

Proceedings of the 8th National Conference on Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in Ethiopia

**Major Theme: Invigorating the Work on Access, Equity
and Quality of the Higher Education Sector in Ethiopia**

**Organized & Sponsored
By
St. Mary's University College**

**September 25, 2010
UN Conference Center
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

Quality of Academic Staff in Ethiopian Higher Education: Views of Students, Department Chairs and Deans of Faculties

Teshome Nekatibeb (Ph.D.)

Associate Professor, Addis Ababa University. Email: 1959teshome@gmail.com

Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to explore the quality of academic teaching staff in Ethiopian higher education as perceived by students, department chairs and faculty deans. As a secondary objective, the study also intended to review factors that influence the quality of teachers in higher learning institutions. The study adopted a survey methodology for data collection using closed ended-questionnaires. The research included 11 public universities and 2 private higher learning institutions. A sample of 576 students, 197 department chairs and 55 deans (N=55) were included in the survey. Findings show that the quality of teachers in higher learning institutions was not high as expected, but better than average. A variety of factors were identified to have influence on teachers' quality including low salaries and social acceptance, large class size and lack of teaching materials. From these findings it was concluded that there is a need to improve teachers' quality by paying attention to issues identified to have associations with academic staff.

INTRODUCTION

The academic profession constitutes the backbone of any higher education institution. Clark (1983) indicates that higher education plays very many roles, but one can centrally refer to its functions in the creation, transmission, application, refinement and conservation of knowledge. Without any doubt, the academia plays a central role in the accomplishment of these roles of higher education. Taking this into account, Enders (2006) calls the academic profession “a profession of professions”. According to Stromquist (2007), professors are central actors in higher education institutions, for it is they who engage in the knowledge production and transmission that constitute the *raison d’etre* of such settings. However, Altbach (2006) indicates that the academic profession is under pressure in comparative and international context. According to him, academics are more challenged by demands for more accountability, less availability of research funds, demands to teach more and looming deterioration of working conditions. Stromquist (2007), also observes that the academic profession in many countries is under pressure for higher academic credentials whereby those who work in prestigious institutions and those in public universities in general face the demand to possess higher levels of education beyond the master’s degree.

The roles of academic teaching staff are highly recognized in the Higher Education Proclamations issued in 2003 and 2009 in Ethiopia. Both Proclamation No. 351/2003 and No. 650/2009 are based on the principles that academic teachers of institutions are entitled to the rights of commenting on the quality of teaching-learning process, rendering community and consultative services, conducting research and studies beneficial to the institution and the country, and are not to be held liable for personal views and beliefs in the course of fulfilling academic duties. Proclamations No. 351/2003 and No. 650/2009 are also more elaborate in putting academics at the center-stage of higher education by way of summarizing their responsibilities. According to these policy documents, academic staff are responsible to teach, including assisting students in need of special support, undertake problem-solving studies and researches and transfer knowledge and skills, participate in curriculum

development, review, and enhancement, uphold the guiding values of the institution, counsel students in acquainting themselves with the mission and guiding values of the institution, devote full working time to the institution.

Academic staff are also responsible to participate in the services provided by the institution, to work in teams and respect ideas of students in the class, to be evaluated for the services s/he rendered by colleagues, students and the institution, to participate in teaching, counselling and other income generating activities.

Certainly, academic teaching staff members need to have the required qualities and competencies in order to adequately play the multiple roles expected of them in higher education. The concept of quality varies based upon the definitions adopted, but in the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy Implementation manual (MOE, 1994), teachers quality was defined in terms of ability to teach, diligence, professional interest, mental and physical fitness. By enlisting the duties, responsibilities and rights of academic staff, Proclamations No.351/2003 and No.650/2009 also indicated the required qualities and competencies of academic teachers who are the core members of higher education. In addition to these proclaimed views, there are also unofficial views which demand higher quality staff in higher learning institutions, implying capabilities of academic staff to meet duties and responsibilities.

The existence of expressed interests in the quality of academic staff of higher education institutions does not commensurate that explore the nature or level of quality of academic staff in Ethiopia. Unfortunately, what is not known weighs more than what is known about the competencies of academic staff particularly in terms of demonstrated practices in the classroom. The purpose of this research was to fill this gap and explore the qualities of academic staff from the official and unofficial perspectives by surveying the views of very relevant stakeholders in higher education.

METHODOLOGY

A survey method which was based on quantitative methods of data collection was used. This particular data was collected to obtain cross-sectional information using questionnaires. There were three types of questionnaires which used closed-ended items in order to obtain the required information. These were Students, Department Chairs' and Deans' questionnaires. All items applied a rating scale which ranged from 1-5 (1=very high, 5=very low). Data analysis was done using the central tendency, although standard deviation was given for sensing the level of dispersion of scores. In order to strengthen the validity of the instruments of data collection, the same type of items were given to different respondents (see Brewer, J. and Hunter, A., 1989). Students were treated with different, but still equivalent quality measures taking into account the experience they have in order to provide the required information.

