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BOLOGNA PROCESS AND REALITY ON THE GROUND IN ETHIOPIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The main intent of this study was to investigate the extent to which Ethiopian universities consider local/national reality while implementing Bologna process. Six universities were selected of which postgraduate students, senior academic staffs and university leaders were included. The study is guided by two research questions. The literature review, in-depth interview and document were used to examine and understand the Bologna process from participants point of view. Though generalization is not the intent of this study, the findings show that all the participants think that Bologna process have some positive impact on teaching and learning; while most of them agree that local realities were not critically reviewed; the implementation principle not well understood in practical terms, rather mechanically implemented. Hence, reform in this regard needs close scrutiny into the reality on the ground and re-visit the practice with main stakeholders, teachers and students, for attaining the sought result is recommended.

Keywords: Bologna Process, ECTS, CBE, Higher education, Internationalization.

INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this study was to investigate the extent to which Ethiopian universities consider local/national reality before and while implementing Bologna process and to draw attention of all responsible bodies to the gaps in real practice and policy intentions. Senior academic staff, university leaders and post-graduate students are considered as main stakeholders of the Bologna process in the universities, as they are the front implementers and responsible for the sought result. In doing this, two basic question lead the investigation. (1) To what extent universities embraced the elements of Bologna process? (2) To what extent local/national reality is considered? This paper is organized following the following conceptual framework. Attempt was made to briefly present Ethiopian higher education policy within the national development policy framework. The concept of Bologna process in general and selected essential elements for implementation in Ethiopian higher education policy context were discussed, as a framework to which the discussion and findings were made.

Ethiopia is the second-most populous country in Sub-Saharan Africa with a population of 99.4 million, and population growth rate of 2.5% in 2015. About 45% of the population fall into the group younger than 15 years. Nearly 83 % of the population is living on agriculture (World Bank Group, 2016). This shows on one hand the country has considerable potential regarding human resource development that can make a positive contribution to the national economic development. On the other hand, a lot has to be done to train human resource to

improve the majority of the population living standard. Cognizant that the Ethiopia's long-term development plan and policy has been agricultural-development-led industrialisation (ADLI) since the current government came to power 1991.

Since then frequent policy formulations and reforms have been made in education in general and recently in higher education in particular. As a result, marvelous changes have been made in higher education. In responding to the chronic problems of higher education 'equity, quality, and access; with aggressive expansion, from two public higher education in 1990s, reached 37 but 32 full-fledged universities accountable to Ministry of education by the year 2014/15 of which enrolment only undergraduate reached 778,766, MoE, (2016) in all its program-regular, evening, summer and distance. Though these quantitative growths were encouraging the issue of quality and relevance remain challenge to date. The gap between performance of the graduates and the need of the economy cannot remain wide but worsen as the economy improves following fast change in technology.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education Policy and Bologna Process Overview: For higher education, the goal is to develop highly qualified, motivated and innovative human resources and produce and transfer advanced and relevant knowledge for socio-economic development and poverty reduction with a view to turning Ethiopia into a middle-income country by the year 2025. (MoE, 2010). The Education and Training Policy (ETP), 1994 is the broadest policy regarding education of all levels, and directs the successive reform programs and policies. The root of the policy is the new economic policy synopsis that encourages a free market economy, (Yizengaw,2004), changed the landscape of the Ethiopian education system radically.

Cognizant the international standard, and the need to standardize teaching, learning and research in Ethiopian higher education system, the government took first step by promulgating a higher education proclamation in 2003, number 351/200. (FDRE,2003). This establishes two institutions-Education Strategy Center (HESC) and Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) and mandated responsibilities in relation to standardization and quality in general. This move is believed that the new proclamation provided a thoughtful and forward-looking policy framework for guiding Ethiopian higher education in the era of Globalization. HERQA and HESC are autonomous government organs having their own legal standing to ensure the relevance and quality of higher education programs offered by any institution. Specifically, HERQA granted powers and responsibilities related to controlling the quality and relevance of higher education that includes evaluating and accrediting programs, ensuring that institutions have the required capacity for enhancing internal quality, ensuring that education and training programs offered by HEIs are consistent with economic, social and other relevant policies of the country, evaluating institutions to make sure that they have met various standards set forth in the proclamation, etc. (FDRE, 2009). On the other hand, HESC is given mandates to deal with issues both at system and institutional level and that can effectively determine the nature and future direction of higher education in general. (FDRE, 2009). These hoped to support the hihger educaiton system to remain compatible with the country's needs and international developments

