

PLENARY PAPERS

Plenary Paper1: Foreign Studies and Employability: Perspectives of Ethiopians Studying Abroad

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Introduction

Discourses around employability are abuzz as institutional, national, regional and international organizations are frantically gearing up to respond to the ominous realities of youth bulge, “mass” enrolment and graduate unemployability. Currently enrolling some 20 million students in its fast massifying higher education system (Teferra, 2017a), Africa produces millions of graduates every year. This growth is in turn resulting in massive challenges at several levels including the preparation of graduates and their eventual employment.

In Ghana, for instance, it is reported that as much as 50 percent of graduates who leave Ghanaian universities and polytechnics do not find jobs for two years after their national service, and 20 percent of them do not find jobs for three years (Allotey, 2017). More than 71,000 graduates enter the job market each year, competing with an estimated 200,000 unemployed graduates in the domestic economy of Ghana (British Council, 2016).

In Kenya, about 50,000 graduates are produced in both public and private universities every year racking up the number of unemployed youth in the country which stands at 2.3 million. It takes a university graduate an average of five years to secure a job today (British Council, 2015). Unemployment in Kenya is especially high – in the range of 67% in 2015 – among those aged 15 to 34 (British Council, 2016). Even many of those in employment are said to be not engaged in the jobs for which they are qualified.

In Nigeria, according to the British Council/Harvard School of Public Health report (2010), the situation is more serious due to the large population in the country. The report states that three out of ten graduates of higher education are not working; and that a highly educated Nigerian is not significantly more likely to find work than one with no education at all; while many are

forced to accept jobs that do not fully utilize their qualifications. The job market for university graduates in Nigeria is very competitive and job openings suitable for university graduates attract a huge number of applicants (British Council, 2016).

The extent of unemployability in Ethiopia, the subject of this study, could be gauged by proxy through applications per vacancies. One such recent report published on *Ethiopian Reporter*, a major Amharic weekly, indicated that over 13,000 applications were received by the Water and Sewerage Authority for its 95 vacancies for audit officers and senior audit officers with a bachelor's degree with two years of experience, among others (Zenebe, 2018).

Though HEIs are expected to respond to this systemic challenge, little is known about the progress made so far. This is mainly because research on the subject is in general too meager to provide a clear picture of the status quo.

The same is true of the literature on foreign study and employability. While the subject of international mobility of students has received much attention within the realms of internationalization, for instance brain drain (Teferra, 2017b), studies related to the perceptions and expectations of international students' employment remain limited (Johnstone, 2003; Di Pietro, 2013). This is particularly so in the context of the developing world where there is a significant mismatch between the attention given to the subject and the available knowledge about it (Maharason and Hay, 2001; British Council, 2016). This study was conducted to bridge the existing gap in this area through a closer examination of the Ethiopian context.

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to examine the profile and perspectives of Ethiopian students on the relevance and significance of their foreign studies on subsequent employment opportunities. The key objectives of the study are to:

- a. Identify the profiles and trajectories of international students of Ethiopian origin; and

- b. Analyze the significance of an international study experience on the future employment of graduates.

The Concept and Components of Employability

Over the last few decades, the concept of employability has become an important issue for graduates, governments, employers and higher education institutions alike. Although the concept is used in various contexts and with different connotations, the most-oft invoked definition on the subject identifies employability as “the propensity of students to obtain a job” (Harvey, 2010, p. 98). The domineering ‘individual-centred’, ‘supply-side’ components of this definition presume the characteristic of graduates and the manners in which they make use of their job skills (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). But what are these skills?

Tymon (2013) argues that there may be no universal agreement on what constitutes an employability framework. In addition to the challenges of identification and definition, Moreau and Leathwood (2006) further argue about the dangers of assuming skills as neutral elements since their operationalization could be affected by factors such as social class, gender, ethnicity and disability. Furthermore, employability attributes and skills are assumed to vary depending on the type of worker, the circumstances of employment and the perspectives of the particular employer being considered (Moreau and Leathwood 2006; Tibby 2012).

Despite the lack of common agreement on the content of what an employability framework should look like, the major areas emphasized in most cases seem to capitalize on areas broadly related to qualities, characters, skills and knowledge of graduates (UoG, 2011; Tymon, 2013).

Overall, employability comprises technical and discipline competences and broader skills and attributes (UoG, 2011). Basic core skills, personal qualities and subject knowledge combine to define the details of these requirements (Saunders and Zuzel, 2010; UoG, 2011; Tymon, 2013).

According to Yorke (2004) graduate employability refers to a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates/individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the

community and the economy. In a similar vein, Harvey (2010) contends that the concept embodies the possession of basic ‘core skills’ or a set of generic attributes specified by employers. Tymon (2013) echoes the same view on the importance of skills and personal attributes, with additional emphasis on the point that the demand for employability skills may differ depending on particular stakeholders in mind.

Having developed their list from the perspectives of students and employers, Saunders and Zuzel (2010) suggest that employability skills should include personal qualities, core skills, and subject knowledge. Helyer and Teeside (2014), on their part, argue that the list should range from skills essential to obtaining a job (e.g., interview techniques) to generic abilities (e.g., teamwork), personal attributes (e.g., punctuality) and specific/subject abilities which are considered as essential skills needed to carry out a job effectively.

McQuaid and Lindsay (2005), on the other hand, argue for a ‘holistic’ perspective on employability and propose a much broader framework that comprises three interrelated sets of factors: individual factors, personal circumstances, and external factors. While individual factors comprise what others earlier called attributes and skills, personal circumstances refer to a range of socioeconomic factors related to individuals’ social and household circumstances and external factors pertain to those factors that influence an individual’s employability (e.g., labour demand conditions).

