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**Theme:** The Role of Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in Sustainable  
Development

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# Realities and Challenges of Private Higher Education Institutions to promote Quality education for sustainable development in Ethiopia: The case of St. Mary's University by Mekdes Adane, St. Mary's University

## Abstract

*The main purpose of this study was to explore and understand Realities and Challenges of Private Higher Education Institutions to promote Quality education for sustainable development in Ethiopia: The case of St. Mary's University (hereafter referred as SMU). Exploratory qualitative case study research strategy was employed and data were collected from purposively selected twenty students that were enrolled at SMU in 2014 academic year, who were selected by using snowball sampling technique., four instructors in each undergraduate departments of SMU, parents and data regarding realities and challenges of private higher education institutions particularly in the case of SMU was collected by using semi-structured in-depth interview and from documents published in the area of higher education in general and SMU in particular in areas of quality education. The data were then inductively analyzed by creating themes from the raw data collected through in-depth interview and documents. The findings of the present study revealed that the value SMU strives to deliver quality service in teaching learning, research and focusing on community outreach areas than the public universities. Even though, there were benefits that Ethiopian students got in pursuing their education in the public universities with no immediate educational pay but the major input i.e. students highly affected by drug and substance abuse, hopelessness, and identity shock. Besides, the sectoral policies devised the demand for higher education in the country challenges the private higher educational institutions to admit those who were dropout of public universities with different educational, social, and psychological problem and these problems were not properly managed due to the tension between the instructors, parents, and the policy makers. Thus, since those who dropped out of campus joined the private higher education institutions, it is then recommended that SMU should create deep collaboration with parents, policy makers, industries, and schools at each level in order to assure both the quality and productivity of the human resource and realize the full aspirations of the private higher education institutions in their endeavor to maintain sound sustainable development and to protect the nation, the country's productive force from misuse if the areas of focus and government intervention to protect these core educational quality; the youth; not to expose to drug, substance abuse, westernization in a negative context by devising life skill education, strong regulatory policies for drug dealers particularly in the regional universities. And close collaboration with parents and caregivers, so as to get more out of these youngsters to the Ethiopia developmental policy and address contemporary issues in the country. Underpinned by a model adapted to the research purpose, the study complemented not only to the existing knowledge in the area, but it also contributed to the fact that there was no research made in non-western countries like Ethiopia over this interesting and potential rich area.*

*Keywords:* Challenges, Private Higher Education, Quality education, Sustainable development, Ethiopia

## Background

The role of education in every sense is one of the fundamental factors of development. In any country in the globe, the realization of sustainable development without substantial investment in the human element never exists. In addition it plays a very crucial role in securing economic and social progress and improving income distribution.

This is because education as a tool for societal development enriches individual understands of themselves and the world around them through constant improvement in their standard of living and the society at large. Besides, education leads individual to boost their productivity and creativity so as to promote entrepreneurship and technological advances.

However, education, in its general and more of formal sense is most of the time considered as a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills, and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training, or research and it is commonly divided into stages such as preschool, primary school, secondary school, and higher learning or tertiary education, which mostly, within the realm of teaching includes vocational education and training, undergraduate and postgraduate studies Varghese (2004).

In this regard, the contribution of all types and levels of education delivery plays a pivotal role for nation building the role of tertiary education becomes the center of discussion. This happens because of a variety of reasons that has a direct effect on the learners' readiness for taking responsibilities in the nation building process. In addition to this, the role and responsibilities of the various types of tertiary level education providers and the regulations related to the education sector have a huge impact on the both the provider and the learner.

In developing nations like Ethiopia, investing on higher education for sustainable development, poverty reduction, democratization, and competitive market advantage is at the top of the countries developmental agenda. (EGTP 2). In so doing, the trend in providing higher education in Ethiopia lies on the hands of the public and private universities.

And unfortunately, due to this lowest rank in higher education enrollment, professional and technical capacities of all types are extremely limited in the country and development prospects have been stunted by this capacity shortage (UNESCO,2009).

In this regard, the role of the higher education providers in Ethiopia tries to provide 'quality' and 'relevant' education in line with the developmental issues of the country. According to world banks report in 2009, elements related to delivering quality education includes; leadership, government oversight, students, instructors, funds, budget, and technology should be in place as a system. Among these factors, students in terms of their readiness for learning are considered as one of the major determinants of quality of education for sustainable development Mulu and Wossenu (2012).

Therefore, prior to discussing issues related to the basic component of quality education provision i.e. students readiness for learning let's briefly explain the higher education landscape of Ethiopia. The expansion of HEIs in Ethiopia brought about, as expected, a remarkable increase in student population.