The Ethiopian Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA) and the Higher Education Strategy Centre (HESC) have been attempting to improve the quality of educational programmes and graduates as well as curriculum standardisation (Ashcroft 2004). As part of the reform process in the Ethiopian higher education, are undergoing

massive reform in their structure and functions. In this movement the Bologna declaration, that transform European higher education from regional cooperation to global power, was in focus and finally influence the entire teaching and learning process in Ethiopian higher education.

Initially, the Bologna Process is a voluntary intergovernmental initiative, which aims to create a EHEA by 2010 where education systems would be compatible, degrees comparable and students' mobility would be unhindered. Bologna process is one of the features of organized internationalization of Higher education system in Europe, for European universities, established in 1999, Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, (2008) to which all higher education institutions in Ethiopia are trying to comply with it. The underpinning philosophy of the Bologna Process is often referred to as the social dimension based on the themes of equity and harmonization while respecting and celebrating the diversity of Europe – its countries and their institutions. Since its inception late 1999, the Bologna process is one of the global discourse influencing higher education policy. Gradually it became global power influencing the entire higher education arena, particularly Africans, due to historical attachment between the two continents. ECTS, CBE, modularization, and flexible learning path and recognition and mobility were selected from the basic elements of the Process.

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS): ECTS, the European Credit Transfer System, often referred as, one of the cornerstone of Bologna Process, European Commission, (2009) was developed by the Commission of the European Communities in order to provide common procedures to guarantee academic recognition of studies abroad. It provides a way of measuring and comparing learning achievements, and transferring them from one institution to another. The use of ECTS for accumulation not only makes programs more transparent and supports the use of learning outcomes earned at another institution at home or abroad, but also those earned outside the formal education system. (Crociera & Parvera, 2013). One of the important feature of ECTS is, its learner-centered system for credit accumulation and transfer based on the transparency of learning outcomes and learning processes. ECTS helps institutions to shift the emphasis in program design and delivery from traditional teacher-centered approaches to approaches to learner centered approach. In Ethiopian higher education ECTS is termed as (EtCTS) Ethiopian Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (MoE, A guideline for Modularisation to Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions 2012).

To make the Ethiopian higher education system compatible with the Bologna process or the policies of European higher education, the Ethiopian Higher Education Strategic Centre (HESC) has formulated and designed the modularisation principles within the last five years. Today, all public universities of Ethiopia are exercising modularization and credit transfer systems (MOE, 2013). With the use of the Ethiopian Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, many practices have been changed. The course workload calculations with regard to students and teachers are clearly articulated in the Ethiopian Credit Transfer and Accumulation System with a new grading system in the accompanying academic policy. (MoE, 2013).

The other features of ECTS is its attachment to Learning outcomes. Learning outcome is described as what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning. The use of learning outcomes makes the objectives of learning program clearer and more easily understood for students, employers and other

stakeholders. According to ECTS user guide, the formulation of learning outcomes is the basis for the estimation of workload and hence for credit allocation. “learning outcomes” and “competences” is used with different shades of meaning and in somewhat different frames of reference. In all cases however they are related to what the learner will know, understand and be able to do at the end of a learning experience (European Commission, 2009). One of the curricular reform components seen in the European Higher Education Area was aligning the existing curriculum or designing new academic programs with the ideals of Competence Based Education (CBE).

A curricula reform component seen in the European Higher Education Area was aligning the existing curriculum or designing new academic programmes with the ideals of competence-based education. This has brought about a shift in curriculum thinking to design a curriculum based on the local and global knowledge demands. The Ethiopian higher education sector is attempting to incorporate competence-based education as ‘a means aligning academic programmes in line with the capability of students to function effectively in the world of the market. (Gebremeskel, 2015).

