Quality Assurance and Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) of Ethiopia: Implications for National Development

Firdissa Jebessa Aga

Director, Change Management and Transformation Office, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Introduction

The current changing landscape of professional, economic, political, social and cultural environments demands responsiveness from governments, institutions, and individuals. Many countries are, therefore, revitalizing their higher education functions to meet the demand. Both the changing environments and the responsiveness prompt us (workers in universities) to:

a) look for the alignments between what we would like to do and what we actually do;

b) have clear conceptions of the values and assumptions of our practices; and

c) consider our universities as places where free mind for knowledge creation, preservation, dissemination, extension and application exists- all implying universities to appear as places where conscience of the society exists and is exercised (Firdissa, 2009).

Virtually, universities are there to support national development by way of producing knowledgeable, skillful, and competent workforce; fostering global competence among students; inculcating value system; promoting the use of technology; and advancing a quest for excellence. These in turn call for assuring the quality of the university functions. Quality assurance has become a rapidly growing concern in our country as elsewhere. It is a planned, systematic, and an ongoing and continuous process of guaranteeing the system and providing adequate confidence about the inputs, processes and outputs of the dimensions within the functions. Quality assurance in Ethiopian context is a means to the end- national development for which the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) is formulated. Whereas the eminence of investing in education as a valuable return for the overall development of the nation has made its way to our country, the quality of the sector to effectively backup the aspired development, nonetheless, remains the main concern of the time (Firdissa, 2009).

This paper, therefore, briefly addresses quality conceptions, trends, rationales, movements, processes, and dimensions; the Ethiopian Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP); relationship between quality education and economic development; and conclusions and implications.

Defining Quality

Defining quality in higher education actually remains a challenging task. Whereas quality has become an everyday word today. It has no clear-cut conception and there is no consensus view on ‘What is meant by quality? Arguably, many people often talk of quality, but they hardly explicate what it really signifies. Particularly in our country, everybody talks of quality, but with little clear understanding of what it is all about. This could be due to different reasons some of which are briefed here.

1) Priority Differences: Different stakeholders prioritize the importance of different dimensions of quality according to their perspectives, purposes, cultures, and level of
understanding. Different constituencies, thus, judge the quality of higher education in various ways. Equally, quality with its indicators is determined by a wider set of criteria which reflects the broadening social composition of its review system; it becomes a composite, multidimensional concept (Furlong & Oacea, 2005, cited in Firdissa, 2006a).

2) **Perceptual Shift:** Our notion of quality assurance has been changing following the recently witnessed considerable HE expansion and globalization, which is at crossroad. Consequently, massive enrolment and diversity of students, instructors, and institutions add many layers of complexity to the existing practices of quality assurance efforts in our country. Compounding the situation is globalization, calling for internationalization, regional integration, and the ever-increasing mobility of students and scholars expanding the need for internationally recognized standards or benchmarks to help guide the comparison and evaluation of academic and professional qualifications (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). As a response to these demands, Ethiopia has embarked on clustering its universities, harmonizing curricula, putting in place peer review mechanisms, and many more.

3) **Changes Overtime:** A Quality element change and evolve overtime with each passing decade and continues to adapt to changing contexts and exigencies. As Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2009: taken from van Ginkel and Rodrigues Dias, 2007) indicate, at the 1998 UNESCO world conference, quality in higher education was viewed as:

\[
\text{... a multidimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions, and activities;}
\]

\[
\text{teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings,}
\]

\[
\text{facilities, equipments, services to the community, and academic environment.}
\]

The same authors (citing in Vlasceanu, et al., 2007) further indicate that a decade later the definition provided in a UNESCO-CEPES report reflects quality in higher education as:

\[
\text{... a multi-dimensional, multi-level, and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual}
\]

\[
\text{settings of an educational model, to the institutional mission and objectives, as well as to}
\]

\[
\text{the specific standards within a given system, institution, program, or discipline.}
\]

4) **Antecedents within the Origin of Quality:** The concept and the concern for assuring and enhancing quality were developed in the business sector in the West for commercial purposes. As things started to change in the western societies as of the late 1980s, however, stakeholders demanded relevant and quality academic programs at Higher Education Institutions (HEIS). Following the demand, quality has become part and parcel of management system of HEIs- worldwide and also a recent concern in our country. Equally, whereas higher education was introduced to our country in 1950, its expansion is a recent phenomenon. Higher education quality, therefore, is not yet well established as value of all concerned stakeholders and consequently less well conceptualized as it ought to be.

