

Practices, Opportunities, and Challenges of Cross Border Tertiary Education in Ethiopia: The Case of Unisa Ethiopia Regional Learning Center

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to explore and understand practices, opportunities, and challenges of Cross Border Tertiary Education in Ethiopia in the context of the University of South Africa (Unisa) Ethiopia Regional Learning Center (hereafter referred as Unisa). Exploratory qualitative case study research strategy was employed and data were collected from purposively selected fourteen key respondents from Unisa, Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA), Ministry of Education (MoE), and Higher Education Strategic Center (HESC) and students that were enrolled at Unisa, who were selected by using snowball sampling technique. Data regarding practices, opportunities, and challenges of cross border tertiary education in Ethiopia particularly in the case of Unisa was collected by using semi-structured in-depth interview and from documents published in the area of higher education in general and cross border higher education in particular. The data were then inductively analyzed by creating themes from the raw data collected through in-depth interview and documents. The findings of the present study revealed that the value Unisa gives for teaching-learning and community outreach in Ethiopia was almost negligible when comparing to the other regional learning center in South Africa as the role of the higher education institution. Even though, there were benefits that Ethiopian students got in the area of research and creates additional job opportunity for Ethiopians but overall the opportunities that was expecting from Unisa to contribute for Ethiopia as cross border higher education institution overshadowed by the challenges faced in relation to the establishment of the regional learning center. Besides, the legal matters related to quality assurance, relevance, and recognition of qualifications was not properly managed due to the tension between the accrediting agency and the policy makers. In addition, Ethiopian students develop feelings of frustration and resentment due to lack of teamwork from supervisors (both South Africans and Ethiopian co-supervisors). Thus, since isolated cross border higher education, that fails to govern by the rules and regulations of the receiving country creates confusion among stakeholders, it is then recommended that Unisa should create deep collaboration with local higher education institutions and with in-country quality assurance agency in order to assure both the quality and relevance of the service and to protect the nation and the country's resource from misuse if the courses and research conducted were not in line with the Ethiopia developmental policy and address contemporary issues in the country. Underpinned by a model adapted to the research purpose, the study complemented not only to the existing knowledge in the area, but it also contributed to the fact that there was no research made in non-western countries like Ethiopia over this interesting and potential rich area.

Key words: Cross-border education; Unisa; Tertiary education in Ethiopia

I. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Knowledge is universal and the institutions producing knowledge have universal appeal. That is why universities remained international entities even when nationalism was on the rise. Today, knowledge has become an international good to be traded, and it transcends national boundaries faster than capital and people. This gives knowledge-based economies a global orientation, scope and operation, making them catalytic agents in the process of globalization. With globalization, the production of knowledge itself has become a process dependent on the market forces. This has implications for the institutions engaged in knowledge production. Universities are increasingly responding to market demands, and they too have become global in their operation. Globalization of higher education has become a market-oriented activity attracting foreign capital, inviting competition, and producing a profit at times higher than that in other sectors.

The internationalization of education implies the imparting of knowledge, skills and values which have universal appeal and application. It also implies that a curriculum becomes cross-national and intercultural in nature. Internationalization of education can also take place in such a form to help students acquire international skills without having to leave the country. At times, this also involves a shift from producing for national markets to international markets. This implies changing the orientation of courses offered in the domestic universities, which are sometimes referred to as ‘internationalization at home’ (Knight, 2003).

Cross border higher education is the best visible example of globalization of higher education. It implies the mobility of students, teachers and programs across national boundaries. Cross-border education, in the context of globalization, has become a market-driven activity involving numerous providers and attracting thousands of students who are willing to buy these services at international prices. The providers are more often investors than educators, and the profitability of the sector attracts them to this area of business. The international market for students accounts for billions of dollars, and hence there is fierce competition among higher education institutions to attract foreign students and to generate income and profit.

Cross border higher education also includes the movement of people, knowledge, programs, providers and curriculum across national or regional jurisdictional borders. Cross-border education is a subset of “internationalization of higher education” and can be an element in the development cooperation projects, academic exchange programs and commercial initiatives (Knight, 2004).

Hence, in light of the fast pace of cross-border growth and innovation, it is important that the higher education sector be informed and vigilant about the risks and benefits and more importantly, the need for appropriate policies and regulations to guide and monitor current and future developments (Knight, 2004).

Much discussion and debate has addressed the rationale that drives the dramatic development of cross-border education and the potential benefits it might generate (Altbach & Knight, 2006; Altbach, 2004a, 2004b; Knight, 1997, 2004, 2005; van der Wende, 1997). A prominent trend has emerged, that is, revenue generation has been widely identified by the exporting country side of transnational programs. At the same time, rationale such as satisfying unmet demand and building educational capacity is reported more frequently by the importing country side of transnational programs.

Other frequently mentioned drives include building an international reputation, student and staff advancement, meeting differentiated student needs, innovation through new delivery systems and providers, and enhancing mutual understanding (OECD, 2004; Saffu & Mamman, 2000; Zhang, 2003).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Numerous studies from the cross-border higher education literature have identified risks, as well as challenges during the operation of cross-border higher educational programs (Davis, Olsen & Bohm 2000; Knight, 2006b; Liston, 2004; Magagula, 2005; McBurnie & Pollock, 2000; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007; OECD, 2004; Shanahan & McParlane, 2005; Wang, 2008).

These challenges and conflicts mainly focus on areas of dimensions and consequences for the various types of providers. These issues are mainly on registration and licensing, quality assurance, accreditation, recognition of qualification, national policies, and funding, which are interrelated and all are influenced by regulations of the sending and the receiving country. A detailed review of these challenges and conflicts suggests that many of them may have been caused by the different understanding about the program and the cross border higher education institutions as well. Consequently, lack of preparedness by stakeholders involved in cross-border educational programs and creates unexpected and conflicting circumstances (Larsen et al., 2004). As it is stated in Higher Education Proclamation No.650/2009, Article 89 sub article 12, HERQA has the right to ensure foreign institutions or their branches operating in Ethiopia are accredited in their country of origin and comply with the relevance and quality standards set by this proclamation and regulations and directives to be issued for the implementation of this proclamation. This proclamation also asserts that this policy will be equally applicable for all higher education institution operating in the Ethiopia (FDRE, 2009).

But these cross border higher education institutions were operating without the necessary policy framework as to their accreditation, quality assurance, recognition, of their qualifications, and even their license to operate as a higher education institutions. For instance, in 2011 HERQA was announced the termination of various private and distance education institutions related to quality issue but even though most of these cross border higher education institutions are delivering their program through distance learning, none of them were reviewed.

