Challenges Facing the Leadership of Ethiopian Higher Learning Institutions in Assuring Quality Education

Mulugeta M. Abay[1]

Nylon Marishane[2]

[1]Department of Education Leadership and Management,
University of South Africa, Pretoria,
South Africa
[2]Department of Education Management and Policy Studies,
Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria,
South Africa

Abstract

This article explores the internal and external factors that affect the leaders of Higher learning institutions (HLIs) in their attempt to ensure the quality of education. Higher learning institutions are physical spaces that equip learners with advanced knowledge, skills, and appropriate attitude toward various disciplines and fields. However, the challenge for most developing countries is that their higher education systems lack quality education, which has implications for leadership. Owing to the complex nature of the subject matter under investigation, a mixed-methods research approach was followed in the study, undertaken in four HLIs (two public and two private). The focus on leadership was motivated by a generally agreed view that leadership is the key to ensuring quality education in HLIs. However, according to the study, some internal and external factors challenge the Ethiopian HLI leadership in its effort to provide quality education in this sector. The study has revealed that the quality of higher education and students' abilities is unsatisfactory. Moreover, the study findings show that, among the many factors, inadequate competence of incoming students, low quality of general education (Grades 1–12), the inefficiency of the leadership, unsatisfactory teaching and learning practice, inadequate qualification and competence of instructors and inadequacy of teaching facilities and resources are the main challenges of the HLIs leadership in the task of assuring quality education.

1. Introduction

Education has become the most powerful avenue through which solutions can be provided to address the economic challenges brought about by global competition (Semela, 2011). In particular, the significance of higher education is recognised in improving the economy, fostering development, and transforming the welfare of society (Pillay, 2011; Aksu, 2018; Castells, 2009). Muhammad, Muhammad, and Fazalur (2011) and Haris (2013) observe that the quality of higher education plays a decisive role

in national development and the transformation of societies. Quality education in higher education produces competent graduates for the world of work, equipped with adequate knowledge, skills, and the appropriate attitude. Producing qualified graduates is essential for every HLI stakeholder: the government, the community, institutions, employers, and students. The ultimate goal of any form of business organisation, including HLIs, is customer satisfaction. Satisfaction is attained when the required standards, expectations and goals are fully achieved. It is also said to be gained when input and process produce satisfactory output that fits the intended purpose (Shibeshi, Mekonnen, Semela & Endawoke, 2009). Therefore, to achieve Goal 4 (quality education) of the United Nations' sustainable development goals adopted in 2015 (United Nations], 2015) and to cope with the current competition of the global economy and technological advancement, quality in Ethiopian higher education needs to be given much attention by all stakeholders.

HLIs in Ethiopia have expanded massively in the last 28 years, increasing access to tertiary education countrywide. This expansion involves reforming the existing HLIs, introducing new fields of study, accrediting new private HLIs, and opening new public HLIs. Accordingly, by the end of the 2021 academic year, the number of these institutions had reached 322 (46 public and 276 private) (Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency [HERQA], 2021). Likewise, student enrolment in undergraduate and postgraduate courses (regular and non-regular) totalled 1,008,614, of whom 903,614 (89.5%) were in public institutions and 105,000 (10.4%) in private institutions (Ministry of Science and Higher Education [MOSHE], 2021). However, the massive increment in the number of institutions and students poses challenges to HLIs in assuring quality education and producing competent graduates for the needs of the labour market (MoE, 2018). Therefore, there has been an increased interest in the government focusing on assuring educational quality through improving material and human resources and implementing reform processes and quality assurance systems (FDRGE, 2003). Quality assurance refers to the policies, activities, procedures, and actions needed to enhance and maintain quality (Woodhouse, 1999).

2. Aim of Study

The performance of each Ethiopian HLI in terms of quality education, social responsiveness, and efficiency is not beyond question, concern, and dispute (MoE, 2018). Moreover, a review of some researchers' work regarding quality education indicates that HLIs are overwhelmed by several challenges in assuring the quality of education, which implies that the graduates are not well equipped with the required competencies (Negash, 2006; Teshome, 2004; MoE, 2018). Therefore, this study explores the current status of quality education in HLIs of Ethiopia and the challenges of HLIs leadership in ensuring quality education in that country.

3. Methodology

To get the view of the various stakeholders of HLI, a mixed methods research methodology and design were applied in this empirical study by employing qualitative and quantitative research methods. Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher merges components of quantitative and qualitative research methods and approaches such as data collection, analysis, viewpoints, and inference techniques to obtain an in-depth understanding of and justification for a given subject under study (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2007; Maxwell (2018). This approach is helpful for a better understanding of multiple issues by complementing or triangulating one set of findings with another and enhancing the validity of inferences (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

A mixed methods design is employed in this study because leadership and quality education in HLIs are multifaceted issues requiring various stakeholders' viewpoints and data collection from multiple sources to better understand the topic under study. The mixed methods approach is useful for exploring the internal and external factors that challenge the leadership by collecting data from

various sources.

Out of the 322 (46 public and 276 private) higher learning institutions located in different parts of the country, using stratified and random sampling techniques, four (two public and two private) HLIs were selected as the targeted sites for this study. For the quantitative component of this study, multi-stage, systematic and random sampling techniques were applied. A sample comprising 320 respondents (160 regular undergraduate students and 160 permanent instructors) was drawn from four HLIs. The quantitative data of the study were generated through self-administered structured survey questionnaires. The response rate for students and instructors was 93.7%. This response rate was satisfactory as it would generate sufficient data for subsequent analysis.

