

# Quality Matters

Quality Matters, Vol. 8 No. 28 August 2014

A Quarterly Newsletter of the Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA)

St. Mary's University College

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## Quote of this issue

*“An effective teacher is one who makes himself progressively unnecessary.”*

*Thomas Carruthers*

This newsletter is published every three months by the Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA) of St Mary's University College (SMUC). The objective of the newsletter is to inform the SMUC community as well as interested public, private, non-governmental stakeholders about the activities and endeavors of the institution in fostering quality education and research in the Ethiopian Higher Education setting.

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## Quality Unit Office of the Private Higher Education and TVET Institutions Association Meeting Held

The Director of CEIQA, Dr. Wondemagene Checkol, attended a meeting on Jan. 3, 2013, held at Mehchare Conference Hall. The meeting was organized by the Quality Unit Office of the Private Higher Education and TVET Institutions Association, focusing on introducing the Self- Assessment Manual, prepared by the Quality Unit Office of the association. Dr. Arega, President of the Association, after welcoming the invited guests, gave a short remark on the significance of the provision of quality education for private institutions to stay in the education sector long. To be competitive in the education enterprise, he pointed out the need for every private institution to work hard in order to win the trust of the government and the society by satisfying its stakeholders.

The Self- Assessment Manual was presented by the Head of the office which was then followed by discussion. Participants appreciated the effort made by the association and recommended to send the soft copy of the Manual to member institutions in order to read it critically and come up with comments for the next meeting. The next meeting was agreed to be called soon.

## Peer Educators Training Provided

The Gender and HIV/Prevention and Control Office, SMU, in collaboration with Dkt Ethiopia, organized the First Round Peer Educators Training for female students on February 7, 2014. The purpose of the training was to explain what peer education means, the topics to be covered in the upcoming peer education sessions and the expected outcomes of the program.

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## From the Editorial Desk

Distance education in Ethiopia is not exploited to the level it should be- even by African standard. This can be attributed to many factors. The expansion of conventional higher education is a recent phenomenon let alone distance education. In a country where there were only two universities for more than four decades, it would be impractical to expect the expansion of distance education in its proper. Lack of qualified tutors and resources are the other problems. The attitude of the society towards distance education adds fuel to the fire: there is a tendency to view it as subsidiary. Some people assume that distance education is not as good as the traditional one. In fact, if it is planned and handled carefully, involving multimedia and qualified human resources, the perception of distance education as inferior will be mere myth. This is because the use of technology will blur the difference. ‘Can we have the technology in Ethiopia and use the web page as a whiteboard soon?’ is, however, a critical question which needs practical answer.

The emergence of private higher learning institutions in Ethiopia has created conducive environment for the expansion of distance education. The number of students who attend their education through distance is increasing. The working class of the country has high interest for it since it allows to study without losing one’s job. High school drop outs are the other interest groups. Even if it is banned, primary and high school teachers also want to upgrade their qualification through distance education. Graduates from other fields are also interested to update themselves since they live in the era of lifelong learning. Therefore, the prospect of distance education in Ethiopia appears bright.

The sector, nonetheless, requires support from the government in such a way that educational policies should be supportive, stable and predictable, and educational resources should be imported free of taxes. There is also a need to expand ICT throughout the country very rapidly.

On the other hand, institutions should also work hard to assure the quality of distance education. The education system should satisfy its stakeholders by providing quality distance education which needs frequent control and policing of resources and inputs. Quality assurance in distance education is less consultative and more assessment-driven. It depends highly on outside consultants and assessment experts. The desire of its clients should predominate. There is a need to assure faculty credentials and student support services. In other words, the focuses of traditional and distance quality assurance differ.

Realizing the above differences, Saint Mary’s University has established the Plan, Quality Assessment and Research Office (PQARO) that works at CODL level. The role of the Office, among others, is to set standards and conduct internal program evaluations and implement quality related standards. Besides, the College is exploring the possibility to use technology for the learning process. The above measures indicate that the university is highly committed to real distance education excellence.

This newsletter focuses on distance education quality assurance culture. Enjoy reading it!

