North-South collaboration: On the making of a Center for Comparative Education and Policy Studies at Addis Ababa University

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Abstract

The Ethiopian educational system has made promising advancements since the turn of the century. Despite this progress, education continues to grapple with a myriad of challenges, including differences in educational access and quality, insecure living conditions, and gender inequalities. Research can offer knowledge for tackling these challenges, but often it is knowledge from the global North that dominates, despite its questionable relevance to the global South. Therefore, this study analyses the evolvement of a Center for Comparative Education and Policy Studies, situated in an Ethiopian higher education context and supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and how the Center has contributed to developing knowledge that is relevant to local contexts. An important outcome of the Center was the development of a doctoral program in International and Comparative Education and the knowledge produced in the doctoral theses that emerged. Our inquiry concerns how Southern theory contributes to an increased understanding of the development of the Center and the relevance of the doctoral theses. The findings underscore the importance of expanding Southern knowledge in education and the need for further reflection on the geopolitics of knowledge in research capacity development cooperation.

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Introduction

A cardinal aim of African universities is to contribute knowledge that can help in overcoming poverty (Gutema, 2013). Arguably, one way of achieving this aim is to decolonize African minds and make African universities relevant to local contexts. This implies that African universities, including those in Ethiopia – the focal country in this article – must create space that allows for critical reflection to articulate societal problems and conjure up solutions (Gutema, 2013). However, the Ethiopian educational system is deeply criticized for its lack of rootedness because models and practices have been borrowed from the North (Molla, 2018), with particular influences from Europe and the USA. In other words, there is an acknowledgment of a predominance of thinking that emanates from the North, which may result in education-related decision-making that is not relevant to Ethiopia.

The case for the study presented here is a research-based doctoral program in International and Comparative Education, which was started by the College of Education and Behavioral Studies at Addis Ababa University (AAU) in 2010/11. In 2014 the Center for Comparative Education and Policy Studies (CCEPS) was established to run the doctoral program with financial support from The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Two Swedish universities have been involved as partners; initially, it was Stockholm University (SU), and from 2018 the University of Gothenburg (GU). Following the AAU senate legislation, CCEPS is "an executive academic unit that runs and/or coordinates programs of trans-disciplinary nature and specialized areas of study and service" (Addis Ababa University, 2019a, p. 2).

One aim of this study is to analyze the evolvement of the Center, situated in an Ethiopian context but as intertwined with SIDA and Swedish universities. Another aim is to discuss the contribution of knowledge from the Center. In particular, our inquiry concerns how Southern theory offers a way to increase understanding of the development of the Center, the relevance of doctoral theses produced therein, and to understand the choices made by key actors in the development of the Center and the implementation of the doctoral program. Thus, the purpose is not to examine how Southern theory was directly employed in the design and implementation of the Center or doctoral program.

The questions are:
1. How was the Center and doctoral program constructed over time, what important agents were involved, and what were the important events?
2. What are the hopes and fears expressed by systems actors?
3. What are the outcomes in terms of knowledge contributions in the doctoral theses?

The study is based on previous research and documentation from AAU regarding the establishment and evolvement of CCEPS and its doctoral program in cooperation with SU and GU, but also on our experiences of being involved in the work at the Center, mainly concerning joint supervision. Hence, we present a case study of collaboration in doctoral education between higher education partners from the global North and South (Woldegiyorgis, 2020).

Southern theory – the geopolitics of knowledge

In this study, the terms "North" and "South" are representative of global divisions in power and wealth and the subsequent exclusion or inclusion of knowledge emanating from therein. The knowledge produced in the South (or periphery) is generally marginalized when compared to knowledge produced in the North (or the metropole) (Connell, 2007). For instance, there are arguments that the conceptual, methodological, and theoretical thinking that comes from the South is largely ignored by the North research community (Connell, 2007; 2017).

