
ACCESS TO QUALITY POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION THROUGH WALL LESS HIGHER INSTITUTION IN ETHIOPIA: THE CASE OF UNISA IN ADDIS ABABA

Melese Mekasha Woldeyes

Education Management, Law and policy Science, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

ABSTRACT

This article addresses the issue of access to quality postgraduate education through wall less higher Institution. It was developed within an argument that access to conventional face-to-face postgraduate studies is still a challenge in developing countries. It argues that distance education can be used as an alternative means of meeting the increasing demand for higher education in the country concerned. This study used a case study of Masters of Arts in Sociology (MAS) program that is offered by South Africa University (UNISA) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to gather the relevant data, to validate the dominate nature of qualitative research method. The study established that distance education has a huge potential as an alternative and cost-effective means of providing quality higher education in Ethiopia. The study suggests that careful planning and integration of distance education into the national higher education policy will enable effective and efficient provision of quality distance postgraduate education in developing countries like Ethiopia.

Keywords: Access, quality, cost, Higher education, delivery mode, distance education, distance education generations, qualitative method, quality assurance, conventional education, Wall less higher institution.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that the traditional face-to-face method is no longer the only means of accessing higher education. An alternative means has been devised in response to a demand for access to higher education. An ever-growing world population; an increase in the complexity of all aspects of life; increasingly higher education requirements for almost all types of jobs; accelerating change in nearly all occupations and jobs; and the special educational needs of disadvantaged and minority groups have all put pressure on the pursuit of an alternative means of access to higher education.

Higher education with appropriate quality and low cost is not achievable within traditional systems of higher education which is based on classroom teaching and learning mode. Some scholars have predicted that by 2020, 40 present of the global workforce will be knowledge workers with a need for high tertiary qualifications Mannan, (2009). The World Bank, which made basic education its priority in the 1980s and 1990s, has changed its focus towards the development of higher education. This is an indication that higher education is getting precedence in the contemporary knowledge based economy. This, in turn, requires countries that

have not yet developed their higher education systems to do so. Indeed, there is evidence suggesting that developing countries want to join the knowledge society by following the example set by developed countries, where age participation rates in higher education of 40 to 50 % are now perceived as necessary for sustained and sustainable development *Kanwar, (2009:30)*. According to Mannan, (2013), national policies on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emphasise the need for expansion of the education system, which focuses on the conventional method of delivery of basic education and tertiary level services in building human and social capital. However, today, it is further seeking and explaining the role of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as an intervening strategy to break the conventional business as usual and in doing so providing access to higher education services and dissemination of information and knowledge that affects personal and community life of individuals became vital especially in developing countries.

Internationally, different means of providing higher education have been explored as a result of the realisation of the inadequacy of traditional contact institutions to meet the increasing demand for higher education. Distance education is generally viewed as an alternative mode of higher education provision. In making a case for distance higher education, the Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa, notes in its White Paper for Post School Education and Training System (2014) that in recent years, distance education has formed a vital part of the university sub-system, contributing approximately 40% of headcount students and approximately 30% of FTE students. It has provided extensive opportunities to those students who were unable, or wished not, to participate in campus-based and fixed time study, including provision of access for those who experience a range of barriers to learning.

Distance education is also no longer offered by national institutions, but it has taken an international dimension with cross border institutions being involved in the provision of education in areas where there are needs. Knight (2007) explains cross-border mobility of providers of the physical or virtual movement of an education provider (institution, organisation, company) across a national border to establish a presence so as to offer education/training programmes and/or services to students and other clients. The overall demand for higher and adult education, especially professionally related courses is increasing in most countries. the growth of the knowledge economy. While the demand is growing, the capacity of the public sector to satisfy this need is being challenged Knight, (2006). While the international mobility of students and scholars represent long-standing forms of academic mobility, it has only been over the past two decades that greater emphasis has been placed on the movement of educational programmes, higher education institutions and new commercial providers across national borders.

1.2. Background to the study

The education system in Ethiopia has, generally, faced a number of problems, including inequality, inaccessibility, the irrelevance of the old education system and low quality. With respect to higher education, the sector was neglected; currently, it faces problems associated with the quality and relevance of programmes of studies and research, equity, resource constraints and inefficient resource utilization (Bogale, 2006).”To alleviate the prevailing problems, the country

needs to put in place many innovative programmes and projects MOE, (2003)”. After acknowledging the undeveloped status of higher education in the country, the present Ethiopian government introduced reforms in the higher education system to enable higher institutions to contribute to the development of human resources needed for the social and economic development of the country.