On the basis of the aforementioned different components that constitute employability skills, a variety of models have also been proposed. Such models include the one developed by Hillage and Pollard (1998) which comprises employability assets, deployment, and presentation as its components; DOTS model by Laws and Watts (Watts 2006) which contains decision learning, opportunity awareness, and transition learning as its features; USEM model by York and Knight (2004) with understanding, skills, efficacy beliefs and met cognition as its components; and Career EDGE developed by Pool and Sewell (2007) with different areas of emphasis like subject knowledge, understanding and skills, generic skills, emotional intelligence, career development learning, work and life experience, self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem, and reflection and evaluation. The most important consideration in these types of models is the

understanding that they can change over time, indicating the need for 'adaptability to the demands of a changing world' (Pool and Sewell, 2007).

The assumptions in the definitions and models developed about employability underlie the fact that a university degree devoid of the skills demanded in the job market is put under question when issues of employability are raised. Academic qualifications without employment skills are no more considered sufficient for securing a job other than serving as threshold requirements for getting a job. This has driven governments, graduates, and HEIs alike to do their share in responding to this new development.

On the part of governments, the issue of graduate employability has become a key objective in addressing unemployment and social exclusion (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005; Tymon, 2013). The central place of employability in terms of informing labour market policies and as a mechanism of increasing national growth and prosperity is now recognized by many governments (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006).

Graduates are also getting more proactive in terms of being aware of the changing faces of the job world, developing concerns about the manners in which they are prepared for their future employment, and in managing their own employability (Tomlinson, 2007; Saunders and Zuzel, 2010; UoG, 2011; Tymon, 2013). Graduates are expected not only to earn employment after graduation but also to meet the ensuing demands of sustainable employability through the continuous acquisition and updating of skills (Mtebula, 2014).

Since knowledge based economy and the concomitant competitiveness of the job market require graduates with the requisite skills, higher education institutions (HEIs) cannot be complacent about the employability of their graduates. As the concept of 'job for life' is being substituted with the concept of graduate readiness for the market, HEIs need to be cognizant of what ought to be done in terms of employability skills. Among others, HEIs must keep abreast of new developments and invest in employability development through such strategies as relevant training, curriculum design, work experience, among others (Saunders and Zuzel, 2010; UoG, 2011; Tymon, 2013).

Foreign Study and Employability

According to OECD (2017), the number of foreign students attending higher education worldwide has exploded within a single generation, surging from 0.8 million in the late 1970s to 4.6 million in 45 years. It is not clear, however, how much this trend is set to continue as the internationalization trend which drives student mobility is being seriously challenged (Altbach and de Wit, 2008).

Countries are increasingly putting in place proactive policies to attract—and keep—international students—with a new shift in dynamics as China now standing as the third largest destination for foreign studies, following the US and the UK (Postiglione and Ailei, 2017).

According to the French government's Campus France (2013) agency, which focuses on the international mobility of students from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Maghreb – with emphasis on France's contacts and activities—there were 380,376 African students on the move in 2010, representing about a tenth of all international students worldwide.

The countries of origin of the greatest numbers of Africans studying abroad were Morocco, with 39,865 international students (10.5%); Nigeria with 34,274 (9%); Algeria with 22,465 (5.9%); Zimbabwe with 19,658 (5.2%); Cameroon with 19,113 (5%); and Tunisia with 18,438 (4.8%). Then came Kenya, Senegal, Egypt and Botswana. According to UNESCO (2016), students from Sub-Saharan Africa are the second most mobile students in the world with 264,774 students pursuing education outside their home counties in 2013. Top senders in 2015 include Nigeria, Cameroon, and Zimbabwe, representing three of four African sub- regions. Over 35,000 students from Sub-Saharan Africa studied in the United States in 2015/16, increasing 5% from 2014/15. With 10,674 students on U.S. campuses, Nigeria is the only Sub-Saharan African country in the top 25 list. Ghana and Kenya are also large senders from the region with more than 3,000 students each. Over the past 10 years, students from Angola and Ivory Coast have grown, more than doubling from 2005/06 to 2015/16, each sending over 1,200 students to the United States in 2015/16 (IIE, 2017).

It is our informed view that the numbers for Ethiopia—with a population size only second to Nigeria in SSA—and a large Ethiopian community in the US—may not be less, if not more, than some of these countries noted here. For instance, the Ethiopian students comprise the largest African student population of the European Erasmus Mundus programme (University World News, Dec 8, 2008).

Studying abroad is generally assumed to provide a variety of advantages to students including linguistic improvement, personal development, cultural experience, and global awareness that have direct impact on employability (Nilsson and Ripmeester, 2016).

Foreign studies create opportunities for graduates to develop marketable skills (e.g., intercultural competence, global awareness, foreign language skills) to which they may have been less exposed given their background (Pietro, 2013; OECD 2017). Foreign study is in general considered to have benefits in terms of employability in addition to its beneficial impact on students' academic work and life (Altbach, Kelly and Lulat, 1985; Pietro, 2013; Nilsson and Ripmeester, 2016). International students are thought to offer employers additional skills such as diverse perspectives, diverse work culture, and a pool of potential candidates to choose from (Hobsons Solutions, 2016).

Students themselves are aware of this importance and expect foreign studies to impact on their career and employability (Preston, 2012; Nilsson and Ripmeester, 2016). One of the major reasons that drive student mobility abroad is lack of educational facilities in their country or the prestige of the educational institutions in the country of destination (OECD, 2017).

The Research Context

Higher Education in Ethiopia includes education programs which are offered as undergraduate degree for three, four or more years after completing secondary education and specialized degrees such as Master's and PhD programs. Completion of this program is certified by awarding a bachelor's degree. The degree of Doctor of Medicine (MD) and the degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) are also considered part of undergraduate studies (HEP 2009).