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# Research Corner

**Research Title:** An Investigation of Learners Satisfaction Level of Distance Education Teaching Material Preparation, Tutors Effectiveness and Student Support and their Predictive Power of Students' Academic Achievement: The Case of Addis Ababa Center of Saint Mary's

**Publication:** A Research Paper Presented at Distance Seminar (2013)

According to the researcher, for a country like Ethiopia where higher learning enrollment is low, distance education opens an ideal opportunity of access to students. Quoting the document of Common Wealth (2004), the writer pointed out the merits of distance learning saying that living a long way from an institution, students can follow their study without giving up their job. Besides, it is highly flexible. Its cost effectiveness is the other merit of distance learning. Compared to the traditional learning, the cost per student is affordable and is advantageous to both students and the government. It is also the only method to reach groups who could not be reached otherwise (ibid, 2004).

Despite the above advantages, distance learning, according to the researcher, needs extra care in terms of quality of tutoring, material preparation and student support services. This is because the role of tutors is significantly different from the face to face instructors which require a different set of orientations. When it comes to material development, it should consider many factors into account such as students' prior knowledge, their reading habit and experience. The material should also need to have attractive format and lots of exercises and examples, being written in clear and simple language. As to student support, learners require care and support from their institution in both academic and administrative area to overcome learning obstacles that they encounter. Academically, distance learners require different skills and orientations such as time management, library usage, reading and writing skills, etc. Similarly, they need various supports from

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the administration which include the choice of suitable study center, timely registration, efficient distribution of quality materials, etc.

The aim of the paper was, thus, to evaluate the quality of Saint Mary's University distance education tutors, material preparation and student support services and examine their predictive powers on learners' academic achievement. The study also examined whether there were perception differences in terms of gender, department and year regarding the quality of tutors, material preparation and student support services.

To examine the above issues, a structured questionnaire was employed to gather data. The questionnaire had three parts, having 17 items under each part with a total of 51 items. The first part addressed tutors effectiveness; the second focused on teaching material preparation, and the third concentrated on student support. A Likert scales ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree was applied after piloting with Cronbach method on 30 students. Students' cumulative average grade was also collected to examine its relationships with the inputs of the University.

Applying stratified sampling based on department, year and gender, subjects were selected. 120 samples were chosen from a total of 263 students of Accounting, Management and Marketing departments proportionally. The data were analyzed quantitatively using mean, standard deviation, F-test, ANOVA and multiple regression. In other words, the study applied both descriptive and inferential statistics.

The findings revealed that students have expressed their satisfaction regarding quality of tutors, material preparation and student support, rating the services as very good. Quality of course material, tutors and student support predict learners' achievement, accounting for 50% of the variation in students' CGPA. Quality of tutors is found to be the strongest predictors of all the three variables. Compared to male students, females are more satisfied regarding quality of tutors and material preparation. First year students

seem easily satisfied in comparison to senior students. However, department differences do not have an impact on the perception of tutors effectiveness, students support and quality of material preparation.

While pinpointing the implications of the study, even if learners rated tutors effectiveness, quality of material preparation and student services as very good, there is still a need to upgrade the quality of the above factors by giving due regard to material preparation, tutors effectiveness and student support and employing tutors based on their content, written and oral competencies instead of relying merely on work experience and university or college CGPA. On top of this, they should have material preparation experience. The institution should also prepare different study skills guidelines and make them easily accessible to students at region levels. Besides, senior students appear to demand much in terms of tutors' effectiveness, quality of material preparation and student support. Thus, care should be taken while assigning tutors and preparing materials. Experienced tutors should be assigned to them, and the institution should ensure the quality of distance materials. He also proposed the need to conduct qualitative study to identify the causes for females' greater satisfaction so as to narrow the gap between the two sexes.

#### *Continued from page 1...*

Equally, the training briefly highlighted topics related to vision, assertiveness, and social support and living in a save and safe principles. And also former facilitators of SISTA (Sisters Informing Sisters about Topics on AIDS) were invited to share their own experience to the newly registered female students to be part of the peer education training program.

During and after the training session, students were actively engaged in discussing topics and also raising timely issues and concerns that they perceive as a challenge for them to manage as university students. The training, which had 32 participating students, was facilitated by the Head of GHAPCO.

