms on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE), and special needs and inclusive education (MOE, 2006, 2008, 2010b).

One of the key reforms aimed at improving pre-primary education is the National ECCE Policy and Strategy. This policy outlines a comprehensive framework for the provision of high-quality ECCE services, including curriculum development, teacher training, and infrastructure improvement (MOE, 2010b). By setting clear guidelines and standards for ECCE programs, the policy aims to ensure that all children have access to quality early learning opportunities.

Another important reform in the ECCE sector is the reinforcement of teacher training programs (MOE, 2010b). In Ethiopia, efforts have been made to enhance the skills and competencies of ECCE teachers through various professional development activities. By equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills, attempts have been made to help them create engaging and stimulating learning environments for young children (MOE, 2010b).

It is clear that education is a fundamental human right that should be accessible to all individuals regardless of their abilities or disabilities (TGE, 1994). Unfortunately, in many countries around the world individuals with special needs often face significant barriers to accessing quality education. In Ethiopia, Special Needs and Inclusive Education (SNIE) has long been neglected, resulting in a large number of children with disabilities being left out of the education system.

In recent years, however, the government has been taking measures towards reforming the education system to make it more inclusive and accessible to students with special needs. One of the key reforms in this regard is the introduction of inclusive education

policy, framework, and strategy (MOE, 2006). The reform aim to promote the inclusion of all students, including those with disabilities, in mainstream schools and classrooms. By creating a more inclusive environment, the government aspires to ensure that all students have equal access to education and opportunities for learning (MOE, 2006). The government has also been investing in training teachers and other education professionals to better support students with special needs. By providing teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively teach students, attempts have been made to improve the quality of education for all students and create a more inclusive learning environment (MOE, 2006).

Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE) has also been one of the concerns of policy reforms in Ethiopia. Adult and Non-Formal Education plays a crucial role in developing the skills and knowledge of individuals who have missed out on formal education opportunities. In Ethiopia, however, the sector faces numerous challenges. In response to these challenges, policymakers in the country have been implementing a series of reforms aimed at improving the status of ANFE (MOE, 2008).

One of the key policy reforms aimed at enhancing ANFE is the establishment of the National Adult Education and Training Strategy. This strategy emphasizes the importance of lifelong learning and highlights the need for a holistic approach to adult education that incorporates literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills training (MOE, 2008). By setting clear goals and guidelines for ANFE provision, the strategy has been guiding the implementation of adult education programs across the country.

Efforts have also been made to enhance the skills and competencies of educators working in the sector. This includes the provision of training on innovative teaching methods, curriculum development, and the use of technology (MOE, 2008). By investing in the capacity-building of adult educators, reforms aim to ensure that ANFE programs are delivered effectively and address the diverse learning needs of adult learners. Efforts were also made to expand access to ANFE through the establishment of community-based learning centres and mobile education units. These initiatives were designed to reach underserved areas, particularly rural areas where access to formal education was limited.

Unresolved Educational Challenges

Despite the national education reforms briefly described, Ethiopia is still grappling with significant educational challenges that affect the quality of education, curriculum relevance, teaching standards, and student achievement. These challenges are impeding the country's aspiration to provide quality education for all its citizens. This section focuses on the prevalent educational challenges of Ethiopia. The challenges are identified through a review of research findings and analysis of qualitative data gathered from interviews.

What does research say about the current educational challenges in Ethiopia?

Education quality

Quality of education is a broad concept encompassing many components. The common practice in understanding educational quality is to examine it in the three interrelated quality variables: input, process, and output (Nega, 2012; UNESCO, 2004).

While input includes the supply of competent teachers, educational resources, curriculum materials, instructional resources, and other related facilities, process refers to how the teaching-learning and academic practices are implemented in the classroom. Output, on the other hand, refers to the quality, competence, and expertise of graduates (Nega, 2012; UNESCO, 2004).

As several studies (e.g., Nega, 2012; Tefera, 2005) revealed, one of the major problems with education quality in Ethiopia is the lack of adequate resources. The country faces a shortage of trained teachers, textbooks, and classroom materials. This shortage of resources directly affects the quality of education being delivered to students. In addition, the infrastructure of schools is often poor, with many classrooms lacking basic facilities like electricity, water, and proper ventilation. Many students in Ethiopia do not have access to computers or the internet, limiting their learning opportunities and skills development.