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Modern higher education in Ethiopia dates back to the establishment in 1950 of the University College of Addis Ababa (now Addis Ababa University)—the first public university in the country. Despite numerous efforts for the next 40 years, little was achieved in terms of changing the elitist orientation of the system until the end of the 1990s. This has best been exemplified by the limited number of institutions created for a large population and the low level of enrollment which were major manifestations of the system. Until the end of the 1990s, the country had only two universities—Addis Ababa University and Haramaya University—and less than twenty colleges which run diploma and degree programs for a student population that did not exceed 40 thousand. The gross enrollment rate (GER) at national level was only 0.8 percent which was far below the level in Sub-Saharan African countries.

The Ethiopian higher education sector has exhibited phenomenal growth since the end of the 1990s. There are now 37 public higher education institutions and more than 100 accredited private higher education institutions, out of which four have assumed a full-fledged university status. The current GER stands at 10.2 % at a national level (MoE, 2016).

Total undergraduate enrolment in public and private institutions has reached 729,000 of which 35% are female (MoE, 2016). The majority of enrolments (85%) are in public institutions with the total number of students who attend programs in private institutions standing at 111,000.

Although not well-documented, Ethiopia's experience of sending students abroad for foreign studies is closely connected with the country's relations with the West which goes as far back as the Medieval period (Zewde, 2002). Although missionaries of different background were mainly involved in sending Ethiopian students abroad—individually and in groups prior to the establishment of modern education in the country—former Ethiopian kings such as Emperors Tewodros, Menelik II and Haile Selassie (especially the last two) had been instrumental in facilitating foreign studies for Ethiopians studying abroad.

Foreign studies began in earnest under the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie while he was still the regency. This period had seen an increasing number of students sent abroad in an organized manner.

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In the years 1964 to 1973, fifty percent of students that studied abroad went to the United States followed by the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) which accounted for 11 percent. United Kingdom and France each accounted for 5 percent of the 4,143 student who studied abroad during this period (Higher Education in Ethiopia, Facts and Figures: 1978). Following the overthrow of Emperor Haile Sellasie in 1974, the new military led regime fully allied with the Eastern bloc. During the years 1974-1977 the list of countries and the major destinations changed with the USSR hosting 36 % of the students, followed by United States of America (18 %), United Kingdom (5 %), Czechoslovakia (5%), Hungary (3 %), and Yugoslavia (3%) (Higher Education in Ethiopia, Facts and Figures: 1978).

Foreign studies has further expanded since the incumbent government, which overthrew the military junta, has assumed power in 1991 with no restrictions to destinations. Despite the lack of firm statistics on the subject, thousands of Ethiopian students are believed to be studying outside their country. In addition to government facilitation and support, family support and individually sought scholarships appear to be on the rise.

Research Methodology

This study sought to explore the perspectives of Ethiopian international students on the relevance and impact of their foreign study on their subsequent employment. It employed a mixed methods approach.

Data were collected using questionnaire initially administered to members of Qine Association—a self- help association established by Ethiopian international students pursuing their higher studies in different parts of the world- and other participants who were reached through a snowballing approach employed. A preliminary list of the email addresses of 125 Ethiopian students studying abroad was finally developed and the questionnaire was sent electronically to all the identified addresses. Sixty five respondents (52%) completed the questionnaire.

Following a sequential explanatory approach, interviews were also held with six (10%) volunteer respondents after the quantitative data were obtained through the survey questionnaire.

Study Results

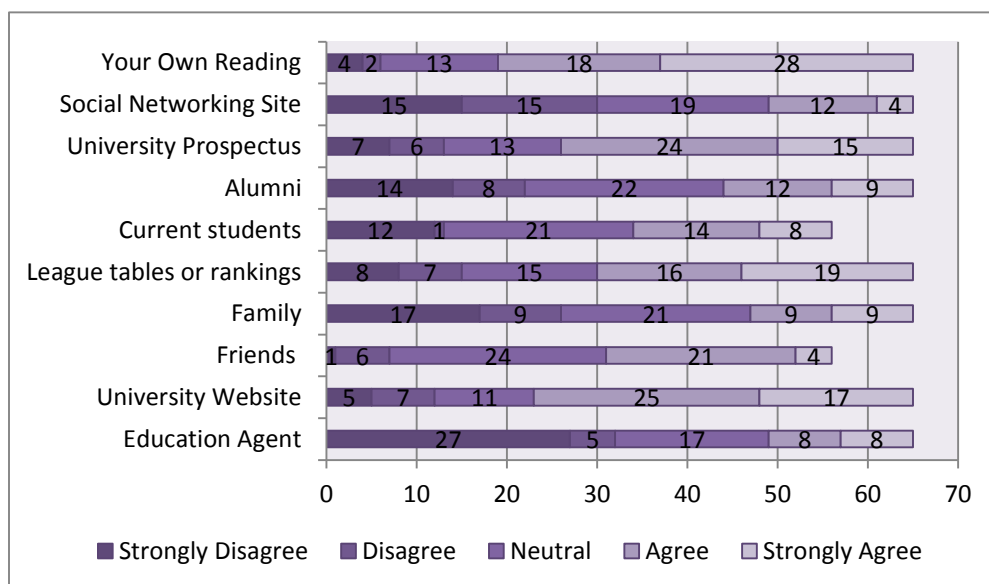
Participants' Profile

The age of the majority of the respondents (80%) ranges from 18 to 29. Only 11% are above 30 years. The majority of respondents were female (59%).

In terms of their educational background, 88% completed their secondary education in Ethiopia, while the remaining 8% attended high schools in the rest of Africa and 4% of the respondents studied outside of the continent. Fifty seven percent of the respondents attended their high school education in private schools; 21.5% studied in international community schools; and the remaining 16.9% came from public schools and religious schools.

