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Students' Expectations and Attitude towards Foreign-Supplied Post-Graduate Programmes through Ethiopian Private Higher Education Institutions

By

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Abstract

Last few decades have witnessed the emergence of various forms of educational exports, e.g. distance-education, online-education etc., mainly caused by the phenomenon of globalization and advancement of Information Technology (IT). This placed education at the threshold of transformation, by allowing the society to demand quality education, and the government to create additional partners, specifically from private domain, to satisfy such needs. However, in recent times, many Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) are also delivering programmes, pertaining to some degree/diploma or certificate, being offered by foreign universities, and often viewed as an adjunct to distance-education or study abroad, at least in the Ethiopian context. Despite the growth of 'at home' mode of delivery of educational services, many researchers still focus on the traditional public-private competition, rather exploring the perspectives for getting benefitted in a more marketing-oriented manner. This paper attempts to investigate the issues associated with 'at home' delivery of educational services by the private HEIs in Ethiopia. Specifically, the paper examines the expectations and attitudes of 215 Ethiopian students pertaining to the delivery of post-graduate programmes by foreign universities. Furthermore, 'at home' mode of delivery, through Ethiopian private HEIs, is not only found to be helpful in narrowing the gap between the demand and supply aspects, but also reported to be adding value and quality to the higher education system of the nation.

Keywords: Private Higher Educational Institutes, Educational Services, Internationalization, Student Expectations, Ethiopia.

Introduction

From the perspective of higher education, the recent trends, at least in the developing world, ensure the usage of cutting-edge technology to bring together students, educators and researchers. Though, cross-broader higher education has developed differently across the world regions. As seen, by and large, student mobility has been policy-driven in Europe and demand-driven in Asia-Pacific region, while USA has mostly been attracting foreign students (Larsen et al. 2002). By following the initial two approaches of targeting overseas student markets: open/distance/online education and study abroad, a third approach gets started as developing and delivering courses and programmes within foreign country/countries. This form of entry is often through a local university/institution of higher learning, via a twinning arrangement (Adams 1998), and mostly seen as practiced by the private institutions, at least in Ethiopian context.

To target higher education market of Africa, the Pan-African e-Network project, a government of India initiative to African Union (AU), is commissioned in the last quarter of 2006 connecting Indian institutions (7 reputed universities and 12 super specialty hospitals) with 53 countries of the continent through satellite and fiber-optic cable links to facilitate tele-education and tele-medicine services. Ethiopia, one of the pilot participants in this project, receives tele-education services from Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi, whereby 40 students of Addis Ababa University and Haramaya University were registered with the University (IGNOU) for their MBA degree. In order to run the courses, an integrated tele-education delivery system/software had been provided, bringing virtual remote classrooms in a multi-studio environment, and by supporting two-

way interaction between the teachers and students through collaborative tools⁵⁰.

Apart from this, IGNOU is operational through a tie-up with St. Mary's University College (a private higher education institute) of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, by following distance education mechanism, and offering Masters level courses in about 10 disciplines ranging from business administration to library and information sciences. This indicates deepening of the market of higher education together with universities market entry into the chosen countries, such as Ethiopia. This view can also be found in the educational literature, which sees 'at home' delivery as a sign of educational globalization and internationalization (Altbach and Morsy 1996; Delors 1999). However, 'at home' delivery is often viewed as adjunct to distance/online education and study abroad programmes rather than a replacement.

However, knowing students' demand and acceptability of subject area(s) enable foreign institutions of higher learning to help draft their courses and programmes in supporting domestic institutions (majorly from private domain) to fill any gap associated with service delivery from the side of government institutions. Keeping this in mind, the study is designed to investigate the issue of 'at home' delivery of higher education as a supportive mechanism in filling the gap between local demand and supply of higher education programmes, by measuring expectations and demands of Ethiopian students with respect to the post-graduate courses (offered by Indian universities). Attitudes towards the issue of delivery of Masters level educational courses and programmes by such universities are obtained with

⁵⁰ Accessed from: <http://www.panafricanetwork.com>

an objective to see 'at home' delivery as a significant mode of exporting of educational services via private higher education institutions to the Ethiopian market.