Education is defined in a number of ways, based on the role it plays in different aspects of human life. However, most scholars and educators agree that education is a basic tool which assists economic development, social welfare and political equality Mishra, Vijayshri, & Garg, (2008); Phillips, (1976:312); Manjulinka, (1996:171). This reality makes education a most important human activity. Higher education, in particular, plays a most appropriate role in guiding future development in Ethiopia. National capacity building, sustainable development and poverty reduction endeavours should, therefore, be a priority in the country. Education has a unique role to play in these respects as Ethiopian society needs investment in education for socio-economic upliftment.

As a result, new higher education reform policies were adopted in Proclamation No.351 of 2003 and Proclamation No.650 of 2009. For the first time, following the implementation of these reforms, higher education institutions became autonomous and were able to run and manage their own affairs, including appointing their own academic vice-presidents and institutional managers. The main reason for restructuring the Ethiopian education system was to bring about a desired quality of standard and a relevant system for the economic development of the country - an aspect which was not recognised by the old education system. Thus, the major focus of higher education in the country should be to provide quality and relevant education.

Globally, and especially in developing country like Ethiopia, the development of human resources can facilitate the social and economic development of countries, if they improve their higher education capacity and capability Thomas, (2008). However, in Ethiopia the universities’ contributions to the development of the country through the improvement of human resources are not sufficient Bogale, (2006). According to Fayessa, (2010), the development of human resources in Ethiopia is not efficient and the country’s economy is also weak. In order to cope with increasing demands for higher education in the context of diminishing resources, many countries have resorted to distance education as an alternative means of accessing higher education. For example, Fayessa (2010) argues that Ethiopia does not have sufficient resources to build enough traditional classrooms to meet the needs of the country. The call is for cost-effective strategies in the provision of higher education which will not only increase access, but also improve the quality of education.

In Ethiopia, as in other African countries, distance education could facilitate the advancement of human resource development at different levels. The Ethiopian Distance Learning Association (EDLA) and the International Open College of Ethiopia (IOCE) observed that if the country aims to improve the living conditions of its people through education, then it should recognise and acknowledge an inevitable paradigm shift from a traditional face-to-face system of education to a system of distance education (Nwuke, 2008:76).

However, in Ethiopia the national education policy has overlooked distance education despite the role it plays in responding to society's needs for access to higher education. Thus, higher education - through distance education - is deemed to be necessary in order to improve the education system to respond to the ever-growing human resource needs of the country (Fayessa, 2010). It is argued that distance education offers an alternative delivery system that could meet the envisaged demand for quality human resources in Ethiopia.

Given the less developed nature of higher education systems in developing countries, many of these countries have become targets of cross border providers who capitalised on the lack of capacity by governments to meet the growing demand for higher education. The lack of access to postgraduate education has contributed to a shortage of qualified staff in public universities and other areas that require high skills in both the public and the private sectors. It is argued that given the constraints of resources to provide adequate access to higher education through traditional contact mode of delivery, distance education providers would play an important role in providing access to quality higher education. To this end, this article uses the South Africa University (UNISA) as a case study to explore the role of distance cross-border higher education providers in providing access to post graduate education in Ethiopia. It asks the research question "*How can distance education enhance access to quality postgraduate education in Ethiopia?*"