### Public Lecture Conducted

St. Mary's, in collaboration with the USA Embassy in Addis Ababa, organized a public lecture on Media Business Management here at the Main Campus on January 24, 2014. The speaker, Mr. Henry Heilbrunn, had 15 years of hands-on experience as corporate executive and another ten years as a journalist. His PowerPoint presentation covered issues related to opportunities for entrepreneurship in the Ethiopian context, projection of target customers, market survey and the causes for the successes and failures of businesses. He stressed that the growth in population in Ethiopia should be considered as an opportunity rather than a threat from business perspective. According to him, since the younger generation is significant in sheer numbers, an entrepreneur might think of considering e-commerce since the youth is increasingly using the internet. Present among the audience was Ms. Catherine M. Diop, Press Officer of the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa.

### Virtual Links

Ethiopian Ministry of Education  
Web site: [http:// www.moe.gov.et](http://www.moe.gov.et)  
Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (Ethiopia)  
Website: [www.higher.edu.et](http://www.higher.edu.et)  
PROPHE- Programme for Research on Private Higher Education  
Website: [www.albany.edu/dept/eaps/prophe/](http://www.albany.edu/dept/eaps/prophe/)  
International Network for Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (INQAAHE)  
Website: [http:// www.inqaahe.org](http://www.inqaahe.org)  
Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK)  
Website: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk>  
Center for International Research on Higher Education  
Website: [http://bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/soe/cihe](http://bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe)  
Quality and Standards Authority of Ethiopia  
Website: <http://www.qsae.org/>  
International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa  
Website: <http://www.eric.ed.gov>  
International Network for Higher Education in Africa (NHEA)  
Website: <http://www.bc.edu>  
European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education  
Website: <http://www.enqa.eu>  
Asian Pacific Quality Network  
Website: <http://www.apqn.org>

# Interview

*This column features interviews of people including government officials, policy makers, educators, and presidents of universities or colleges as well as students on quality related issues. In this edition of the newsletter, we interviewed Ato Tesgaye Gebissa who is the Vice President of Open and Distance Learning at St. Mary's University regarding the growth and development of CODL and quality assurance systems, used by the College to realize quality education. Ato Tesgaye has served the University, assuming various positions from 2006 up to now. He did his M.A. in Leadership and Management at Addis Ababa University. Enjoy our conversation!*



**Quality Matters:** When did St. Mary's University start offering distance education?

**Ato Tesgaye:** It was in May 2000, when St. Mary's became a dual mode private higher education institution. That was the time when the foundation was laid for the College of Open and Distance Learning (CODL) which is now a leading distance education provider.

**Quality Matters:** How do you evaluate the contribution of St. Mary's CODL from the perspective of individual and national merits?

**Ato Tesgaye:** I feel that CODL's national and public contributions are immense and multifaceted. Regarding its contribution to increased access to education, CODL has opened many distance education coordination centers all over Ethiopia. It has also graduated over 46,000 degree, diploma and certificate level professionals who serve the nation. What magnifies this great achievement is that the graduates pursued their studies without compromising their commitments to their jobs

and their involvement in developmental activities. CODL's role in raising public awareness about the possibility to learn despite limitations related to time, space, age and gender too should not be ignored. Its other noteworthy contributions are the employment opportunities being enjoyed by over 600 Ethiopians who serve as its distance education staff and the various tax payments amounting to many millions of Birr made every year.

**Quality Matters:** How many study centers does the University's CODL have, and what are their roles?

**Ato Tesgaye:** It has 12 regional offices, 88 distance education coordination centers and 32 agent offices. They form a hierarchy in descending order and are accountable to CODL Headquarters. They have been established in all zones and major woredas to facilitate access to education. They serve as bridges between CODL and its distance learners and as its branch offices from region to woreda level. It is mainly through these centers that learners receive distance education services.

**Quality Matters:** Is there any difference in terms of quality assurance mechanisms between distance education and face-to-face learning? If so, in what ways?