Framework of the Study

Higher education has become increasingly international in the past decade as more and more students choose to study abroad, enroll in foreign universities and institutions in their home country, or take courses with the universities in other countries. This results a change in the context of internationalization of higher education, and forced domestic academic institutions, particularly from private domain, to work together with foreign institutions to promote intellectual exchanges, educational quality and systems, and build educated workforce in the home countries to fill the requirement gaps across various sectors. As a result, worldwide development of information systems, free trade, and the free movement of skilled workers are witnessed as the hallmarks of globalized activities, even in the educational realm. As global players, institutions of higher learning help to shape this process and at the same time, have to adapt their structures accordingly (Eggins et al. 2004).

On the other hand, delivering foreign educational programmes so that students can study at a foreign centre of higher learning without leaving home has been largely driven by institutions themselves. It has been made easier by institutional frameworks granting substantial autonomy to local higher education institutions, and by the policies adopted by receiving countries (Larsen et al. 2002). Therefore, a large number of studies and reports focusing on the issue of study abroad and distance education were developed and widely published by scholars in the recent past. To the

former, studies by Rao (1979), Bromilow and Zubrzycki (1990), Stewart and Felicetti (1991), Lawley and Blight (1995), Wilkinson (1995), Lawley and Perry (1998), and James et al. (1999) identified a range of factors affecting the choice of overseas country students chose for their “study abroad” education. These studies, however, did not consider the option of delivering courses and programmes in the students’ home countries.

There has also been a wealth of research in the area of distance education pertaining to the issues such as, how education and knowledge be transferred via distance education from one culture to another and how, as a concept, distance education is being merged with elements of open learning, multi-media delivery, and ‘at home’ learning (Edwards 1997; Mills and Tait 1999). However, ‘at home’ delivery of higher educational courses and programmes is rarely considered in the literature, may be as it has been relatively recent mode of educational export, particularly in African context, whereby demand exceeds supply, mostly. Indeed, some scholars (Yanshen 1997; Jiang 1998; Ji 1998; Xu 1998) considered foreign ‘at home’ delivery of courses and programmes into their research work and identified a range of course gaps which were often filled through foreign cooperation particularly in the areas like business management and marketing, and to a lesser extent in engineering, pure/applied sciences and other traditional fields. But the prospective students’ views on the issue are hardly tested.

Willis (2000) identified four levels of ‘at home’ delivery programmes ranging from basic alliances where a foreign university might simply deliver a course or programme in the home country to high level joint-venture campuses formed between national and foreign universities for the delivery of wide range of programmes and courses. Therefore, these studies do not

specifically deal with what students actually think of foreign university-delivered programmes, majorly as a mechanism to fill the supply-side gap and about learning process or acceptance of such degrees/diplomas by local employers, particularly when obtained through a private institution.

Furthermore, Hayhoe (1996) and Ming (1999) reported that adaptation of educational services is required, though sometimes the universities requests their particular styles or delivery approaches i.e., from the foreigners point of view, a standardized approach in the sense that they were asked to teach as they would at home. In the classroom, however, adaptation was still often required to meet the needs of students used to a more restricted and structured teaching approaches (Ross 1993). Thus, a debate among researchers is on, with many arguing that the delivery of the programme should be adapted in varying degrees rather standardizing it, depending on the nature of the market (Hite and Fraser 1988). Though, in general, the issue of adaptation and standardization is not applied to higher education where it could have been of considerable relevance. But based on the work of Street (1992) and Hayhoe (1996), it could be postulated that at least some degree of adaptation would be required for a market with multi-lingual and multi-cultural settings such as Ethiopia- in terms of course material (using local examples, case studies etc.), mode of delivery including the mix of theories to practical application, and in/out class presentations.

Research Methodology

Post-graduate courses and programmes have been selected, to enquire upon, for two main reasons. Firstly, because of high demand among Ethiopian candidates for Masters level courses particularly in Business Management, Economics, and other Social Science areas, as being observed

in the pilot study. Secondly, an increasing number of foreign partners are now offering higher educational programmes within Ethiopia- such as IGNOU, Sikkim Manipal University (SMU), both from India, the University of South Africa, the University of Greenwich etc and some other on the way.