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

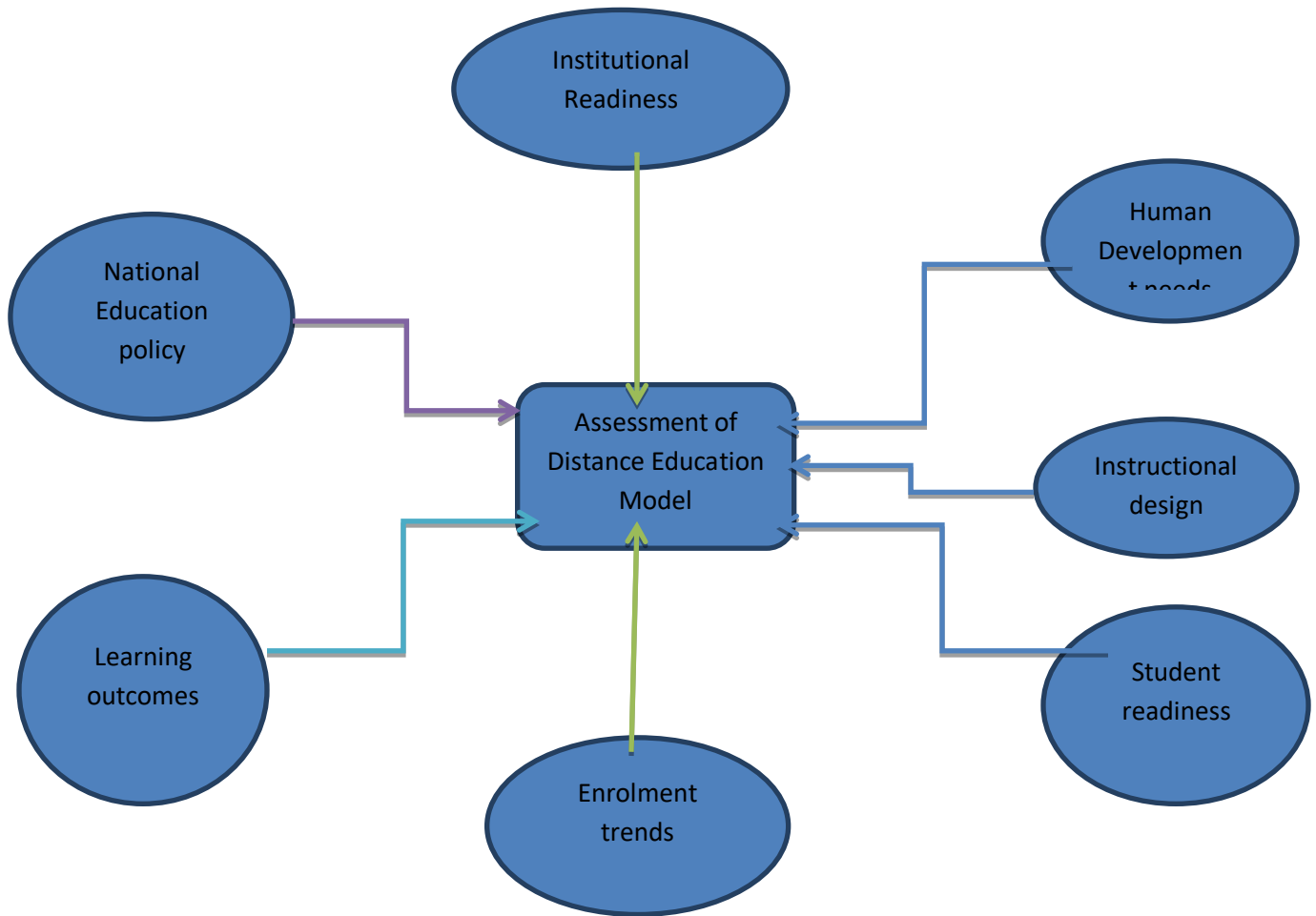
2.1 Background to higher education in Ethiopia

For many centuries until the early 1990s when secular education was adopted, education in Ethiopia was dominated by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Higher education was only launched in 1950 following the establishment of the Addis Ababa University College. Not much improvement in education was observed during Emperor Haile Selassie's regime from 1930 until 1974. The noticeable achievement in this period was the establishment of the Addis Ababa University College. The Soviet-backed military junta, the "Dreg", led by the Mengistu Haile Mariam regime which took over and ruled the country from 1974 to 1991, established four university colleges. In many ways these were, mainly, dependent on Addis Ababa University which played a leading role in terms of their establishment, curriculum design and development and staff recruitment.

The education system in Ethiopia has, generally, faced a number of problems, including inequality, inaccessibility, the irrelevance of the old education system and low quality. Generally, higher education in Ethiopia was neglected and, consequently, became underdeveloped. The universities' have not been able to produce the large numbers of the human resources required for the development of the country Bogale, (2006). After acknowledging the undeveloped status of higher education in the country, the present Ethiopian government introduced reforms in the higher education system to enable higher education institutions to contribute to the development of human resources needed for the social and economic development of the country. The main reason for restructuring the Ethiopian education system was to bring about a desired quality of standard and a relevant system for the economic development of the country - an aspect which was not recognised by the old education system. Thus, the major focus of higher education in the country should be to provide quality and

relevant education. However, the current reforms in higher education overlooked the potential of distance education to support by the policy.