**Ato Tesgaye:** Yes, the quality assurance mechanisms in distance education and the conventional mode of education show many differences although they share many features as well. Distance education appears to be more amenable to quality assurance. This is because it has focused objectives with clear statements of mission and is administered in a less bureaucratic fashion. It also focuses on fewer fields of study and is market sensitive. Besides, the learners are usually mature adults having some professional experience.

They enjoy flexible admission requirements and changeable program completion period, and they do not distract the management with continual interaction. As a result, quality assurance in distance education focuses on issues that are internal to the institution. That is, it relies on efforts of course coordinators, educational technologists, course editors, supervisors of student support services, staff development agents, program and course reviewers, staff evaluators, and communicators of learner and tutor feedback. In addition, the external approach which involves actions taken during course-making, learner evaluation and institutional audit as well as external academic audit on programs, general institutional operations and future institutional directions is utilized.

**Quality Matters:** CODL has established the Plan, Quality Assessment and Research Office (PQARO). What are its specific roles related to quality issues?

**Ato Tsegaye:** The office is a multi-function office that operates at CODL level and is entrusted with management of planning, supervision, quality assessment and research activities. It works closely with the Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA) which operates at the University level. The specific quality-related functions of PQARO include developing the awareness of the CODL community about quality issues, facilitating exchange of good practices among the community, coordinating institutional self-assessment at CODL level, facilitating program evaluation by academic departments and following up the implementation of quality-related directives.

**Quality Matters:** What are the strengths of CODL? And in what areas does it require improvement?

**Ato Tsegaye:** Well, I can mention its effective management of huge distance learning programs, the access to education it has provided all over Ethiopia, its high-quality and learner-friendly course materials, its well-organized delivery mechanisms, its various learner support services, its use of term-based registration and its application of continuous evaluation among the strengths. But I feel that it needs to offer additional fields of study, to enhance its use of ICT for distance education purposes and to further develop the capacity of its personnel required for the system.

**Quality Matters:** What quality assurance strategies does CODL use to realize quality education?

**Ato Tsegaye:** The College strives to ensure quality before student enrollment, during the operation of the

course delivery and at the end of the learning phase. It always tries to meet its institutional needs depending on their essentiality and desirability. It also uses explicit review of its programs through careful specification of standards and implicit review through professional judgments as quality assurance strategies. Besides, it attempts to involve all stakeholders and puts agreed institutional missions and operations at the heart of its quality assurance strategy. That is, it does not take quality assurance as a question of few professionals but as a total orientation of the institution towards the satisfaction of learners and other stakeholders.

**Quality Matters:** Compared to conventional mode of learning, distance learning has more pressure and demand on learners. What kind of support services do you offer to your students to alleviate this problem?

**Ato Tsegaye:** I should make what I mean by student support services clear first. Student support is the range of services provided to learners as individuals or groups to complement their course materials or learning resources. It is an interesting feature of distance education systems. This is because the professor or teacher addresses the cognitive and affective dimensions of student support in the face-to-face mode, but specific provision must be made at the system level for distance teaching. Therefore, CODL provides support services to learners by using its student support system and paying attention to specific characters of learners. Its support service activities include informing the public about its services, advising learners on career choice and/or further education opportunities, informing learners about regulations governing their studies (such as those related to flexible study pace, determination of course load, allocation of study time, tutorials, practical work, assignments etc), advising potential students on the methods and practices of the distance education system and helping them through it. All these and others are provided considering conditions such as dispersal of students, the range of services delivered, the types of programs offered, the nature of academic counseling given, the possibility of using technology for support services and the application of examinations and student assessment.

**Quality Matters:** Thank you very much for sharing the practice of CODEL!

**Ato Tsegaye:** Never mind!

# Perspective

## DISTANCE EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE CULTURE, DEVELOPMENT AND CHALLENGES



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Distance education refers to the application of print or electronic communications media to offer instruction since instructors and students are separated in both place and time. Distance learning, “can be carried out from any location within the confines of a course schedule, at any time that is convenient to the learner” (Tandon et al, 2011,n.p.). Using the available resources-print or electronic and choosing the convenient mode of communication- synchronously or asynchronously, distance students direct their study in an independent manner to realize their dreams.