Due to these reasons and other features, the concept of quality remains fluid, illusive, complex, and slippery. It is, nonetheless, possible to synthesize some quality conceptions (Figure 1) from Harvey and Green (1993); Firdissa (2006 a, b, & 2007a); Harvey and Knight (1996); and Owlia and Aspinwall (1996, cited in Mishra, 2006).
Quality as:

1. **Exceptional (High Standards)**: performance that is exceptional; attainable only in limited circumstances. This can happen only when very able and brightest students are admitted to the system, mainly in world class universities.

2. **Consistency (Zero Defects/Errorless)**: this deals with producing perfection through continuous improvement, among others, by adopting Total Quality Management (TQM) to create a philosophy about work, people and human relationships built around shared values. This definition implies fulfilling ideal standards so entails ideal environment in which all achievements can be measured and verified. This aligns with positivist paradigm which espouses for the belief that the world is definable, fixable, discoverable, and describable.

3. **Quality as Value for money (Return on Investment, Accountability/efficiency)**: this is to see quality as the ability to provide value for resources invested and to be publicly accountable for the ‘bucks’ and for the ‘bangs’. It goes with the types of learners joining our universities and the concerns of cab payers, funding agencies and governments. This conception may be popular with today’s changing landscape of higher education and the competitive climates for scarce resources, particularly in countries like ours.

4. **Quality as Transformative (as Enhancement or Improvement, an Ongoing Process that Includes Empowerment and Enhancement of Satisfaction)**: today the world demands adaptive knowledge, skills and attitudes. This calls for enhancing the readiness and capability of HEIs to transform students on an on-going basis and add value to their knowledge and personal development. This aligns with current concerns for higher education for the masses, where emphasis is more on value adding per se rather than value adding from an already high level.

5. **Quality as Fitness for purpose (Fitting Customer Specifications, Needs, and Priorities)**: this sees quality as fulfilling the purposes or missions of all parties involved in and affected by the program and/or the services we render.

---

Figure 1: Quality Conceptions
6) **Quality as Fitness of Purpose**: this deals with doing the right things (instrumental) setting and implementing appropriate purpose to bring change and betterment in the practices and for transforming the learners for the world of life, work, and competition.

7) **Quality as Culture**: These deals with a supportive set of shared, accepted, and integrated systems (embedded), patterns of quality, an attitude and set of group values, taken-for-granted practices, and a specific aspect of organizational culture that guide how improvements are made to everyday working practices and consequent outputs. It serves as social glue to hold an organization together being made up of many variables—modes of interaction, assumptions, rituals, membership, structures, control mechanisms, training, educational sessions and so on. In the spirit of quality culture, it is the responsibility of each unit to ensure the quality of their own work. The emphasis is on ensuring that things are ‘done right first time’. (Vlăsceanu, Grünberg and Pârlea, 2004; Harvey and Green, 1993).

In the context of primary education, quality for UNICEF (2000) includes:

1) Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities;

2) Environments that are healthy, safe, protective, gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities;

3) Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life;

4) Processes through which trained teachers use child-centered teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities;

5) Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.

UNICEF has also synthesized the conceptions of quality in the form of framework as shown in the Figure 2 (next page).

For our purpose, we shall view quality assurance as a process where key elements of higher education are measured; and performance, standards, norms, accreditation, benchmarks, outcomes, and accountability overlap to form the foundation of the quality culture emerging in higher education everywhere (Adelman, 2009). Inherently, therefore, the conceptions of quality as ‘fitness for purpose’ and ‘fitness of purpose’ could be acceptable. The former conception is more of utilitarian and conformance to the requirements, priorities and needs of our customers. In this sense, we need to strive to fulfill the utmost needs of the different level stakeholders of our services. Implied within the latter conception is ‘what the purpose itself needs to be’ for transforming the learners for the world of life, work, and competition.