Competency Based Education(CBE): *Similar to ECST, a paradigm shift from teachers centered to learner centered teaching and learning approach, CBE* also brought about a shift in thinking of university based design, and traditional way of looking into curriculum as subject matter, to world of work based design. In this effect in recent years Ethiopian universities have been doing their best to fit their existing curriculum into competence based curricula by converting the existing academic programs into modules that are based on competencies and clustering of courses to form modules based on their contribution to the competence. (MoE, 2012). Modularization is promoting compatibility and curriculum flexibility as well as student mobility in line with with the Bologna policies and practices. This clearly shows the impact of the Bologna process on Ethiopian higher education with regard to restructuring its mode of delivery in the global market. (MoE, 2013). Not only ‘right reform’ with the ‘right implementation policy’ is mandatory development plan to be ensured but also the reform efforts should meet the pace of local and global demands. (Yizengaw, 2004). As indicated above, the environment in which Ethiopian higher education operates is changing rapidly, in various ways: rapid enrolment; rapid expansion frequent sometimes inconsistent policy directions (Molla 2013).

In sum, the ETP, 1994 and its successive implementation strategies- Education Sector Development Program (ESDP 1-5) focused on the development of country’s skill human power demands at all levels. I almost all policy documents higher education given a central role to economic development, which a critical prerequisite for sustained poverty reduction efforts (MoE, 2001). Looking at these facts the intent of Bologna process and the need of Ethiopian government development plan through education converges. However, the weak linkage of Ethiopian higher education institutions with research institutions and the intellectual brain drain quality issues and its global dimension (Yizengaw, 2004 & 2007) were some of the scenarios pertaining to Ethiopian higher education. More importantly the weak linkage of the universities functions-teaching-learning, research and service the local/national and global current situations, were major intervention area of Ethiopian higher education within the parameters of national development plan.

Bologna process and Ethiopian higher education context: On the surface, the Bologna process promotes cooperation among European higher education and however, Zgaga, (2006) express that the Bologna process is part of the larger script in which people, ideas and

information are moving freely across national borders. Moreover Sewonu, (2010) shows how the Bologna process is linked to globalisation by means of three basic rationales: shaping the global intellectual landscape, shaping international academic mobility and changing patterns of power and influence in today's world. The aim of the Bologna declaration was 'to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction' Bologna followup Group, (2009). It is also seen as an opportunity for moving into the policy of curriculum restructuring on the national and international arena to develop a unified system that facilitates mobility, transparency and recognition of qualification from one educational setting coherent and compatible with the European framework, (EUA, 2014).

The challenge is higher education in Africa as well as in Ethiopia are not fully harmonised as in Europe. However, because of the current global discourse and responsive policy demands with regard to internationalization, the Ethiopian higher education institutions are exerting all efforts to align their system with the current regional and global standard. As briefly mentioned above, ECTS has been adopted as the Ethiopian Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. though it lacks clarity on curriculum design and its validation (Gebremeskel, 2014). It is hoped that the effective implementation of the ECTS will realize the Bologna process that promotes common policy regulations between regions for mutual benefit. (Crosier & Parveva 2013).

One of the incongruences is that most of Ethiopian Universities are at the early stage, with young professionals and with limited international and global experiences. This is to show that almost the entire Ethiopian higher education system is in its infancy compared to European higher education system. Private higher education institutions are the youngest of all compared to the rest of the public higher education system of Ethiopia (MOE, 2013). The alignment of the Ethiopian higher education National Qualifications Framework with that of the European Qualifications Framework as well as with other globally recognised institutions is another challenge for the relevance of Ethiopian higher education qualifications in the current global arena. Therefore, to narrow the gaps and minimise the challenges; the balance between 'thinking globally and acting locally' and 'think locally and act globally' helps with setting general standards and procedures for Ethiopian higher education institutions while incorporating the Bologna process and other global practices into a comparable and reliable policies. It is within this context, the Ethiopian higher education system is attempting to reform its structures regarding the global higher education perspectives of which the Bologna process is a typical model.

METHODS

Guided by the aforementioned basic questions, this study explored extensive literature review and recent empirical studies on impacts of Bologna process on higher education system and its discourse at local, national and global level. The rationale for this approach was that the data and results are expected to provide a general picture of the issue from participants and practical point of view. In depth interview, literature review and document analysis were method of data collection for the study.