On the other hand, the separation of instructors and students affects the teaching learning process seriously, and distance education program provides various special techniques to surmount the side effects of the separation. In line with this, Moore in Fuller et al (2011, P4) pointed out that “when we talk about distance education, we are referring to a distance that is more than simply a geographic separation of learners and teachers. It is a distance of understandings and perceptions that has to be overcome by teachers, learners, and educational organizations.”

Distance education has passed four stages. The first stage is text based correspondence courses, where by the texts are similar to the classroom texts. The second generation is characterized by self instructional design. It is text based, but being designed fulfilling the features of distance mode. The third generation integrates print and media i.e., using audio and video with texts and the fourth generation uses interactive ICT to prop up the teaching learning process (COL, 2001).

According to Keegan (1980), distance education has six features: the teaching learning is separated in time and space; the usual study area of the student is his/her home or workplace; the impact of educational organization in planning, development and delivery of teaching is essential; the use of communication technology such as broadcast radio and television; audio- and videotapes; interactive audio and video teleconferencing; various computer and Internet technologies, and print technologies while delivering instruction is prominent; the use of two way communication to facilitate interaction and dialogue is important, and the application of principles of industrialization to teaching should be feasible.

Quality, irrespective of its controversy, is the concern of every stakeholder, involved in education, and open and distance education is no exception. In fact, quality in higher learning, according to the World Conference on Education, is viewed as a multidimensional concept involving various functions and activities such as academic programs, teaching and learning, research, academic staff, learners, buildings, laboratories, facilities, equipment, community services, scholarship and academic environment.

The vision and mission, strategic priorities and their effective implementation and monitoring, the skills and experience of instructors, admission and assessment yardsticks, the quality of the library and facilities, management skills of middle line and top managers and the quality of the graduates (which results from the quality of input and process of the teaching learning) affect the effectiveness of higher learning. The process of assuring the existence of the above effective standards is known as quality assurance. Mackoww and Witkoski (2005) in Ogunleye (2008) defined quality assurance as a planned and systematic process of

reviewing about the existence, maintenance or enhancement of defined characteristics which serve to improve and modernize the provision of the teaching learning process of higher learning institution by assuring quality.

Quality assurance grounds on the standards set by the stakeholders which can be government, higher learning institutions, students, employers or donors. The aims of quality assurance are to bring about reforms so as to fulfill expectations, serve as a spring board for future planning, provide a structure to realize educational improvement and quality, make efficient the communication system in the education system and assist users so as to pass informed decisions about different educational issues (Ogunleye, 2008).

For an effective learning to occur, distance education needs to assure the existence of dialogue, program structure and learner autonomy (Moore & Kearsley, 1996).

The ease of communication which exists among educators and students, students and content, students and students, students and the management are essential parts of the learning process for distance learning. Educators specifically tutors are expected not only to tutor but to counsel. While explaining the role of tutors, summarizing the works of other researchers, Pierrakeas, Xenos and Pintelas (2003, p.3) point out that tutors “should promptly solve students’ educational problems, discuss in a friendly way the issues that distract them, instruct them during their studies, but most of all encourage them to continue their studies- understanding their difficulties and supporting them effectively.” Dialogue is not limited between students and tutors; it is a broad concept which entails the entire communication of the learning environment. Distance educator trying to develop quality distance learning environments should carefully consider learner-content interaction, learner-learner interaction, and learner-instructor interaction (Moore, 1989; Moore & Kearsley, 1996). To attain the above mission, opportunities for communication should be designed in the learning program, being mediated in the best possible way with the help of technology.

Next, structure refers whether the course design is responsive to the needs of learners, being conducive for student-student and student-tutor dialogue. The elements of a course such as learning objectives, thematic content, presentations, case studies, animations, exercises, projects and exams should be designed in a flexible manner, catering independent learning. To formulate such kinds of learning experiences, multidisciplinary teams are essential. Student centered approach enables learners to organize learning experiences into meaningful contexts, relating the learning content with their background knowledge (Hannafin & Land, 1997). Distance education is different from the face to face in such a way that the course elements should be formulated well ahead of delivery in line with the needs and interests of students. It should also comply with the intricate relationships among the course content, other students and the instructor. Learners join distance learning having different background. Therefore, the elements of the courses should take into account the background of students’ experience, level of knowledge and motivation. For instance, learners may not be mature in their reading ability and within the same group there may be variability of reading comprehension ability. As a result, the design should satisfy all types of students and enable to attain learning excellence standards irrespective of their background differences.