Figure 2. 1: Conceptual Framework Based On Distance Education Assessment Model



The conceptual framework of the above identified by Lockhart and Lacy (2002), is adapted to fit the purpose of this study. Lockhart and Lacy (2002) explains an assessment model and methods for evaluating Distance Education programs potential and importance, through variables, such as, Institutional readiness/administration, faculty services, instructional design/courses usability, student readiness, student services, learning outcomes and retention. In the case of this study, it has been adapted to fit the understanding as regard to what extent do Distance Education institutions presentation of Master’s Degree in sociology play a role in Ethiopia. Therefore, this study’s focus and necessitate that, Distance Education providers access to variables like

institutional readiness, instructional design, human development needs and enrolment trend; national education policy that dealing with Distance Education in Ethiopia, student readiness and learning outcomes component will be used to assess this study as follow:

- **Institutional Readiness** - which includes, administrative, infrastructure, staff and with other necessary things, all that leads to quality postgraduate education
- **Instructional design** - which needs to align with Human development need of the country, by then attract learners which leads to acceptable standard of the learners by their respective stakeholders.
- **Enrolment and graduation trends** - This will help to review the statistics of the students in different years and categories for further trace assessment of the graduates in their respective workplaces.
- **Policy** - How the country education policies support DE providers towards their role to play? If not, to find out the gap
- **Student's readiness** - This is in terms of student preparation to acquire knowledge and skills including other necessary materials for learning that lead to improve and enhance the learning and teaching processes for best results.
- **Learning outcomes**- Will be measured through graduation rates and change on qualified employed people and graduates performance and best results, through regular feedback from employers.

Thanking the above interconnected variables, the South Africa University (UNISA), through its long year's reputation and best achievements experience in Ethiopia providing quality postgraduate education through distance mode of the study. UNISA in Addis Ababa Ethiopia, which established in 2006,

“ ... To my mind, education is the spirit of enquiry, the ability to keep one's mind and heart open to beauty and goodness, indeed all that surrounds us, to be able to think and judge for one self. Education should inculcate a life-long habit to learning. And today, this is all the more necessary because the corpus of knowledge is increasing at a tremendous pace, often making what one has learnt obsolete...” (Indri Gandhi).

Globally, and especially in developing country like Ethiopia, the development of human resources can facilitate the social and economic development of countries, if they improve their higher education capacity and capability Thomas, (2008).

African Virtual University for Degree and Diploma Courses in Business Administration

Munene, (2007) explains the important role ICTs plays in the provision of distance education, especially in terms of the World Bank donation which aided the establishment of the African Virtual University (AVU) in 1997. AVU delivers distance education to twenty-seven African countries, including Ethiopia, at fifty-five learning centres by means of information communication technologies and satellite systems. The aim of the AVU in sub-Saharan Africa is to provide world-class higher education and training programmes to students and professionals.

The main emphasis of the AVU is on the satellite transmission of distance education to many African countries. The AVU which is based in Nairobi, Kenya, has developed into a Pan-African University. According to Moore and Kearsley (2005), the AVU has the following main objectives:

- To increase access to college-level and continuing education;
- To make the best educational resources accessible to all students by means of a common network;
- To increase the information and communication technology capabilities of all participating learning sites to ensure the sustainable growth of the sites and the programme; and
- To supply skills training to Africa’s growing population of professionals.

The AVU offers a variety of programmes, certificates, degrees, diplomas and short courses, including bachelor degrees in Business Administration and Computer Science - in both French and English. Table 2.3, below, reflects the number of students enrolled at the AVU for Business Administration courses through distance education *via* satellite mediation in collaboration with four prominent universities, namely: Addis Ababa University, Kenyatta University, the University of Dares Salaam and the Kigali Institute of Science and Technology in Africa.

Table 2.3: Number of Students Enrolled in the African Virtual University for Degree and Diploma Courses in Business Administration

University	Program	2004	2005	2007	2008
Addis Ababa University	Degree	71	107	0	0
	Diploma	0	0	15	0
Kenyatta University	Degree	14	22	0	0
	Diploma	0	0	0	1
University of Dar es Salaam	Degree	15	10	0	0
	Diploma	0	0	1	0
Kigali Institute of Science & Technology	Degree	40	49	0	0
	Diploma	0	0	3	2

(Source: Graber & Bolt, Susan, 2011)

In Africa, however, there are challenges regarding the use of ICT because of the irregular supply of electricity in countries across the continent and this is something which needs further attention for improvement by the governments of African countries (Graber and Bolt, 2011). In their research Moussa and Schwere (1992) identify five major factors which limit the success of ICT projects in Africa: institutional weakness, human resources, funding, local environment and technology and information change.