Whatever conceptions for quality we espouse, academic standards (the level of achievement that a learner has to reach to gain academic award) need to be maintained if we want to sustain our credibility as learning institutions. If not, we may mislay the game for the clients consider us vendors not producers of the required knowledge, skills and competence (Firdissa, 2009).
LEARNERS & TEACHERS AS LEARNERS

Health and Psychosocial Development: Good health and nutrition status; Learner confidence and self-esteem; Regular attendance for learning; Early assessment of disabilities

- Home: Home/school/community partnerships; Family support for learning; Positive early childhood experiences

ENVIRONMENTS

Physical Elements: Access to quality school facilities including water and sanitation; Class size

Psychosocial Elements: Peaceful, safe environments – especially for girls; Effective school discipline, health and nutrition policies; Inclusive environments

Service Delivery: Provision of health services

QUALITY OUTCOMES

- Learning what they need to learn, for learning throughout life
- Healthy, well-nourished, and free from exploitation, violence and labor
- Aware of their rights and have opportunities to realize them
- Able to participate in decisions that affect their lives in accordance with their evolving capacities
- Able to respect diversity, practice equality, and resolve differences without violence

CONTENT

Materials: Comprehensible, gender-sensitive, relevant to schooling

Curriculum: Based on defined learning outcomes; non-discriminatory and student centered; unique local and national content; includes Literacy, Numeracy, Life skills; includes relevant knowledge on gender equity, HIV/AIDS, health, nutrition and peace;

Standards: Standards and targets for student learning

PROCESSSES

Students

- Intervention and special assistance where needed
- Time on task
- Access to language used at school
- Relevant, student-centered methods
- Leading to active participation

Teachers

- Competence and school efficiency
- Ongoing professional learning for teachers
- Positive and gender-sensitive teacher/student relationships
- Belief that all students can learn and commitment to student learning
- Feedback mechanisms that target learning needs
- Frequent monitoring and assessment by teachers that leads to further learning
- Positive living/working conditions

Supervision & Support

- Adjustment in school hours and calendars to support student learning
- Administrative support and leadership
- Using technology to decrease rather than increase disparities
- Governments that are supportive of education systems
- Financial resources for education systems, esp. for recurrent budgets

Figure 2: Conceptions of quality in the form of framework (UNICEF, 2000)
Current Trends, the Why, Movements, and Processes of Quality

Quality Trends

In Ethiopian context, the quality of HEIs is now evaluated against the ten Focus areas set out by the Higher Education and Relevance Agency (HERQA). There is also a gradual move to gauge the achievements of public universities against a set of performance elements/criteria developed by the Consortium of Ethiopian Public Universities (CEPU). Whereas the former is an external auditor, the latter is a peer review mechanism for the purpose of learning and growth. The latter purpose has become increasingly necessary and important with the growing diversity of institutions and delivery systems. Quality from the practice is viewed as internal and within the peers as a continuous process of assessment and improvement. This calls for shifting (in the long run) the role of HERQA to a validating agent focusing on whether institutions have adequate mechanisms in place and in operation to support the dynamic process.

Equally, the current landscape of HE demands maintaining standard (national as well as international). Though not the same, there is significant overlap between the concepts of ‘quality’ and ‘standards’. Standards are specified and usually measurable outcome indicators or expected level of requirements and conditions against which quality is assessed or that must be attained by higher education institutions and their programs in order for them to be accredited or certified. Normally, academic quality is translated into standards and indicators embedded within the functions of HEIs.

There is also a growing trend for developmental approach to quality. Quality can no longer be thought merely in terms of maintaining standards. Instead, higher education institutions, like other organizations, are being encouraged to take a developmental approach to quality (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2003, cited in Mishra, 2006). This implies that organizations as well as individuals within those organizations are continually changing and learning as they cope with new situations and expectations. This calls for making quality assurance the culture of all the university community and the functions of the university. The culture implies collegial discussions and consensus-building to reduce inefficiencies or waste from the very start; develop an environment of trust, honesty and respect; embedding lines of accountability, transparency into a process of continuous quality improvement, at the institutional level, and at the level of the academic disciplines as well.

Why Worry about Quality Assurance?

Quality assurance has become a rapidly growing concern of the day. This is due to internal developments and external pressures. Internally the emerging economy and industries demand knowledgeable, skillful, competent and enlightened workforce. Externally, the need for some basis for the comparison of the quality of programs and of qualifications at the international level has become more urgent as a result of the increasing number of internationally mobile students, now projected to reach 7.5 million by 2025 (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007). By implication, local systems for quality assurance are simply no longer adequate (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009).