Data were collected through structured questionnaire developed based on the factors and issues associated with studying for a foreign degree in Ethiopia e.g. university reputation, programmes on offer etc. Finally, all the statements pertaining to the related areas are placed on a 5-point Likert type scale with an objective to determine their relative importance and drawing attitudinal profile for ‘at home’ mode of educational delivery through private (local) institutions. The questionnaire was pre-tested with 30 students/respondents before its administration in the final study. The respondents who filled in the questionnaire were generally aged 18-40 and were distributed across two categories:

- i) Just graduated with first degree and seeking to enroll for a post-graduate programme with a private Ethiopian higher education institute/university or an Indian university.
- ii) Already enrolled/registered students with those of Indian universities for obtaining their Masters degree through local (private) partners/ institutions of higher learning (St. Mary’s University College and SRI SAI Educational Foundation).

Moreover, during pre-testing phase of the initial questionnaire, a general tendency of students to select to study in foreign country as against studying for a foreign/Indian degree in Ethiopia was reported, perhaps due to have a

chance to travel overseas. This indicated the relevance of separating out the issue of study abroad and 'at home' delivery of foreign courses. As a result, in the final instrument, comparative statements have been avoided and presentation was maintained more from Indian perspective. In this way, the data are collected from 225 respondents (distributed between the two participating groups), contacted personally by the researchers, and 215 correctly filled questionnaires are retained for analysis purpose. This process of data collection was carried out during 2010-2011 session.

Data Analysis and Findings

For the purpose of analysis, SPSS 17 package is used. All the study variables are exposed to test for normality by using appropriate statistical procedures. One sample t-test is carried out considering mild variations from normality in the values of the variables (Table 1). Findings based on data analysis and associated discussions are presented as follows:

Table 1: Students' Expectations and Attitudes toward 'At Home' Delivery

S.N.	Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value
1	Reputation of the University	4.62	1.02	42.16
2	Subject Range	4.04	1.24	39.98
3	Course Delivery in English	4.74	0.78	44.12
4	Up-to-date study materials	4.02	1.42	34.20
5	Up-to-date delivery technology	4.14	1.28	38.82
6	Foreign instructors	4.86	0.64	46.06
7	Ethiopian Instructors	3.38	1.52	22.94
8	Business Management Subjects	4.66	0.88	42.82
9	Other Social Science Subjects	4.38	1.14	40.88
10	Science Subjects	3.44	1.56	26.76
11	Engineering Subjects	3.06	1.54	24.34
12	Agriculture Subjects	2.72	1.80	18.64
13	Delivery via Ethiopian (Private) Institutions	3.76	1.34	32.62
14	Masters Level Programmes	4.78	0.70	44.96
15	Doctorate Level Programmes	3.52	1.32	31.14
16	Studying in Ethiopia is good	3.64	1.74	26.36
17	Is more practical	4.14	1.18	40.12
18	Is cheaper	3.96	1.42	32.84
19	Would let more people study	3.14	1.78	22.42
20	I would rather still study abroad	4.52	0.94	42.68

Note: All t-values are significant at 0.001 levels.

The image of the foreign university is of prime importance to prospective students: The results support the view with the computed mean score of 4.62 for the total sample. Respondents, therefore, felt that the reputation, status, and image of the foreign/ Indian universities were important in ensuring quality of courses and programmes. They were also reported to check the status of universities while collecting information

either through local study centers or through the internet. Moreover, universities located in affluent foreign countries, and particularly in capital cities were seen by students to be of higher on status than universities located in less affluent countries and in smaller states/cities. As a result, respondents supported to go more for IGNOU than SMU courses/programmes when selecting an Indian university. Also, the universities which delivered programmes through a professionally managed academic institution/university were admired more than those entered the market through privately managed agents or brokers, another reason to put IGNOU ahead of SMUC as their choice.

The range of courses and programmes available with the university is a key factor in selecting it: The range of courses and programmes was observed as being of considerable relevance by the students (mean 4.04). The respondents suggested that they would not be disadvantaged compared to students actually studying abroad in foreign universities. However, they expressed the view “we want what they get outside in foreign land...” Also, a strong support for the degree programmes leading to postgraduate level was reported. The two Indian universities were seen to be committed to the Ethiopian market in providing Masters level programmes, while respondents put higher scores for IGNOU (with 9 postgraduate degree programmes including an MBA, M.Com., and MA degree in 7 disciplines) than that for SMU.

