
A Study on Quality management: Challenges and Prospects of Ethiopian Universities

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Abstract

Higher education has build capacity and contributes to the developement endeavor of the country. However, relentless advances in technology have brought, this sector on the precipice of significant changes and transformation in the past few decades. Quality in the higher education sector drives competitiveness, excellence, and innovation, improving economic status by contributing a skilled workforce and raising the standard of living. With the establishment of agencies like HERQA and many other economic reforms, the Ethiopian government improves higher education quality. However, issues like poor infrastructure, lack of policies to regulate education quality, staff resistance, low enrollment, or inappropriate budget allocation; hampers the education sector's development. This study aims to identify the challenges faced by Ethiopian universities in the implementation procedure of quality management practices. The study employed a mixed research approach; the quantitative analysis on the perception of 472 students and faculties of 11 universities was utilized and suggested that political challenges like policies implementation or government budget allocation, economic challenges like student's enrolment at the primary-secondary level, socio-cultural challenges like attendance level, and execution challenges like ICT development have a significant influence in the quality of higher education. Whereas the qualitative study of 20 quality assurance units of 11 universities and 4 senior experts of the ministry and the agency also stated that staff resistance, lack of awareness, or inadequate facilities hamper education quality in higher institutions. Thus, there is a need for de-politicizing institutional policies, innovative teaching mechanisms, unique regulatory bodies, and effective quality management models like ISO9000 to overcome the existing challenges and develop educational quality in higher educational institutions.

Keywords

Challenge, Ethiopia, Higher education, Quality Management

1. Introduction

Ethiopia is one of Africa's leading countries and considers higher education as one of the core factors responsible for economic growth and poverty reduction. Since human

resources play an essential role in supporting the economy's functioning, a skilled workforce is necessary for each country (Tefera Tadesse et al., 2018). Although the agency Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) has established in the country, it ensures the quality of education in public and private universities. However, the country faces challenges such as lack of infrastructure, political instability, funding issues, and inadequate teaching mechanisms, which hamper the growth of quality management practices (World Bank, 2009; Yizengaw, 2005). The divided text of the article should fall into chapters. The numbered Titles of branches except for the introduction and conclusion are written in bold type and arranged from the left margin. Only two levels of chapter numbering are allowed. It is described to follow the format below:

Higher Education Management practices in universities

Quality Management in higher education has been a dynamic concept that has witnessed various changes across the globe due to national and regional forces (Sallis, 2014). Although the quality management concept has been the top agenda for the academic participants, government, and institutions, these practices started very late (Addy, 2013). As quality education directly reflects an individual's skill in future work, the implementation of quality management practices assures organizations that individuals joining them through their skills would improve the company's performance and market position in the future (In'airat & Kassem, 2014). The quality management practices stated to maintain the quality of education, the minimum standard, or the criteria. This process ensures that effective teaching and learning process is directed by striving students towards excellence (Sudha, 2013). Institutions stressing quality management's relevance through their continuous improvement in education facilities would motivate students to enroll. Further, these practices manage competitiveness and international recognition to make the education relevant for the present and future times (Ewell, 2010).

Shortcomings of Ethiopian higher education institutions interms of quality

Focus on educational reforms; the Ethiopian government increased the number of institutions raise from 2.7 million in the year 1991 to 9.3 million in 2006 and the net enrollment for upper-secondary education from 16% in 1999 to 26% in 2015 (World Bank, 2009).

Hence, 30% of the institutions do not provide annual data to the Ministry of Education. Due to this, the quality of education does not know. Staff resistance in maintaining the standard of education, lack of annual data maintenance for identifying the required changes, and inadequacy in information and communication technology add to the complexity of quality assurance and management (Shin and Harman, 2009; Daniel, 2015). Even a lack of government support due to shortage of resources, absence of research in private institutions quality maintenance, inadequate funds, and lack of infrastructure facility significantly reduces the improvement trend of higher education quality, apart from these the social aspect of Ethiopia, i.e., scattered population, low enrollment, higher dropout, lack of

health and hygiene facility, and gender-based disparity in education limit the reach of higher education along with ineffective quality management (Teferra et al., 2018).