Foreign Stay and Programs of Study

At the time of this study the respondents were attending 39 institutions in four major continents: North America (50.8%), Asia (21.5%), Europe (18.5%) and other parts of Africa (9.2%). They used a variety of strategies to



select their respective universities as indicated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Strategies for Selecting Universities

The major strategies used by respondents to choose their place of study were one's own reading and rankings, followed by university website and prospectus. This indicates the active engagement of the respondents in choosing their universities. This was also confirmed by the interviewees who acknowledged the additional role of their schools in facilitating opportunities for recruitment by the universities in question. The influence of family, education agents, and friends appears to be limited in the overall recruitment process.

As regards their stay abroad, 16 (24.6%) have stayed in their current place from 0-6 months; 17 (24.6%) from 6 months to 1 year; 14 (21.5%) from 1-2 years; 9 (13.8%) from 2-3 years; 4 (6.1%) from 3-4; 2 (3.07%) from 4-5; and 1 from 5-6 years. The overall stay of respondents outside Ethiopia extends from 0-5 years for 60 (92.3%) respondents and 5-10 years for 4 (6.15%) respondents.

Among the respondents, 53.8% are pursuing their bachelor degrees while 24.5% and 20% of them are pursuing their masters and PhDs, respectively. The majority, 41(63%) respondents, started their studies between 2016 and 2017 while 22 (33.8%) began their studies between 2011 and 2015. The intended year of completion for 44 (67.7%) respondents extends from 2016 to 2020 whereas 17 respondents plan to graduate between 2021 and 2025. It looks the latter group comprises mainly those who are pursuing their PhD studies.

At the time of the survey, 72.3% of the respondents were attending their education on full scholarships while 10.8% on partial scholarships; 6.2% of the respondents were supported by their family. Only 1.5% of the respondents said they pay for their education.

Motivations for Studying Abroad

Respondents were asked to identify the factors that motivated them most in choosing to study abroad.

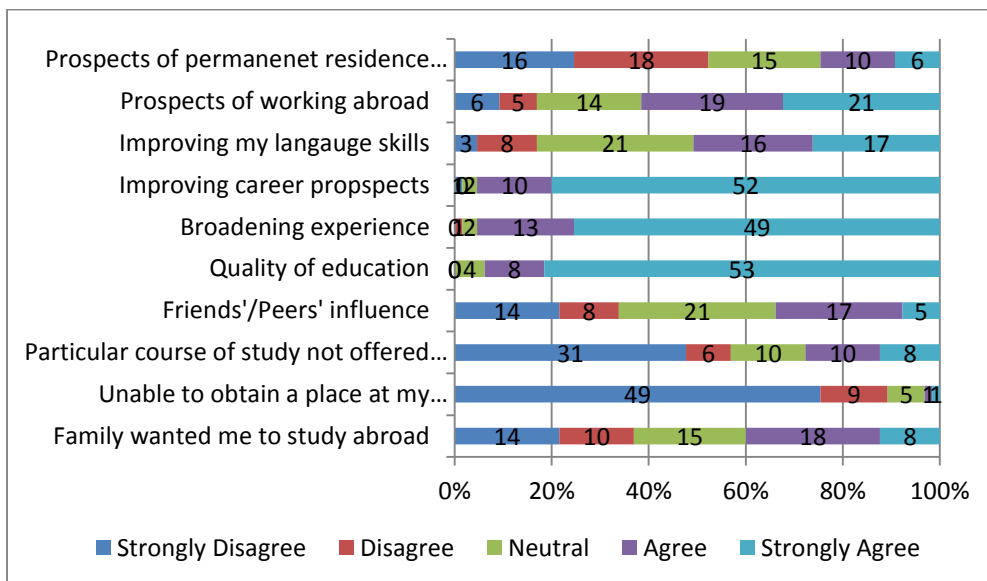


Figure 2: Motivations for international study

The most important reasons that drive respondents to pursue foreign studies are reported as the quality of training abroad, future career prospects and broadening of one’s experience. The same reasons were emphasized during the interviews with the six respondents. The respondents felt that their foreign training would give them competitive advantage by exposing them to a variety of skills and opportunities that they would not have obtained if they were trained in Ethiopia.

Such other reasons as friends’/peers’ influence and lack of particular course of study in Ethiopia assumed limited place in the decision of the respondents to pursue foreign studies outside their country.

Attributes and Skills for Employability

Respondents were asked to identify the types of attributes that they would consider critical for employability.