For the qualitative component of this study, sample selection was made using a purposive sampling technique to get a representative sample covering different characteristics. By applying purposive sampling, based on the researcher's knowledge and judgment, one academic staff member, one student, one top-level leadership from each sampled HLI, and one professional/researcher engaged in higher education were selected. This sampling generated 13 participants for the semi-structured and unstructured one-to-one interviews. In addition to one-to-one interviews, focus group discussions with the student councils, visiting facilities, and referring to documents of the four sampled HLIs were also conducted. Various measures, such as pilot testing, triangulation, member check, and peer scrutiny, were applied to assure the quality of the study. Finally, the data collection task was performed based on ethical principles applicable to social science research.

4. Aspects of Leadership

4.1 'Leadership' as a concept

Leadership is an everyday phenomenon that almost everybody has experienced in some way. It is a universal human experience observed in many animal species, such as patriarchal gorillas and matriarchal elephants. Leadership is recognised as an essential element for the existence of an organisation and as crucial for its performance and achievement (Goleman, 2000; Lumby, 2012; Thompson, 2000). A leader can influence others, and leadership is what leaders do (Robbins & Coulter, 2012). Leadership influences others and facilitates individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives (Yukl, 2013). It is an everyday phenomenon that one experiences in everyday life in social groups, schools, religious organisations, businesses, and public agencies. It is also evident in the international scene, state and national government, and local communities. Leadership makes the difference, and it can be good or better or best; in some circumstances, it can also be bad or worse (for example, in a bankrupt organisation). Leadership has been built into the human consciousness by one's parents since birth, owing to the long nurturing period necessary for continued human existence (Bass, 2008).

Leadership is the process of influencing the behaviour of others with the motive to attain certain desired results (Armstrong, 2012). To lead people is to inspire, guide and influence people to achieve intended results. Even if an organisation has all the monetary resources to excel, it may fail miserably if its leadership does not inspire followers to fulfil their tasks successfully. Followers are crucial for leaders' existence and success (Yukl, 2013). Therefore, the role of followers deserves due consideration in the leadership process. Leadership is an intensive activity with a shared aim and given norms and rules that guide how to behave and perform a given task successfully (Kooskora & Isok, 2014). It is the process of influencing the activities of a group or followers' activities in their effort towards achieving a given common goal (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2017). For Northouse (2016), leadership is a process in which an individual influences a follower to attain a common goal. The approach emphasises that leadership is an interactive two-way process between followers and leaders. In other words, a leader affects followers and is also affected by the followers. Most of these definitions reflect the assumption that leadership is a process whereby an individual exerts influence over followers to guide and facilitate relational activities in a group to achieve an organisational goal

or goals.

The type of leadership applied in different functions depends on the contexts, situations, working environment, culture, new regulations and laws, organisational complexities, psycho-social developments and information overload (Amabile, Schatzel, Moneta & Kramer, 2004). The leadership process is also influenced by the type of organisation, the nature of the work performed by the leader's unit, and the external environment (Yukl, 2013). From this viewpoint, to be effective, leaders need to adapt their style to cope with the demands of various situations. Understandably, people are not born with leadership skills; however, the quality and skills of leadership can be developed over time by facing the circumstances (Zafar, Hmedat, Chaubey & Rehman, 2019).

4.2 Leadership in Higher Learning Institutions

Today, the role of higher education in developing the national economy is fundamental in any nation (Kohoutek, Pinheiro, Cabelkova & Smidova, 2017). The existence of rapid economic, socio-cultural, and technological changes in the world necessitates educational institution leaders to make their institutions better and more competitive than before (Stevens, 2012). It is indisputable that HLIs leaders can significantly influence their institutions and the larger society in many ways, directly or indirectly. "Leadership is considered as a major factor in the success of the institution" (Zafar et al., 2019:37). Leading an HLI is becoming more challenging due to the high expectations of society, high expectations of nations in dealing with national and global issues, increasing student numbers and expansion of programmes (Kezar, & Holcombe, 2017; Black, 2015). More challenges are presented by the HLI's numerous goals, traditional values, and organisational complexity (Mahdinezhad et al., 2018; Zafar et al., 2019). As the global economy becomes increasingly competitive, governments realise that coping with competition depends increasingly on the developing workforce. Dealing with competition needs committed and trained teachers as well as sufficient resources. But they, in turn, require the leadership of highly effective top academic leaders and the support of middle management and other senior leaders (Mahdinezhad et al., 2018; Fraser, 2005; Bush, 2007).

As in other organisations, the leaders in HLIs operate their educational activities at various hierarchical levels (Lumby, 2012). In many contexts, these hierarchies can be divided into three main levels, which are common in many such institutions, namely the departmental (first-line) leadership level, the college/faculty/school (middle) leadership level, and the institutional (top) leadership level. This study focuses on the top-level (president and vice presidents) and mid-level (college/faculty/school deans) leadership positions.