Another challenge of education quality is the lack of quality in the teaching and learning process (Asgedom, 2009; Dufera, 2006; Tadesse et al., 2022; Yayeh, 2012). Many teachers in Ethiopia are untrained or underqualified, leading to ineffective teaching methods and poor student outcomes (Asgedom, 2009; Dufera, 2006; Yayeh, 2009, 2012). The lack of professional development opportunities for teachers also contributes to the low quality of education in the country (Gemeda & Tynjälä, 2015).

Low education quality is also evidenced by low levels of student achievement and high drop-out rates. Students who do not receive quality education are less likely to succeed in higher education and secure well-paying jobs, further perpetuating the cycle of poverty. The challenges briefly described have been contributing to low student learning outcomes (EAES, 2022; Molla & Tiruneh, 2023). A good example in this regard is the Grade 12 national examination results. The Ministry of Education's official announcement revealed that more than 96% of students who took the exam in 2022/2023 did not pass, marking the lowest score in the Sub-Saharan region. As Molla and Tiruneh (2023) pointed out, unlike their Ethiopian counterparts, nearly 80% of Grade 12 students in Nigeria passed their exam that year. This underscores the significant issue of education quality within Ethiopia's education system.

The ongoing concern regarding the quality of education has also been persisted for decades in higher education institutions. Universities in Ethiopia have been criticized for supplying graduates who do not meet the expected standards of proficiency (Areaya, 2010; Nega, 2012). Many believe that the sudden expansion of higher education intake capacity is the leading problem in assuring the quality of education (Areaya, 2010; Nega, 2012). Every year, a growing number of students are enrolling in universities, but there is consensus that the widespread growth of higher education institutions with inadequate resources, facilities, and governance is contributing to the declining quality and effectiveness of the education system (Nega, 2012; Tefera, 2005).

Curriculum relevance

Though much efforts have been made to improve curriculum relevance in Ethiopia, many issues still remained unresolved. As many studies uncovered, there are evident gaps in the alignment of curriculum and educational programs with the current and future demands of

society (Asgedom, 2009; Debele, 2017; Tadesse & Melese, 2016; Worku et al., 2018; World Bank, 2013). The curriculum implemented in the country's educational institutions lack quality and does not adequately prepare students for the challenges of the modern world.

Negash, a well-known analyst of the Ethiopian education system, repeatedly stated that the country's education was inadequate and unsuitable to address national needs. In one of his influential books, he pointed out that the impact of Ethiopia's education on poverty reduction has been minimal (Negash, 2006).

Another significant study regarding curriculum relevance was carried out by the World Bank in 2013. The study revealed that the secondary school curriculum in Ethiopia was academically focused, with challenging content for students (World Bank, 2013). It also highlighted that the curriculum was not particularly relevant to most students who were unable to pursue higher education.

In Ethiopia, numerous questions that need to be addressed regarding relevance still persist. To be specific, questions such as what programs are essential, how to tailor the curriculum to benefit the country's development, and how to align it with market demands are still unanswered (Asgedom, 2009; Debele, 2017; Tadesse & Melese, 2016; Negash, 1990; 2006). Similarly, the education system in Ethiopia has struggled to adequately answer questions such as whether curricula align with the demands of the job market, what specific skills graduates require for success in the modern economy, and who is accountable for the development and implementation of curricula, as well as the involvement of all stakeholders in the process (Debele, 2017; Tadesse & Melese, 2016; Worku, 2017, 2021).

Other educational challenges

Despite the reforms described earlier, there is still much work to be done to improve ECCE in Ethiopia. One of the primary challenges facing ECCE is the lack of adequate funding. Due to this challenge, many ECCE centers lack basic resources such as educational materials, safe and child-friendly facilities, and qualified teachers (Boitumelo et al., 2021). This hinders the quality of education provided to young children and limits their opportunities for learning and development.

Limited access to quality ECCE services is another significant challenge. Many children, particularly those in rural areas do not have access to ECCE programs due to a lack of facilities and trained teachers (Boitumelo et al., 2021). As a result, a large number of children miss out on the benefits of early childhood education, which can have long-term consequences on their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Likewise, the shortage of trained teachers in the ECCE sector poses a major obstacle to providing quality education to young children. Many ECCE teachers in Ethiopia lack formal training and do not have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support children's learning and development (Boitumelo et al., 2021).