Our theoretical approach to understanding how knowledge is generated and how certain knowledge comes to dominate is based on Southern theory, which R. W. Connell is a key contributor to with her book *Southern Theory* (2007). Drawing on her knowledge of the colonization of Australia, and situated examples from Africa, Latin America, and India, Connell conceptualizes Southern theory. The notion of Southern theory refers to a geopolitical imbalance in the knowledge that is considered relevant in society and academia. Central to this concept is "Knowledge generated *in the colonial encounter*, and in the postcolonial experience of the colonized societies…" (Connell, 2017, p. 9). Thus, Southern knowledge should not be confused with indigenous knowledge, which refers to knowledge generated through people's interaction with their natural surroundings (Takayama et al., 2016). Since the doctoral program conducted within our cooperation takes place jointly in the North and South, the knowledge generated therein is, in some ways, understood as part of the colonial encounter. In this context, the concept "colonial" implies that even between countries that were never in a direct colonial relationship, such as the case between Ethiopia and Sweden, there is an unevenness in how the politics of knowledge work.

Connell (2007) argues that knowledge is culturally, historically, and geographically located, implying that knowledge is not universal and that there is a need to create space for both Southern and Northern knowledge and theory. In the context of higher education, where there is variation in how education is arranged, the implication is that context is important and knowledge of that context needs to be considered when making decisions in education. For example, Takayama et al. (2017) argue for creating space by re-imagining scholarly research and practice in comparative and international education without the dominance of Northern theory.

However, doctoral education can also be conceived as part of the post-colonial experience. To illustrate, doctoral education can make space for Southern perspectives and knowledge to flourish by raising the consciousness of the dominance of Northern knowledge and by encouraging doctoral students to think in ways that can benefit their local contexts. Nevertheless, historical power relationships still have the potential to surface in doctoral education. For example, in the context of North-South capacity building projects, Mählck and Fellesson (2016) describe how donor policy agendas and the dominant university, in terms of economic and academic resources, influence power and positioning in doctoral supervision.

Southern knowledge in doctoral education

Research on Southern knowledge in the context of doctoral education is an emerging area, and much of the research has centered on international students from the South attending doctoral programs at universities in the North. One such study examined doctoral theses written by international students in the United Kingdom to uncover whether Northern knowledge was reproduced or if the theses offered a space for students to develop Southern perspectives (Montgomery, 2019). The results indicated that some alternative perspectives emerged but that dominant theories and methodologies from the North prevailed. The author pointed out the possibility for expanding Southern knowledge and perspectives within doctoral education but argued that this potential was dependent on the capacity of the students themselves, and even more so on the support provided by their primary supervisor. Similarly, Singh (2011) indicated that even if doctoral supervisors from the North are unfamiliar with theories originating from the South, they can still have students produce scholarly arguments for using these theories and that the North can also learn from the South in this way. Contrary to this notion, Mählck and Fellesson (2016) are skeptical since doctoral students from the South perceive that they and their research goes unrecognized in Swedish academia. Southern knowledge and theory are not always accepted as valid and relevant in academia in the North. Devos and Somerville (2012) called attention to the "invisible pedagogies of doctoral examination" (p. 54), referring to senior academics' preferences for doctoral research to mirror their own (i.e., scholarship reproduction).

Research from Scandinavian countries on development aid-funded doctoral education in the context of North-South cooperation has touched on the geopolitics of knowledge and the struggle African universities face, on one hand, to integrate Northern knowledge in teaching and research and on the other to ensure societal relevance in Africa (e.g., Adriansen & Madsen, 2019). Cooperation in development aid-funded projects must be handled delicately because such cooperation can lead to dependency on the North for models in teaching and research practices, as well as on funding and academic culture (Teferra, 2014). For instance, while cooperation may, in some instances, lead to developing technologies and research that enable African researchers to participate in international scientific debates, the new technology may be unsustainable after funding ends, which raises questions about the relevance of the research for local contexts (Adriansen, 2019). Similar concerns that research excellence and standards are perceived as universal, and thus transferable, have also been noted in the context of doctoral supervision practices and standards for how doctoral research should be presented and evaluated (Madsen & Adriansen, 2020).