Academic leadership is the concept of collaboration, empowerment of others, teamwork, and the art of forming alliances or networks (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Leadership in higher education is defined as the combined knowledge, attitudes, and skills of academics needed for leading teaching and learning, consultancy services and research activities in inspirational, inventive, and critically contemplative ways (Aspland & Patel, 2014). Academic leadership refers to building a community of scholars by setting direction to attain common goals and objectives through empowering staff and faculty (Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002). Academic leaders must empower others by providing resources needed to do their job efficiently, helping faculty to acquire the skills and knowledge required to perform their work effectively, rewarding and recognising faculty for effective performance, and sharing power. All these actions stimulate change.

5. Results and Discussion

Two major findings emerged from the study. The first finding relates to quality education in the Ethiopian higher education sector. The second finding relates to the challenges facing leaders in higher learning institutions in assuring quality education in that country.

5.1   The state of quality education in Ethiopian higher learning institutions

In this study, the quality of education (students' performance) is approached in terms of the learners' perceived improvement in their skills, knowledge, and attitude as measured by the students, in addition to their instructors' level of satisfaction supported by document analysis and interviews for better triangulation. Based on their learning experience, students were asked through the structured questionnaire to evaluate whether or not their quality of learning was up to their expectations. The data collected from the four sampled HLIs show that 75 (50%) of the 150 respondents perceived their knowledge, skill, and attitude as below their expectations during their teaching and learning. Further, 57 students (38%) perceived that the quality of education they acquired was up to standard, and the remaining 18 (12%) failed to judge. These figures show that students' overall satisfaction with the quality of learning proficiencies gained during their studies was low.

Based on their teaching and learning experience, instructors were also asked to evaluate students' competency. In this regard, the perception of instructors from the four sampled HLIs show that 82 (55%) instructors of the 150 respondents perceived that the student's knowledge, skill, and attitude during their teaching and learning were below standard, whereas 52 (35%) of them perceived it was up to par. The remaining 19 (11%) failed to judge their students' capacity status. The findings from the quantitative data of this study indicated that the quality of education or students' ability is not satisfactory, as measured by instructors' and students' perceptions.

Further analyses of the interview data were conducted to substantiate the above findings. These analyses revealed that almost all instructors and the top-level leaders interviewed believed student learning capacity was low. From the study's qualitative data, it can be understood that concern about low-quality education is a major issue among instructors and the HLI leadership. These qualitative data findings complement the results of the quantitative data regarding the existence of a problem in the quality education provision of the HLIs of Ethiopia. Additionally, most students are not actively engaged in the teaching process. The motivation of students to read reference books from the libraries and their active participation in teaching and learning activities is low, and their motivation to acquire the necessary knowledge is lacking. One of the academic staff interviewees from a public university stated:

> *In the Ethiopian context, professional competence is not as important as certificates to secure employment opportunities. As a result, most students who pursue their education in the HLIs of Ethiopia are more concerned with receiving degrees, regardless of their learning quality. In such circumstances where professional competence is not appreciated, it is not easy to expect competent learners.*

According to a study conducted by a team of Ethiopian researchers (MoE, 2018), the impact of the government's interventions on assuring the quality of higher education was unsatisfactory. The reduced education quality was noticeable across the Ethiopian higher education system (MoE, 2018). Based on document analysis and the views gathered from academic staff, students, and the leadership on teaching and learning processes in the sampled HLIs, this study proved that the quality of education offered in the four HLIs was below standard. In other words, the student proficiencies gained during their studies were found to be low. Thus, from the quantitative and qualitative data analysis, it can be seen that the provision of quality education at HLIs in Ethiopia is below standard.

5.2   Challenges facing the higher learning institution leadership in assuring the quality of education

Using the open-ended questions of the structured questionnaire, respondents had the opportunity to list the external and internal factors that affected the leadership of HLIs in their effort to ensure the quality of education. Instructors and students who thought the students' performance (quality of education) was not up to standard responded accordingly. The frequently mentioned reasons offered

by respondents were counted and are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: External and internal factors affecting the leadership of HLIs in efforts to assure the quality of education

*S.N.	Reasons identified as challenges to HLI leadership in assuring quality education	Number of respondents
1	Poor educational background (primary & secondary school) of students (inadequate competence of incoming students); low quality of general education (Grades 1–12) (external)	58
2	The inefficiency of the leadership (internal)	51
3	Unsatisfactory teaching and learning practice (internal)	50
4	Inadequate qualification and competency of instructors (poor teaching capacity of teachers) (internal)	48
5	Inadequacy of teaching and learning facilities and resources (internal)	45
6	Poor engagement capacity of students in the teaching and learning process (internal)	42
7	The low motivation of students to learn (internal)	40
8	The low motivation of teachers in the teaching process (internal)	31
9	Low employability rate of graduate students (external)	27
10	Insufficient financial resources (internal & external)	19
11	Insufficient support and follow-up from Ethiopian Education and Training Authority (external)	15
12	The large size of the student population, particularly in public HLIs (external)	12
13	Insufficient support from the Ethiopian Ministry of education (external)	11
14	Insufficient support from the industry and other employers (external)	10
15	The inefficiency of administrative/support staff and lab technicians (internal)	10
16	The problem of Ethiopian education policy (external)	7
17	Insufficient support from professional associations (external)	5
18	The poor economic condition of the country (external)	3
19	Lack of integration between indigenous knowledge and the modern education system (external)	2
20	Linking education with politics (external)	2

 * Serial number

As can be deduced from Table 1, the study revealed various internal and external challenges affecting the leadership of HLIs to ensure the quality of education. The following sections discuss the most frequently mentioned reasons behind the challenges using document analysis and interviews.