As it is indicated in the above paragraph, the issue of demand for education and expansion of higher education in the country is immense. Likewise, the role and share of private higher education institutions in the country is significant. However, there are noticeable deviation exists in the country's higher education landscape which is directly related to policy, admission, standards, quality assurance, relevance, budget, staff mix, minimal research engagements are some of the bottlenecks that challenges the role of the private sector to work with their maximum capacity.

Above all these problems, the operation and existence of the private higher education institutions are highly dependent on the controlling agency i.e the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) which is established by the Ministry of Education (MOE) under Articles 71 and 72 of the Higher Education Proclamation (HEP) No. 650/2009 (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2009).

And also this proclamation enforces the PHEIs to comply every rule and regulations stated regarding their internal governance and related issues and they need to get accreditation, quality audit, and reaccreditation from HERQA so as to sustain their programs which is not the case for Public Universities that have a huge share in the sector ), Mulu and Wossenu (2012), Getnet and Wondwossen (2012), Teshome (2007),.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is Realities and Challenges of Private Higher Education Institutions to promote Quality education for sustainable development in Ethiopia taking St. Mary's University as a focus.

## Methods

This exploratory qualitative case study used to produce insight into the realities and the problems of the private higher education institutions to deliver quality education so as to promote sustainable development in the country taking the issue of students and their readiness for learning as a major element of the study. Individual interviews were the major data collection method for the study, augmented by document review and observation. The role of the researcher was observing the cases, and as interviewer, data collector, analyst.

## Sample

The data were collected from purposively selected twenty students that were enrolled at SMU in 2014 academic year, who were selected by using snowball sampling technique. Four instructors in each undergraduate departments of SMU, and 4 parents were interviewed for this study.

## Interview

Interview questions were “unstructured, informal, flexible, explanatory, more like conversation” to produce a relaxed environment for participants (Merriam, 2009, p. 2). The interview questions were designed to explore the issues that the participant identified as challenges for the smooth delivery of quality of education, identify quality challenges in terms of students’ readiness, and indicate possible remedies to help resolve the identified problems that threaten the quality of private higher education in Ethiopia.

## Document Review

To augment and triangulate the data collected from the interviews as a primary data collection instrument secondary data were also employed in the form of observations and document review.

Documents related to quality education, guidelines of MoE and HERQA private higher education student admission, retention, studies conducted in youth development and harmful practices, and minutes related to disciplinary measures were reviewed

## Data Analysis

The data collected from all participants of the interview, observation and from the document reviewed were analyzed in arranged themes Creswell (2008). The interview recordings were transcribed, categorized, and reviewed to “make meaning” from the data in the manner indicated by Merriam (2009).

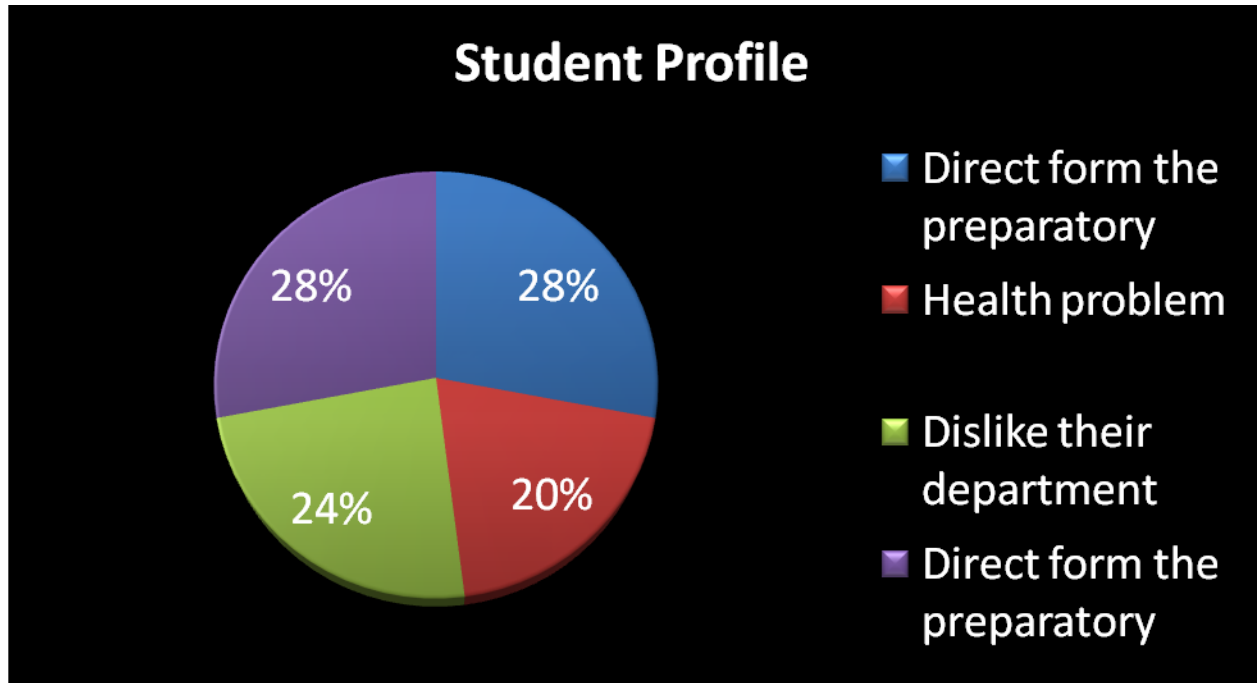
The transcripts of the interviews were reviewed and categorized to facilitate coding; shorthand designations were assigned to various aspects of the data for easy retrieval (Merriam, 2009). The responses were placed in tabulations and charts to organize key elements of the responses for descriptive statistical analysis to reach sound conclusions, classifying and categorizing emerging patterns and evaluating percentages or proportions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2003). Comparison of results across participants of the study was used to summarize their responses from different responses but same categories (Gay, 1996).