This shows that the landscape of higher education in general and the expectations of individual institutions have become more complex. In addition to educating, tertiary-level institutions have assumed (and been assigned) a broader social role-including advancing society, engaging in constructive criticism, resolving social inequities, providing appropriately
trained labor, contributing to regional and national economic growth, and producing marketable research. Consequently, fee-paying students, professional bodies, employers, politicians, and funding agencies are all voicing their particular expectations of what a degree or diploma should represent adding complexity to the concerns (OECD, 2004; ENQA, 2007, cited in Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009).

The concerns and complexities are born out of some forces and reasons, such as: competitiveness; internationalization; moral; professional; accountability (Firdissa, 2008); customer satisfaction; maintaining standards; improving employee morale and motivation; credibility, prestige and status; and image and visibility (Mishra, 2006).

1) The Competitiveness Force: As the trends of employment and work are changing locally and globally, the demands for learning different skills and knowledge are high. Consequently, a variety of learner types come to our universities to learn. Equally, quality is becoming a survival strategy in a situation where competition among HEIs for students and funds is heading its ways to our country. It demands us improving the quality of our contents; delivery mechanisms, assessment and feedback systems, and aligning our programs with that of the world development and trend. We need to: a) adopt a system of quality management, mainly TQM, which is customer-driven, focusing on the needs of our clients and be responsive to their needs and priorities; b) set strategies that clearly differentiate ourselves and our institutions from our competitors-externally and internally; and c) ensure that quality service delivery is the only differentiating factor for us. This calls for taking proactive stance to meet the needs of our customers, which is at the heart of quality services.

2) Internationalization Force: Basically universities have international nature. At the same time we are living in a competitive and knowledge-dependent world of economic, social and political panorama. Today education itself is globalized in many of its forms and knowledge has become a commodity. The process of knowledge production, therefore, has to be customized to the world trend if we want to thrive in the complex and pluralistic world. This is because the world is becoming a village of competition whereby universities are affected by the external as well as internal environments. Whether we like or not, every aspect of our life is affected by the world development and trends.

By implication, we need to take proactive stance to prepare our students for the world of work, life and to be effective and efficient in the global competition. This can be achieved by internationalizing our academic programs, maintaining their national responsiveness. Internationalization is a strategy to respond to the many demands placed upon us by globalization and as a way for our universities to prepare individuals for engagement in the globalized world. It has exciting opportunities for us. Among others, internationalization enables us to: a) walk with the world trend and the changing landscape of higher education locally and globally; b) inject our programs with new knowledge, skills and world outlooks; and c) mobilize resources from different corners of the world. The effort of internationalizing our programs within the effort of managing quality demands:

- Recapitulation and clear conception of the quality of the functions we render;
- Revitalizing and formulating quality visions and/or directions;
- Enhancing empowerment and commitment of the frontline implementers;
• Making in place appropriate structure for continual improvement process; and
• Enhancing institutional commitment and overall communication for the vision.

We are, therefore, duty bound to redefine, redirect, redesign, and renew our vision, mission, and on long traditions in line with the demands of the modern world. Handling this new direction involves a shift of mind or attitude regarding learning as lifelong process that is as natural as breathing whenever and wherever we live and work.

3) **The Moral Force:** It is our (collective and individual) moral obligation to fulfill the minimum needs of our customers and clients (students, parents, employers, the community, and the society). They deserve the best possible quality of teaching, research and services provisions. This for Sallis (2002) “is the moral high ground in education and one of the few areas of educational discussion where there is little dissent”.

In such moral obligations, we are liable to justify the quality and relevance of our services from the point of view of content, methodology, assessment, research and services. We need to value the life and time of the primary beneficiaries of our services- learners and also consider the institutional and societal demands and requirements with regard to the services we render.

4) **The Professional Force:** Professionalism today is not only to be responsible to others but also to truth. On top of this, one may ask: “Is teaching a profession?” It should be clear from the outset that teaching is a profession and teachers are professionals fulfilling seven characteristics: service, theory, practice, judgment, learning from experience, community, and uniqueness. These characteristics call for: a) employing the most appropriate pedagogical practices; b) ensuring that both classroom practices & the management of the institution are operating to produce the utmost possible quality, standard, & relevant teaching, research and services; & c) demonstrating a professional duty to improve the quality of education in general (Firdissa, 2006.b & 2007.b).