Though HERQA prepares a guideline for these foreign universities and some of them are fulfilling the minimum requirement set by the agency and get accreditation to deliver their program particularly at Masters level through various modes of delivery, still there are other cross border higher education institutions running their program at doctoral and masters level without the knowledge of the agency and not abide by the rules and regulations set by the higher education proclamation and to sensible guidelines related to cross border higher education registration and licensing, quality assurance, recognition of qualification issues is currently depicted.

Therefore, the purposes of this research were to explore practices, opportunities, and challenges of cross border tertiary education in Ethiopia particularly at Unisa- Ethiopia Regional Learning Center by raising the following guiding questions.

1. How does Unisa functions in Ethiopia as cross border higher education institution?
2. What are the rationales for Unisa for engaging in Cross Border higher education in Ethiopia?
3. What opportunities and challenges have been faced in the operation of Unisa?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to explore practices, opportunities, and challenges of cross border higher education institutions in Ethiopia in the context of University of South Africa Ethiopia Regional Learning Center.

Specifically, the study intends:

- To examine how Unisa functions as cross border higher education institution in Ethiopia.
- To find out the rationales behind Unisa's engagement in Ethiopia as a cross border higher education institution.
- To explorer the opportunities challenges faced in relation to Unisa's involvement in Ethiopia.

II. Review of Related Literature

Economic and cultural globalization has ushered in a new era in higher education. Higher education was always more internationally open than most sectors because of its immersion in knowledge, which never showed much respect for juridical boundaries. In global knowledge economies, higher education institutions are more important than ever as mediums for a wide range of cross-border relationships and continuous global flows of people, information, knowledge, technologies, products and financial capital.

2.1 What is Cross-Border Education?

Cross-border education refers to the movement of people, programs, providers, knowledge, ideas, projects and services across national boundaries. The term is often used interchangeably with “transnational education,” “offshore education” and “borderless education”. There are subtle but important differences between these terms, (Knight, 2005). The Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education, which was *jointly* developed by UNESCO and the OECD defines cross-border education as:

Cross-border education may include higher education by public/private and not-for-profit/ for-profit providers. It encompasses a wide range of modalities in a continuum from face-to-face (taking various forms from students travelling abroad and campuses abroad) to distance learning (using a range of technologies and including e-learning) (UNESCO/OECD (2005)).

2.2 Nature and Trends of Cross-border Education

There are two significant trends in cross border education. The first trend is the vertical shift downwards from student mobility to program and provider mobility. It is important to note that the numbers of students seeking education in foreign countries is still increasing. However, more emphasis is currently being placed on delivering foreign academic courses and programs to students in their home country. The second shift is from left to right, signifying substantial change in orientation from development cooperation to competitive commerce – or, in other words, from aid to trade. Given the presence and importance of GATS and other multi-lateral trade agreements, this discussion focuses on the mobility of programs and providers for commercial purposes.

Figure 1: Framework for Cross-Border Education

Category	Forms and Conditions of Mobility		
	Development Cooperation	Educational Linkages	Commercial Trade
People Students Professors/scholars Researchers/ Experts/consultants	Semester/year abroad Full degrees Field/research work Internships Sabbaticals Consulting		
Programs Course, program sub-degree, degree,	Twinning Franchised Articulated/ Validated		

post graduate		Joint/Double Award Online/Distance
Providers Institutions Organizations Companies	↓	Branch Campus Virtual University Merger/Acquisition Independent Institutions
Projects Academic projects Services	↓	Research Curriculum Capacity Building Educational services

Adapted from Knight 2006c

2.3 New Developments in Cross Border Education

The demand for international education is forecast to increase from 1.8 million international students in 2000 to 7.2 million international students in 2025 (D. Meares and D. Pearce (2002)). This is a staggering increase that presents enormous challenges as well as opportunities. It is not known what proportion of the demand will be met by student mobility, but it is clear that there will be exponential growth in the movement of programs and institutions/providers across national borders.

2.4 Who are the Cross Border Providers?

The increase in worldwide demand for higher education has resulted in a diversity of providers delivering education across borders as illustrated in the previous section. The providers are classified into two categories: 1) the traditional higher education institutions who are normally oriented to teaching, research and service/commitment to society; and 2) the “new or alternative providers” who primarily focus on teaching and the delivery of education services.

2.5 Perspectives on Rationales and Impacts of Cross Border Education

It is enlightening to examine the rationales and anticipated impacts of cross border education from different viewpoints. Table 2 presents the perspectives of students in a home country, providers in a source or sending country, and providers in the home/receiving country on several key factors (Knight, 2006).

As this section has shown, a wide range of traditional higher education institutions and new providers is involved in cross-border education and there are many different forms of delivery used. Whether one is a sending or a receiving country, a variety of important policy issues and implications must be considered.

Most important is whether receiving countries have the requisite policies in place to effectively manage registration and accreditation of foreign education programs and providers and also regulation of the financial aspects – including taxes, degree of foreign/local ownership, profit sharing and repatriation.

The next section focuses on the basic rules of GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) and the key issues that the education sector needs to monitor as the agreement becomes further developed and is applied to private and commercial education moving across borders.

2.6 Higher Education Policy and Practice

This section of the Guide takes a closer look at some of the implications of the relationships between cross-border education, GATS and higher education policy and practice. Much has been debated about several notable trends in higher education: • commercialization (buying and selling including commodification), • privatization (private ownership and/or funding), • marketization (allowing the market to determine supply and demand) And • liberalization (removal of trade barriers and promotion).

A fifth trend – globalization – it is often pointed to as being a cause for the others. These trends are closely related to each other and are linked to the following four important issues discussed in this section. The first group of issues deals with the challenge for national governments and other bodies to develop new policies and regulations regarding the registration, quality assurance, and recognition of cross-border provision. The second group of issues focuses on the implications of GATS for the role of government, financing, student access and program offer. The third group deals with broader issues including culture, values, and brain drain/gain. And the fourth group focuses on the implications for policy and practice at the institutional level.

Policies for registration, quality assurance and recognition of qualifications of cross-border education
Registration of cross-border providers in receiving country A fundamental question is whether the institutions, companies and organizations that are delivering award-based programs are registered, licensed or recognized by the receiving country. The answer to this question varies. Many countries do not have the regulatory systems in place to register out-of-country providers.

Several reasons account for this, including lack of capacity or political will. If foreign providers are not registered or recognized, it is difficult to monitor their performance. It is usual practice that if an institution or provider is not registered as part of a national system, then regulatory frameworks for quality assurance or accreditation do not apply. This is the situation in many countries in the world and therefore foreign providers (bona fide and rogue) do not have to comply with national regulations of the receiving countries.