Courses should be delivered through a local/national university and institute: This is an issue of great relevance as relating to the modes of market entry in Ethiopia. It is possible to enter in the market through government bodies and institutions, government agents, and even in

collaboration with private higher educational service providers. However, foreign university entry to the market via alliance with state universities or institutions of higher learning (both public and private), was found to be reported as more trusted (mean 3.76) or respected especially when the local institution has a high reputation (e.g. IGNOU-Addis Ababa University tie-up). Furthermore, the respondents found to be more cautious and less confident about programmes delivered through private agents (Sri Sai Educational Foundation running SMU degree programmes) in Addis Ababa. They felt such entry as less credible and with an interest of making money.

Courses should be delivered by the staff of both local and foreign universities: A great majority (79.3%) of the respondents was found to be preferred to have courses and programmes delivery by foreigners (mean 4.86) over Ethiopian instructors (mean 3.38). This reveals respondents' desire to access an international degree in a way they would experience in a foreign nation. Furthermore, students felt that without foreign staffs, the course would lose its international orientation as they would not be exposed to foreign culture, personalities, lifestyles, and behaviors brought to the class by the staff member.

Courses should be delivered in English language: Respondents found to be in support of the idea of delivering courses and programmes in English (mean 4.74), as to maintain international standard at post-graduate level. They further stated using English, as a means to achieve their goal of practicing it, improves understanding foreign culture and differentiates the degree from a local programme. Therefore, respondents insisted to have all subjects delivered in English by such universities, a crucial aspect of foreign

'at home' delivery of post-graduate programmes, and in maintaining a truly foreign degree.

Access to up-to-date course materials and learning technology is important: Almost all (94.2%) of the respondents found with the agreement that the foreign supplied courses in Ethiopia must be supported with up-to-date printed/electronic course materials (mean 4.02) and learning technology (mean 4.14). However, these were not reported and discussed to the extent of factors such as foreign-university reputation, foreign-staff delivery, and use of English language in course delivery.

There is a keen demand for postgraduate programmes and courses: Students indicated Masters level programme (mean 4.78) more in demand than that of Doctoral (mean 3.52). However, the data revealed that demand was high for business and management courses (mean 4.66) including commerce, marketing and economics, followed by other social science subjects (mean 4.38). However, for sciences (mean 3.44) including medical and paramedical, engineering (3.06), and agriculture (2.72) disciplines, the demand was reported to be less. This shows respondents assumption of a market driven economy that may have a good demand for the business and management professionals. Other reasons may be attributed to professionalism of many foreign/Indian universities in delivering business and management category subjects, and such educational practices might be seen as a link to the development of Ethiopian industries leading to better jobs market, in an integrated world economy. Surprisingly, being an agricultural economy (Ethiopia), very few students appeared to pursue their postgraduate level of education in agriculture and related areas. This may attribute to the fact that the sample for the study was drawn from the capital

city where most of the individuals are working class and very few of them maintain their first degree in the area.

‘At home’ delivery is considered as a sound and valid form of educational delivery: Though the respondents shown a strong preference for going abroad for higher studies (mean 4.52), simultaneously they rejected that studying in Ethiopia for a foreign degree is not good (mean 3.64). The issue of cost was tested in order to ascertain whether students felt that it would be cheaper to study for an international degree in Ethiopia compared to that of overseas. Respondents found it to be practical (mean 4.14) and allowing more people to study (mean 3.14), while paying less for tuition, transportation, living and other costs (mean 3.96), when enrolled themselves for ‘at home’ delivery by foreign universities. Studying for an international post-graduate degree in Ethiopia was seen as viable for accessing the experience of foreign education without having actually gone overseas. Therefore, many students who wished to study in foreign countries for obtaining their post-graduate degrees, found ‘at home’ delivery very attractive and cheaper. However, students reported that there were not sufficient ‘at home’ foreign-delivered programmes and those available are limited in their offerings of subjects or not serving well. Hence, the market had not really been fully tapped effectively.