Autonomy is a difficult term to define. Autonomy does not mean learning without the support of tutors. In other words, it does not mean giving up responsibility on the part of tutors. According to Holec (1995) in Dickinson (1995) autonomy refers to the potential and critical ability to reflect on the experience one has and to be in charge of one’s own learning. It is being able to determine one’s objective, learning experiences, methods and techniques of learning, monitoring and evaluation of one’s learning progress and achievements (LITTLE, 1991; Moore & Kearsley, 1996). Here, the learner assumes greater responsibility through active involvement and better learning. The learner constructs knowledge which, in turn, paves the way for creativity, interaction and engagement; s/he is a producer but not a consumer of knowledge.



Using the above transactional framework theory of Moore, this paper tries to examine the quality assurance mechanisms of selected developed and developing countries universities with the view to draw lessons for the developing country universities. How do Open University of England and Ethiopian higher learning institutions assure the quality of their distance education systems?

From England if we examine the quality assurance mechanisms of Open University, it has its own coherent procedures. The institution has clear educational mission and objectives. The university applies both internal and external evaluations to assure quality with the aim of achieving excellence in the fields of study, regions' services or courses to serve as the baseline to other institutions when it comes to quality assurance issues (O'Shea and Downes, 1997). The practice of Open University in assuring curriculum design, content, organization, teaching, learning and student support is summarized as follows.

#### **A. Curriculum Design, Content and Organization**

Individual academic units are responsible in developing course profiles, being overseen by the university. The units plan in their five year forward plan about courses which they intend to produce. There is a need to approve the courses by the faculty or school board. The curriculum can be either modules or courses, and the institution encourages innovation in course, curriculum and program design, using it as a benchmark to academic promotion (ibid).

#### **B. Teaching, Learning and Student Support**

Offering student support services facilitate students self confidence, competence and social interaction skills. Due to this, Open University as to O'Shea and Downes (1997) offers high quality multimedia teaching materials, being supported with tutorial and counseling. The institution has around 8,000 part time associate lecturers whose role is to tutor and

counsel. Students get study calendar, which enables them to adjust their pace and programs. Students are encouraged to seek support on any issue. With regards to counseling service:

*When an applicant first accepts a place on an Open University course, they are assigned to a tutor-counselor. On a designated entry course, the tutor-counselor will act as both tutor and counselor. For subsequent or higher-level courses, students will be assigned to a tutor for the specific course, while the tutor-counselor may continue to provide a counseling service, or this may be provided direct from the regional centre (O'Shea and Downes, 1997, p63).*

Regional directors are responsible for the recruitment of associate professors. New academic staff members usually take part in an induction, and academic staff members normally participate in a staff development program every year. The role of tutor and course tutor differ. In the case of tutor, they are responsible for correspondence tuition and course marking. On the other hand, course tutors are expected to facilitate learning by having personal contact with students in order to offer answers and explanation to their queries and concerns about the courses. They use multimedia while contacting learners. They are expected to allocate tutorial contact hours to tackle learners' problems and arm them with various skills, needed to understand the learning experiences of the courses (ibid).

The external audit values diversity among institutions and fields of studies within an institution and requires reviewing "how far we can expect to provide the same inputs to the student experience across our range of provision" (ibid, p.64). The issue of quality assurance, however, does not appeal to academic staff, and yet there is a strong need from society to assure the existence of appropriate quality inputs. The institution addresses the pressures by working closely with external quality assessment and quality audit (ibid).

When it comes to Ethiopia, distance education was started in the 1940s. And it is the arrival of private institutions which has strengthened its growth and expansion.

Even if the contribution of private higher institutions is notable, the number of enrolled learners is very few, compared to the population of the country. For instance, it was only 144,869 students who were enrolled between 2009 and 2010 (MoE Statistical Abstract, 2003). According to Taye and Tesfaye (2012, p.69) “the ratio of ODL to population in Ethiopia is 0.002%, while that of Botswana 2.7%, Namibia 1.6% and Tanzania 0.6%” which signals that a lot is required to arrive even at the level of sub-Saharan countries.