The factors at play in the registration or licensing of foreign providers are many. For instance, are there different criteria or conditions applicable to those providers who are part of, and recognized by, a national education system in their home country than for those providers who

are not? Does it make a difference if the provider is for-profit or non-profit, private or public, an institution or a company? What conditions apply if the provider is a company that has no home based presence and only establishes institutions in foreign countries? How does one monitor partnerships between local domestic institutions/companies and foreign ones? Is it possible to register a completely virtual provider? Clearly, there are challenges involved in trying to establish appropriate and effective national or regional regulatory systems for registration of cross-border providers.

Quality assurance of cross-border education First of all, it is important to acknowledge that the terms “accreditation” and “quality assurance” have different meanings and significance depending on the country, actor or stakeholder using the term. In this Guide, quality recognition and assurance is used in a general sense and includes quality audit, evaluation, accreditation and other review processes and elements.

It is also important to acknowledge that there is a great deal of cross border mobility of students, teachers and programs through non-commercial initiatives. Education activities that are part of development aid projects and international academic linkages and networks are good examples. Therefore, international trade of education services is not the only factor driving the urgency of addressing international quality recognition and assurance. At this point, it must be clarified that GATS or any other bilateral trade agreements do not claim to be establishing rules for quality assurance or accreditation. But increased trade in education is an important catalyst for more urgent attention being given to the creation of national level systems to assure the quality for incoming and outgoing cross-border education.

As the discussion moves forward, it will be of strategic and substantive importance to recognize the roles and responsibilities of all the players involved in quality assurance, including individual institutions/providers, national quality assurance systems, non-government and independent accreditation bodies, and regional/international organizations, all of whom contribute to ensuring the quality of cross-border education. Much is at risk if rogue providers or fraudulent qualifications become closely linked to cross-border education. It will be important to work in a collaborative and complementary fashion to build a system that ensures the quality and integrity of cross-border education and maintains the confidence of society in higher education.

III. Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Exploratory qualitative case study research design was employed and data were collected through an in-depth interview with key respondents and documents related with cross border higher education in general and Unisa ERLC in particular.

3.1.1 Qualitative Method

This research was qualitatively designed. Qualitative research design is a system of inquiry which seeks to build a holistic, largely narrative, description to inform the researcher's understanding of a social or cultural phenomenon. It takes place in natural settings employing a combination of observations, interviews, and document reviews.(Creswell, 1994). Qualitative research design helps to produce more in-depth, comprehensive, subjective information and participant observation to describe the context, or natural setting, of the variables under consideration, as well as the interactions of the different variables in the context and it seeks a wide understanding of the entire situation. However, the very subjectivity of the inquiry leads to difficulties in establishing the reliability and validity of the approaches and information and also very difficult to prevent or detect researcher bias and because its scope is limited due to the in-depth, comprehensive data gathering approaches required.

Therefore, the major objective of this study was to explore practices, opportunities, and challenges of cross border higher education in Ethiopia by taking Unisa-Ethiopia as a research setting and tries to answer the following guiding question. These are:

1. How does Unisa functions in Ethiopia as cross border higher education institution?
2. What are the rationales for Unisa for engaging in Cross Border higher education in Ethiopia?
3. What opportunities and challenges have been faced in the operation of Unisa?

3.1.2 Exploratory Case Study Design

Since no evidence was found in the literature review of similar studies on the practices, opportunities, and challenges of cross border higher education in Ethiopia, this study attempts to investigate, describe and explore this new area of interest for cross border education. An exploratory case study is used in this study because it helps to find out how cross border higher education institutions are treated and how their activity is recognized.

3.2 Data Sources

Potential data sources may include, but are not limited to: documentation, archival records, interviews, physical artifacts, direct observations, and participant-observation. Semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted with 14 participants from 4 respondents from Unisa (ERLC), 4 participants from HERQA, 2 from MOE, 1 from HESC, and 3 students who are currently enrolled at Unisa.

These documents can be Annual Abstract from the Ministry of Education, annual magazine, cross border education guideline prepared by Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency, guidelines and other documents from University of South Africa, Higher Education Proclamation, books and journals.

3.3 Ethical Issues

In order to get an in-depth description about the basic questions raised in this study from the participants' experience, I have to build a sufficient level of trust based on a high level of participant disclosure. To attain this, as a researcher I was communicating the University of South Africa (UNISA) Ethiopia Regional Learning Center because it was chosen to be the research site for this study. UNISA was chosen, because it was the only independent, government owned cross border higher education institution that establishes its branch campus based on the bilateral agreement made between the Republic of South Africa and the Federal Democratic Republic Ethiopia to work in collaboration with the Ethiopian government in human resource capacity development. Based on this understanding, I believe that this cross-border higher education institution will help in exploring the issue that I raise in this research.

Then after I got the research access I met every participant and inform them about the purpose of this research and mechanisms used to protect them to create trust and confidence with participants from deceptive practices, sharing information to them about my role as a researcher, and adopt ethical interview practices, maintain confidentiality, and collaborating with participants.

3.4 Population

The accessible population comprises all the cases that conform to the designated criteria and are accessible to the researcher as a pool of subjects for a study. The target population comprised employee of Unisa (those that have direct contact with the program), students who are currently enrolled in the university in doctoral, masters, and bachelor programs, HESC and HERQA experts and officials from MOE.

3.5 Sample and Sampling Techniques

For the purpose of this study participants were selected because they have the knowledge and experience in relation to the issue cross border higher education in Ethiopia. Although this approach increases the possibility of samples that are not representative (Burns & Groove 1999), it provided the only way of reaching the subjects working in this particular case.

Since there was no access for students registering in every cohort, the researcher decided to use snowball sampling to identify student participants. In snowball research the researcher collects data on the few members of the target population she/he can locate and then seeks information from those individuals that enable the researcher to locate other members of that population.

At the beginning of this research, the research had access to Unisa's employee in ERLC (about 19 in number) and 4 of them were purposively selected because they were engaged in university's core activity and have the knowledge of Unisa in relation to its activities, and legal procedures as foreign university was perceived as an input to select them as key participant,

from the Higher Education Relevant and Quality Agency 2 quality and relevance experts were purposively selected and they refer to other 2 experts in their agency who were rich in information about cross border higher education, 1 individual from Higher Education Strategic Center and 2 incumbents from the Ministry of Education were also purposively selected. On the other hand snowball sampling was used for the student participant of the study I had the opportunity to meet one student and he referred me to his three friends whom he believes information rich.