5.2.1 Inadequate competence of incoming students

The quality of higher education is also related to the quality of secondary schools (Michaelowa, 2007). According to Michaelowa (2007), great differences in the quality of educational institutions at the secondary level may be detrimental to tertiary education quality. Students need to be equipped and well-prepared for higher education, starting from the lower levels of schooling. As highlighted in the literature review, poor quality education at lower levels harms students' performance in higher education. From document analysis, reading assessments of young Ethiopian students (Grades 2 and 3) conducted in 2010 (Research Training Institute [RTI], 2010) show their poor capacity for reading and comprehension. By taking Grades 4 and 8 as particular levels of investigation, the Ethiopian national learning assessment was conducted on student learning attainment in the years 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2015 (NAE, 2001; NOE, 2004; GEQAEA, 2008; NEAEA, 2013; 2016; 2019; NAE, 2001a; NOE, 2004a; GEQAEA, 2008a). In all five years, the national composite mean percentage scores of students' performance in Grade 4 (in four key subject areas) and Grade 8 (in five key subject areas) were less than 50% (the minimum passing mark). Similarly, the assessment result of students in Grades 10 and 12 for the years 2010, 2014, and 2018 (NAE, 2010; NEAEA, 2019) in five subject areas were

also found to be less than 50%. Moreover, an insufficient number of students achieved 50% and above in the Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (which is written at the end of Grade 10) and in the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (which is written in Grade 12) (MoE, 2018a; 2016/17; 2017). The low scores of students at various assessment levels demonstrate the poor quality of general education. This has an enormous influence on the quality of higher education. A Professional engaged in higher education who was asked about his view on the above argument stated:

> It is believed, by many scholars, that the quality of student learning is the outcome of the aggregate efforts made at the various levels of educational hierarchies. The quality of education in HLIs is closely related to the quality of the education system in the lower tiers of the education ladders. Poor quality education provision at the lower levels of the education system inevitably has a repercussion on the quality of higher education. The poor quality of the general education system is a big challenge to higher learning institutions' leadership in ensuring the quality of higher education.

In this regard, an instructor interviewee from the public university portrayed the challenges facing his university as follows:

> Many students joined our department without adequate academic grounding and faced tough courses. During the teaching and learning process, due to their low competency, the students are not fully engaged; their class participation and learning motivation are low. Moreover, their communication skill is poor, especially in English, the medium of instruction in Ethiopian HLIs. In such circumstances, we face difficulties in implementing the student-centred teaching methodology.

As one of the quality assurance officer interviewees from a private university reported:

> The learning capability of incoming students is low; admitting many students without adequate academic preparation is like sowing on uncultivated farming land. It also incurs an extra cost, energy, and time on the part of the higher learning institutions to mitigate their deficiencies through remedial classes.

In such circumstances, it might be difficult for HLI leadership and instructors to educate and produce competent professionals who become fruitful in their future occupations. However, one of the academic staff interviewees opposed this viewpoint, stating:

> The problem of the incompetence of incoming students is a vicious circle. I heard many academics give the poor academic background of incoming students as a cause for the poor quality of education. Of Course, it has implications for the quality of teaching and learning. But these students were taught by teachers who graduated from the institutions which trained them. Instead of complaining about the performance of incoming students, they should try to produce competent teachers who can produce competent students. At the same time, they need to empower low-performing students by designing remedial measures and identifying their weak side. In my view, instead of pointing our finger at others, it is better to assess our approaches to teaching and learning. So, the HLI leadership should design a system where academically incompetent students are supported by their teachers.

The main issue emerging from the above analysis is that the competence of incoming students from the pre-higher education classes is likely to have implications for students' achievement levels in HLIs. It is also noteworthy that such situations may cause a serious challenge to HLI leadership in assuring the quality of education in their institutions. Therefore, to attain quality education at the higher education level, it is vital to give attention to improving the quality of general education.

5.2.2 Unsatisfactory teaching and learning practice

Teaching and learning that nurtures the continued engagement of students in the learning process

are believed to enrich students' competency. Learner-centred teaching enhances the confidence and knowledge of students (Weimer, 2013). The pattern and format of instruction vary from course to course and programme to programme, depending on the nature of the course and the teaching and learning methods outlined in the curriculum. Instructors are expected to implement active learning methods such as presentations, group discussions, project works, role-playing, case studies, and seminars.

In the case of public universities, findings from the interview data indicated that the lecture method (teacher-centred) was the dominant teaching method applied to the teaching and learning process. We found that inexperienced teachers' lack of teaching methodology skills, high student-staff ratios, poor engagement capacity of students in the teaching and learning process, and inadequate facilities made it difficult to implement the student-centred approaches effectively. Similarly, the dominant method of teaching and learning in the sampled private HLIs was the lecture (teacher-centred) method. However, student-centred pedagogy makes students for stimulating and develops their critical thinking and sense of responsibility (Serin, 2018; Froyd & Simpson, 2008). Engaging students more actively in the learning process is beneficial for students to improve their competence (Anyanwu & Iwuamadi, 2015; Knights & Woods, 2005). Academic staff, students, and the leadership in the four sampled HLIs were asked about their level of satisfaction regarding the overall quality of the teaching and learning process. Their responses indicated low satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning because the mode of delivery was not practice-orientated or up-to-date, and students were not particularly engaged in the process. Most respondents reported a shortage of teaching facilities and resources that hindered the current teaching and learning practice, especially in public HLIs. In this connection, an academic staff interviewee described the situation:

We are applying the nationally harmonised curriculum. However, due to the lack of adequate laboratories, workshops and workplaces for practical learning, implementing the practical aspect of teaching and learning is difficult.