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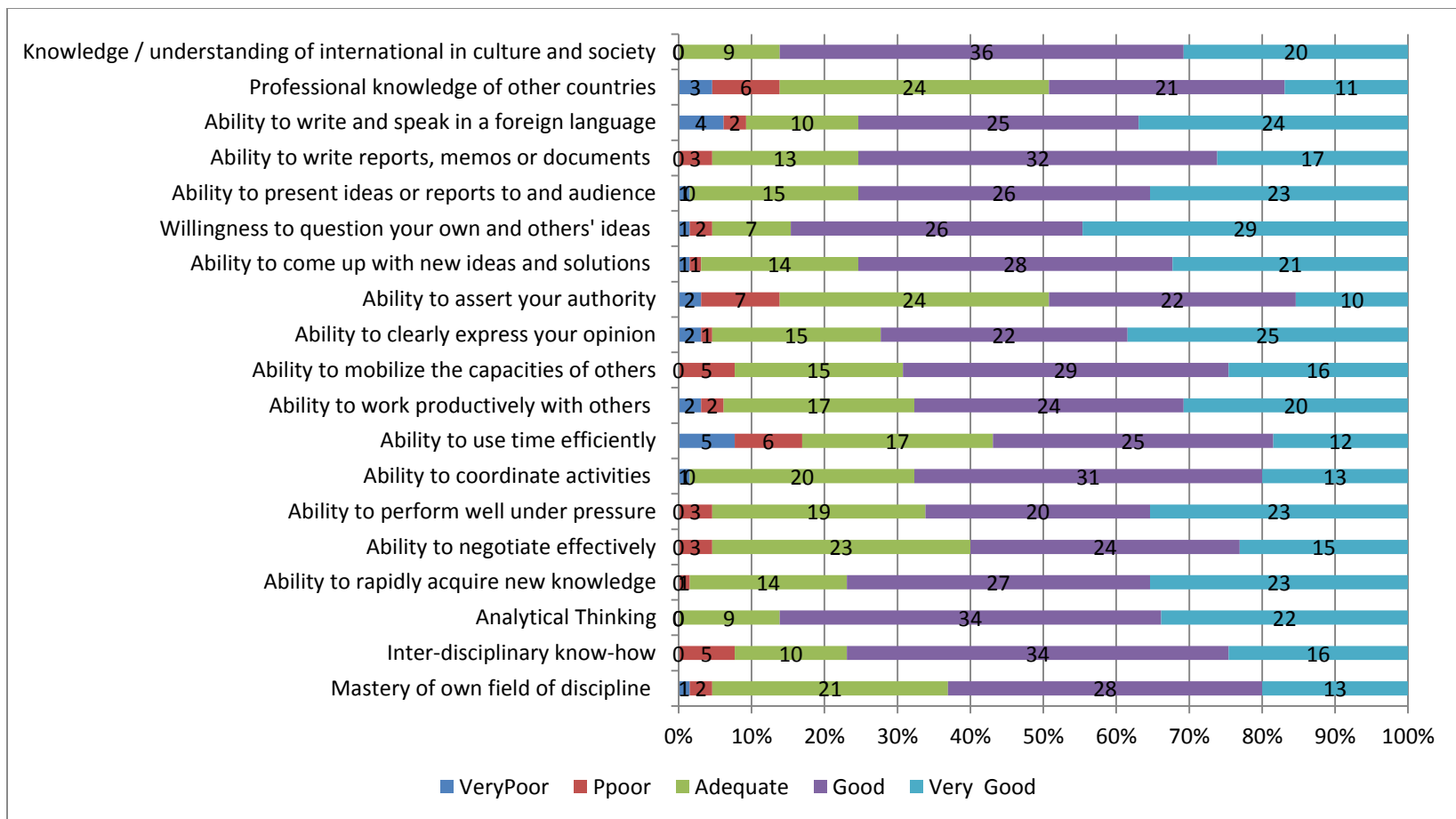


Figure 3: Importance of skills and Attributes for employability

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In terms of importance, such attributes as willingness to question one's own and others' ideas, ability to clearly express one's opinion, ability to write and speak in a foreign language, ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge, and to perform under pressure were perceived as key for employment. A response from the open-ended questions further consolidates this by offering the unique nature of their training:

When it comes to my discipline and how I am taught here, I feel like the pedagogy leaves more space for individual thinking, the professors try to give us as much tools as possible to tackle issues in this rapidly changing world; we are kept up to date when it comes to new publishing and developments in the scientific community through Research Gate and Academia; and by using platforms like Piazza, my classmates and I can actually discuss various topics that holds our interests with our professors on a day-to-day basis. Additionally, the mandatory internship period starts as early as the second semester and in doing so, a student will have the knowhow about the professional world and doing the internship this early might help the students in figuring out in which direction they want to approach their field. Additionally, a larger emphasis is given on experimental works than theoretical. The curriculum is also diverse; we take as much courses as possible from different departments or minor in another discipline making the education more interdisciplinary.

Respondents also talked about the advantages of studying abroad which they considered to be significantly different from their experiences in Ethiopia. The major areas of differences in the training modalities of foreign universities, which respondents reported as highly beneficial include, small student-faculty ratio, committed faculty to help students, existence of a system for accountability and compliance, predominance of skill-based training, and continuous assessment.

Mastery of Employability Attributes

After having reflected on the attributes and skills they consider important for employability, respondents were asked to rate their own mastery of these attributes and skills. The results are quite instructive as the figure below might reveal.