Like ECCE, Special Needs and Inclusive Education (SNIE) faces a myriad of challenges. Despite efforts by the government and various stakeholders to promote inclusive education, there are still several obstacles that need to be addressed. One of the major challenges in this regard is the lack of adequate resources and infrastructure (Teferra, 2005).

Many schools in the country do not have the necessary facilities, equipment, and trained staff to accommodate children with special needs.

Another challenge is the lack of awareness and understanding of disability among parents, communities, and teachers (Teferra, 2005). Many people in Ethiopia still hold negative attitudes towards children with disabilities, viewing them as burdens or incapable of learning. This stigma and discrimination often result in children with special needs being marginalized and excluded from schools, further perpetuating their social isolation and hindering their educational opportunities. There is also a shortage of special education teachers and professionals, making it difficult to provide the necessary support and services for children with disabilities (Teferra, 2005).

Instructors' Perspectives on the educational challenges of Ethiopia: Interview Results

Many interviewees reported that the quality, relevance, and efficiency of the Ethiopian education system began to sharply decline since the EPRDF took power in 1991. Many participants feel that the regime valued donor funding more than the country's resources, resulting in emphasis on quantity rather than quality when it came to expanding schools and universities. This led to a rushed increase in the number of educational institutions without proper preparation, ultimately hindering student success.

Most participants also expressed concerns that simply providing access to education without ensuring the quality, relevance, and efficiency of graduates could potentially lead to a collapse of the overall education system. Similarly, it was observed by many that a significant number of university graduates lacked the necessary skills for the current job market and were ill-equipped to succeed as entrepreneurs due to deficiencies in the education system.

Most interviewees agreed that the poor quality of higher education and the education sector in general are visibly affecting the competencies, skills, and behaviors of students. This is evident in the high rates of youth violence and unemployment in the country. Many research participants also noted that university courses do not match market demands, leading to graduates struggling to find employment or start their own businesses. Additionally, it is common for graduates to lack the necessary skills to meet job requirements in their field of study.

Some respondents pointed out that the problems currently faced are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the extensive consequences of low quality in the country's education system. Others brought up concerns about the capabilities of universities, such as the adequacy of their ICT centers, the quality of their laboratories and equipment, and the effectiveness of their strategies for improving the development of teachers both academically and professionally.

One common explanation for the failure of the education system is the practice of pressuring students to pursue fields of study that do not align with their interests or abilities. Many participants in the study noted that a key issue was the recent education initiative, which mandated that 70% of freshmen enroll in natural science programs, leaving only 30% for social sciences. This reform meant that regardless of their preferences or strengths, most students were pushed into the natural science track. Like it or not, or able or unable, most of the freshman students had to join the natural science stream.

In the interviews, participants were asked about the main purpose of classroom teaching. One interviewee brought up the issue by saying, "Teachers tend to prioritize an instructional system that emphasizes testing students rather than focusing on what and how to effectively teach the material."

The participants were also asked a question on the focus of higher education teaching and learning. In this regard, one of the interviewees stated that higher education teaching and learning focus on encouraging students to memorize information, with little emphasis on higher-order thinking skills such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. This approach neglects the value of application and hinders the development of students' intellectual capabilities.

The Role of the University of Education in Alleviating Educational Challenges

The essence of university of education

A university of education is an institution that focuses solely on the field of education. It offers a comprehensive and specialized curriculum tailored specifically to those interested in pursuing careers in teaching, education administration, curriculum development, and related fields (Taber, 2019). A university of education differs from traditional universities in that it places a primary emphasis on programs and research related to the field of education. While students at traditional universities may choose to major in education, a university of education offers a more focused and specialized approach, providing students with a deep understanding of teaching and learning theories, practices, and policies.

One of the key benefits of attending a university of education is the opportunity for students to immerse themselves in a learning environment dedicated solely to the field of education. Attending a university of education gives students the opportunity to work with experienced and knowledgeable faculty members (Taber, 2019). The professors in this kind of university are experts in their field and bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the classroom. They are able to provide students with valuable insights, guidance, and mentorship that can help them succeed in their academic and professional endeavors.