Regarding student engagement in the teaching and learning process, a member of the middle-level leadership interviewee explained:

It is believed that teaching and learning without student engagement can't be considered effective learning; even though our academic staff members are committed to enhancing students' capacity, they are disappointed by the low participation of students during class time.

During the discussion with student representatives, it was noted that teaching and learning activities are also affected by students' low engagement and motivation towards their learning. One interviewee reported that

the current low employability rate of graduate students has implications for student engagement and motivation in the learning process because most students aren't confident about securing their future careers.

It is necessary to continuously assess the teaching and learning process and take corrective measures by identifying the gaps to improve the quality of education. In this regard, an academic staff interviewee pointed out that

in order to improve the quality of education, the teaching and learning process should be supported by research. However, in most HLIs, including my institution, it is rare to find a research-based solution to the problem of the teaching and learning aspects. This problem is attributed to the professional incompetency and inadequacy of academic staff in undertaking research.

As reported by many interviewees, there is no proper balance in public HLIs between theory and practice in the teaching and learning process, particularly in natural sciences, engineering, and

health sciences. In connection to this, a student interviewee said,

"owing to the mismatch between the increasing number of students and the available equipment and laboratory facilities, students learn more theoretical than practical aspects of the courses".

Another interviewee added, "*lectures without adequate practical sessions are common in the teaching process; we lack practical knowledge*". Academic staff respondents from the two public universities held a similar view that practice-orientated teaching and learning methodology is deficient in most programmes due to the shortage of lab facilities.

Academic staff members are expected to fully engage in their teaching and learning activities and provide academic advice and support to their students. But the leadership interviewees from the sampled HLIs cited a lack of staff engagement and commitment as a serious problem in implementing efficient teaching and learning and academic counselling. Some academic staff members are engaged in moonlighting – with or without the knowledge of the employer HLI to generate additional income. Such extra work may hamper the teaching and research activities and students' academic advice services. The main cause of moonlighting is the low remuneration scale of academic staff.

Student representatives from public universities were not happy with the academic advice services provided by their universities. An academic staff interviewee confirmed that:

"adequate academic advice is not given to students. Because of the large student class sizes and high workload of instructors, providing proper academic advice and follow-up becomes difficult".

During our observation, we also noticed that many staff members did not have private offices. As noted during interviews with academic staff and students, none of the sampled HLI offered organised, consistent or planned tutorial services to students with academic deficiencies. The lack of continuous supervision and follow-up by HLI leadership in the teaching and learning process also raises questions about the efficiency of the leadership.

5.2.3 Inadequate qualification and competence of instructors

Instructors are the frontline implementers of the teaching and learning processes designed in the curriculum. Although there are many other contributing factors, it is believed that the academic attainment of HLI students depends mainly on instructors' professional competency (capacity and experience). A significant correlation exists between instructors' professional competencies and HLI students' school attainment (Sahin, 2014). The role of academic staff members is vital in enhancing student learning competency by applying appropriate teaching methodologies. The quality of education, the provision of service to the wider community, and the relevance of research output are directly affected by the quality, availability, and sufficiency of academic staff in any educational institution. Since the academic staff members of HLIs are an indispensable resource in producing qualified professionals, they must be appropriately qualified, adequately skilled, and sufficiently knowledgeable to provide quality education. Quality teaching demands instructors with appropriate qualifications relevant to the programmes they are appointed to teach. Moreover, they should conduct their teaching and learning activities with commitment and motivation.

Statistics collected from the four sampled HLIs show that the proportion of academic staff members with PhDs, master's and bachelor's degrees are 12%, 80% and 8%, respectively, indicating that most possess master's degrees. The academic level of teaching staff in the four HLIs is far below the standard set by MoE, which demands 30% PhDs and the remaining 70% master's degrees. Regarding academic rank, most of the academic staff (68.8%) are lecturers. From these figures, it can be seen that most of the academic staff members are inexperienced and novice graduates. The shortage of experienced and qualified academic staff is a major problem across the four HLIs.

The leadership of the four institutions, instructors, students, and officials from the ETA agreed with the finding that a shortage of competent and qualified academic staff is critical across the HLIs. As one of the interviewees put it:

Most of the instructors recruited at our university are fresh graduates and lack experience transferring knowledge to their full capacity. They are inexperienced in guiding us to explore essential teaching materials from different sources. Most of the time, they focus more on their lecture notes.

Another interviewee added that "the instructors' teaching skills, motivation and interest in teaching are low. Moreover, they perceive that students' learning capacity is low". Instructors expressed similar views regarding the prevailing problems with academic staff competency and qualification. An interviewee noted that

even though it is insufficient, our university is working hard to upgrade the educational qualification level of instructors by providing long-term (PhD) training in domestic and foreign universities. However, the instructor's ability to teach and conduct research is still unsatisfactory.