When repetition of themes is achieved and new participants do not add new information, it is believed that saturation of data has been reached. A total number of 16 members of the target population were approached to participate in the study. Of these, 2 individuals were not able to participate in the study because of their personal problem. Then saturation in this study was reached, and the findings were confirmed by participants.

3.6 Data Gathering Tools

This study used document analysis, site visits, and one-on-one semi structured interviews as data collection methods. These methods allowed the researcher to collect data from multiple sources. Obtaining different streams of information provided the researcher with a more comprehensive and holistic picture of the studied programs. One-on-one in-depth semi-structured interviews were used because social abstractions like “education” are best understood through the experiences of the individuals whose work and lives are the matter upon which the abstractions are built (Ferrarotti, 1981).

Document also represent good source for text (word) data for a qualitative study. They provide the advantage of being in the language and words of the participants, who have usually given thoughtful attention to them. The researcher obtained these documents from multiple sources, including archive files, local newspapers, program and institution websites, and interview participants.

However, documents are sometimes difficult to locate and obtain. Because the information may not be available to the public or it may be located in distant archives, that require the researcher to travel which is time consuming and expensive. Besides, the documents may be incomplete, inauthentic, or inaccurate.

Then questions were arranged in a manner to be in an understandable language level without asking them a kind of leading question and let the researcher to know about their face sheet information about respondents’ sex, educational background, and their work experience were asked due to its relevance in contextualizing their answer.

3.7 Data Collection

Data were collected by conducting One-on one in-depth interview with those who have direct relation with cross border higher education and the university of South Africa Ethiopian regional

learning center and written documents were also used to augment the interview result based on the questions that were set along with document analysis.

In order to ensure full and accurate descriptions of the phenomenon of cross border higher education practices, opportunities, and challenges, data were collected until saturation occurred. Once it was evident that saturation had been reached, no more contact or requests to participate in the study were asked. The following questions relevant to the objective of the study were asked.

- How would you describe your experiences about Unisa?
- How do you put Unisa's function as higher education institution?
- What do you think that Unisa contribute to Ethiopia as cross border higher education institution?
- How do you evaluate the work of Unisa as a student?
- What potential challenges that you perceive in the process of Unisa's activity in Ethiopia?
- What are the opportunities that Ethiopia got by training its human resource in Unisa?

Even though all of the participants speak in English, the one-on- one interview discussions were held in Amharic because the respondents and I were comfortable while talking in Amharic. Even if, the interview guide was prepared in English and decided to conduct the interview in English too but allowing the participants' to feel free to use either or both Amharic and English whenever they need to. And they were using a mix of Amharic and English. As per the informed consent of the participants, all of the interview results got from the eleven respondents were audiotaped.

The interview session was conducted in two rounds in their respective offices. However, the bulk of the discussion was conducted in the second round than the first one. For instance, the first round was for about a total of five hours and forty minutes tape discussion and one hour and fifteen minutes oral discussion was held. But in the second round it was lasted close to nine-hour taped-discussion with two hours and fifty five minutes unrecorded discussion was apprehended. From a total of fourteen hour and forty minutes taped discussion and three hours and seventy minutes unrecorded discussion 164 pages were transcribed.

Once I finished transcribing the audiotaped data, I destroyed all the tapes and immediately changed all the names of the participants mentioned with pseudonyms. But I didn't change the name of the institutions where I conduct the study because attempting to change of the name of the institutions would make the research artificial. All the recordings were then manually transcribed on hard copies in Amharic. And then I was carefully translated them in English and start coding the data.

3.8 Data Analysis

Though it was time consuming to translate the entire data in to English manually, it helps me to get familiarize myself with the substantial part of the empirical material. After I have familiarize myself with the empirical material, I went through each of the transcriptions several times to have a feel of it and thereby find possible themes at the same time doing what Huberman and Miles(1994) calls data management(e.g. crosschecking possible discrepancies between the Amharic and English transcriptions, editing conceptual inconsistencies).

Then I look forward to find out for possible themes by way of classifying a particular text under a particular theme, what I did was while reading the transcribed material I was writing on the right hand side of the paragraph what is it all about and where that particular text will be categorized. When looking for emerging themes from the empirical materials, I would write multiple of themes simultaneously, and not a theme at a time. To make it clear, instead of identifying a particular theme exhaustively across all the transcriptions at one go, I would first identify a theme in a text and try to examine under what other themes would come next. Similar procedure was followed until all the transcripts were codified in one way or another.

Once the empirical materials were grouped thematically, they were put together in a separate word document for further regrouping by cutting and paste it mechanism. And all the sub-themes that go together were then regrouped under bigger themes and overarching themes. Doing this was not as such easy rather it was messy.

Then twelve of the sub themes were identified as “function of Unisa in teaching-learning”, “role of Unisa in Research”, “Role of Unisa in Community Outreach”, “access to education”, “minimize cost and brain drain”, “bi-lateral relation between South Africa and Ethiopia”, “Political will rather than academic alliance”, “Information gap”, “poor infrastructure”, “underestimation”, “study habit”, “lack of control”, ‘tension between the Ministry of Education and HERQA/ quality assurance, relevance, recognition of qualification”

A lot of grouping and regrouping of the sub-themes including those not cited here led to a number of bigger themes and five overarching themes. The following are the overarching themes: The research site and the participant of the study, Role of Unisa in teaching-learning, research, and community outreach, The rationale behind the establishment of the regional learning center, Opportunities got in relation to the opening of the branch campus, Major challenges perceived in the operation.

Generally, in coding and classifying the empirical materials if an issue is mentioned by a respondent and doesn't generate or provoke discussion, it was not considered. The materials classified and coded by writing a note on the material was not given to another researcher for verification. That was partially because of various factors like shortage of time and this could be considered as one limitations of the study.

Then by combining the data extracted from documents with interview result, the empirical materials were hoped to primarily answer these three basic questions:

1. How does Unisa functions in Ethiopia as cross border higher education institution?
2. What are the rationales for Unisa for engaging in Cross Border higher education in Ethiopia?
3. What opportunities and challenges have been faced in the operation of Unisa?

3.9 Triangulation

Explains the advantage of triangulation as follows, by combining methods and investigators in the same study, observers can partially overcome the deficiencies that flow from one investigator to method. Another advantage of designing multi-method research lies in the potential for enhancement of the validity of the study of when they are supported by multiple and complementary types of data. Therefore, data triangulation and the use of multiple sources in a study were used in this study.