The case – a North-South cooperation in doctoral education

Our case study consists of two main components. The first is the establishment of CCEPS and the processes and actors involved in its development. The second is the doctoral program in International and Comparative Education hosted within CCEPS, and the knowledge produced therein. Using a case study design, we can gain an in-depth, context-dependent understanding of the evolvement of CCEPS and its doctoral program.

The data drawn on in our study come from three main sources: previous research and documents from AAU on the development of CCEPS and its doctoral program, doctoral theses produced within CCEPS, and our experiences working at the Center. We used document analysis (Bowen, 2009) to identify the major events, actors, and reasons for action. The analysis of the doctoral program was guided by three pre-defined questions: 1) What do the students study and how do they conceptualize their object of study?; 2) What is stated as the problem?; and 3) What references do they use and who are the authors?

The remainder of the article is structured in the following way. In the next section, we present a brief historical background of the institutional embedding of CCEPS, starting with a discussion of AAU and its founding. Thereafter, we describe how cooperation between AAU and SIDA was initiated. Then we turn to the cooperation between SIDA and CCEPS specifically. Finally, we describe the doctoral program and the knowledge generated by doctoral students' theses. This discussion is framed in the context of Southern theory, where the relevance of the knowledge produced in the doctoral theses to Ethiopian education and society is underscored.

Table 1 gives an overview of the major events, actors, and reasons for action that are discussed in the following sections.

Table 1: Major events, actors, and reasons 1951-2021

Time	Event	Actors	Reasons
1951	University College of Addis Ababa was established	Imperial Government of Ethiopia and French Canadian Jesuits	Provide high level educated manpower to the nation
1961	Haileselassie I University was created	Imperial Government of Ethiopia and Americans, particularly the University of Utah	Consolidate various colleges and institutes in the country into one university administration
1975	Haileselassie I University was renamed Addis Ababa University (AAU)	The socialist regime that ousted the emperor from power	-
1978	Graduate education was started in AAU	AAU presidential committee on graduate education	Shortage of staff due to the withdrawal of academic staff from the West; heavy cost of foreign education; irrelevance of educational knowledge from abroad
1979	AAU established research and capacity building cooperation with SIDA	AAU, Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission, and SIDA	Need to strengthen the research capacity and access to knowledge in developing countries in areas of vital importance to poverty reduction

Time	Event	Actors	Reasons
2009	SIDA started supporting the development of in-house doctoral programs	AAU and SIDA	Provide qualified teaching and research staff to the newly established universities in the country
2014	Center for Comparative Education and Policy (CCEPS) Studies was established	AAU, SU in Sweden, and UNESCO-IICBA	Run doctoral education, research and community outreach on educational issues in international and comparative education
2018	CCEPS-GU partnership started	AAU, GU and SIDA	Part of Research Training Partnership Agreement 2018-2023 between AAU and SIDA, to effectively run the doctoral program at CCEPS
2021	Twenty-three PhDs have completed their studies at CCEPS	AAU-CCEPS and GU	-

Addis Ababa University and SIDA

The first higher education institution of Ethiopia of a Northern style was the University College of Addis Ababa, established in 1950. In 1961, through the consolidation of the existing colleges and higher education institutions in the country, the Hailesellassie I University was created. By this decision, all colleges were brought under the administration of the new university. The university acquired its current designation, Addis Ababa University, in 1975.

AAU was founded and organized following models from the North, particularly the American model (Asgedom, 2005; Kebede, 2010; Woldegiorgis, 2020). The founding staff and administrators of the University College of Addis Ababa were French-Canadian Jesuits. Between 1951–1955 there was no Ethiopian academic staff. The first academic vice-vice president and also an acting president of Hailesellassie I University was from the USA. Asgedom (2005) noted that in 1960 a team from the USA strongly advised the government of Ethiopia to model AAU as a service type institution[2] parallel to the state universities of America[3]. Taken together, how AAU was founded and organized and its early stages of development suggest a Northern orientation, which possibly facilitated conditions for the hegemony of Northern knowledge[4] (Asgedom, 2005; Molla, 2018; Woldegiorgis, 2020). Molla (2018, p. 26) argues that the "imported" higher education

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[2] During the days of Haileselassie I University, some attempts were made to connect teaching, research and service (community engagement). These include, for example, agriculture extension services, rural development programs like the Ethiopian University Service (EUS) program, research and experimentation on low cost building materials and housing construction, and summer in-service teacher training. (Asgedom, 2005).