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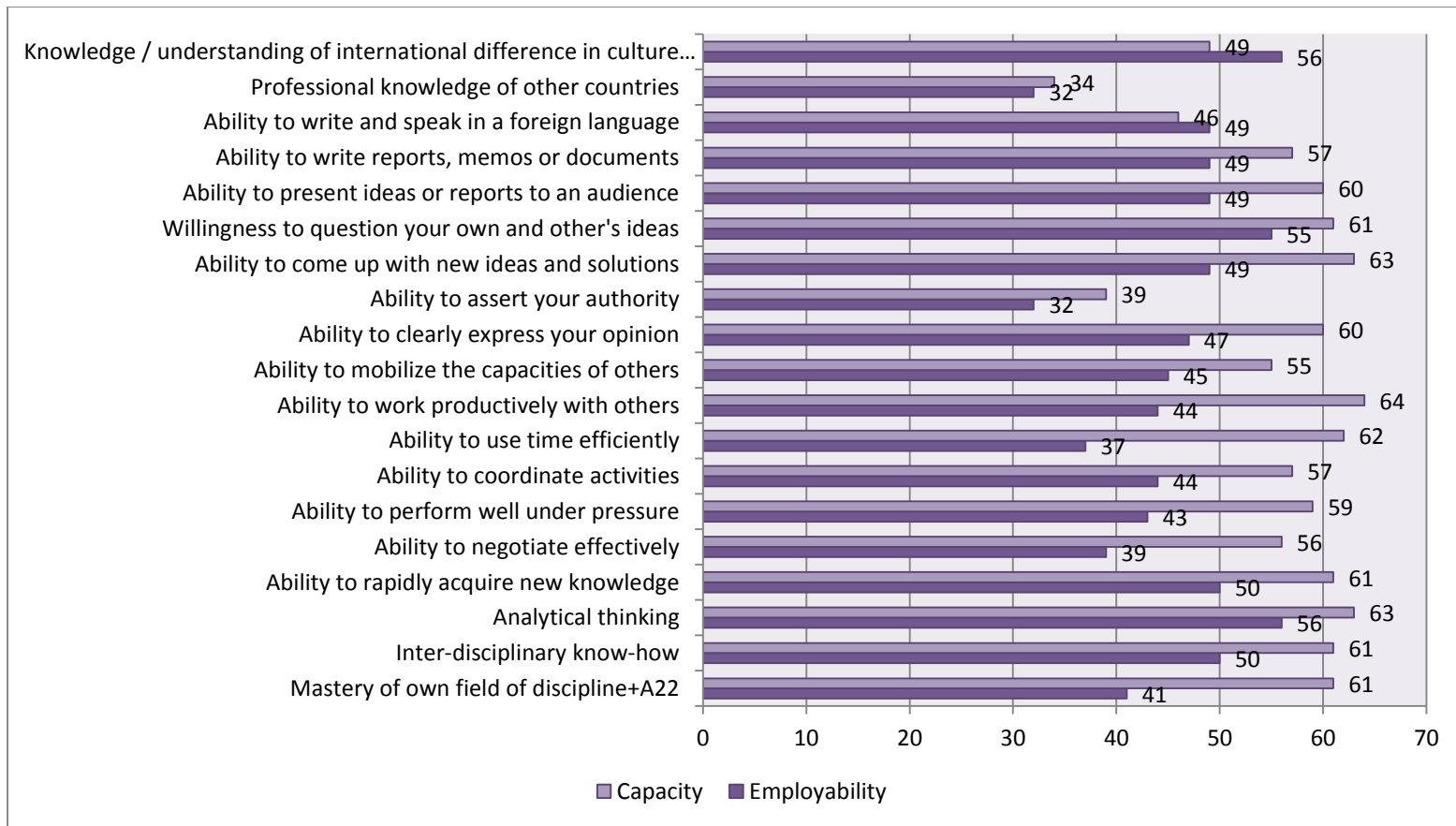


Figure 4: Perceived mastery of employability attributes and skills

The respondents appear to be overwhelmingly confident of their preparation for the market place—particularly in terms of the ability to use time efficiently, ability to work productively with others, and mastery of own field of discipline. The only exceptions in this regard were knowledge/understanding of cultural and societal differences and ability to write and speak in a foreign language. These could be attributable to deficiencies associated with the recent movement of respondents to the country of study.

The high level of confidence respondents seem to have shown could be further understood in terms of their views on what they would do with the knowledge they have acquired. This was especially noted during the course of the interviews, as the following response indicates:

I think, one of the biggest tools that I have gained from studying abroad is shaping the knowledge that I acquire in accordance to my experiences and upbringing. It had also exposed me to different people and as a result to different cultures, history and policies. It has also pushed me out of my comfort zone and has made me see the challenges that people face day-to-day in the world. Therefore, I think I can use the skills that I acquired here, first and foremost, to create awareness about several issues and to tackle them by professional activism. Additionally, I can relate the knowledge that I have gained to the world that I know while growing up and can try to work in creating technological solutions for my country. Additionally, being here has exposed me and taught me a lot about startup culture, entrepreneurship and the power of the youth so I think I can use this knowledge for creating a platform for the Ethiopian youth in the form of a co-shared workspace, youth volunteer organizations or creative urban spaces.

Preferred Nature of Job

In terms of the aspects of a job that would interest respondents most, the nature of the job, career advancement opportunities and attractive salary and benefits stood up from the list of elements included. It is interesting to note that attractive salary and benefits (28.1%) stood third after interesting and challenging work (35.9%), and career advancement opportunities, training, mentorship (32%). Interestingly, vacation time and flexibility did not attract respondents' interest.

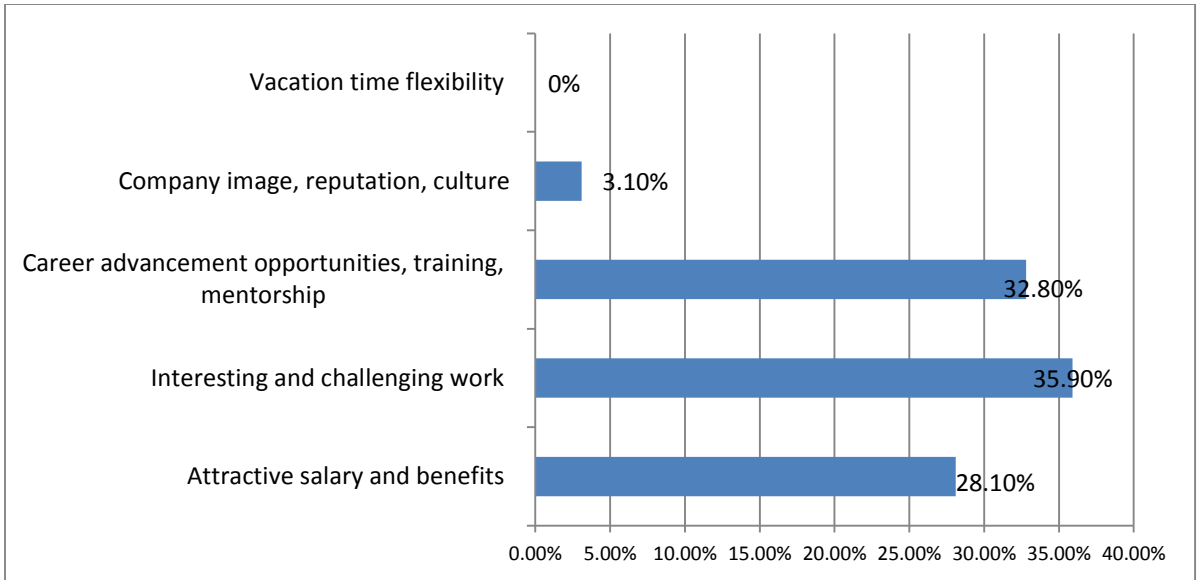


Figure 5: Preferred Nature of Job

Plan after Graduation

In terms of their plans after graduation quite a large proportion of the respondents (36.90%) seem to be unsure yet.