The leadership across the four HLIs expressed concern about the shortage of qualified and experienced academic staff in their institutions. In this connection, a middle-level leadership interviewee said:

Our university has a sufficient number of academic staff that matches the minimum requirements of ETA. However, their qualification level and experience are not satisfactory. The number of academic staff with PhD qualifications and long-term experience in teaching is low. Even though we advertise vacant posts, recruiting permanent, experienced PhD-holders from the market is hard.

In addition to the low proportion of qualifications in the mix, instructors' motivation in the teaching process is also not satisfactory. Most instructors from public HLIs relate the low motivation of instructors to the low remuneration scale of the government. A middle-level leadership interviewee explained:

The problem observed in academic staff is not only their professional incompetence but also their low teaching motivation. The motivation of academic staff to teach is low because they are unsatisfied with the existing scale of remuneration.

From the results discussed above, it can be noted that the competence, qualification, and motivation of academic staff at the HLIs are inadequate. In such conditions, ensuring the quality of education and producing competent graduates for the world of work is difficult. These findings suggest the need for more intervention by the institutions' leadership and other concerned bodies to improve the academic competence of the instructors.

5.2.4 Inadequacy of teaching facilities and resources

A significant correlation exists between students' performance and satisfaction with the academic environment and an institution's facilities, such as computer laboratories, laboratories, and libraries (Karemera, Reuben & Sillah, 2003). Therefore, it is necessary to ensure the availability of adequate and updated teaching and learning facilities such as classrooms and lecture halls, a library, access to ICT, laboratories, workshops, and teaching staff offices for quality education. Moreover, equipping these facilities with the necessary resources, such as workshop and laboratory equipment and chemicals, reference books, and journals, is a decisive factor in assuring the quality of education. The absence of basic teaching and learning facilities and resources impacts the quality of education.

During our field observation in the public HLIs, we found that various teaching and learning facilities and resources were available to help the teaching and learning process. On the other hand, a

shortage of facilities and resources was also noted. Moreover, the accessibility of teaching and learning facilities and resources compared to the student population was unsatisfactory. Shortages of up-to-date reference books, computers and ICT facilities, academic staff offices, laboratory and workshop space and equipment, library seating capacity, and classrooms were some of the shortcomings noted during teaching facility observation.

During our observation in both public universities, we noted the absence of an established system of regular maintenance of teaching facilities. Many broken and dysfunctional facilities were not being maintained. Therefore, both universities need an efficient system to oversee the maintenance of damaged teaching facilities and equipment. The sampled private HLIs were in a better position because they fulfilled the minimum requirements set by the ETA during the accreditation and re-accreditation process. However, the slow speed of the internet connection and shortage of staff offices, particularly for part-time academic staff, was observed during the facility visits.

Analysis of the interview data confirmed that the insufficiency of learning facilities for the student population is a major problem across public HLIs. An interviewee described the situation as follows:

> *Getting good updated reference books and seating space in the libraries, particularly during exam periods, are major challenges in our libraries. The library seating capacity is far too small for the existing student population. During exam time, the libraries are overcrowded, and there are occasions when we must wait around until we get a free chair. Moreover, most books students frequently refer to are old and shredded, with many missing pages.*

Another interviewee from a public university described the learning facilities situation by saying that:

> *"the teaching and learning facilities and resources do not progress in parallel with the increasing number of students and staff members, or with the existing expansion of new programmes in the institution".*

Contradicting the claims raised about the library resources, however, a respondent from one of the public universities argued as follows:

> *I don't think the shortage of reading materials is a problem; these days, various learning materials are available from websites. Students can explore plenty of reading materials from different websites. The university library also has adequate books in soft copy (e-books). However, in my observation, students' low interest and reading capacity are major problems.*

A member of the top-level leadership from the public university acknowledged the shortage of laboratories and commented as follows:

> *The laboratories need to be better equipped to meet the needs of the learners. They need more capacity to accommodate the increasing number of students assigned to the programmes each year. The university leadership recognised the insufficiency and serious shortage of practical laboratories and demonstration sites in various university programmes and has been actively working to close the gap by furnishing laboratories, purchasing laboratory materials, creating linkage with nearby industries, and arranging frequent practical field trips to other concerned institutions.*

Our observation of facilities at the public universities revealed that most workshops and laboratories needed to be equipped with basic instruments or sufficient essential chemicals, machines, set-up, and apparatus. In some cases, the space of the laboratories and workshops was insufficient for many students. The group discussants from one of the public universities complained that the insufficiency of the existing laboratories and workshops and skilled laboratory and workshop assistants makes it difficult for most programmes to offer the practical science experiences required.

Moreover, there need to be more computer laboratories and internet-connected computers to serve the students.

The shortage of academic staff office was observed in public universities during facility visits. Concerning the academic staff office, an instructor from a public university stated, "*the academic staff office is inadequate; it is common to see three to seven staff members in one relatively small office*". Another interviewee described the learning facilities situation by saying that "*the teaching and learning facilities and resources do not progress in parallel with the increasing number of students and staff members, or with the existing expansion of new programmes in the institution*". The above findings indicate that the HLIs, particularly the public ones, are not providing adequate teaching and learning facilities. In addition, proper utilisation and maintenance of some existing teaching and learning facilities is a major problem. It is unreasonable to expect skilful and knowledgeable students to appear under these circumstances. The leadership must give more attention to the teaching and learning facility and resource problems.