1. Aim of study

This study aims to examine the challenges that impede Ethiopia's higher education institutions, implementing a quality management system.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Higher Education quality management practices in Universities

The higher education system in the 1990s, maintaining the quality in the educational sector, and increasing access to higher education has become cardinal in Ethiopia. Proclamation number 351/2003 issued for the establishment of a national agency to control quality, and in 2005, proclamation number 650/2009 and 1152/2019 focused on the formulation of policies for structural changes in the education sector for enhancing the maintenance and adoption of quality standard (T. Tadesse, 2015). Further, the traditional model of education was replaced by modular approaches to implement outcome-based learning assessment. The education sector's various quality management models are Malcolm Baldrige, Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, ISO9000, Six Sigma, Benchmarking, Total Quality Management, Business Process Re-engineering, and EFQM Excellence Model (Papanthymou & Darra, 2017). Developed Transfer System European Credit Accumulation for maintaining the consistency in education; Education and Training Policy focused on pursuing education with proper technologies, materials, and management support; Higher Education Proclamation, Science and Technology Innovation (STI) policies developed to promote the practical knowledge attainment by supporting research; and announced Ethernet application since 2001 for raising the access of educational resources by developing ICT infrastructure (Bankole and Assefa, 2017; Tadesse, Manathunga and Gillies, 2018).

2.2. Factors influencing the quality management practices

Higher education quality management practices drive students towards excellence, making the institution recognized in the competitive environment and creating value for stakeholders (Woodhouse, 2014). All these changes in the education sector and contribution in improving the higher education quality influenced by various factors i.e.

- Political – Governments, through their policies and budgets, define the quality standard of education. Herein, the government formulates the strategy to develop a quality education process, provide funds or grants for research, provide a unified platform for international exposure, and fund-based support for exchange programs. Thus, the government, through their policies to reduce privatization in the education sector, government funding available for higher education institutions, and quality assurance via ranking the institution based on quality help in restricting the growth of education for profit along with raising the international ranking and access to education in top-ranked institutions (Carr, Hamilton,

and Meade, 2005; Sudha, 2013).

- **Economic** – The financial resources for institutions provide funding for research and retain and employ research and teaching staff. This economic backing enables higher education institutions to provide practical education and refrain from compromising the quality due to a lack of funds. Further, the research initiatives promotion contributes to having new development and attaining new knowledge standards. Thus, good economic backing is a medium that ensures good quality education delivery (Smith & Abū ‘Ammuh, 2013).
- **Socio-Cultural** – The quality of education is dependent on various socio-cultural aspects like the Meritocratic system wherein productive academic administrations are included as part of institutions, thus promoting grants attainment for teaching and research. Further, social origin, attendance, and high school attendance also influence education quality, i.e., attendance provides the scholarship facility in Japan. Academic freedom defines the prism of excellence stating the focus on theoretical or practical approach. Thus, socio-cultural factors ensure the quality of education and groom individuals towards being the skilled workforce (Taylor, 2006; Dey, 2011; Farooqi, 2017).

2.3. Challenges in implementation of Quality Management practices

Apart from influencing political, economic, and social-cultural factors, various other aspects work as a challenge in implementing quality management practices. Herein, one such element is execution based challenges. The resistance of staff to moderate their teaching as per quality standards due to the additional workload (Shin & Harman, 2009), issue in the strategic initiatives or academic planning for quality management due to lack to lack of knowledge about data assessment (Horine & Hailey, 1995), and lack of information and communication technology (ICT) tools for examining the quality data further unable the effective implementation of the quality management practices (Daniel, 2015). Additionally, Ethiopia's environment, i.e., the scattered population living in different regions, limits students' training and education, thus reducing students' accessibility to higher education. Apart from the low enrollment rate, a high dropout rate also remain a challenge for the education sector.