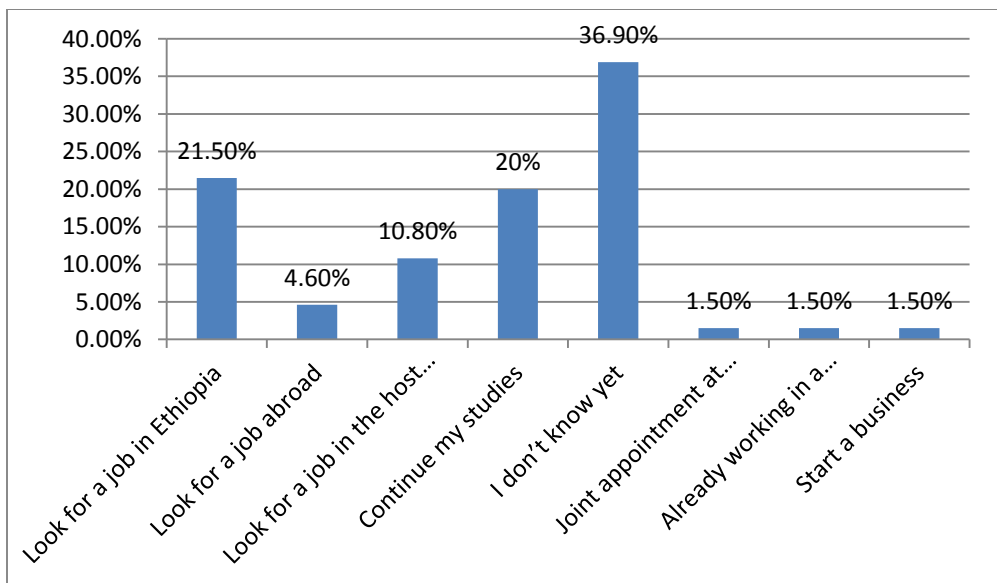


Figure 6: Plan after graduation

Another notable observation, also noted during the interview, is that those who intend to search for job opportunities in Ethiopia excel nearly by two fold from those who chose to seek jobs in a foreign country. This is, despite respondents' awareness of the prevalence of low-earning jobs, limited knowledge of skill deficiencies in the local market, and poor internet access in the country.

Another twenty percent of the respondents still want to continue their studies abroad. This does not appear surprising as the greater share of respondents is currently studying for their bachelor degrees.

A strong interest to return to Ethiopia, with an attractive job opportunity, was exhibited. An overwhelming majority (72.3%) responded in the affirmative while the rest reacted to the contrary except a few (1.5%) who said 'we don't know'.

Respondents were further asked what specific features of a job would attract them to go back to their country; and the responses are shown in Figure 7.

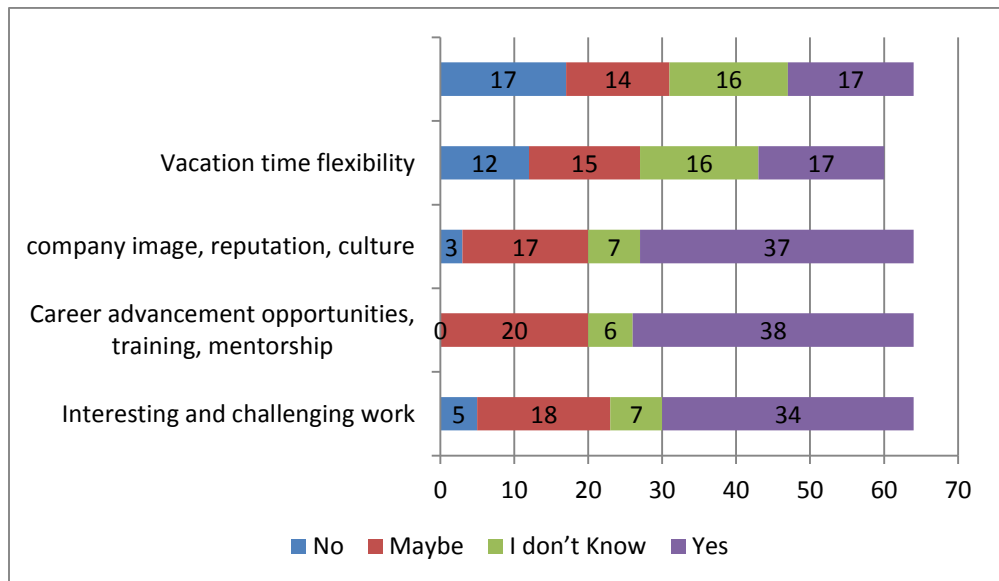


Figure 7: Attractive elements of a job

The most common responses remain to be interesting and challenging jobs, career advancement opportunities, followed by attractive salary and benefits. This is an indication that compared to other factors the nature of job matters most to respondents.