[3] Currently there are 50 public universities and close to 200 private higher education institutions in Ethiopia (Ministry of Education, 2020).

[4] In his address during the inauguration of Haileselassie I University on December 18, 1961, Emperor Haileselassie of Ethiopia stated that "the fundamental objective of the university must be the safeguarding and the developing of the culture of the people it serves" (Cowan et al., 1965, p. 303).

model "alienated the accumulated knowledge and value system" of the people of Ethiopia and prevented the education system from serving its core functions.

Graduate education in AAU was started in 1978 (Addis Ababa University, 1987), and Yigezu (2013) put forward two important reasons. First, the 1974 socialist revolution in Ethiopia and the subsequent withdrawal of West European and North American staff from the country had resulted in an acute shortage of academic staff. Second, the Ethiopian scholarship students who were sent abroad for their studies never returned after completion.

Ethio-Swedish cooperation in higher education in general and with AAU, in particular, can be traced back to 1954 when an agreement was signed for the construction of the Etho-Swedish Institute of Building Technology (Mouton et al., 2007). An important aspect of Swedish involvement in AAU was their role as academic staff members in the nascent Hailesellassie I University. In 1969, for example, from the total body of expatriate staff in the University, 10 percent were from Sweden (Balsvik, 2005).

The collaboration between AAU and SIDA began in 1979 (Mouton et al., 2007). In his report on the rationale for Swedish support to universities in low-income countries, Olsson (1992, p. 1) stated that "the development of skills and knowledge is an absolute prerequisite for national development," and he continued, "the central role of the universities in this respect is undisputed". Thereby he pointed out a belief in science *for* the development of society, or in other words, a mode of knowledge production in which science *speaks to* society but where society also speaks to science (see Gibbons et al., 1994; Bekele & Ofoyuru, 2021).

In the 2008/2009 academic year, AAU organized a conference in collaboration with SIDA aimed at seeking an international collaboration for its research and capacity building plan (Gebremariam, 2009). Close to 500 participants attended, representing 75 universities from 26 countries, and bilateral and multilateral organizations. In 2009, SIDA entered into a new cooperative agreement with AAU to support the development of in-house doctoral programs.

In their study of completion rates, Fetene and Tamrat (2021) show that the number of doctoral education graduates at AAU has increased from 14 in 2011 to 276 in 2020 in 16 different faculties/colleges. On average the completion rate is 6.1 years. They specifically argue that the development of support structures for doctoral students must coincide with expansion.

In the next section, we turn to CCEPS and its doctoral program in International and Comparative Education.

SIDA supporting CCEPS

The Doctoral Program in International and Comparative Education was one of the new programs launched during AAU's new push to expand in-house doctoral programs. The curriculum document (CCEPS, 2015) states that a rationale for launching the program

emanates from a needs assessment of the Ethiopian education system that indicated a strong need to address meager capacity to undertake a comparative analysis of educational policies and practice. The motives were to actualize the internationalization drive in the Ethiopian education system, and:

- conceptualize Ethiopian education within the global, regional and local forces,
- adapt or adopt policies and strategies to international standards,
- contribute with scientific knowledge that can inform Ethiopia's plans to participate in international large-scale assessments and global university ranking schemes.

These motives indeed signal grand aims and an international outlook, justified by societal challenges but that also might contradict Southern perspectives.

Initially, the doctoral program was hosted in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction where Dr. Teshome Nekatibeb, a graduate from the Institute of International Education at SU was a staff member. Nekatibeb was the only Ph.D. holder in International and Comparative Education in AAU while the program was launched. Swedish support for the International and Comparative Education doctoral program at AAU started with involvement in the delivery of courses for the first cohort of students in 2010/2011[5].