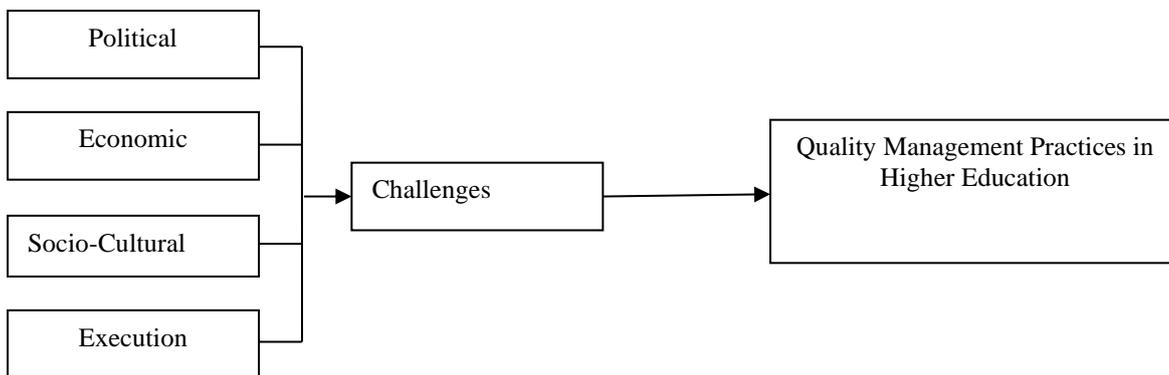
Lack of information regarding capacity development activities, absence of documentation, lower interchange of data between agencies and ministries, lack of staff with required skills, lack of usage of educational data, poor ICT infrastructure, limited capacity, inappropriate health and nutrition management, sanitation and hygiene issues, lack of developed, plan to the institutional system, inefficient resource allocation, budget constraints, and lack of monitoring or evaluation prevent the practical assessment of the quality management practices in higher education sector (Teferra et al., 2018; World Bank, 2009). Thus, these challenges present to limit higher education accessibility and prevent the quality-based management of Ethiopian institutions.

2.4. Conceptual Framework

Even though there have been various efforts to improve the quality of higher education in Ethiopia, factors like political, economic, socio-cultural, and execution due to their strong influence on quality management tend to be challenging in the implementation process.

As in fig 1. each of these challenges affects the implementation procedure of quality management. Thus, this study focuses on studying the influence of each challenge on higher education quality management practices.

Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: own research

3. Methodology

The methodology of a study defines the procedure that needs to follow to fulfill the study objective. Herein, focusing on studying the influence of various challenges in quality management implementation, the researcher focuses on having a primary analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data following the explanatory research design. Would collect data for the qualitative analysis would be collected from 20 quality assurance unit head and senior experts of the Ministry and the Agency. In contrast, quantitative analysis data consist of 472 students and faculties from 11 universities in Ethiopia. Each study's data was collected using the random sampling method via a survey-based close-ended and interview-based open-ended questionnaire. Herein, the respondents' demographic and background information examined using the graphical frequency-based analysis with SPSS software. Further, would do the quantitative analysis for assessing the influence of various challenges on the quality management practices would be done by having the correlation and regression-based analysis via SPSS software for the below-stated hypothesis i.e.

H01: Challenges of quality higher education does not impact the quality of higher education.

HA1: Challenges of quality higher education does have an impact on the quality of higher education.

For deriving the relevant information, tested the above-stated hypothesis at a 5% level of significance. The thematic analysis would do qualitative research for the same. As prevented human-based errors were, and the confidentiality of respondents' private information is maintained, the study results are ethical, valid, and reliable.

4. Analysis

This section focuses on having the quantitative and qualitative assessment of the students and academic staff perception, respectively. The below sub-section would identify the significant challenges that a higher education institution has to bear based on the perception.

4.1. Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis refers to the research method wherein the relationship between the variables is built using the statistical method. Initially, the demographic analysis defines the respondents' demographic characteristics, i.e., age, gender, education, experience, or income.