5) **The Accountability Force:** We individually, collectively, and institutionally are accountable to the taxpayers, the learners, the employers of our graduates, and the society at large in terms of demonstrating the highest relevance, quality, and standard of our teaching, research and services. For Sallis (2002), “TQM supports the accountability imperative by promoting objective and measurable outcomes of the educational process and provides mechanisms for quality improvement”. Quality improvement, therefore, becomes increasingly important as institutions and staffs strive to achieve greater control over their own internal affairs. Such control is a freedom which has to be matched by greater accountability. Institutions and staffs, therefore, have to demonstrate that they are able to deliver what is required of them – in qualitative and quantitative terms. (Firdissa, 2009 and 2012).

6) **Customer Satisfaction:** students, the government, parents or sponsoring agencies as customers of our universities are now highly conscious of their rights or getting value for their money and time spent. They are now demanding acceptable quality and relevant teaching and receiving employable knowledge, competence and skill sets, and thus we should constantly worry about the relevance of our courses and programs to the needs of the labor market.
7) **Maintaining Standards**: Universities should always set their own standards comparable with that of the world and update on a continuous basis—year after year. In order to maintain the standards, we should consciously make efforts to improve the quality of the educational transactions, inputs, processes and outputs.

8) **Improve Employee Morale and Motivation**: The concern for quality as an institution will improve the morale and motivation of the staff in performing their duties and responsibilities. If a quality system is in place, the internal processes would be systematic making every lower academic units complementing each other’s service domain and helping in developing internal customer satisfaction leading to high morale and motivation.

9) **Credibility, Prestige and Status**: If we are concerned about quality, continuously and not once in a while, it will bring in credibility to individuals and our institution because of consistency leading to practice, status and brand value.

10) **Image and Visibility**: Quality institutions have the capacity to attract better stakeholder support, like getting merited students from far and near, increased donations/grants from philanthropists/funding agencies and higher employer interest for easy placement of graduates (Mishra, 2006).

**Quality Movements**
The forces and the subsequent reasons for quality have stimulated quality movements, basically as a concept in the 20th century in the manufacturing industry and management. This came with the advent of industrialization and adoption of new scientific approach to management based on strict division of labor. In the initial days of quality movement in the United States and Japan (where it was more popular), statistical approaches ruled the domain. Among the scholars who have contributed significantly to what we know today in the field of ‘quality’ are W. Edwards Deming, Joseph Juran, Philip B. Crosby, Kauru Ishikawa and Genichi Taguchi. The following chronology of quality shows the evolution of the concepts in quality movements (Mishra, 2006, taken from Sallis, 1996).

1. Pre -1900: Quality as an integral element of craftsmanship;
2. 1900-1920: Quality control by foreman;
3. 1920-1940: Inspection-based quality control;
4. 1940-1960: Statistical process control;
5. 1960-1980: Quality assurance/total quality control (the quality department);
6. 1980-1990: Total quality management; and
7. 1990-Present: TQM, the culture of continuous improvement, organization-wide quality management

Though quality has been part of all the higher education functions since the establishment of the first HEI in Ethiopia in 1950 by the name *University College of Addis Ababa* and currently *Addis Ababa University*, explicitly institutionalizing quality assurance is a recent phenomenon. Currently, quality assurance has raised to the top of the policy agenda of our country in general and that of the universities in particular. This is in line with the need for quality already discussed and the new mandates to prepare graduates with new skills, a broad knowledge base, and a range of competencies to enter a more complex and interdependent economic, social, political, cultural, and professional world. The world today demands defining goals in terms that can be understood and shared across borders and cultures (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumble, 2009).
The Process of Quality Assurance

Even without a concise definition of quality in higher education, a pattern for evaluating higher education has been established in most parts of the world. For Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2009), the issue of quality is addressed more usefully as a process than an idea. The new pattern tends to rely on peers rather than government authorities to conduct the evaluation process.

In Ethiopian context, universities conduct self evaluation and report to Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA). HERQA then scrutinizes the self evaluation report through discussions with pertinent stakeholders; observations of classrooms, facilities, equipment, etc and studying documents. Similarly, the currently being put in place peer review mechanism led by the Consortium of Ethiopian Public Universities (CEPU) starts with self evaluation report (SER) followed by peer review by team of vice presidents and validated by panels of presidents. The self-study obliges a university under review to undertake a thorough examination of its own practices, resources, and accomplishments with an eye toward measuring performance against agreed upon performance elements/criteria and identifying ways to improve.