In September 2012, AAU organized a workshop to enhance collaboration with Swedish universities and encourage them to contribute to the doctoral programs at AAU. One area identified for possible collaboration was the doctoral program in International and Comparative Education (Lemma et al., 2017). The workshop led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between AAU and SU in March 2013. The overall purpose was to promote international cooperation in doctoral education, research, and academic exchange. In the MoU, the two institutions also agreed to establish a Center for International and Comparative Education at AAU.

The genesis of establishing an independent center that runs graduate programs and research in International and Comparative Education thus can be traced to the 2013 MoU. In addition, there was a regional/continental interest through the UNESCO-International Institute for Capacity Building (IICBA) to have a center like CCEPS at AAU. UNESCO-IICBA has a program that admits and certifies students from all over Africa into an advanced post-graduate program in teacher policy development and capacity building. In this connection, UNESCO-IICBA officially requested the collaboration of the Ethiopian Ministry of Education, as well as the then President of AAU. Thus, CCEPS was also a response to a request from UNESCO-IICBA.

In 2014, the academic units in the College of Education and Behavioral Studies deliberated on the added value of establishing a new center that runs doctoral programs and research in the field of international and comparative education. By June 2014, the above

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[5] Dr. Agneta Lind was involved in the delivery of courses in the 2010/2011 academic year. She was the Head of the Education Division of SIDA in the early 2000s.

processes resulted in the establishment of what is now called the Center for Comparative Education and Policy Studies (CCEPS) at AAU.

CCEPS was primarily meant to focus on graduate education, research, and outreach, and community services, which parallels the mission statement of AAU. Another purpose was to provide scholarly service to the Ethiopian education system in standard-setting and international comparability. The idea of developing indicators illustrates how Northern science speaks to Southern science and how Northern science is considered by some to set world standards. In this regard, the CCEPS establishment document states the following:

> Different regional and international learning assessments of student achievement (like IEA, PISA, TIMSS etc.) require researching and maintaining comparative core curriculum at least in Science, Mathematics and Reading. In this respect the Center will work to maintain the comparability of Ethiopian curricula with world standards and lead the nation to participate in different assessments of students' achievement at regional and international levels. The center will create a capacity to conduct university ranking and also to carry out graduate tracer studies as one part of realizing this effort (CCEPS, 2013, p. 9-10).

The doctoral program at CCEPS was developed in alignment with the AAU program design, approval, and review guideline dated July 2012. CCEPS was responsible for the whole process of developing the doctoral program. However, SIDA allocated funding for the implementation of a contract between AAU and SU for teaching and supervision. SIDA's initial allocation of funds covered the time from May 2014 to May 2016[6]. During this period, SU collaborated with CCEPS on the supervision of ten first cohort doctoral students, and in the course teaching for thirteen cohort two and three doctoral students[7]. In September 2016, AAU received a letter from SU stating that the MoU was terminated. The termination significantly affected the academic activities of CCEPS, particularly in terms of the progression of the doctoral students. It was perceived that there were not enough experienced senior researchers at the Center to provide supervision[8].

In 2018, a new contract was signed between SIDA and AAU regarding a five-year so-called Research Training Partnership Program. In total, four projects were involved, of which the doctoral program at CCEPS was one. CCEPS' new partner was GU. The thirteen doctoral students of cohorts two and three could now resume their studies. In addition, a new cohort of four doctoral students was included in the project, which not only embraced doctoral supervision but also strengthened the academic capacity at the Center.

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[6] This information is drawn from a Stockholm University financial accounting report document sent to Addis Ababa on 2017/06/26.

[7] CCEPS records show that only three PhDs from cohort one completed their studies in June 2016. The 13 cohort two and three PhD students completed two years of course work in June 2016.

[8] A lack of well-qualified faculty and staff in higher education has been a commonly perceived challenge in Ethiopia and across Africa due to rapid growth in the higher education system (Woldegiyorgis, 2020). A high ratio of students to senior researchers may overwhelm those researchers and jeopardize educational quality.