In the study were included 576 sampled students, 197 department chairs and 55 Deans in 13 universities (2 private and 11 public universities) who were asked to directly give opinions and views on different types of competencies or qualities academic teachers demonstrate in the course of their services. Moreover, deans and department chairs were asked to give their opinions of factors that affect the quality of teachers of higher education for implying possible explanations of the observed level of quality of academic staff.

MAIN FINDINGS

Tertiary education students were asked to express their views about the quality of their teachers' vis-à-vis the five quality characteristics, ability to teach, diligence, professional interest, and mental fitness noted in the policy. A five-point-scale (very high=1, high =2, average =3, low=4, and very low=5). The results of their response are summarized in the table below.

Table 1: Student views about the academic staff quality of teachers in tertiary education

Academic Staff Quality	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Ability to teach	2.34	.928	576
Diligence	2.53	.939	576
Professional interest	2.30	1.007	576
Physical fitness	2.38	1.016	576
Mental fitness	2.27	1.003	576
Overall mean	2.36	0.1	576

The above table indicates that the overall mean score of student responses about the quality of their teachers is 2.36 with a standard deviation of 0.1. The overall reliability of item measuring the construct (academic staff quality) using Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items is 0.863. This means that according to tertiary education students, the quality of the academic staff is between high and average. However, if we put the views of students in a rank order it indicates that the number one quality of the academic staff is mental fitness followed by professional interest, ability to teach, physical fitness and finally their least quality being diligence.

The fact that the ability of teachers to teach did not rank “high” among the expected qualities can be an issue of concern for the Ethiopian higher education sector. According to Perkin (2006), teaching and scholarship combined with corporate autonomy and academic freedom is one of the main purposes of a school of higher learning. Proclamations No. 305/2003 and 650/2009 are also predicated on the centrality of teaching.

There can be many reasons for lack of capacity in teaching, but teachers' qualification can be one of the main ones. According to Gebre Mariam (2009), all Ethiopian universities except Addis Ababa University do not fulfil the requirement of Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency which demands that at least 30% of the teaching staff must have Ph.D. Degrees. Even Addis Ababa University meets the 30% requirement through the employment of expatriate staff. The reported level of diligence among higher education staff by students may also be due to several factors, but still the issue of competence can be considered as an important factor. Teachers need to know how to work with students and the findings are indicative of how much professional development activities are required.

Academic department chairs in higher learning institutions in Ethiopia were also asked to assess and rate the competence of academic staff members in their department vis-à-vis the measures outlined in the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation using a five-point-scale (very high=1, very low=5). The following table depicts the summary of the results:

Table 2: Academic department chairs' view about the quality of academic staff

Competencies of Academic Staff	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Transmitting knowledge to students	1.78	.755	197
Respecting student ideas in class	1.85	.819	197
Teaching and rendering services	2.01	.851	197
Producing competent and democratically cultivated graduates	2.10	.886	197
Being open to evaluation	2.13	1.017	197
Working in teams	2.23	1.043	197
Not promoting political partisanship	2.24	1.182	197
Assisting, counselling, and guiding students	2.24	.985	197
Participating in services rendered by the institution	2.25	1.003	197
Providing assistance to students with special needs	2.36	1.076	197
Providing support to one's own and other higher education institutions	2.44	.965	197
Participating in institutional income generating activities	2.55	1.149	197
Conducting problem solving studies and research	2.87	1.097	197
Overall mean	2.23	0.288	197

As can be seen from the above table, the overall mean score of the responses of the department chairs about the quality of their academic staff is 2.23 with a standard deviation of 0.288 and a reliability of the overall items measuring the construct using Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items 0.910. This means that the judgment of academic department chairs regarding the quality of the academic staff is no better than that of students' as they have rated them between high and average. The most significant finding of this section is that department chairs have rated the ability of teachers to transmit knowledge to their students at relatively more than high level. This is quite contrary to student views. Perhaps, department chairs can be very remote from what happens in the classroom since visits or classroom supervisions by department heads are a rarity in higher education institutions. In this case, students are more knowledgeable since they spend considerable time directly with the teachers. However, the department chairs have the view that most academic staff members are very poor in conducting problem solving studies and researches.

From the above table, it is also possible to observe that teachers' participation in income generating activities, their provision of support to other institutions in need of support and their efforts to help students with special needs are not high. However, these are also areas where the Higher Education Proclamations have given higher emphasis for achievement.

The view of deans of tertiary education institutions about the competence of the academic staff is also in agreement with that of students and department chairs. This is apparent as the overall mean score of the deans' responses about this issue is 2.25 with a standard deviation of 0.311. This means the quality of the academic staff according to the deans' view is also between high and average. The following list provides the summary of the results of the deans' views about the quality of academic staff listed hierarchically starting from teachers' relatively high quality at the top and their observed very low qualities toward the bottom of the list.