Fig. 2: Demographic analysis of students

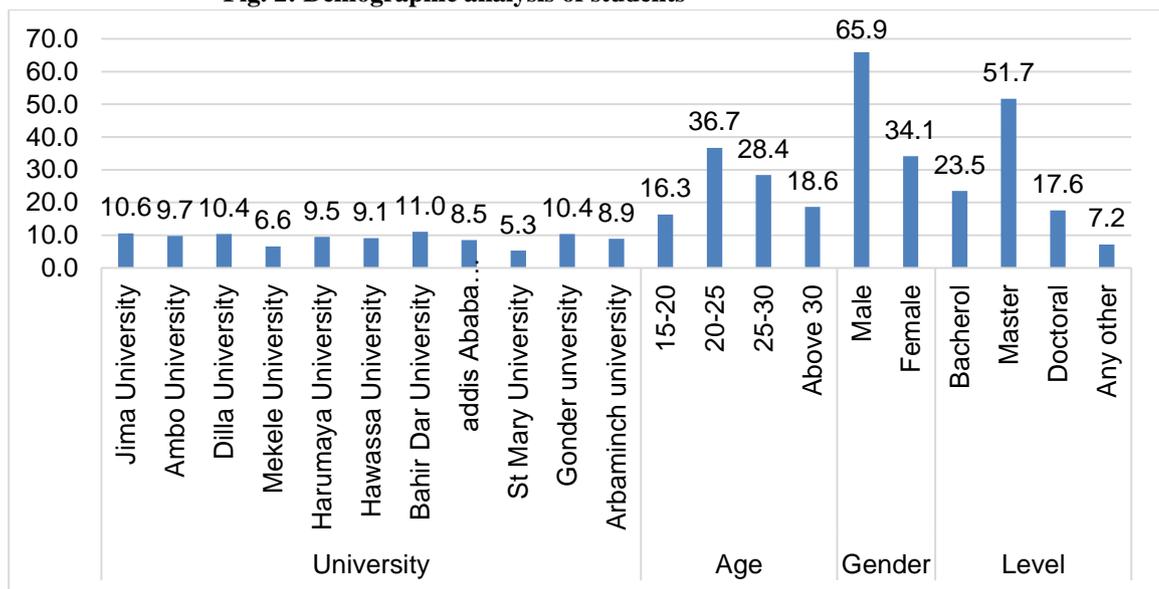
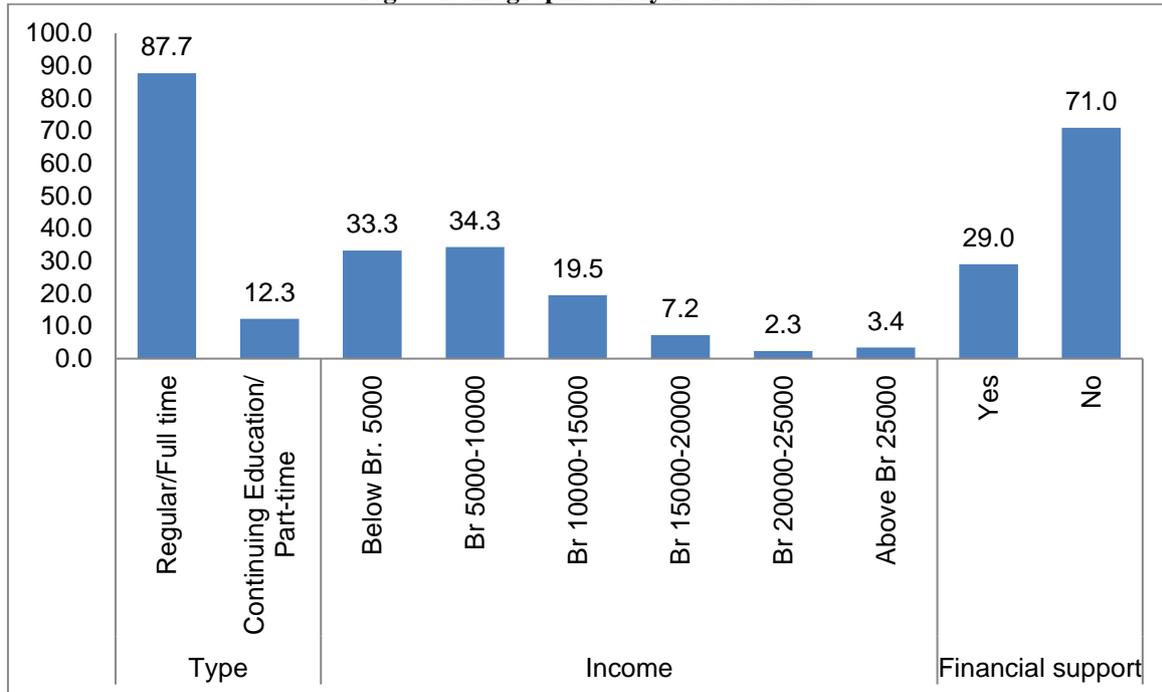


Figure 2 shows that the students and faculties considered for the quantitative analysis are from 11 different Ethiopian educational institutions, wherein about 36.7% belong to the age group 20-25 years and 28.4% to 25-30 years. Having 65.9% of the students as male, most of the students have enrolled in masters (51.7%) and bachelor's degrees (23.5%). Further, fig. Three shows that 87.7% of the students are pursuing a regular degree wherein most of the students are from lower-income groups, i.e., 33.3% with income below Br. 5000 and 34.3% with income range Br. 5000-10000. Lastly, financial support depicts that about 71% of the students cannot get any financial support. Hence, the analysis shows that

the study participants are mostly from a young age, i.e., between 20-30 years of pursuing a full-time course and belong to the lower-income group family. Despite having low income, there is no financial support available in the form of a scholarship.