The partnership followed the SIDA sandwich model meaning that doctoral students spend time in Swedish universities as well as in their local context[9] (Kjellqvist, 2013). The doctoral students are registered at AAU and are awarded their degrees from AAU but are supervised by researchers from AAU and GU. Currently, CCEPS has eight Ethiopian academic staff members out of which five work full-time and three half-time for the Center. All are Ph.D. holders. CCEPS is funded by AAU. The doctoral students and CCEPS staff visits to GU, and supervision from GU arefunded by SIDA. Data collection, as well as all coursework, takes place in Ethiopia and is supported by the Ethiopian supervisors. In addition, both Ethiopian and Swedish supervisors spend short periods at each other's universities. This rendition of the sandwich model is meant to reduce some fears of highly educated Ethiopians leaving to pursue further education and not returning upon completing their studies, and also to emphasize research that addresses local challenges.

Cases in the making of doctoral theses

In the previous sections, we discussed systems actors involved in the development of CCEPS and the doctoral program in International and Comparative Education, as well as their hopes and fears regarding the outcomes of these efforts. In this section, we turn to the doctoral program and its outcomes to date. As of June 2021, thirty-two doctoral students have been accepted by AAU into the doctoral program of which seven are females. Twenty-seven are part of the partnership funded by SIDA. The doctoral students are predominantly admitted from university departments outside AAU, international organizations working on education, and the Ministry of Education. Admission of students follows the general admission requirements of AAU as stipulated in the AAU doctoral programs standards and management (Addis Ababa University, 2019b). The proposed research area must be in line with the current research priorities at CCEPS, which is to link education with development, diversity, and global understanding.

The themes of their doctoral theses are wide-reaching, yet all have relevance for the Ethiopian educational system, reflect CCEPS' research priorities, and can be categorized as follows:

   a) The right to education for the disadvantaged
   b) Education and employment/jobs
   c) Quality of education
   d) Teacher education
   e) Internationalization of education

Some of the theses have compared countries or have had an international perspective, while others have been concerned with comparisons of regional or cultural aspects. So far, twenty-three doctoral students have graduated and four are about to submit. Among those who have graduated, many have received prominent positions with the Ethiopian

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[9] The more specific roles of the two partnering institutions (CCEPS and GU) are clearly defined in the project document for research partnership program in international and comparative education (Addis Ababa University, 2018).

higher education system, ranging from presidents of higher education institutions to Directors and Directors General at the Ministry of Education and its agencies, and to academic university staff.

However, the outcomes of the program span beyond the sheer number of graduates and their subsequent employment statuses. As we will show in the following sub-sections, the program has also contributed to developing Southern perspectives by the problems conveyed in the doctoral theses. To illustrate this point, we selected three doctoral theses. These theses were selected because they represent three different approaches to international and comparative educational research that are prevalent in the doctoral program. The first thesis takes an international comparative approach by focusing on university ranking from a global perspective. The second focuses on teacher education in the context of diversity and takes a cultural comparative approach where influential theories and frameworks from the North are problematized as less relevant for conditions in the South. The final thesis that we discuss uses a cross-national comparative approach to study the policies and programs of private-public partnerships for sustainable development. Through the students' critical reflections on the relevance of widely accepted concepts and processes taken from the North to the Ethiopian context, Southern perspectives are emphasized in their work.

University ranking in a global perspective

University ranking is a fact for higher education and research all over the world. Such comparisons have a long history but at the turn of the millennium, it came into focus by the so-called Shanghai list (ARWU) where universities were ranked by using a set of criteria to identify world-class universities. It was supported by the Chinese government in a context of ambition to put Chinese universities among world-class universities, exemplified by Harvard in the USA as an ideal, and to compete with such higher education institutions. The ARWU indicators are constructed to realize that ambition. Similar lists are provided by the Times Higher Education Supplement, where marketization of higher education is important in informing about universities to different stakeholders.