IV. Presentation and Interpretation of Data

4.1 Discussions

As has been mentioned earlier, since what the 14 one-on-one in-depth interview participants' views, opinions, discussions and even their disagreements on the issues, ideas and question that I raised make up the bulk of the data for this study. Overview of the participants of this study was assessed to give information about their lived experience of each participant in relation to the cross border higher education practices, opportunities, and challenges in Ethiopia in the context of Unisa.

Figure 2: Overview of Participants' Profile

Participant's Name(Pseudo name)	Sex	Academic Qualification(Highest)	Work Experience (on their current post)
Hanna	Female	BA	2 years
Bekele	Male	MA	5
Edil	Male	BA	3y
Nebil	Male	BA	4
Lemma	Male	MA	6

Hailu	Male	MA	4
Beka	Male	MED	10
Yayeshe	Female	BA	12
Senay	Male	MED	10
Selam	Female	MA	8
Akalu	Male	MA	11
Mesfin	Male	MA	9
Temesgen	Male	MA	9
Mulatu	Male	Ma	8

As it was shown in the above table, the respondent's academic qualification and the service that they have in their current position help them to understand issues related to cross border higher education and enable them to discover beyond the prevalent condition in Ethiopia related to the phenomena.

4.2 Findings of the Study

4.2.1 The Role of Unisa in Teaching-Learning, Research and Community Engagement

As it is depicted in the discussion section of this study the university intensively engaged in research area than teaching learning and community service. The underlying reason for this extremity is that the university is that shortage of academic and lack of budget for these activities together with the university's focus contribute to this unavailability of these services as it is performing in other regional learning centers.

4.2.2 Rationales behind the Establishment of the Regional Learning Center

As per the majority of the respondents' belief the physical presence of the branch campus here in Ethiopia adds nothing or facilitates their learning in any aspect because they can access and use anything that the university permits for students on online basis. Besides they claim that this regional learning center is the only regional learning center out of the South African territory but the service that it gives is not the same as those regional learning centers. Rather they feel that currently the regional learning center's role in Ethiopia is more of political than educational.

4.2.3 Opportunities Got Due to Unisa's Presence in Ethiopia?

4.2.3.1 Knowledge Transfer

As it is witnessed from the participants' response the establishment of this bilateral agreement gives them the chance to acquaint themselves with a new research philosophy and get an in-depth theoretical knowledge about research and other valuable seminars and trainings like academic English. The university is not only try to educate students but it also gives a chance for the regional learning staffs to upgrade themselves by conducting various kinds of seminar and workshops. Even though, the above issues were raised as a benefit but the majority of respondents agreed that this was not the ultimate goal expected to be achieved by the university rather this is a kind of 'starter' the main course is not yet served. and also it is not as such a surprise for them to get the above things in the physical presence of the university.

4.2.3.2 Technology Transfer

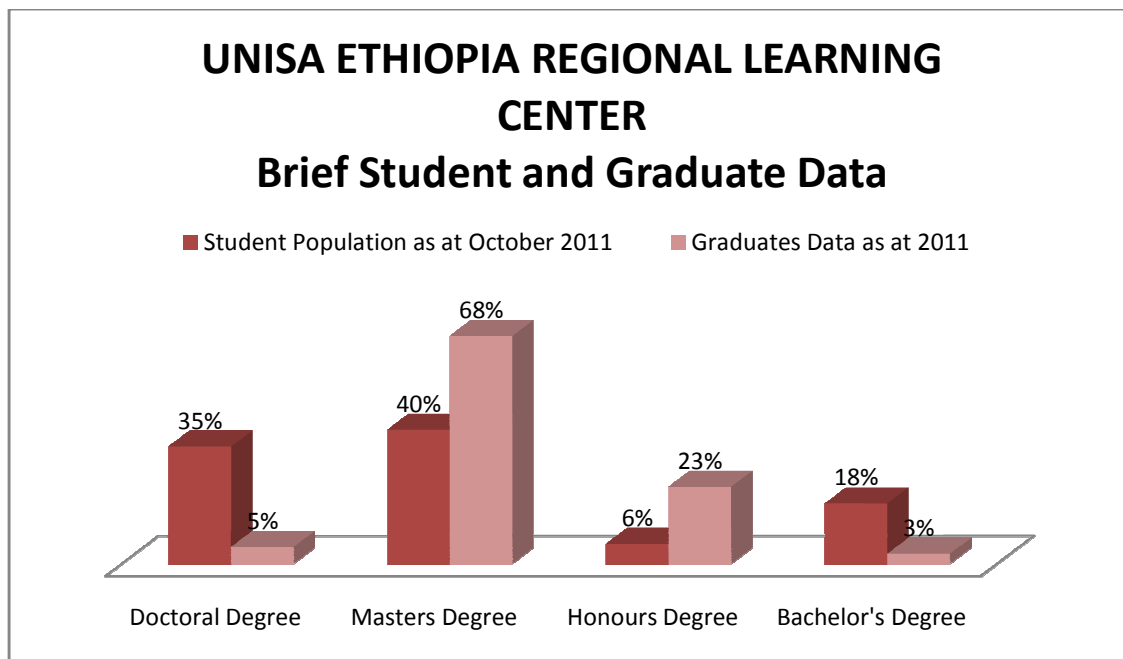
From the respondents idea it can be said that the university creates access to use internet and related web based teaching modalities for students and employees working in the university. This is because it is an open distance university and most of the activities including registration, admission, assignment submission and related issues are facilitated thorough this technology. In order to perform these activities knowledge related to this technology is important. Therefore, to achieve all these activities will be possible through skill training get from the university is the only way. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents believe that these issues are not as such new for Ethiopians particularly for those currently enrolled in Unisa. Because using information communication technology for either academic or social issue is prevalent here in Ethiopia particularly at higher education institution. Besides they believe that without the physical presence of the university here in Ethiopia it was possible to access the main library at Pretoria and get access to different materials and communication too.

4.2.3.3 Job Opportunity

As it is indicated in the discussion section because of the establishment of branch campus here in Ethiopia, it creates job opportunity for 19 Ethiopian administrative staff and for those university instructors who are working as co- supervisor and advisor for students enrolled. But from the academic point of view most of the respondents agree that this administrative interaction is not the motto of either the university or the government of Ethiopia. And their stand about this issue is that this is a way for creating bureaucratic channel because it was easy for students to get everything such as registration, admission, consultation online without the interference of this center. Generally they feel that this regional learning doesn't have an impact on their study.