The study showed that the commitment of the leadership to solving problems on time and the support given to the quality assurance activities of the higher learning institutions is minimal. The leadership also lacks continuous supervision and monitoring of the teaching and learning implementation process. This problem was attributed to the incompetency of the leadership.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the influence of HLI-specific and external environmental factors on the practice of HLI leadership in the target HLIs. The findings indicate that the quality of education and students' abilities are unsatisfactory. Academic staff and student respondents listed several factors that hinder the assurance of quality education; these are considered challenges to the HLI leadership in their effort to assure the quality of education. The study demonstrated that the quality of general education influences the quality of higher education. Therefore, the government, the Education and Training Authority, and the Ministry of Education need to improve the quality of general education. The leadership needs to design effective teaching and learning policy (focusing on student-centred learning) and conduct periodic evaluations of the teaching and learning process. Giving due attention to identifying the challenges in implanting the policy and taking corrective measures to address the identified problems is advisable. Moreover, the leadership needs to create environments conducive to teaching and learning for academic staff and students by improving the adequacy of the teaching and learning facilities and resources, particularly in public HLIs, such as staff offices, laboratory and workshop materials and ICT infrastructure.

The study's findings indicated that the HLI's leadership needs to arrange long-term training (PhD level) for academic staff members in domestic and foreign HLIs and encourage them to conduct more research and enhance their academic rank. It is also advisable to arrange short-term capacity-building training to fill the skill gap identified during staff appraisal to strengthen the competency of instructors. Moreover, it is recommended to enhance the efficiency of the leadership, lab technicians and support staff members through short and long-term training by identifying their skills gaps.

References

Aksu, T. (2018). The concept of quality in higher education. *Journal of educational and instructional studies in the world*, 8(1), 28-34.

Amabile, T. M., Schatzel, E. A., Moneta, G. B., & Kramer, S. J. (2004). Leader behaviours and the work environment for creativity: Perceived leader support. *The Leadership Quarterly, 15,* 5-32.

Anyanwu, S.U. & Iwuamadi, F.N. (2015). Student-centered teaching and learning in higher education: Transition from theory to practice in Nigeria. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 3(8), 349-358.

Armstrong, M. (2012). *Armstrong's handbook of management and leadership: developing effective people skills for better leadership and management* (3rd ed.). London: Kogan page limited.

Bass, B. M. (2008) *Handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial applications*, (4th ed.), New York: Free Press.

Buchanan, D. & Huczynski, A. (2017). *Organisational behaviour* (9th ed.). United Kingdom Edinburgh Gate: Pearson.

Castells, M. (2009). *The role of universities in the development, the economy and society*. Available at: http://www.chet.org.za/papers/role-universities-development-economy-andsociety (accessed 27 March 2020).

Creswell, J. W. & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.).Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

FDRE. (2010). *Education Sector Development Program IV (ESDP IV) 2010/11-2014/2015.* Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), Addis Ababa: Government Printers.

FDRE. (2015). *Education Sector Development Program V (ESDP V), 2015/2016-2019/2020*. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), Addis Ababa: Government Printers.

FDRGE. (2003). *Higher Education Proclamation, No. 351/2003, Federal Negarit-Gazeta.* Federal Democratic Republic Government of Ethiopia (FDRGE), Addis Ababa: Government Printers.

FDRGE. (2016). *Growth and Transformation Plan II (GTP II), 2015/16-2019/20,* Volume I, Federal Democratic Republic Government of Ethiopia (FDRGE), Addis Ababa: National Planning Commission.

Froyd, J., & Simpson, N. (2008). Student-Centred Learning Addressing Faculty Questions about Student-Centred Learning. In Course, Curriculum, Labour, and Improvement Conference 30(11). Washington DC.

GEQAEA. (2008). *Ethiopian Third National Learning Assessment of Grade 4 Students*. General Education Quality Assurance and Examinations Agency (GEQAEA), Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa.

GEQAEA. (2008a). *Ethiopian Third National learning Assessment of Grade 8 Students*. General Education Quality Assurance and Examinations Agency (GEQAEA). Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education.

Goleman, D. (2000). Leadership that gets results. *Harvard business review*, 78(2), 79-90.

Haris, I. (2013). Assessment on the implementation of internal quality assurance at higher education: An Indonesian Report. *Journal of Educational and Institutional Studies in the World*, 3(4), 41-49.

Harvey, L. (2006). Understanding quality, Section B 4.1-1 of ' Introducing Bologna objectives and tools'. In Purser, L. (Ed.), *EUA Bologna Handbook: Making Bologna work*. Raabe: Brussels European University Association and Berlin.

HERQA. (2021). *Statistics on the number of private and public HLIs*. Addis Ababa: Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA).

Johnson, R. B., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Turner, L. A. (2007). Toward a definition of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(2), 12-133.

Karemera, D., Reuben, L.J. & Sillah, M.R. (2003). The effects of academic environment and background characteristics on student satisfaction and performance: The case of South Carolina State University's School of Business. *College Student Journal*, 37(2),298-309.

Kooskora, M. & Isok, P. (2014). Ethical leadership and different leadership archetypes. *International Leadership Journal*, 6(3), 30-52.