The overall approach of the CEPU peer review process is purposive, interactive and consensual in planning, undertakings, giving feedbacks and disseminating best practices. It shall use institutional plans and self-evaluation reports as points of departure and aim at reaching fair judgments through on-site supervision to verify information so provided. The reviewers verify Self Evaluation Report (SER), consolidate their findings of all the deliberations and give preliminary feedbacks to the university both at plan review and performance review levels. The university may appreciate, defend its claims or may confirm the findings. Determination of the effectiveness of an educational program in particular and the achievement of the university in general may require some degree of assessment of inputs, processes and value-added measures that focuses on what students have actually learned as a result of their participation in the programs. Though the current practice mainly focus on macro level institutional plan and performance reviews, in the long run, the practices of student learning evaluations, employer perceptions/opinions, objective tests, student exit interviews, compared scores of incoming and exiting student groups in a cross-sectional study using a Learning Skills Profile (LSP) to measure learning skills, rather than job performance or academic competencies, etc, will be made in.

A mixture of both quantitative and qualitative data would be used. Principally, nonetheless, quantitative data are used to produce quantitative ratings. Though the quantitative ratings generally fail to provide any clear explanations to why certain ratings are given, they facilitate performance comparability, especially on a longitudinal basis and are more suitable for quality assurance initiatives at specific university and nationally. Equally, though qualitative data often provides richer data, which can more readily inform decision making for quality enhancement purposes, they are less beneficial when benchmarking performance. Consequently, dominantly quantitative ratings of the performance elements and/or criteria are used.

The CEPU Peer Review Process covers 11 successive steps followed by subsequent action as outlined hereunder.

Step 1: Setting annual national higher education objectives, goals and performance indicators, and arriving at consensus;
Step 2: Preparation of Institutional plans;
Step 3: Establishing a Team to Review Institutional Plans and Performances;
Step 4: Peer review of institutional plans;
Step 5: Self-evaluation;
Step 6: Submission of the Self-Evaluation Report;
Step 7: Preparation: fixing dates, correspondence with the university;
Step 8: On-site verification peer review, plus Exit exams for assessing output Performance of universities;
Step 9: Presidents’ Panel Review and/or inter panel forum;
Step 10: Decisions: Identification of frontline universities and actions;
Step 11: Dissemination of best practices by MOE (HESC);
Step 12: Subsequent Actions (Firdissa, 2013).

Quality Dimensions in Higher Education

Stakeholders of higher education (the government, providers/funding bodies and the community at large, students, staff and employers of graduates) want to know the different dimensions of quality (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2003, cited in Mishra, 2006). The most commonly grouped dimensions of quality are product, software and service. Based on the review of literature on the different approaches to quality in higher education, Owlia and Aspinwall (1996, cited in Mishra, 2006) present a conceptual framework that covers six criteria to depict quality dimensions. These are tangibles, competence and attitude, content, delivery and reliability as have been outlined hereunder.

1) **Tangibles**: Sufficient and modern equipment/facilities; ease of access; visually appealing environment; and support services.

2) **Competence**: Sufficiently qualified (academic) staff; theoretical and practical knowledge, qualifications; up to date; teaching expertise, communication skills, etc.

3) **Attitude**: Understanding students’ needs; willingness to help; availability for guidance and advice; giving personal attention; emotional, courtesy, disposition, etc.

4) **Content**: Relevance of curriculum to the future jobs of students; effectiveness; containing primary knowledge/skills; completeness, use of computers; communication skills and team working; and flexibility of knowledge, being cross-disciplinary.

5) **Delivery**: Effective presentation; sequencing, timeliness; consistency and fairness of examinations; feedback from students; and encouraging students.

6) **Reliability**: Trustworthiness; giving valid award; keeping promises, match to the goals; and handling complaints, solving problems.

The dimensions and the criteria are indicative of the areas that should be of concern to ensure quality in higher education. It might be advantageous to see whether the Ethiopian Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) have given space to the dimensions and the criteria.

The Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) of Ethiopia

Ethiopia has formulated the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) and is implementing it. GTP is a medium term strategic framework for the five-year period (2010/11-2014/15). The design of GTP has made use of the lessons and gains of:
1) Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP)- 2002/03-2004/05; &
2) The Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) - 2005/06-2009/10. This was the First Five Year Phase aimed at laying out the directions for accelerated, sustained, and people-centered economic development as well as to pave the groundwork for the attainment of the MDGs by 2015.