In this case, based on the doctoral thesis by Ali Mohammed Seid (2021), we put in focus such ranking lists and their implications in Ethiopia. Starting with the Southern theory notion concerning geopolitical dominance in terms of what counts as relevant knowledge in different contexts, the ARWU list is a very clear example. The criteria used to emphasize, for instance, scientific publications dominated by Anglo-Saxon universities and publishing companies. This corresponds well with the ranking of world-class universities according to ARWU where 25 out of the 30 top universities are from the USA or UK. A broader but similar picture is shown in table 2.

Table 2: ARWU ranking Statistics by Region 2020

Region	Top 20	Top 100	Top 200	Top 300	Top 400	Top 500	501-1000

Americas	15	45	75	109	137	161	107
Europe	5	36	77	112	150	185	179
Asia/Oceania	—	19	48	77	111	149	203
Africa	—	—	—	2	2	5	11
Total	20	100	200	300	400	500	500

Source: http://www.shanghairanking.com/ARWU-Statistics-2020.html

This way of evaluating the qualities of higher education institutions is put forward by many actors over the world (see e.g., Hazelkorn, 2015) but is also questioned in several places. For instance, such ranking was criticized by the higher education organizations in Sweden (Lindblad & Foss Lindblad, 2009) and regarded as being of little importance to old universities with a strong research record, compared to less recognized higher education institutions, which regarded them as more influential (Sundén, 2012). It is also questioned in terms of societal relevance related to geopolitical terms – for instance when considering African higher education institutions and their tasks and contexts.

This served as a point of departure where Seid compares ARWU and other ranking lists with the national ranking lists in Ethiopia, where the latter uses quite different criteria compared to the ARWU (e.g., emphasizing education measures and potential for development). Thus, the ranking positions in the different lists do not correspond, neither in terms of the relevance of ranking criteria nor in positions (Seid, 2021). Given such conclusions, there are joint interests in questioning the relevance and validity in governing by global university ranking lists in Sweden as well as in Ethiopia.

Teacher education in a context of diversity

Teacher education is often seen as a key to building national identities and citizenship, and hence, as a means for the creation of economic and social development. Imperatives toward the development of new national policies often come from international organizations and that might put pressure on governments to act accordingly. Teacher educators are frontline actors situated between the state and the needs and demands of teacher students. In her doctoral thesis, Eyerusalem Azmeraw Melese (2021) focuses on diversity tensions in two Ethiopian teacher education colleges. She explores the teacher educators' experiences of dealing with diversity in a culturally responsive manner and the challenges to which they were exposed.

Influential research carried out by scholars like Banks (2002) and Gay (2010) is a source of inspiration for Melese's work since they offer conceptual understandings and approaches to phenomena like multicultural education and culturally responsive teaching. As widespread as they are, these concepts are often given an almost universal character, even if they have their roots in an American context. Contrary to the Ethiopian situation, diversity, as conceptualized in the American context might emanate from social inequalities related to migration and race.

Importantly, conceptual understandings are not neutral but might also imply a geopolitical power relation that obscures the analytical eye of the researcher, even if unintentional. Thus, there is a risk of losing sight of all complexities embedded in the Ethiopian teacher educators' work, as Melese argues that the issue of diversity is played out differently. In her study, she for instance points to teacher educators' work as embedded and intertwined in various ethnic, cultural, historical, and political narratives. The teacher educators are mainly supported by their own personal, educational and professional experiences. They are also challenged by interconnected institutional conditions, rules, and policies that sometimes were inappropriate in supporting the educators in their dealing with diversity. Thereby she also points to the unique complexity embedded in diversity in the Ethiopian context, and that the issue of dealing with diversity in teacher education is much more than being a matter of ethnicity and identities.

Public-private partnership for sustainable development in education

A positive relationship is assumed between quality and demand-driven technical and vocational education and training (TVET), increased productivity, growth and innovation, and poverty reduction (Fluitman, 2002). The importance of TVET for development is also highlighted in some of the important pillars of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

In his study of public-private partnership for sustainable development in the context of TVET programs in Ethiopia and Zambia, Eskinder Jembere (2021) identifies low quality and supply-driven TVET as the major deficiencies in the TVET system in both countries. As a result, the countries have not benefited from the core role of TVET in promoting gainful employment, productivity, and poverty reduction. The study specifically investigates how heterogenous and multiple stakeholders, UNIDO, SIDA, VOLVO, and local TVET training centers in Ethiopia and Zambia, interact and work towards transforming local TVET practices and structures through sharing resources, skills, and technologies.