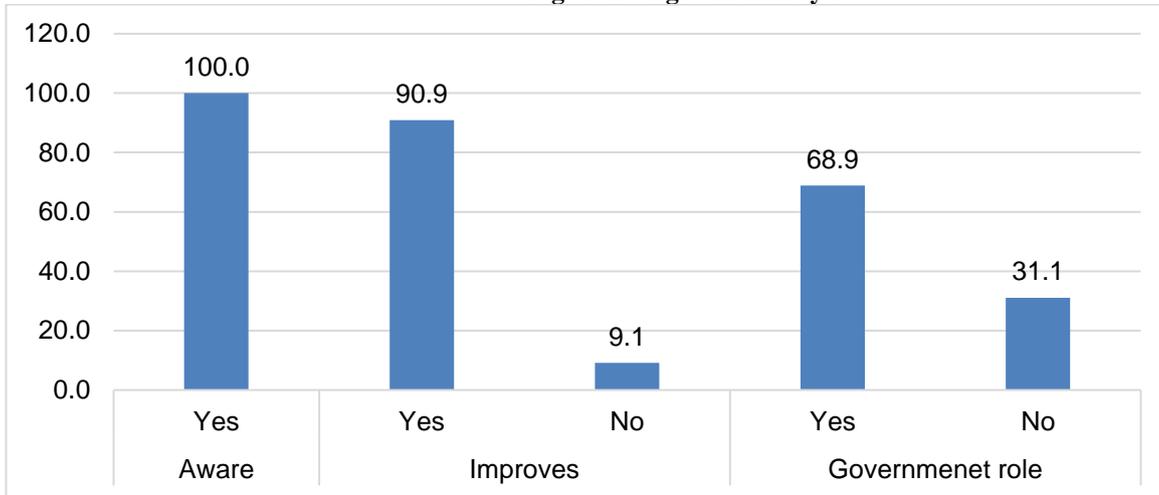
Fig. 3: Demographic analysis of students



Source: own research

Further, the analysis of the necessary knowledge depicts that all of the respondents were aware of quality management, and 90.9% of them believe that the implementation of quality management practices would improve the efficiency of education. As shown in Fig. 4, even 68.9% accept that the government's support is an essential aspect of higher education standards.