Participants: Six higher education institutions which are relatively well-established offering a variety of programs at undergraduate and postgraduate levels are included in the study. These are: Addis Ababa University, Bahir Dar University, Jimma University, Haramaya University, Hawassa University and Mekelle University. The university leaders, senior academic staff and postgraduate students from the six institutions were participated in in

depth interview based on year of experience, academic rank and engagement in teaching learning, research and community services.

Data Analysis: Thematic analyses were employed from the data obtained from in depth interview, and policy document analysis, helped by our professional experiences working in the universities for more than a decade. Findings and ideas generated from the in-depth interview and document analysis were organized in line with the research questions.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

As mentioned in the review of Ethiopian higher education, the Bologna process is relatively a new discourse influencing policies on higher education. That all universities in Ethiopia implementing the Bologna processes, thinking it is an opportunity to gain global experiences. In seeking the understanding of participants about Bologna process; university leaders, academic staff and post-graduate students do reflect view of the process. While this seems natural majority of the respondents did not see the Bologna process creating an opportunity for Ethiopian higher education to engage in global discourse. These shows universities are practicing the Bologna process without a sound understanding of main stakeholders, academic staff and students, whether the process would create opportunities for Ethiopian higher education in response to the global demands.

In addition, most participants do not agree that the notion that the Bologna process plays a vital role in standardizing Ethiopian higher education. Their argument is the idea which works in Europe might not fit into Ethiopian higher education context. The Bologna process is the standard for European universities which are comparatively within well-developed culture of research and the overall education system. However, Ministry of Education see the Bologna process as the only means of standardizing the Ethiopian higher education curriculum.

Concerning the compatibility (Minor 2004) shares his experience about African higher education:

...African higher education systems are terribly underdeveloped and that the doctrine of U.S. higher education is not necessarily applicable. Additionally, any number of cultural and historical factors must be taken into consideration for understanding the scope of African higher education, its potential, and its relationship to a country's well-being"

This idea, though focus on US but comply with the most participants concern about the reality on the ground and the ambition of the standardizing the curriculum and teaching learning process in Ethiopian higher education with that of Bologna process. Interestingly no participants denied the use of the Bologna process, their concern lies on the how of implementation.

The response of respondents on individual items regarding the extent to which universities in Ethiopia embrace the reality of the Bologna process viewed differently at different participating universities. For instance, even though the majority of the institutions agreed on the responsiveness of Bologna process to the current global knowledge convergence, the majority of respondents from the Addis Ababa, Haramaya and Mekelle Universities perceived it differently. The difference lies on the impact bologna process on teaching and learning. The majority, with the exception of the Addis Ababa and Haramaya Universities,

believed that the Bologna process is seen as an opportunity for Ethiopian higher education, in supporting the internationalization of teaching and learning that contributes to local and global knowledge.

Academic staff are not expecting much result from their institutional policy responsiveness in the area of teaching and learning, research and innovation and policies that relate to local and global engagement. On the other hand, postgraduate students were more optimistic regarding their institutional policy responsiveness to teaching and learning, research and innovation engagement in the context of local realities. However, all the respondents share concerns that university's responsiveness policy on graduate employment demands as seen from local to global perspective, though implementing the Bologna process. One of the study participants reflect on the Bologna follows:

We feel that Bologna process is another form of globalization; at the policy level, it encourages cooperation and scholastic exchange opportunities and similar accreditation. This also subjects structural change in the mode of delivery and curriculum reformation. On the other hand, it ignores local reality, the way higher education experiences, its respective backgrounds. While we are exercising globalization since the last five years, we are in a state of role confusion, with the introduction of modular approaches informed by the Bologna process.