Figure 3: Development Programs/Strategies/Plans (Source: Firdissa, 2012)

Objectives of Higher Education Institutions in GTP: Among others, the pertinent objectives of higher education in GTP are the following.

1) Establish a HEI system which focuses on result-based management, administration and performance, that recognizes and scales up best practices;
2) Produce a higher level skilled and capable human power as per the demand of the development of the country in general and the manufacturing industry in particular;
3) Ensure HE enrolment that prioritizes science and technology;
4) Assure HEIs that have achieved education quality and relevance in accordance with the demands of the economy;
5) Enhance the competitiveness and competency of female students to promote their success and ensure gender equity (MoFED, 2010).

The underlying reason for formulating GTP is to backup Ethiopia’s aspirations to:
- be a middle income country by 2020-2023,
- achieve the MDG targets by 2015,
  - achieve UNESCO’s teacher-student ratio of 1:20
- improve and ensure the quality, relevance and efficiency of education at all levels with the purpose to produce trained manpower-knowledgeable, skillful, enlightened, inspired and innovative citizens in line with the demands of the emerging economy and industry.

GTP, therefore, has ambitiously targeted quantitative gains in teacher development; student-teacher-ratio; annual intake for postgraduate programs, average graduation rates, gross admission and participation rates as have been shown in the following Table.

A look at the above targets generates a concern about quality. Regardless of the growing recognitions for, and the efforts made by the Federal Ministry of education, it seems that plea and applauds, emphasis and resources are directed to quantitative gains- enrolling and graduating whatsoever level quality students. It seems that little conscious efforts are made to consider the quality forces, dimensions, and rationales.
Table 1: The Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) Targets for Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Targets</th>
<th>2009/10</th>
<th>2014/15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. University teachers (no)</td>
<td></td>
<td>23,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Teachers with second degrees (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Teachers with PhD degrees (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Student-teacher ratio</td>
<td></td>
<td>1:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Annual intake for postgraduate programs (second degree and PhD (no))</td>
<td></td>
<td>16,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The average graduation rate of undergraduate program (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. The graduation rate undergraduate programs for females (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. The graduation rate undergraduate programs for males (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Gross admission for undergraduate program (70:30 program mix) (no)</td>
<td>185,788</td>
<td>467,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Participation rate of females in undergraduate programs (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Participation rate of females in postgraduate programs (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MoFED (2010).

Relationship between Quality Education and Economic Development

As Firdissa (2012) indicates, quality education and economic development have direct, bidirectional and strong bond. Although growth does not necessarily eliminate poverty, economic growth is a powerful weapon against poverty. Economic growth is generally assumed to be explained largely by stocks of labor, physical capital, and human capital (improvement in the quality of the labor force). Technology is assumed to be part of the growth equation, and the rate of technological change is associated with the availability of highly qualified workers. Demographic structure and change support or inhibit economic growth. Economic growth is a means for poverty reduction. Equally, as with education and economic growth, there is a two-way relationship between education and poverty. Family income is strongly positively associated with education attainment, and low earnings of the poor are the result partly of lower human capital endowments and partly of labor market discrimination (Quibria, 1994).

Studies support the positive impact that education has on economic growth. For instance, between 30 and 50% of that part of American output growth that could not be explained by conventional factor inputs were due to the increase in the quality of labor through education. Reflecting the association of education and poverty, in the Philippines, data from 97 provinces and cities with provincial status demonstrate that the incidence of poverty was associated with the extent of school participation, frequency of school completion, and level and quality of school staffing (Adams, 2002).

As it is true that advanced education leads to preferred employment, poverty reduces the opportunity for education attainment and acquisition of education outcomes (Adams, 2002). Particularly, quality education is the major driver for development. It therefore becomes a necessity:

1) in today’s changes in technology, globalization, and demographics;
2) to muddle through, to survive and thrive within this unpredictable world;
3) in producing a labour force with appropriate skills, disciplines and commitment;
4) to catalyze the means to the end;
5) to create a strong and versatile economy; and
6) to remain competitive and/or to be winners within the competitive world.

Economy at the same time expands educational opportunities. The bond demands that all the programs at all schooling perform well and are in line with the requirements of the economy. The bi-directional and strong bond between the two can be seen from Figure 4.