However, in terms of the question of when they would like to return home, 29.2% of the respondents said they do not have such a plan currently while the majority (49.2%) said that they are intending to return in 5- 10 years. The remaining 21.5% said they will return immediately after graduation. The overall interest to return home among the respondents seems quite high, contrary to expectations and the wider literature that suggests that student mobility encourages brain drain.

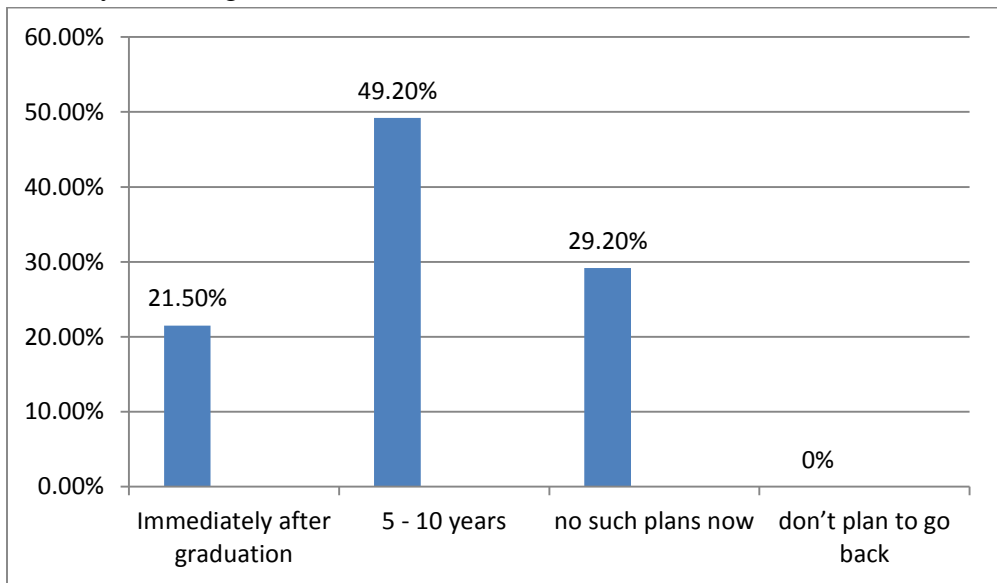


Figure 8: Planned periods of return

Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored the perspectives of Ethiopian students on their future employability by examining such relevant factors as motivations for studying abroad, employability attributes, respondents' mastery of these attributes, nature of jobs preferred, and respondents' plan after graduation. The findings reveal a variety of interesting observations about each of the issues investigated.

Among other issues, the study has established the views of international students on their training and has identified factors that drive the motivation of students to study abroad. Respondents realize the potential of their foreign study in terms of its critical role to their future which seems to be reflected in their choice of universities, programs of studies and prospects.

Although it is not the only factor that accounts for the choices of respondents, employment appears to be one of the overriding reasons for choosing to study abroad. From the perspective of respondents there is a clear association between their current training and its perceived outcome in the future. In this regard the research concurs with earlier studies that outlined students' conviction about the advantages of international study over local studies due to the additional opportunities it might offer (Di Pietro 2013; Hobsons and Solutions 2016; Tomlinson 2007; Tymon 2013).

The overall tendency of respondents who gave more importance to the acquisition of skills and personal qualities as contrasted with subject specific knowledge is also in accord with other similar studies (Saunders and Zuzel, 2010; Tymon 2013) and has been identified as the major point of difference between Ethiopian and foreign HEIs. In this regard, the extensive reflections made by respondents on the manners in which their trainings at foreign universities are conducted might offer useful insights to local universities. In light of the increasing demands of the time, it is important that Ethiopian universities find mechanisms to cater to these additional needs often lacking in their subject-dominated curricula and methods of delivery.

Although the literature on student mobility is replete with its effects often on "brain drain" (e.g., Teferra 2014), this research has shown an overwhelming interest of respondents to return to their country after graduation. This, however, seems to depend on the availability of conducive situations at the local level including the availability of information. As noted in the profile, half of the students currently study in the United States—a country where many Ethiopians are pursuing their studies and most are known to stay at the completion of their studies. In light of this underlying view, it may be appropriate to further undertake a comprehensive study in bridging the gap between the views and the existing trend.

Respondents are aware of their possible contributions to their country after graduation, and yet they are unsure of the demand for their skills at the local level. This has been mainly due to the disconnect between those that are studying abroad on the one hand and the government and local employers on the other who seem to have little knowledge about the profile of students studying abroad.

On attractive elements of a job, respondents appreciatively listed “interesting and challenging work” at the top followed by “career advancement opportunities” which was followed by “attractive salary and benefits”. Given the general sense of “attractive salaries and benefits” as key pull and push forces of academic mobility, this observation is worthy of serious policy consideration—and further study.

This study is largely consistent with the one undertaken by Bodycott and Lai (2017) on Chinese students. They observe that the Chinese students were motivated by the employment and study opportunities offered by cross-border education, the personal experience of visiting the country, the influence of family and friends, enhanced language proficiency and the development of networks that would help secure higher paid employment (p. 198).

It is well established that international student mobility enhances employability for graduates; and as such Ethiopian students are not an exception. Wachter (2014) however cautions that studies on the professional impact of study abroad have recently noted “declining returns” of anticipated benefits of mobility due to largely that study abroad has become much more of a “normal option’ today. It may be relevant to intimate this observation with the overwhelming enthusiasm expressed by Ethiopian students to return home after completing their overseas study.

In general, knowledge and understanding of Ethiopian students studying abroad are rather sketchy. This calls for a systematic way of documenting and analyzing them, among others, for human capital planning and deployment—for governments, businesses, NGOs and think tanks. This provides an opportunity to tap the huge potential of the Ethiopian intelligentsia that lies outside the borders of the country and also enables an in-depth review and analysis on various aspects of foreign study.

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