A university of education can also offer students a sense of community and support that may not be as readily available at larger, more generalized universities (Taber, 2019). Because everyone at the institution is dedicated to education, students can collaborate with like-minded peers, share ideas and insights, and build lasting relationships with others who share their passion for teaching and learning. Furthermore, a university of education can provide students with a range of resources and support services tailored specifically to their needs (Taber, 2019). These may include specialized advising, career counselling, and networking opportunities that can help students prepare for successful careers in the field of education.

Put succinctly, a university of education offers a unique and specialized learning environment for students interested in pursuing careers in education. By providing a deep focus on teaching and learning, access to top faculty members, opportunities for hands-on experience, a sense of community and support, and specialized resources and services, these institutions can play a vital role in preparing the educators of tomorrow.

The need to a university of education in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has had higher education institutions for the past 70 to 80 years (Tefera, 2005; Negash, 2006). Teacher education training has been given in the country in different institutions for decades. Some teacher training colleges like the Kotebe College of Teacher Education and Bahir Dar College of Teacher Education were among the pioneers in providing teacher-related programs for many decades. Today, the country has more than 50 public universities teaching different disciplines including teacher education. However, until very recently, there was no a university of education.

The lack of competent professional teachers in Ethiopia has become a cause for concern among scholars and the government. Questions have been raised about whether universities are adequately preparing teachers to provide high-quality education, if there are standardized institutions to ensure the training of certified teachers, and if there are criteria in place to measure teachers' competence, expertise, and qualifications. Moreover, the absence of a specialized university in Ethiopia solely focused on educating and training professional teachers raise the question of why the country does not have an institution dedicated to preparing education experts, especially when other universities are providing training in areas such as engineering, medicine, management, and electricity.

The urgency of these interconnected questions has driven the country to embark on a thorough educational reform, including the establishment of a higher education institution to oversee the national education system. In response to the longstanding challenges faced by the education sector, the Ethiopian government has recently established a specialized university of education. This university, known as Kotebe University of Education, was officially founded by the Ethiopian House of Representatives on September 24, 2014, under Article 1263/2014. The proclamation designates the university as a specialized higher education institution dedicated to the field of education.

The responsibilities of university of education

Kotebe University of Education has a crucial role to play in addressing the pervasive educational problems that continue to plague the country. Through its academic and research units, the university has the potential to make a significant impact on improving the quality of education and training future generations of educators and leaders. Based on international best practices, the researchers' experiences, and various research findings, this section highlights some crucial activities that the new university of education in Ethiopia needs to focus on.

Teacher education

Many studies unanimously underscored that the quality of teachers directly impacts the quality of education (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Mekonnen, 2023). Teacher competence and qualification determine what students learn, how to learn, and what knowledge, skills and know-how they acquire.

Hence, it is essential that teachers in Ethiopia are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively teach students. In this regard, the university should

provide comprehensive training programs for teachers focusing on pedagogy, subject matter knowledge, and classroom management (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Mekonnen, 2023). The university's teacher education program should also incorporate the latest research and best practices in the field of education. This includes incorporating technology into the classroom, promoting inclusive education, and addressing diverse learning styles and needs. Teachers educators should also be trained in fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and creativity among their students (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Mekonnen, 2023).

In addition to theoretical knowledge, practical experience is crucial for teacher education. Hence, the university's student teachers should have opportunities to observe experienced teachers, engage in teaching practicums, and receive feedback on their teaching performance (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Mekonnen, 2023). The importance of hands-on experience in applying the trainees' theoretical knowledge in real-world situations and improving their teaching skills needs to be emphasized.

The university of education should also give much attention for the professional development of educators involved in teacher education programs. In this regard, the university should provide opportunities for its teacher educators to attend workshops, conferences, and seminars to enhance their knowledge and skills. The importance of collaboration with other educators, researchers, and stakeholders in facilitating knowledge transfer, sharing of best practices, and innovative teaching methods should also be capitalized.

In sum, by providing comprehensive training programs, incorporating the latest research and best practices, and promoting practical experience and ongoing professional development, the university can help prepare teachers to effectively meet the needs of students and contribute to their academic success.

Leadership education

Strong leadership is essential for driving change and innovation in the education sector. Hence, the university should offer programs that train educational leaders, such as school principals and administrators, to effectively lead and manage schools.