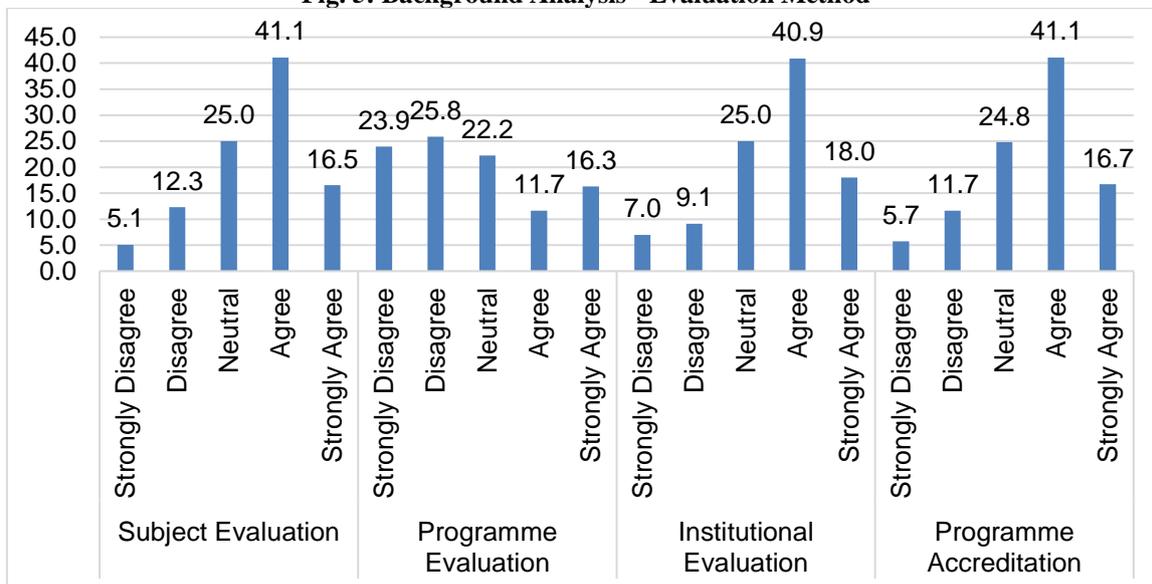
Fig. 4: Background Analysis



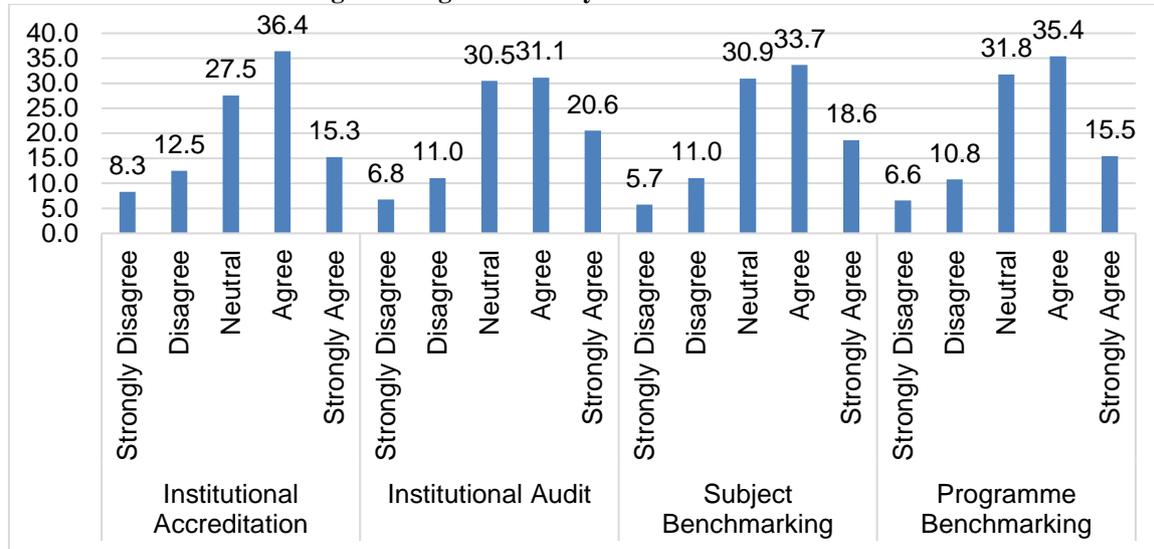
Source: own research

Fig. 5 and Fig. 6 state their institution's evaluation practices, and about 57.6% accept subject evaluation. Whereas 28% of research participants considered that program evaluation practice as beneficial, 58.9% of which agreed on the institutional evaluation practice, whereas 57.8% believed the usage of program accreditation, 51.7% carry institutional certification, 51.7% assume in institutional audit, 52.3% agree on the use of subject benchmarking practice, and 50.9% accept program benchmarking practice implemented in their respective institution.

Fig. 5: Background Analysis - Evaluation Method



Source: own research

Fig.6: Background Analysis - Evaluation Method

Source: own research

Thus, the background analysis revealed that participants are aware of quality management concept relevance. Most higher educational institutions are focused on implementing the practices like Subject evaluation, institutional evaluation, program accreditation, institutional accreditation, institutional audit, and subject and program benchmarking.

Further analysis to understand did the linkage between the variables was done. Considering the quality of higher education as a dependent variable and the political, economic, socio-cultural, and execution challenges as independent variables, the correlation analysis is done. Shown Coding for the variables in Tab. 1. Results of the study conducted below the table (Tab. 2)

Tab. 1: Coding for the variables

Statements	Code
Quality (Dependent)	Q
Implementation of Policies in Higher education Sector	pc1
Effective usage and application of Public Funds and resources	pc2
Government Higher educational Budget Allotment	pc3
Availability of government ranking mechanism	pc4
Setting up of benchmark, and higher educational quality standards by Government for private institutions	pc5
Setting strategies for developing Quality Higher education Process to transfer funds for research, providing uniform higher education platform.	pc6
Availability of economic backing and economical standing of university	ec1
Effective financing available to universities	ec2
Enrolment rate at primary-secondary level	ec3
Implementation of innovative higher education system	ec4

level of attention to Social origin	sc1
High School Attended	sc2
Attendance level	sc3
Academic freedom	sc4
Implementation of Quality Management Practice for academic planning or other strategies of higher education institution	ecc1
Information and Communication Technology	ecc2
Student Participation in extra-curricular activities, research works, etc.	ecc3
Lack of monitoring, evaluation and reporting skills	ecc4