Knight, J. K. & Wood, W. B. (2005). Teaching more by lecturing less. Cell Biology Education. 4 (4), 298-310.

Lumby, J. (2012). What do we know about leadership in higher education? The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education's research: Review Paper. *Leadership Foundation for Higher Education*, 1-23.

Maxwell, J. (2018). Mixed Methods Research, In Bruce B. Frey (Eds.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation*, pp.1070-1073. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

MoE. (2016/17). *Education Statistics Annual Abstract, Education Management Information Systems, Ministry of Education (MoE)*. Addis Ababa: Government Printers.

MoE. (2017). *Education Statistics Annual Abstract, for 2015/16 academic year, Education Management Information Systems, Ministry of Education*. Addis Ababa: Government Printers.

MoE. (2018). Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2018-30), Ministry of Education, An Integrated Executive Summary, Education Strategy Centre (ESC), Addis Ababa: Government Printers.

MoE. (2018a). *Education Statistics Annual Abstract*, for 2017/18 academic year, Education Management Information Systems, Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa: Government Printers.

MOSHE. (2021). *Higher Education and Training Statistical Abstract Series I.* Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MOSHE).

Muhammad, H. U., Muhammad A., & Fazalur R. (2011). *Analysis of Quality Indicators of Higher Education in Pakistan. A paper contributed to the 22nd International conference on higher education held at Bilkent University*, Ankara. http://www.intconfhighered.org/FINAL%20Ullah%20full%20text%20.pdf.

NAE. (2001). *Ethiopian First National Learning Assessment of Grade 4 Students, National Agency for Examinations (NAE)*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education.

NAE. (2001a). *Ethiopian First National Learning Assessment of Grade 8 Students, National Agency for Examinations (NAE)*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education.

NAE. (2010). *Ethiopian First National Learning Assessment of Grades 10 and 12 Students, National Agency for Examinations (NAE)*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education.

NEAEA. (2013). *Ethiopian 4th National Learning Assessment of Grades 4 and 8 Pupils, National Educational Assessment and Examinations Agency (NEAEA)*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education.

NEAEA. (2016). *Ethiopian 5th National Learning Assessment of Grades 4 and 8 Students, National Educational Assessment and Examinations Agency (NEAEA)*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education.

NEAEA. (2019). *Summary results of educational assessment and study, National Educational Assessment and Examinations Agency (NEAEA)*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education.

Negash, T. (2006). *Education in Ethiopia: From crisis to the brink of collapse*. Stockholm, Sweden: Elanders Gotab AB.

NOE. (2004). *Ethiopian Second National Learning Assessment of Grade 4 Students, National Organization for Examinations (NOE)*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education.

NOE. (2004a). *Ethiopian Second National Learning Assessment of Grade 8 Students, National Organization for Examinations (NOE)*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education.

Northouse, P. (2016). *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, (7th ed.). California, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Pillay, P. (2011). Higher Education and Economic *Development*. Available at: https://www.chet.org.za/papers/higher-education-and-economic-development-review-literature (accessed 25 March 2020).

Plano Clark, V. & Ivankova, N. (2016). Why use mixed methods research?: Identifying Rationales for Mixing Methods. In: *Mixed Methods Research: A Guide to the field*, pp. 79-104, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Robbins, S. & Coulter, M. (2012). *Management*, (11th ed.). New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc, publishing as Prentice Hall.

RTI. (2010). *Ethiopia Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), Research Training Institute, RTI International (RTI), the Ethiopia Ministry of Education (MoE) and Improving Quality in Primary Education Program (IQPEP)*. Addis Ababa: USAID/Ethiopia.

Sahin, M. (2014). The Relationship between Instructors' Professional Competencies and University Students' School Engagement. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 14(2), 581-584.

Semela, T. (2011). Breakneck expansion and quality assurance in Ethiopian higher education: Ideological rationales and economic impediments. *Higher Education Policy*, 24(3), pp.399-425.

Serin, H. (2018). A comparison of teacher-centered and student-centered approaches in educational settings. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies*, 5(1),164-167.

Shibeshi, A., Mekonnen, D., Semela, T., & Endawoke, Y. (2009). Assessment of Science Education Quality Indicators in Addis Ababa, Bahirdar, and Hawassa Universities. In: *Quality of Higher Education in Ethiopian Public Institutions*. Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies (161-264).

Teshome, Y. (2004). The status and challenges of the Ethiopian higher education system and Its contribution to development.*The Ethiopian Journal of Higher Education*, 1(1), 1-19.

Thompson, M. D. (2000). Gender, leadership orientation, and effectiveness: Testing the theoretical models of Bolman & Deal and Quinn. *Sex Roles*, 42(11–12), 969-992.

UN. (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. United Nations (UN), A/RES/70/1,https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org.

Weimer, M. (2013). *Learner-centered teaching*: *Five key changes to practice*, John Wiley & Sons.

Woodhouse, D. (1999). Quality and Quality Assurance. In *Quality and Internationalisation in Higher Education*. 29-44, OECD-IMHE.

Yukl, G. (2013). *Leadership in organisations*, (8thed.), NewJersey: Pearson Education, Inc., publishing as Prentice Hall.

Zafar, S. T., Hmedat, W., Chaubey, D. S., & Rehman, A. (2019. An exploration of academic leadership dynamics: A literature review. *International Journal on Leadership*, 7(1), 35-43.