![Bidirectional bond between quality education & Development](Firdissa, 2012)

In today’s Ethiopian Education and Training Policy, tertiary level degree provides high level knowledge, skills and disciplines enabling new information to be absorbed faster, unfamiliar inputs and new processes applied more effectively, and many social and institutional barriers to economic growth removed. The contribution of quality assurance to output growth can be seen in three ways:
1) Through the more varied and better generic skills it bestows on workers;
2) Through the greater research productivity it generates; and
3) By contributing to the rate of technical progress or a rise in ‘total’ productivity by increasing labor and professional quality and productivity.

Conclusions and Implications
The current world dynamism is both a chance and a challenge to HEIs in our country. It is a chance because of the fact that the world developments and trends are heading to our country. It is a challenge because of the low or no readiness from the side of our HEIs. The dynamisms call for devising survival strategies by assuring the quality and relevance of the functions of HEIs in the country. Quality, nonetheless, is indefinable due to priority differences, perceptual shift, changes overtime, and antecedents within its origin. Regardless of these reasons, however, it has been viewed as exceptional (high standards), consistency (zero defects/errorless), value for money (return on investment, accountability/efficiency), transformative (an ongoing process that includes empowerment and enhancement of satisfaction), fitness for purpose (fitting customer specifications, needs, and priorities), fitness of purpose (what the purpose itself needs to be for supporting the survival strategy whereby
learners are transformed for the world of life, work, and competition), and a culture (shared values) of the institution and its community.

In Ethiopian context, the quality of HEIs is now evaluated against the ten Focus areas set out by the Higher Education and Relevance Agency (HEROA). There are growing trends whereby the achievements of public universities are judged against a set of Performance elements/criteria developed by the Consortium of Ethiopian Public Universities (CEPU) with a purpose to be responsive to national and international demands. This gradually leads to adopting developmental approach to quality whereby the universities as well as individuals within them are continually changing and learning as they cope up with new situations and expectations by making quality assurance the culture of all the university community and the functions of the university.

One may ask: “Why Worry about Quality Assurance?” It could be due to the concerns and complexities that are born out of the forces and reasons, such as: competitiveness; internationalization; moral; professional; accountability; customer satisfaction; maintaining standards; improving employee morale and motivation; credibility, prestige and status; and image and visibility. These forces and the subsequent reasons for quality have stimulated quality movements, basically as a concept since the 20th century in the manufacturing industry and management. It was customized to HEIs, passed through different chronologies, and currently viewed as the culture of continuous improvement, organization-wide quality management, which is the nature of Total quality Management (TQM).

Current trends also show that there are three dimensions of quality (product, software and service) with six criteria within the dimensions, namely, tangibles, competence, attitude, content, delivery and reliability. These dimensions and the criteria are indicative of the areas that should be of concern to ensure quality in higher education institutions.

It seems that little conscious efforts have been made within the Ethiopian Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) to consider the quality forces, dimensions, and rationales. It is more about estimating the rate of return to educational investment solely from quantity as precedence is given to quantitative targets. This is regardless of the fact that quality education and economic development have direct, bidirectional and strong bond.

Virtually, quantitative gains solely serve as surface symptoms for development, but cannot be decisive and requirements for the required development. Whatever efforts are made if quality is not there, the gain is solely quantitative (Firdissa, 2012). Basically, the main reason for Ethiopia to put in place systems, organs, strategies, plans including GTP is to enhance national development. National development is, nonetheless, a result of many conditions (beyond quantitative gains) one of which is the presence of qualified labor force with appropriate skills, disciplines, and commitment- all founded on the provision of quality and relevant education.

The discussions made so far imply the need for:
1) Adopting a dynamic conception of quality whereby the priorities of all stakeholders are addressed, the developmental approach has become a culture of each and every member of the university community;
2) Recapitulating the current trends, the why, movements, and processes of quality assurance responsive to national development endeavors of Ethiopia;
3) Revitalizing the quantitative targets within the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) in
4) Adapting developmental culture of continuous improvement, and university-wide quality management involving all stakeholders, among others by situating and embedding quality assurance structure within and/or near the academic units (colleges/faculties/schools/centers/departments); and

5) Appreciating the direct, bidirectional and strong bond between quality education and economic development.

Specifically, the interconnectedness, interdependence, and incremental roles of the issues cited above for producing knowledgeable, skillful, enlightened, inspired and innovative citizens in line with the demands of the emerging economy and the industry have been shown in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Implications of the quality assurance trends and GTP to national development
References