Preliminary findings of the study show that the partnerships were successful in producing demand-driven and readily employable TVET graduates. Successes were also achieved in ensuring girls' access to training and jobs and TVET institute and industry linkages. Jembere (2021) argues that all success is at the project level, with positive implications for transforming the TVET system in Ethiopia and Zambia.

However, the sustainability of the gains from the projects is doubtful, particularly due to a failure to promote ownership in both Ethiopia and Zambia and problems associated with identifying appropriate local stakeholders. The study also identifies that the hegemony of international actors, from the inception of project ideas to project implementation, in both national contexts has damaged local ownership. Particularly, the multiple roles UNIDO carried and the power asymmetry between local and international actors in the

partnerships were shown as an epitome of the Northern hegemony. The partnerships suffered from problems of ownership because there was a replication of practice from one national context to another. In this regard, Jembere (2021) argues, that how international actors approached ensuring ownership *vis a vis* the aspiration of local actors to experience local ownership, requires a careful conceptualization of ownership. Jembere's study can also benefit from a critical appraisal of different interpretations of ownership (e.g., Frazer & Whitfield, 2008). Jembere (2021) concludes that such partnerships in TVET can be a relevant model for poverty reduction if the challenges of power asymmetry, ownership, and contextualization are worked out carefully.

Conclusions

This study was about important agents and events involved in the construction of the Center and the doctoral program, hopes, and fears expressed by system actors, and outcomes in terms of knowledge contributions of the doctoral theses. First, the study showed that over time several agents have been important to the evolvement of CCEPS and its doctoral program in international and comparative education. Agents from the North have changed over time, with American universities having a larger role in the early years of developing AAU and SIDA and Swedish universities in the later years when establishing CCEPS specifically. From the South, the Ethiopian government was key to establishing the foundation to what would become Addis Ababa University (AAU), a consistent and crucial agent. The formalization of a capacity-building cooperation with SIDA and AAU, and the subsequent partnership with Swedish universities, marked important events leading up to the formation of CCEPS and its doctoral program.

Second, the hope was that CCEPS and the doctoral program would create space for Southern knowledge to flourish, which was perceived as crucial for devising local approaches to tackling challenges in educational access and quality, insecure living conditions, and gender inequalities. Prior to emphasizing the development of local doctoral education, Ethiopians went abroad. Many either did not return after their studies ended or returned with knowledge irrelevant to the local context. These patterns understandably prompted fear over how to obtain a level of highly educated Ethiopians with relevant knowledge and who could meet the needs of an expanding higher education system.

Third, we have here specifically pointed out international ranking lists, theoretical concepts, and project ownership as examples of potential struggles between Southern and Northern theorizing in doctoral theses. With the development of CCEPS and its doctoral program, including co-supervision involving both Ethiopian and Swedish supervisors, it became possible to encourage critical reflection on ideas and theories from the North and their relevance to the Ethiopian context. In doing so, ideas from the North were not thoughtlessly adopted in the doctoral students' work, rather Southern knowledge and theories were given room to grow.

To conclude, these examples of Southern perspectives in education touch on just some of the current issues that are relevant to the Ethiopian education context. In the future,

there will undoubtedly be further challenges that require reflection and solutions using research-based in Southern perspectives. Demands on societal relevance placed in an international and comparative perspective can be fruitful when contextualized with sensitivity for the geopolitics of knowledge, but there is also a risk for dependence if demands on societal relevance are blind to the complexities embedded in a national education system. Hence, clear strategies for encouraging Southern perspectives in doctoral coursework and thesis writing are needed. Additionally, as long as partners from the North, such as SIDA, cooperate in doctoral education and other capacity development initiatives with the South, reflections on the geopolitics of knowledge, including the potential transferability of standards and practices, will be necessary.

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