Source: own research

Tab. 2: Correlation Analysis results

Dependent Variables	Q	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Q	1.000	
pc1	0.809	0.00
pc2	0.432	0.00
pc3	0.744	0.00
pc4	0.707	0.00
pc5	0.397	0.00
pc6	0.694	0.00
ec1	0.665	0.00
ec2	0.643	0.00
ec3	0.667	0.00
ec4	0.545	0.00
sc1	0.580	0.00
sc2	0.595	0.00
sc3	0.576	0.00
sc4	0.495	0.00
ecc1	0.616	0.00
ecc2	0.609	0.00
ecc3	0.570	0.00
ecc4	0.575	0.00

Source: own research

The above table (Tab. 2) shows that the significance value for each of the variables is 0.00 less than the significance value of the study, i.e., 0.05; thus, each of the variables is significant. The Pearson correlation value depicts that for all the variables except pc2 – 0.432, pc5 – 0.397, and sc4 – 0.495, the value is more significant than 0.5. Thus, there is a possibility of having a linkage between the Q and the independent variables. As the value of pc2, pc5 and sc4 are less. Thus, they won't consider them for further analysis.

The examination of the linkage between the variables is using the regression analysis. The results of the study shown in table Tab. 3.

Tab. 3: Regression results

Challenge	Coefficient	T-statistic	p-value	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F ratio
Political Challenge						
Constant	0.323	3.556	0	0.735	0.733	324.604
pc1	0.449	12.24	0			
pc3	0.188	4.84	0			
pc4	0.16	4.276	0			
pc6	0.139	3.842	0			
Economic Challenge						
Constant	0.898	7.287	0	0.497	0.492	115.264
ec1	0.254	3.489	0.001			
ec2	0.124	1.817	0.07			
ec3	0.295	4.872	0			
ec4	0.079	1.759	0.079			
Socio-Cultural Challenge						
Constant	1.206	9.51	0	0.417	0.413	111.574
sc1	0.216	4.069	0			
sc2	0.281	5.3	0			
sc3	0.174	3.147	0.002			
Execution Challenge						
Constant	0.922	7.249	0	0.477	0.472	106.293
ecc1	0.338	8.046	0			
ecc2	0.173	2.741	0.006			
ecc3	0.118	2.049	0.041			
ecc4	0.136	2.386	0.017			

Source: own research

The Adjusted R² value for all the four models represents the independent variables influenced by the political challenge represent 73.3% variation in quality, whereas 49.2% of the variation in quality by economic challenge, the socio-cultural challenges determine 41.3% of the variation in quality, and 47.2% of the variation in quality is due to execution challenges. Further, the F-ratio of each of the models is greater than 1, i.e., PC – 324.604, EC – 115.264, SC – 111.574, and ECC – 106.293; thus, more precision in assessing the changes in quality derived by including the respective independent variables in each of the models. The P-value for all models is less than the required value of 0.005 except for the economic challenge model's ec2 and ec3. Thus, the null hypothesis that the quality higher education challenges do not impact higher education quality management practices is rejected. Coefficient value further depicts the magnitude of variation i.e. for political challenge with 1% improvement in pc1 (policies implementation), pc3 (government budget allocation), pc4 (availability of government ranking mechanism), and pc6 (strategies

settling) the quality of higher education increases by 0.449%, 0.188%, 0.16%, and 0.139% respectively; for economic challenge with 1% rise in ec1 (economic backing and standing availability) and ec3 (students enrolment at the primary-secondary level) the quality of higher education rises by 0.254% and 0.295%; for socio-cultural challenge with 1% increase in sc1 (social origin attention), sc2 (high school attended) and sc3 (attendance level) the quality of higher education rises by 0.216%, 0.281%, and 0.174%; and for execution challenge with 1% rise in ecc1 (quality management practices implementation), ecc2 (ICT development), ecc3 (student participation), and ecc4 (monitoring, evaluation, and reporting) the quality of higher education rises by 0.338%, 0.173%, 0.118%, and 0.136% respectively. Hence, the regression analysis shows that political, economic, socio-cultural, and execution challenges greatly influence higher education quality. Each aspect's maintenance would improve the quality of education.

4.2. Qualitative Analysis

The academic staff considered for the analysis consists of professor or lecturer (45%), associate professor (25%), HOD (15%), assistant professor (10%), and research assistant (5%) having experience of above four years. Herein, the academic staff identifies the various challenges borne by the institutions in the form of attitude or capacity and suggests some strategies for improving the status of higher education in Ethiopia. For confidentiality, the study respondents are coded in alphabetical order by the code as KI-A to KI-T.