- Transmitting knowledge to students

- Producing competent and democratically cultivated graduates
- Teaching and rendering services to learners
- Participating in services rendered by the institution
- Working in teams
- Respecting student ideas in class
- Being open to evaluation
- Assisting, counselling, and guiding students
- Participating in institutional income generating activities
- Providing assistance to students with special needs
- Not promoting political partisanship
- Providing support to one's own and other higher education institutions
- Conducting problem solving studies and research

Factors affecting teachers in higher education

Department Chairs and Deans were requested to share their views about factors affecting teachers in tertiary education institutions with regard to the teaching profession. The following table, describes the summary of these views about such factors (scale: very high=1, very low=5).

Table 3: Academic department chairs' view about the factors affecting teachers

Factors	Dept' chairs		Deans	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Large class size	2.15	1.424	1.57	.787
Low salaries	2.20	1.436	1.71	.756
Inadequacy of teaching facilities/materials	2.35	1.424	2.00	1.155
Lack of incentives including health insurance, educational benefits	2.35	1.694	2.00	1.528
Poor supervision and professional support	2.45	1.234	2.29	.756
Poor conditions of service	2.45	1.356	2.43	1.397
Low regard for academic staff	2.55	1.191	2.86	1.574
Lack of in-service training	2.75	1.293	3.00	1.000
Lack of accommodation	2.75	1.251	3.00	1.155
Lack of career promotion	2.80	1.152	3.14	1.345
Lack of proper transference for academic staff	2.85	1.348	3.29	1.254
Too demanding load teaching	3.00	1.522	3.43	1.618
Lack of student interest in education	3.30	1.129	3.57	1.618
Transportation problems	3.35	1.348	3.57	1.134
Poor attendance in courses	3.35	1.182	3.57	1.397
University/ college location in remote area	3.70	1.525	4.29	.756
Overall mean	2.73	0.203	2.75	0.810

The above table shows that large class size, low salaries and inadequacy of learning materials constitute the three most affecting factors for teaching in higher education. These ratings are equally indicated by department chairs and deans. The fact that class size is reported as having a significant influence should not be astonishing. The reason is that the growth of enrolment at all levels in higher

education, and particularly in the Government sector, is the highest of all educational levels having about an annual average increase of over 33% per year over the last five years (MOE, 2007/08).

Low salaries as an impending factor for teacher quality are not limited to Ethiopia. In a comparative perspective, Enders (2006) indicates that there are high and low paying countries even in the industrialized country. According to Enders (2006); Belgium and the United States of America are among the top paying countries from developed nations while such countries as Finland, Norway, Sweden etc are considered to be relatively low paying nations. Furthermore, Enders (2006) indicates that it is a general rule that academic salaries are very low in developing countries.

Discussions and implications for practice

The above findings indicate that the quality of higher education teachers is not high. Students, department chairs deans all agree that there is a lot to be desired from staff of higher education institution. One of the biggest problems for deans and chairs has to do with conducting research while students said that diligence is a problem. Moreover, department chairs say that participation in income generation, providing support to other institutions, and providing assistance to students with special needs are some of the problems of higher education staff.

Factors affecting the academics of higher education are enormous: large class size, low salaries and inadequacy of learning materials, work load, lack of student interest, transportation problems, poor service conditions, low regard for academic staff, lack of career promotion, and lack of accommodation are some of such factors.

These findings imply that the quality of teachers needs to be improved as higher education institutions are expected to be centres of excellence for the production and distribution of new knowledge. One way to do this was identified as improving factors that negatively affect their capacities to accomplish their duties as well as expected. These include salaries, class size, teaching materials and other several conditions.

REFERENCES

- Altbach, P.G. (2006). Comparative Higher Education: Knowledge, the University and Development. Boston: Boston College.
- Brewer, J. and Hunter, A. (1989). Multimethod Research: A Synthesis of Styles. London:Sage.
- Clark, R.B.(1983). The Higher Education System: Academic organization in Cross National Perspective. London: University of California Press.
- Enders, J. (2006). “*The Academic Profession*” In J.J. F. Forest and P.G. Altbach (2006). International Handbook of Higher Education. Part One. Dordrecht/ Netherlands: Springer.
- Gebre Mariam, T. (2009). Graduate Studies and Research at Addis Ababa University:Past and Present. Addis Ababa:LESAN.

Government of Ethiopian Federal Democratic Republic (2003). Higher Education Proclamation No. 350/2003. Negarit Gazeta. 9th Year No.72. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Government of Ethiopian Federal Democratic Republic (2003). Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009. Negarit Gazeta. 15th Year No.64. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Ministry of Education (1994). Education Sector Strategy. Addis Ababa, MOE.

Ministry of Education (2007/08). Education Statistics Annual Abstract. Issue No.15. Addis Ababa: MOE.

Perkin, H. (2006). “*History of Universities*” In J.J. F. Forest and P.G. Altbach (2006). *International Handbook of Higher Education. Part One*. Dordrecht/ Netherlands: Springer.

Stromquist, N. (2007). “*The Academic Profession in the Globalization Age: Key trends, Challenges and Possibilities*” In P.G. Altbach and P.M. Petterson, (2007). Higher Education in the New Century. Boston: Boston College.