In Ethiopia, there are 24 higher learning institutions which offer undergraduate programs in distance mode. Cross border postgraduate programs are also on the rise: St. Merry’s University in collaboration with Indra Gandhi Open University and Institute of Leadership and Management in partnership with the University of Greenwich, UK, can be mentioned (Taye and Tesfaye, 2012). Distance education is a recent phenomenon, and the available researches on distance education appear scanty, but the issue of quality assurance in relation to distance education is in its development stage. It is common this day for institutions to formulate their missions and visions, and self assessment is also becoming a regular practice. HERQA formulates its own expectations; for example, institutions are required to conduct tutorials twice per semester. External quality audit focusing on distance education alone is not yet common.

Even if there are serious financial, infrastructural and human resources, some of the institutions are trying to use audio materials and exploring the existing opportunities to open virtual libraries and implement electronic advising and online tutorial service (Action Plan of Saint Mary’s University, 2013/14).

Due to the young age of distance education, it is not common to find research findings on quality assurance. Desalegn (2008) studied the practices of distance education in Ethiopia from course materials development, delivery and evaluation practices angle, choosing well known institutions in offering distance learning such as St. Mary’s University, Admas University College, Alpha University College and Ethiopian Civil Service College.

According to the study, institutions were not uniform in their course design procedures: some had a course team while others did not have. For those institutions which set course team, the team consisted of course authors, three different editors, internal and external reviewers with student evaluators. The researcher applied ten yardsticks to evaluate whether the courses were conducive for deep learning. The institutions were found to be successful in producing self instructional modules, conducive for deep learning. The other focus of the study was student support. Formal tutorials were found to be insufficient, and so were counseling services. The administrative support also required improvement in the area of module distribution and keeping record of students’ grades. On the other hand, the institutions provided orientation and “student information book”. The handbook provided essential information.

Mode of assessment was the third area. Respondents pointed out that the institutions under study applied a 30% continuous assessment and 70% end of course exam as evaluation system. Lack of uniformity, while offering assignments and examinations, was the challenge reported by the respondents. Marking uniformity and the use of new technology were also the other problems.

From the findings, the quality of distance materials in Ethiopia appears commendable, and yet there are gaps with regards to tutoring and student support. The application of technology, the recruitment of part time associate professors from regional universities, the assignment of tutors and course tutors by allocating contact hours to counsel students in both personal and academic issues, the provision of staff development training on material development, tutoring and student support every year, the evaluation of distance education by external examiners, the establishment of strong internal quality assurance office which can formulate explicit standards in relation to tutoring, material preparation, student support and evaluation in order to conduct internal evaluation regularly can be some of the useful lessons that Ethiopian universities can draw from Open University of England.

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# ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY

## Post Graduate Programs

- ❖ Master of Business Administration (MBA)
- ❖ Master of Business Administration (HRM Focus)
- ❖ Master of Rural Development
- ❖ Master of Agricultural Economics
- ❖ Master of Agri Business Management
- ❖ Master of Accounting and Finance

## Under Graduate Programs

Faculty of Business:

- ❖ Accounting
  - ❖ Management
  - ❖ Marketing Management
  - ❖ Tourism and Hospitality Management
- Faculty of Informatics:
- ❖ Computing Science
  - ❖ Information Technology
  - ❖ Information Systems

## Distance Learning

- ❖ Business (four programs)
- ❖ Agriculture & Development Studies (six programs)
- ❖ Educational Planning and Management
- ❖ Economics
- ❖ Sociology

## IGNOU Programs

- ❖ Master of Business Administration (MBA)
- ❖ Master of Commerce (MCOM)
- ❖ Master of Arts in Economics (MEC)
- ❖ Master of Arts in Rural Development (MARD)
- ❖ Master of Arts in Sociology (MSO)
- ❖ Master of Arts in Public Administration (MPA)
- ❖ Master of Arts in Social Work (MSW)
- ❖ Master of Arts in Political Science
- ❖ Master of Arts in Library & Information Science

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