4.2.3.4 Educational Access (Sharing Burden)

As it is shown in the discussion section few participants consider the university as a means to share the burden that the country faces particularly in capacitating instructors in higher education institutions that are working in from the newly established public universities in the country. But what is depicted from the majority of the respondents and the data from Unisa shows that even the university establishes its campus for about six consecutive years. The number of students enrolled and graduate particularly in areas that Unisa agrees with is minimal as compared to the original agreement made. To graphically represent the university's role:



4.2.4 Challenges Perceived in relation to the Activities of Unisa

4.2.4.1 Poor Infrastructures

As it was depicted in participant's response, poor infrastructure hampers the smooth flow of activities particularly those working in the university says it is due to the countries incapacity broadband system that the admission, responses from supervisors, and availability of books will take long time to reach. Besides, the mechanism that the university devises to alleviate this problem like using postal service will also take time due to distance.

4.2.4.2 Information Gap

The discussion section of this study portrays problems related to supervisors' were sighted as a major problem for students to properly discharge their duty. As it is explained, lack of timely

feedback, lack of interest, lack of proper channel of communication, and unable to initiate students were the major challenge that participants' direct.

4.2.4.3 Poor Study Habit

In the discussion section of this study Ethiopian students study habit was also sighted as a major problem for this distance education program. As some of the participants belief students are not aware of the difference between conventional and distance education mode of delivery and that is why they are complaining supervisors.

4.2.4.4 Lack of Transparency

As it is shown in the discussion section of the study the university was not willing to either inform stakeholders what is going on there rather than keeping everything secrete. For instance, it was not possible to get any record material regarding students' enrollment. Besides it is not only the university's problem to kept things secret but it was also difficult to find information pertinent to Unisa form those organizations that have direct contact with the university. Also officials and, most of the employees are not willing to speak frankly what they know about the university's activity.

4.2.4.5 Higher Education Policy

As it is shown in the discussion section Unisa was exceptionally treated than other higher education institutions in Ethiopia. Up on its establishment and course delivery, its activity was linked to the Ministry of Education without the involvement of HERQA. On the other hand as HERQA's recently published guideline indicates Unisa was not in accredited list of cross border higher education institutions.

Figure 3: List of Accredited Cross Border Higher Education Institutions in Ethiopia

Name of the Institution	Affiliated with
Linchon University	New Generation University College
Seri Sai College	Skimm Manipual Univerty
Indhra Ghandi National Open University	St. Mary University College
Greenwich University	International leadership and Management Institute
Cambridge International College	Zemen Development and Management

	Institute
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Source: (HERQA, 2011)

Therefore, issues related to quality, relevance, and recognition of qualifications becomes an area of discomfort. Besides, the discussion result shows that this university was seems to function with its own interest without clear and mutually agreed criteria based on the country’s education policy and international principles.

As participants’ response indicates the university is fully engaged in giving training for those in the area of social science and humanity and the issue of hard sciences, those related to, natural science is almost neglected. This results due to cost related issues and lack of deep collaboration with local universities.

4.2.4.6 Admission Criteria

As respondents from the interview assert that the inconsistency in admission procedure of the university is not in line with the Ethiopian context when it comes to master’s study. This creates to take additional courses to make the Ethiopian bachelor degree equivalent to their standard which is expensive and time consuming.

4.2.4.7 Lack of Preparedness

From the participants reaction it can be said that stakeholders that were liable for cross border higher education institutions were not in a position to oversee the functions of these cross border educational institutions as per the country’s higher education policy. To make things more clear there until recently(December 2011) there were no any guideline in the country that demarcates how cross border higher educational institutions expecting to operate.. And it seems due to this reason that lack of awareness, accountability and responsibility vanishes.

V. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

The bulk of the empirical material for the qualitative segment of the research was drawn form an in-depth interview which was conducted with five groups of participants in two rounds. Fourteen participants 10 males and 4 females, with diverse profile in terms of academic class, work experience, and willingly participated in the interview session.

5.1 Summary

5.1.1 Functions of Unisa in Teaching /learning, Research, and Community outreach

As regards to the university’s function in teaching –learning, research and community service in Ethiopia, the interview result as well as the document found from the university shows similar result. The three functions of the trilogy of higher education, which consist of teaching, research and community service, are not assigned equal merit. The priority for performance is only given

to research, and to a certain extent to conducting seminar and workshops efforts, and community service is not given importance at all. Even though cross border higher education institutions mostly focus on this kind of research activity but in reality what is expected from those particularly engaged in capacity building agreement is more than producing graduates.

5.1.2 Rationale for the Establishment of the Regional Learning Center

As per the majority of the informants reaction towards the essence of establishing this regional learning center was its contribution to the smooth flow of their learning is very little because what the regional learning currently performing is more of administrative part which is also possible for students to use it in online. In addition to this, this regional learning center is the only regional learning center out of South Africa but the services found in Ethiopia Regional learning center was not the same as those regional learning centers. From this respondents asserts that the establishment of this regional learning center was more of political than educational.

5.1.3 Opportunities Got due to the Establishment of Unisa ERLC

As some of the respondents belief the university's physical presence enable students to get familiar with the use of information communication technology as a means getting access to different educational resources and let them to get acquainted with the technology. In addition to this, employee of the regional learning center and students are benefited in this technology enabling environment. Because believe that registration, admission, and related activities are processed using the internet technology. In addition to this, the respondents also sight the university role in job creation for both administrative staff of the university and for those university instructors who are working as a co-advisor and advisor for doctoral, masters, and bachelor students respectively.

However the majority of respondents are against the above idea. The respondents from this category believe that the establishment of this regional learning center is important only for employee of the regional learning center and the governments of the two countries. As it is indicated in their response, for them the purpose of this learning center is just to serve as a shop. They believe that rather its political representation is magnified than its academic role. As participants belief the establishment of this center brings new problem to Ethiopian students of the because the bilateral agreement made between the two countries bring a kind of 'aid' mentality between the academic group(students and supervisors) and creates an atmosphere which hampers academic freedom of learners. In addition to this, it also serves as a means for both sides to minimize cost of education.

Therefore, from the majority of respondents' response it can be said that what is termed as a benefit doesn't fully represent majority's idea rather the establishment of the regional center add nothing significant in their academic maneuver.

5.1.4 Perceived Challenges in Relation to the Activities Performed by Unisa

For the sake of simplicity it is better to classify these challenges in to two realms. First problems arise within and outside the operation of the university.