## Findings

The results of this study are summarized under the following three major areas which was not included in almost all researches conducted in Ethiopia particularly on problems related to quality education in Private Higher Education institutions: (a) current situation of quality of higher education realities in PHEIs, (b) Student mix found in PHEIs (c) major challenges inhibit students to gain from the quality education provided by PHEIs.

The review of the situation of the quality of higher education was mainly based on the responses of study participants to five relevant questions designed to explore the current status of students as a major input in quality education provision. Participants were asked to reflect on (a) their satisfaction on the current trend; (b) challenges related to students’ readiness; (c) input-, process-, and output-related challenges. The main results of the study that are related to the above questions are presented in brief as follows.

As it was depicted from the discussion section majority of the informants believes that the major problems related to students behavior and readiness for learning as the use of drug and substance abuse, unscheduled day and night parties, lack of interest in education, feeling of modernization to engage in various destructive practices.



From the finding of this study the major causes for these problems were hopelessness, lack of motivation, lack of positive role models (former graduates, instructors, families,..), eroded family and community values, lack of firm control from government towards abusive drug and substances, lose control from the HEIs particularly the Public PHEIs, support from the community, peer pressures, inappropriate use of media particularly social medias.

## Conclusions

- Higher education is the most vital place to guide the future and it must continue to be a centerpiece in the national capacity building, sustainable development, and poverty reduction endeavors of any government through a shift in creative attitudinal shift to the learners.
- Unfortunately, the burden was found to be even higher on private higher education sectors. Though the number of challenges mentioned by different researchers related to providing quality education in PHEIs the issue of quality in terms of students profile and readiness should be taken as a crucial input for quality provision in any educational system to be effective.
- Though the PHEIs strives to provide quality education through student centered learning, & produce efficient, effective and responsible citizens so as to accelerate the developmental agenda, poverty reduction, good governance and democratization in the nation with the crucial input in the teaching learning activity, i.e students have these limitations to inculcate

the skill, knowledge, and the needed attitudinal makeup so as to alleviate poverty and maintain sustainable development in the country.

## Recommendations

Since the study conducted on the real teaching-learning platform of the university, the following workable recommendations will serve as a guide to properly manage the delivery of quality education so as to promote sustainable development, poverty reduction, and democratization in the country.

Therefore, to unleash the potential of these young generation from abusive environmental factors, countries like Ethiopia can achieve their developmental goals through quality and competitive education. In this regard, the issues for this research mainly focus private higher educational intuitions and need to be implemented for better result for their service in generation building. In order to assure educational quality and maintain the sustainable development due attention must be given to the major educational input i.e. the human element rather than the processes, the outputs and the outcomes through collaborative effort.

## For Policy Makers

Due consideration and value should be given to the education sector in terms of policy related to

- Learner centered Curriculum, funding
- Teachers training and development
- Devise strong legal framework so as to protect the human resource in general and students in particular from unproductive schemes such as drug and substance abuse through high tax imposition, prohibitive measures, and establishing rehabilitation centers,
- Mainstream life skill education to the curriculum and deliver it as a course at the grass root level.

## For Private Higher Educational Institutions

- Tri dimensional collaborative problem solving system should be devise to minimize these challenges and to unleash the potential of these youngsters.
- Give due attention to scientific and behavioral interventions to the existing student support system.
- Create strong link among different sectoral offices including government and non government offices to collaborate in working closely with self skill, self concept, life and social skills.
- Strengthen student instructors' linkage so as to alleviate the problems perceived in the class rooms as part of their professional commitment.

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