In the practical implementation of quality management practices, it is essential to have coordinated activities continuously assessed. The inadequacy in the process led to hampering the working procedure and providing non-efficient quality. KI-A (professor), regarding this aspect, stated that "As the quality education delivery became important, many challenges like academic staff resistance, non-availability of effective technologies, and lack of knowledge came forward. Associated even some of these problems were with inadequate government working, i.e., non-availability of economic backing or lack of focus on strict implementation of quality practices". KI-N (Associate professor) further added that "Government support is one of the essential parts in developing the higher education sector. Weak capacity of government agencies, their lack of commitment towards external assessment, and inadequate allocation of budget limit the growth path of quality based development in education". KI-I (HOD) mentions that "Institutions are lagging in planned efforts and technologies availability. With the usage of traditional methods of teaching and lack of infrastructural development, the institution fails to execute quality management practices".

However, with the technological advancement and rise in international competition in the education sector, the Ethiopian government is also working towards reducing the complication in higher education delivery by assisting institutions through stricter regulations, awareness campaigns, and making quality management the obligation of all institutions. With this respect, KI-D (Associate professor) stated that "Our institution is regularly working on providing the smart technology of learning. Workshops and Training programs organized to improve teachers' capacity and raise the awareness of students and faculties about quality management". KI-L (Lecturer) mentioned the political influence and suggested that "Distinction required between the institution and government policies. As often due to political changes, the government has to bear consequences; thus, strategy for institutions improvement needs to implement at the institution level, and even de-politicizing education delivery needs to do". Even KI-Q (Lecturer) added that "Facilities of institutions contribute to influencing the quality of education; thus, we focus on modernizing the laboratories, using innovative teaching mechanisms like group discussions or problem-based learning upgrading the computer and internet services. Even the curriculum is designed in a way to promote gaming for the overall development of students". Thus, an institution faces various challenges like staff resistance, lack of awareness, or inadequate facilities and

services. An institution needs to focus on the strict assessment of smart technologies' quality and usage to improve teachers' capacity and raise students' learning ability.

Conclusions

With the growth in the relevance of quality in the development of the higher education sector, the Ethiopian government focused on directing institutions towards implementing quality management practices and improvising the teaching mechanism towards practical knowledge. Although many quality management models and agencies are developing to assure the quality of education, poor infrastructure, lack of funding facility, low enrollment rate, scattered population, uncoordinated national agencies, and high dropout rate hamper the accessibility of education. Even factors like political, economic, or socio-cultural aspects influence the growth of higher education quality. Thus, based on these shortcomings, this study focused on identifying the challenges affecting quality management practices' implementation procedures.

Initially, Discussed the perceptions of 472 students and faculties from 11 different Ethiopian educational institutions and belonging mostly from the lower-income group.

The analysis revealed that it has a significant influence on the quality of higher education. Political challenges like policies implementation, government budget allocation, availability of government ranking mechanism, and strategies settling; economic challenges like economic backing and standing availability, and students enrolment at the primary-secondary level; socio-cultural challenges like social origin attention, high school attended and attendance level; and execution challenges like quality management practices implementation, ICT development, student participation, and monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. Further, assessment of 20 quality assurance unit heads and senior experts at the system level quantitative results depicts that aspects like staff resistance, lack of awareness, or inadequate facilities and services do influence the higher education quality management practices. Based on these findings, to improve higher education status and accessibility and overcome the challenges of the Ethiopian economy and government, the following recommendations can offer.

- De-politicizing the institutional policies should be done to eliminate political decisions on higher education institutions' working.
- Design Mechanism to maintain academic freedom, institutional autonomy, accountability, professionalism, and collegiality in the institutions.
- The specific policies or principles must be aware of the academic staff and students and faculties about the relevance of quality management practices. It has effective monitoring of education quality.
- Innovative teaching mechanisms like peer learning activities or case-study-based programs need to be adopted to shift from the theoretical and outdated teaching approach to a more practical and knowledge-based approach.
- The unique regulatory body should establish to discriminate against the educational policies from political aspects and have easy accreditation and assessment of the higher educational institutions.
- Quality management models like ISO9000 are required to work by universities and maintain education quality standards effectively.

Above stated are recommended to enhance quality in higher education so as to contribute the socio-economic and over all development of the nation from the system.

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