5.1.4.1 Within Unisa ERLC

- As respondents response the major problem that they faced in relation to their activity with Unisa was that the university's academic staff totally forget and even fail to consider Ethiopian students as their supervisee. Besides students feel that they don't even respond their questions timely and they believe that the establishment of the regional learning center here in Ethiopia becomes the source of this underestimation and willingness to interact with each other because they feel that the Unisa's presence in Ethiopia is just for assisting Ethiopian in 'aid' not as they did to other nations in trade therefore it is because of this mentality that the supervisors poorly treated Ethiopian students. To supplement the above idea the majority of the respondents said that together with this poor treatment their academic trip was also cancelled in order to minimize cost and they fear that all these problems have direct impact on the quality of their academic achievement. Likewise they don't even predict when they finished their study because due to supervisors' failure to respond timely the time that they expect to finish their study becomes open like the program itself. Due to these reasons they fail to consider themselves as a student rather feel bored.
- On the other hand, the university's admission criteria don't let Ethiopian students to pursue their education and as participants response it was also inconsistent and does not have room for Ethiopian academic award. Besides, the amount of tuition fee that the university sets is not affordable for Ethiopian middle income citizens and also most of the field of specializations currently working in their full capacity particularly to students in Ethiopia regional learning center is in social science and humanity. As the response got from the participant of the study the university is not encourage those hard sciences that need laboratory and related issue rather most of the courses that the university wants to offer here is out of natural science.
- What was observed also that the universities don't have any kind of academic collaboration in any of the higher education institutions in the country particularly in teaching-learning, research and in community service activity.
- During my interview session at Unisa I can see that the degree of freedom to disseminate information about the university's function was totally secret. In order to get any information about the university permission must got from the Pretoria office. This information can be students' enrollment, their curriculum design content and organization, student progression and achievement, the university's agreement with Ethiopian government and so many things are closed.

5.1.4.2 Out of Unisa ERLC

- As it was shown in the respondents response among the problems exhibited in working with Unisa was Ethiopian students' inability to cope up the distance learning style. As it is indicated it is because students were still expecting everything from their supervisors as they did in conventional learning. And those respondents from Unisa believes that any kind of delay can potentially be created due to this problem even the problem related to delay in supervisors response was not because they fail to cooperate with students rather it is due to the poor infrastructure that the country has.
- The other problem related to the above is that because of the poor telecommunication technology in the country the availability of resource materials and any information related to the study program also delayed.
- As it was shown from the respondents' reaction, there was conflict of interest between Ministry of Education and Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency regarding the issue of accreditation, quality assurance, recognition of qualification, and registration of the university as other cross border higher education institutions in the country.
- Lack of control by the responsible government body as to how Unisa is working in the country. This means that there was no any clear guidelines that control Unisa's activities; if it is working in line with the country's policy, whether the courses are relevant for Ethiopian context, if the research conducted are important for contemporary Ethiopian problems.
- Lack of preparedness by the organs that are responsible for issues related to higher education in general and cross border higher educations in particular. As it is depicted in the discussion section the country didn't have any policy for cross border higher education institutions. They all simply coming and operating without any kind of control.

5.2 Conclusions

From the findings of this study the following conclusions were dawn.

5.2.1 Functions of Unisa in Teaching- learning, Research, and Community Service

The Higher Education Proclamation no. 650/2009 under Article 4states that, the objectives of higher education are to prepare knowledgeable, skilled, and attitudinally mature graduates in numbers with demand- based proportional balance of fields and disciplines so that the country shall become internationally competitive. And also responsible to promote and enhance research focusing on knowledge and technology transfer consistent with the country's priority needs by design and provide community and consultancy services that shall cater to the developmental needs of the country. But the findings of the study shows that Unisa was engaged in only on research area without comprising the teaching learning and the community outreach as its primary objective. Therefore, Unisa was not performing its activities in line with the country's higher education proclamation.

5.2.2 Rationales for the establishment of the Regional Learning Center

The Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia are desirous of creating a framework for development of cooperation in the field of higher learning to their mutual benefit and the benefit of the societies they serve as it is believed that the establishment of such Unisa's learning center in Ethiopia shall play a significant role in the development of human resources and greater scientific and technological capabilities of Ethiopia which will ultimately contribute and enhance the economic and living condition of the population at large. Even though the regional learning center was established with the above intentions but what has been found in the findings of the study shows that the establishment of the learning center has nothing to do with the major goal expected to be achieved by the university i.e. accelerating academic achievement. Therefore, the essence for establishing the regional learning center was not properly address the implicit intention understood by the stakeholders.

5.2.3 Opportunities got due to the establishment the Branch Campus

When trying to address opportunities related to cross-border higher education is the need to determine its existing scope and the role it plays in any given country, at a specific moment in time because for countries like Ethiopia where limited capacity in absorbing the unmet demands for higher education is large, the availability of cross border higher education becomes a mechanism to share the burden in this area.

This can be either in terms of enrolment or in terms of areas of knowledge that cannot be dealt with using national resources. It may also provide new pedagogical or curricular approaches that help modernize and update national higher education and bring new technologies or approaches to teaching into the country without ignoring its impact in creating additional job opportunity for the country. However what was found out from the finding of this study shows that the both the number of enrollment and graduates were negligible, knowledge and technology transfer was not properly gained by the respondents, and even if the presence of the regional learning contribute for the creation of job opportunity for administrative workers but as per the findings of the study the university's opportunity in this regard was minimal. From this it can be said that the opportunities expected to achieve from the establishment of this regional learning center was not yet achieved.

5.2.4 Challenges Perceived in relation to the Establishment of the Branch Campus

As per the Higher Education Proclamation 650/2009, institutions shall develop quality standards, undertake academic audit on a periodic basis, follow-up and rectify the deficiencies revealed by the audit, and maintain appropriate documentation of the audit, activities undertaken and of the ensuing results, and submit such documentations regularly to the Higher Education Relevant and Quality Agency. In other words, institutions shall be responsible to give practical effect to appropriate recommendations by the Agency on quality enhancement measures that have to be

taken. However the findings of this research shows that Unisa and the agency do not have any operational relationship in this regard.

Parallely, as per the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation every institution shall undertake research that shall take into account the priority needs of the country and enable the country to solve its challenges and build its capacity through technology transfer, equip students with basic knowledge and skills that enable them to undertake further and relevant studies and research. Besides every institution shall have an institutionalized system that enables it to carry out planned research and conduct joint research projects with other national and international institutions, research centers, and industries. But the findings of this study shows that the focus of the research is more of in international agendas but if the student wants to conduct research pertaining problems in the country it becomes a source of problem because of advisor assignment. The other important finding that was depicted in this study was the university had no any academic like joint research collaboration in a single local higher education and all of the of the programs delivered in the university was also concentrated on social science and humanity without the natural science dimension.