For the AVU, one of the major challenges it faces in delivering distance education has been a lack of access to the internet and its infrastructure in many African countries. Therefore, in order for the AVU to be successful in delivering programmes in these countries' further development, their governments need to embark on efforts and programmes to improve the ICT infrastructure in their respective countries.

CONCLUSION

Darkwa, (2007) suggests that for sub-Saharan African countries to be successful in distance education there must be "a national strategy that aligns different resources, such as government, academic, and private resources. Developing ICT infrastructure in Africa is a question of funding and political leadership and, thus, the Ministries of Education must urge for policies that encourage distance education" (Darkwa, 2007:58). Furthermore, it is clear that for distance education to grow further and develop on the continent funding must be made available to improve the development of ICTs and the infrastructure needed in these countries; this is something which needs the further attention of the various governments (Graber & Bolt, 2011:80). In distance education, the debate is not only about the provision of access to higher education, but there is a growing concern about issues of costs, quality and leadership which become important for all providers of, and students in, higher education.

REFERENCES

- Allen, i. e., & Seaman, j. (2012). *Changing course: ten years of tracking online education in the United States*. Sloan consortium\ PO Box 1238, Newburyport, ma 01950.
- Bogale, S. (2006). *Higher education in Ethiopia: The higher education Strategy Centre*, Retrieved June 2006, from HES.
- Daniel, Asha Kanwar & Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić. (2009). Breaking Higher Education's Iron Triangle: Access, Cost, and Quality, Change. *The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 41(2), 30-35. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3200/CHNG.41.2.30-35>
- Desimone, L. M. (2009). Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development: Toward better conceptualizations and measures. *Educational Researcher*, 38(3), 181-199. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0013189X08331140>

- Dey, I. (1993). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A User Friendly Guide for Social Scientists*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203412497>
- Fayessa, D.(2010). Distance learning at the tertiary level in Ethiopia: As strategy For promoting human resource development, at the University of South Africa: (PhD thesis)
- FDRE (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia). (2003) & (2009). *Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003 and No.650/2009* Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazette.
- Immerwahr.J. (2002). The affordability of higher education: a review of recent survey research The National Centre for Public Policy and Higher Education, and Public Agenda.
- IGNOU, (2012). About Indira Gandhi National Open University. Retrieved April 23, 2012 from <http://www.ignouonline.ac.in/vel/pgccl.html>
- IGNOU.(2013). Common Prospectus. Retrieved September 27, 2013 from www.ignou.ac.in/upload/Prospectus2013-141pdf
- Jung, I. S., & Latchem, C. (2007). Assuring quality in Asian open and distance learning. *Open Learning*, 22(3), 235–250.
- Kanwar, A. (2009). Breaking Higher Education's Iron Triangle: Access, Cost, and Quality Commonwealth of Learning CC BY SA
- Kishore, S. (1998). Student Support and Quality Indicators in Distance Learning. *Indian Journal of Open Learning*, 7(2), 205-212.
- Knight, J. (2007). Cross-Border higher education: Issues and implications for quality assurance and accreditation. In Sanyal, B.C. and J Tres, *Higher Education in the World 2007*, Palgrave McMillan.
- Knight, J. (2006). *Higher Education crossing the border: A Guide to the Implications of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) for Cross-border Education*. Paris,
- Nganga, G. (2014). *University regulator slams growing inequality: The global window on higher education*. Australia, University World news, Issue, 00332
- Nwuke, K. (2008). *The private provision of higher education in Ethiopia: Growth, Challenge, and prospective*. Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, 6 (1), 71-94.
- Perraton, H. (2000). *Open and Distance Learning in developing world*. Published, London: Routledge

- Pityana, N. B. (2004). *Distance education in Africa: Dome challenges and perspectives*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of NADEOSA: The potential of mixed mode delivery', St John's College, Johannesburg.
- Roper, C., & Shaw, M. (Eds.). (1993). *Quality in Education: Aspects of education and training*. London, New Jersey: Kogan Page.
- Sharma, R. C. (1997). Distance Education in Global Perspectives. *University News*, 35(46), 12
- Taylor, J. (2001). *Fifth Generation Distance Education*. Report No. 40. Higher Education Series, Department of Education, Training, University of South Queensland.
- Teferra, D. (2014). Charting African Higher Education: Perspectives at a glance. *International Journal of African Higher Education*, 1(1), 9-21. <http://dx.doi.org/10.6017/ijahe.v1i1.5642>
- Tesfaye, S. (2010). Adult and continuing education in post-secondary education in Ethiopia: Policy, practice, and challenges, *Hawassa, Journal of Social Sciences*, 13(1), 34.