The leadership education program offered by the university needs to focus on principles of effective communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and team-building (Fullan, 2007; MOE, 2013). It can also include training in conflict resolution, strategic planning, and motivational techniques. Additionally, leadership training should emphasize the importance of being self-aware and empathetic, as well as the ability to inspire and motivate others towards a shared vision.

By offering leadership education programs, the university can help cultivate a new generation of educational leaders who are well-equipped to address the challenges facing the education sector. These leaders will have the knowledge and skills to implement innovative and effective teaching methods, improve student achievement, and create a positive school culture.

Leadership education can also extend beyond school administrators to include teachers who aspire to take on leadership roles within their schools or *woredas* (districts). By providing professional development opportunities in leadership, the university can empower

teachers to become instructional leaders who can drive school improvement initiatives and support their colleagues in implementing effective teaching practices (Fullan, 2007; MOE, 2013).

Overall, by equipping educational leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge, the university can help create a more effective and efficient education system that ultimately benefits students and contributes to overall societal progress. By developing strong leadership skills, the university can help create a more effective and efficient education system.

On-the-job-training for school practitioners

Another important role that the university of education needs to play is on-the-job training. By offering professional development programs for teachers and educational leaders, the university can help educators continuously improve their skills and stay up-to-date with the latest developments in education (Areaya, 2008; Fullan, 2007).

One way the university of education can provide on-the-job training is through workshops and seminars that focus on specific topics or areas of interest for educators. These workshops can cover a range of subjects, from classroom management techniques to instructional strategies for diverse learners. By providing opportunities for teachers to come together and learn from experts in the field, the university can help educators develop their skills and knowledge in a supportive and collaborative environment (Fullan, 2007). The university should also provide coaching and mentoring programs for teachers and educational leaders. By pairing experienced educators with newer teachers or those looking to advance their careers, the university can provide valuable support and guidance to help educators succeed in their roles. This personalized approach to professional development can help teachers set goals, identify areas for growth, and receive ongoing feedback and support to improve their practice (Areaya, 2008; Fullan, 2007).

Furthermore, the university needs to offer opportunities for teachers to participate in action research projects and collaborate on curriculum development initiatives. By engaging in these hands-on, practical experiences, educators can apply their learning in real-world settings and gain valuable insights into how to improve their teaching practice (Fullan, 2007).

Training for education experts

Education experts play a critical role in shaping the future of education in their country. They are responsible for developing innovative teaching methods, designing effective curriculum, implementing policies that promote inclusivity and diversity in schools, and providing support to teachers and school leaders (Areaya, 2008; Fullan, 2007). Education experts also work closely with government agencies, non-profit organizations, and other stakeholders to develop strategies for improving the quality of education at all levels.

In order to become an education expert, one must undergo rigorous training and education in various fields of education, including educational psychology, andragogy, special needs and inclusive education, and curriculum development. Hence, the university of education should focus on the education and training of education experts. Its curriculum and pedagogical approach need to be relevant to prepare students with the knowledge and skills

needed to tackle the complex challenges facing the Ethiopian education system, and to strive for positive change.

The training programs for education experts would involve advanced coursework in education research, policy analysis, and leadership development. Courses could include topics such as education law, data analysis, instructional design, and project management. Additionally, trainees could engage in internships or fellowships in schools, government agencies, or education-focused organizations to gain practical experience in the field. The university should also arrange workshops, seminars, and conferences for practicing education professionals to enhance their skills and stay up-to-date on emerging trends in the field. The crucial role that ongoing professional development programs play in helping education experts to make informed decisions and implement effective strategies should be emphasized.

Educational consultancy

The university of education plays a crucial role in providing guidance and support to other educational institutions in the country. By consulting with other universities, teacher education colleges, and education bureaus, the university can share best practices, collaborate on research projects, and address common challenges in the education sector (Areaya, 2008; Fullan, 2007). By leveraging its expertise and resources, the university of education can help to improve the quality of education across the country and ensure that all students have access to high-quality learning opportunities.

In addition to consulting services, the university of education needs to offer professional development workshops, seminars, and training programs for educators and administrators from other institutions. This can help to build capacity and enhance the skills of education professionals, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes and increased educational attainment rates (Areaya, 2008; Fullan, 2007).