Furthermore, Article 2 of the Memoranda of Understanding states that, Although maintain the right to offer its full spectrum of programs and offerings to anyone who may be interested to register accordingly, the parties confirm that the mission of Unisa in offering distance learning programmes referred to above are relevant and in line with the needs, policy, and strategy of Ethiopia and consistent with Unisa's mission and objectives and subject areas in which Unisa has expertise.

From this it can be concluded that even if the University produces graduates in social science and humanities but currently the government of Ethiopia rushes to realize its development by supporting the industrial sector through competent graduates from science and engineering area than the social science. In other word, 70:30 policy mix of graduates is the current priority that the government wants to achieve at 2014. Therefore, the university's role in assisting the country's capacity building according to the priorities set is minimal.

Article 1 of the MoU signed by Ministry of education and Unisa all credentials, such as certificates, diplomas and degrees issued by the university shall be fully accredited by the ministry of education of the federal democratic republic of Ethiopia in accordance with its norms, while respecting international standards and Unisa's identity. But the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation 351/2003 gives HERQA the responsibility to recognize qualifications offered in higher education institutions. Together with this issue it is also the agency's responsibility to accredit programs offered and assure the relevance and quality assurance of higher education institutions. However, the finding of this study and the above signed memoranda of understanding shows that there is tension revealed between the Ministry of Education and that of HERQA.

As it is stated under article of this proclamation institutions shall establish efficient systems for statistical data collection and information exchange among themselves, their units, and with the Ministry, shall publish accurate, detailed, and comprehensive annual educational and financial

statistical data. The statistical data shall be published, except in circumstances of force majeure, within 120 days after the end of an academic year. Also without prejudice to legal restrictions, governmental and non-governmental organizations shall have the responsibility, upon request, to cooperate in providing the necessary information to academic staff or students who undertake research. But the findings of this study shows that no room for giving information regarding the university's activity. Even what the findings of the study depicted that students were not aware of the operation of the university clearly. Due to this reason, the communication between their supervisors and co-supervisors were below standard. Therefore, this shows that the university's interaction to the outside stakeholders in Ethiopia lacks transparency. Specifically, due to lack of communication between supervisors and students quality of their education suffers.

5.3 Recommendations

As can be realized in the concluding section above and in the discussions of the preceding chapters, there are a number of problems worth addressing in relation to practices, opportunities, and challenges of cross border higher education in Ethiopia particularly in the case of Unisa Ethiopia Regional Learning Center. The rise in cross border tertiary education services worldwide is not only a source of new opportunities for counties but it has also potential problems that seek immediate attention and action. Existing national frameworks for quality assurance, accreditation in cross border higher education are often insufficiently prepared to address the new challenges from trade and private provision. In many developing countries, such frameworks do not exist. Among the different forms of trade in tertiary education, programme and institution mobility carry the greater risk, because they are new, less stable and often do not fall within the scope of quality assurance and accreditation systems. In particular, distance education is potentially the most problematic given that quality assurance and accreditation systems are harder to adapt to this form of teaching and because this mode of trade can more easily escape the control of relevant authorities (OECD, 2004a). Therefore, I would like to acknowledge that to try and provide workable recommendations is equally complicated. It is worth nothing that the brief suggestions given below are made at the backdrop of this acknowledged complexity of the issue.

5.3.1 Recommendations for the Government

- The trinity of teaching/learning, research and service to society has traditionally guided the evolution of universities and their contribution to the social, cultural, human, scientific and economic development of a nation. But the combination of these roles is disregarded by the University of South Africa as cross border higher education provider. Therefore, it will be possible to enrich our education system if mechanisms are created to create deep collaboration of the University of South Africa with the local public and private higher education institutions.
- Although all Unisa programs are accredited in South Africa, the Ministry of Education needs to verify the accreditation programs of Unisa by the Higher Education Relevance

and Quality Agency in Ethiopia as Unisa operates in different environmental settings in order to assure quality distance learning provision and to safeguard the public interest.

- As per the higher education proclamation 351/2003 and 650/2009 accreditation of credentials is the mandate of other institution. For instance HERQA accredited degree programs as autonomous agency not the Ministry of Education. Certificates and diplomas are presumably accredited by TVET. This must be clearly stipulated by MOE. Unless if Unisa gives certificates and diploma, degrees in its name before getting accreditation from the in-country agency mutual recognition of the credentials need to be sorted out before the commencement of the programs. Otherwise equivalence will be undertaken by Ministry of Education. Therefore, in order to maximize the benefit and minimize the risk related to cross border higher education in Ethiopia, it will be better if the Ministry of Education acknowledges the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency's autonomy and capacitate the agency to be responsive to the changing global world.
- It will be promising if the government creates conducive environment for comprehensive, fair and transparent system of registration and licensing of cross-border higher education providers wishing to operate in our country. And assist the establishment of a comprehensive capacity for reliable quality assurance and accreditation of cross-border higher education provision, recognizing that quality assurance and accreditation of cross-border higher education provision involves both sending and receiving countries and consult and coordinate amongst the various competent bodies for quality assurance and accreditation both nationally and internationally.

5.3.2 Recommendations for Unisa Ethiopia Regional Learning Center

- To sustain and assure quality distance learning provision, it will be better if Unisa creates collaboration to work with higher education institutions in the country in teaching-learning, research, and community service. This can be easily arranged through memorandum of agreement with in-country public or private higher education institutions.
- The mission of Unisa in offering distance learning programs should be relevant and in line with the needs, policy and strategy of the country. It will be beneficial if all the university's program is consistent with the mission and objectives and limited to those subject areas for which Unisa has expertise.
- Curriculum and instruction: the content and credit of all programs must be the same and consistent with those offered on campus. The requirements of courses must also be consistent with the national norm for comparable degrees in higher education. To guarantee quality distance learning program provision, the objectives of the programs must be of such nature that they can be achieved through distance study.
- Student support: proper training support must be provided. Provision of assistance to students who may experience difficulty in the program needs to be addressed. Unisa also

make sure that students admitted to a distance learning programs must satisfy all the requirements for admission, high and timely interaction between instructors and students and among students is a typical feature of such program and deserve high attention.

- When students learning and research are administered, it will take place under circumstances that include firm students' identification and assure the integrity of students work.
- Student learning outcome: student learning outcomes are the best performance indicator of distance learning programs. Hence documented assessment of student achievement is conducted in each course and at the completion of the program and serves to compare student performance to intended learning outcome.

5.3.3 Recommendation for Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency

From the responsibility and accountability of the agency in protecting stakeholders from un accredited cross border higher education institution it will be possible if the agency creates a link with international quality agency and make its system proactive.

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