The views of respondents reveal that the Bologna process implemented in Ethiopian higher education ignores the local realities. The new teaching and learning policy formulation on curriculum standardization and competency with regard to Ethiopian higher education is linked to the Bologna process. However, a participant at one university was very critical about the applicability of the Bologna process presented as follows:

The current Ethiopian universities teaching and learning approach, the Bologna process, encourages student mobility. However, there is no system policy, or responsive policy in place to attract international students. The problem is that, we started Bologna process without clear understanding of the policy of Bologna. It was given to us from the Ethiopian Ministry of Education to convert the former credit hour, Cr.hr grading system to the European Credit Transfer System, ECTS, which in our case today. Now we are playing the game of grade conversion, not the actual Bologna process. To make Bologna Process plausible in Ethiopian universities in teaching and learning the process, the science of Bologna process must be understood by implementers, and the academic staff of universities.

It is possible to deduce from this argument that there is clear gap between what is intended and what is going on in reality. It is clear that Ethiopian universities appreciate the Bologna process for regional and global integrity. However, the challenge is the way it is endorsed, and many argue it was without sufficient preparation and consensus among the implementers. The difference between all the participating universities leaders believed that Bologna process encouraged staff and student mobility that ensured international teaching while participating academic staff have different view. One of the participant question even its applicability in Ethiopian higher education local context to the level of global demands.

Even though we are practicing Bologna process, there is no standard and flexible admission policy put in place to attract international students. Even there is no initiation among Ethiopian universities to promote global context under the umbrella of Bologna process. In Europe, the Bologna Process is attracting international students across the globe. In the case of Ethiopia, such things are not in place

weather at Ministry of education or at institution level. The problem is, we do not have clear policy guidelines in place.

In support of this comment, another participant recommended that “*curriculum development requires an international dimension that attract global students*”. These arguments confirm that there is a gap between the intention of indorsing Bologna process and the practice, on one hand, on the other hand there is a lot to do to realize the plan in having clear guide line and policy to attract international students and international staff. One of the internationalization measurements of higher education is its curriculum reputability; student scholarship and mobility, international staff recruitment and exchange programs. However, from the observations and discussions with participants from the sampled universities, realizing the intention of globalizing Ethiopian higher education through internationalization is lagging behind. Moreover, the academic staffs of the sampled universities question the way Bologna process was being adopted. For instance, one of the participant viewed curriculum modularization as follows:

The modular approach is designed without critical analysis of the nature of courses and disciplines of the study. For instance, we are forced to teach genetic course and breeding course in one semester as block course system. These courses are main course for those who study animal science and veterinary medicines for instance. There are so many similar courses in health sciences too. This may create another challenge on quality of graduate and program as well. Assessment policy of modularization somewhat complicated. There are courses which need sequential assessment specially heath courses in internship and hospital practical engagements. On the other hand, there are courses only assessed on the basis of theoretical understanding. Contrary to this, the modular assessment guidelines say 60% continuous assessments and 40% final examination. This guideline doesn't consider the nature of courses and disciplines understudy.

The Bologna process by its nature aims to standardize European higher education through uniform qualification and accreditations processes. It takes into consideration the nature of European higher education development and economic contexts. However, in the Ethiopian case, the adoption process took place without common consensus on assessment of higher education contexts, the status of academic resources and qualified academic staff that could play a role in measuring competency based education outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

One conclusion to be drawn is that almost all respondents perceived that the Bologna Process can be instrumental to the current global knowledge economy if it is implemented in through scrutiny and through understanding of local and global situation. Considering local and national context while adopting any global dimensions like Bologna process, is emphasized by all for the result sought. *The understanding of implementers, teachers and students, at institutional level is mandatory, as they are the engine where change begins to grow.* (emphasis is ours).

Although all public universities are supervised and guided by Ministry of Education, they have different resources, context and background, hence all are expected to implement Bologna process irrespective of their context. It can be can conclude that the Bologna process in Ethiopia misses not only local/national realities dimensionality in line with flexible

curricula, competency-based education and student mobility policies that renders harmonization.

The literature review, policy document analysis confirms that the reform landscape of the Ethiopian higher education emanate from Ethiopian Education and Training Policy of 1994, with the strong conviction of education for economic development focusing on the higher education. All participants in this regard, are optimistic of their institutional policy responsiveness to teaching and learning, research and innovation engagement in the context of local realities but on graduate employment at local and international world of work, even after trying CBE.

As a concluding remark, there are a wide gap in the implementations on the ground and the principles of Bologna process in its all aspects that calls for revisit the issue in real sense.

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