Overall, the University of Education's role as a consulting partner to other universities, teacher education colleges, and education bureaus is essential for fostering collaboration, sharing knowledge, and driving innovation in the education sector. This collaborative approach can ultimately benefit students, teachers, and communities across the country.

Early age talent development

The university of education needs to devise mechanisms to nurture and develop students' talents and abilities from an early age, ensuring that they are well-prepared for higher education. By establishing satellite centers or centers of excellence in basic education, the university can ensure that students are receiving the necessary support and education to succeed academically.

By accessing students with special talents in science and creativity at the school level, the university can help these students develop their skills and knowledge further, providing them with opportunities to excel in their chosen fields. This proactive approach to education ensures that students are given the support and resources they need to succeed, ultimately benefiting both the students and the university in the long run.

Curriculum relevance

In order to improve Ethiopia's education system, it is crucial to incorporate the nation's indigenous knowledge, values, and traditions into the curriculum. To successfully implement curriculum reform in Ethiopia, it is also essential to involve all stakeholders in the process. This includes teachers, curriculum experts, international professionals, students, society, and other education-related sectors and NGOs (Melese & Tadege, 2019; Tadesse & Melese, 2016). By incorporating a variety of perspectives and input, the curriculum can be more effectively tailored to the needs and learning experiences of the students.

Besides, the curriculum of the university of education needs to be student-centered focusing on the unique experiences and knowledge of the students. By integrating indigenous knowledge and skills into the curriculum, the university's curriculum should enable students to see the relevance of their own background and culture in their education (Melese & Tadege, 2019; Tadesse & Melese, 2016).

By including input from all stakeholders in the curriculum development process, the university of education needs to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and responsive to the needs of the community. This approach promotes ownership and engagement from all parties involved in the education system. The curriculum should emphasize the country's indigenous knowledge, skills, and resources, as this is essential for promoting a meaningful learning experience for students. By integrating local contexts and resources into the curriculum, students can better connect with the material and apply their learning in real-world situations (Melese & Tadege, 2019; Tadesse & Melese, 2016).

To sum up, the university of education in Ethiopia has a critical role to play in addressing the country's pervasive educational problems. By focusing on teacher education, leadership education, training of education experts, consultancy, on-the-job training, and community schools for talented students, the university can help improve the quality of education in the country and provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. By fulfilling these responsibilities, the university can help shape the future of education in Ethiopia and contribute to the country's overall development.

Concluding Remarks and the Way Forward

Ethiopia has been undergoing significant educational reforms in recent years. The reforms aimed to improve the quality, relevance, and efficiency of education provided to citizens. This study was conducted to assess these reforms and the persistent challenges of education system, with a specific focus on the role that the new university of education needs to play in addressing these challenges. For this purpose, a comprehensive review of major educational reforms implemented in Ethiopia, as well as an examination of relevant documents and research reports were made. Besides, qualitative data collected from 12 university instructors through interviews was analysed.

The results of the study revealed that despite efforts to expand access to education, issues such as low quality of education, curriculum irrelevance, limitations in teacher education, and a lack of competent education workforce still persist. As the study showed,

these challenges have been impacting the overall effectiveness of the education system and have implications for the country's socio-economic development.

In light of these findings, the study emphasized the critical role that the university of education should play in addressing the pervasive educational challenges. As the study highlighted, the university of education can serve as a hub for innovation and improvement in teacher training programs, curriculum development, educational leadership initiatives, and overall capacity building within the education system. By focusing on the quality and relevance of education, the university can contribute significantly to overcoming the existing challenges and fostering positive educational outcomes in Ethiopia. By leveraging the expertise and resources available at the university of education, targeted interventions can be designed to enhance various aspects of the education system and drive sustainable improvements.

For this purpose, the university of education needs to be empowered in relation to the pervasive educational challenges of the country. The university should also mobilize its resources to prepare high quality teachers, leaders, and other professionals essential for the education sector. Besides, through research, training, consultancy, community engagement, and other activities, it needs to play its leading role in mitigating the various educational problems of the country.

By strengthening the capacity of the university of education and placing a strong emphasis on the quality, relevance, and efficiency of education, unreserved efforts need to be made to transform the current state of education in Ethiopia. Through collaborative efforts and strategic investments in education, Ethiopia can pave the way for a more inclusive, equitable, and effective educational landscape that benefits its citizens and contributes to national development.

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