Study abroad is still more popular than ‘at home’ delivery: The idea was supported by the respondents (mean 4.52). Also, this reflects the view that ‘at home’ delivery by foreign universities is viable for students as either an alternative to study abroad or as a first choice of people who do not want actually to study overseas for family or other financial reasons. Therefore, study abroad and ‘at home’ delivery were seen as two related, but

distinct, forms of educational delivery, and one was not found to replace the other. However, the choices of Ethiopian partners, subject areas and courses, and demand for higher learning programmes were crucial to gain acceptance and credibility in the market.

Additionally, an attempt is made to model respondents' attitude towards 'at home' delivery of post-graduate programmes, offered through private (local) higher educational institutions, and with other variables used in the study. Correlations were obtained between attitudinal score (average) towards 'at home' delivery and other variables (affecting it). Attitude towards 'at home' delivery of courses by Indian universities is found to be significantly ($p < 0.001$) associated with image/reputation of university ($r = 0.498$), subject range ($r = 0.473$), and the language of course delivery ($r = 0.436$). This implies that the attitude towards 'at home' delivery of foreign designed post-graduate courses and programmes favorably affected by the reputation of the university, subject range and choice on offer, and the language used for course delivery in the respective institution. Furthermore, to calculate the contribution made by each independent dimension in estimating attitudinal scores, multiple regression analysis was carried out.

The model thus obtained shows 45.2% variation as explained by the predictors i.e. three independent variables. Reputation of the university ($\beta = 0.258$) was found to be the highest contributor followed by subject range ($\beta = 0.218$), and course delivery in English language ($\beta = 0.208$) in estimating the attitudes towards 'at home' delivery by foreign university (Table 2).

Table 2: Regression Estimates for Attitude towards ‘at home’ Delivery

Variables	Standardized (β) Coefficients	t-value
Reputation of the University	0.258	3.346**
Range of Subjects on Offer	0.218	2.855*
Language of Delivery	0.208	2.730*
Note: Adj. $R^2=0.452$; $F=7.639$; $p<0.001$; *sig. at 0.01 level; **sig. at 0.001 level		

Conclusion

The study maintains relevance to ‘at home’ delivery of higher educational programmes in Ethiopia through local (private) higher education institutions, at least as a mechanism of filling the gap between existing demand and supply. Furthermore, this form of market entry is found to be supported and in demand among Ethiopian students as long as delivered in the following manner:

- As part of a strategic alliance or joint-venture with a well-recognized and high-standing Ethiopian institution or university.
- With a commitment to offer a full degree programme, particularly in the business management and social science areas at Masters Level, considered to be useful to develop the required skills for fetching employment opportunities by the students.
- Delivered in English by the foreign staffs/instructors in a way where the students feel that they are receiving the same type of educational experience as they would receive in the parent university campus (rather concentrating on local institutions).

The study further suggests that while the adaptation of Ethiopian cases and examples in course/teaching materials is widely supported, the overall framework and image of the programme are to be visualized “foreign” in delivery. This indicates a standardized educational service with only marginal modification. Additionally, the study reveals that the fundamental concept of courses and programmes delivery in Ethiopia is seen not only viable but also a rational alternative to compensate the existing educational gap, both in terms of quality and quantity, and study abroad tendencies. As a result, respondents found ‘at home’ delivery as a way to satisfy increasing demand of postgraduate education in Ethiopia, as many of them could not afford to study abroad. They added that it might be an option to experience foreign culture through ‘at home’ delivery, without actually going overseas. Perhaps, this explains why respondents highlighted that the courses should be taught by foreigners and in English language. Additionally, many of the respondents felt that access to updated course materials and modern technology in course delivery would ensure and promote educational quality, an issue of experiencing different educational style together with their hardship in fetching places in the Ethiopian higher education system.

Finally, it is seen that the high level of dependence on distance/online teaching approach is not liked compared to that of face-to-face by the foreigners, and overuse of distance education by foreign university was not meeting the actual needs of students. Therefore, it can be concluded that though there is significant demand for ‘at home’ delivery as an approach of market entry by the foreign universities, in partnership with local (private) institutions, this mode of entry can only be seen as an alternative to other forms of educational export to fill the gap between demand and supply.

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