

Historic Merger of the Former Testing Center with the Institute of Educational Research

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In the last issue of the *Ethiopian Journal of Education* (EJE: 1986. Volume X Number 1, PP.80-82) a brief report was given by me on the birth of a new autonomous Institute of Educational Research (IER) in Addis Ababa University. At the end of 1987, a very comprehensive and scientific assessment of the overall activities of the Institute was undertaken by a senior consultant of IER from Finland, Professor Jukka Lehtinen (Dec. 1987). Professor Lehtinen's assessment was thorough with a lot of challenging implications for policy implementation. To this effect the report was submitted for consideration by all concerned.

Since its establishment the Institute of Educational Research (IER) has undertaken a number of bold steps and recorded some humble achievements. For instance in its 1987/88 Plan of Action, the Institute of Educational Research has planned to undertake twenty three projects. To date, over 60% of these projects have been completed. The projects are diversified, their depth and qualities impressive. The source of funds for these research projects came directly from the Addis Ababa University Special Research Fund and IER's Special Accounts. The financial contributions of foreign donor agencies such as SAREC, FINNIDA and IDRC are duly acknowledged. The multidisciplinary strategy of the Institute has enabled it to solicit and involve senior associate researchers both from within and without the University.

Efforts has also been made to reactivate and revitalize the ailing Journal of the Institute, the *Ethiopian Journal of Education* (EJE)

Within the last three years the Institute of Educational Research has taken steps aimed at strengthening and training its research and supportive staff. To this effect three IER research staff were sent overseas to complete their second and third degrees. Practically all the secretaries in the Institute were given opportunities to benefit from short term training program offered in the University. Three members of IER staff also attended specially designed Computer Training Program in AAU. The research staff of the Institute were able to attend both local and international Workshops and Seminars. Generally, the man-power training plan of the Institute has been implemented to some extent with the limited available resources.

Measures were taken to use effectively and efficiently the meager human and material resources available at IER. The Institute positively enhanced its consultation and counseling services. A number of "manuals" were prepared by the Institute for all those concerned. For instance, a Manual On Educational Research (in Amharic) was prepared and given freely to the Ethiopian Teachers' Association to be distributed to all schools in the country. In cooperation with this Association, plans are underway on how to train some selected teachers in different regions so

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that in their turn they could train other teachers on ways and means of undertaking educational research activities. The tradition of offering series of lectures to teachers, students, educators and policy makers both inside and outside the University has been maintained.

The Merging of the Former University Testing Center with IER

One of the greatest achievements of the Institute of Educational Research since its inception (1983) is its integration with the former University Testing Center in 1987. Questions might be raised as to the necessity of such merging in the first place. Different individuals could offer different views depending upon their own personal and professional convictions and interests. To those of us in the Institute of Educational Research, the issue of integration heralded a new venture that enhanced effective implementation of our objectives. Professional educators and pedagogists believe that a scientific examination system enhances the quality of education. The Institute is engaged in all kinds and aspects of educational research that would improve and strengthen the learning-teaching processes. Designing, developing and implementing examinations of all types for effective learning-teaching processes is an important aspect of our research endeavours. Similarly, these activities were also the major preoccupation of the former Testing Center. Since the objectives of the two Institutes overlapped, it was only logical to merge them.

There were other obvious justifications why the former Testing Center had to merge with the Institute of Educational Research.

Comrade Dr. Abiy kifle, President of Addis Ababa University invited the following persons to his Office on February 4, 1987. Dr. Makonnen Dilgassa, Academic Vice President, Dr. Bekure W/Semiat, Academic Programmes Officer in AAU, and Dr. Mokenen Yemer, Dean of the Faculty of Education and former Director of the University Testing Center and myself. The major agenda of the meeting was on how to salvage the ailing Testing Center.

The University Testing Center was established in 1966 by Professor Charles Langmuir, a USAID expert, under the auspices of the AAU-Academic Vice President. Its major objectives were to undertake research on test development and to offer testing services for personnel recruitment, placement and promotions, and to develop appropriate standardized aptitude tests for use in Addis Ababa University. Unfortunately no written documents or records were available on the achievements and problems of the Center. However the few technical papers and special bulletins that were available (though in a scattered manner) could easily convince one that at least at the initial stage of its establishment the University Testing Center was active. None-the-less, that was all that one could note on its positive achievement. The fact is however that the Center was haunted by numerous obstacles. For over two decades, the psychological, educational and occupational (vocational) tests that were offered by the Center to its prospective consumers were hardly evaluated scientifically. The role and relevance of these tests, their validity and reliability were questioned. As income generating Center, it was never able to use its fund for the revision of old tests, development of new ones and for the improvement of its resources. The Center was ill-staffed and ill-equipped. It suffered from acute leadership problem. Its mission of undertaking research could not be realized for numerous obvious reasons. It could not achieve its major objective enhancing the learn-

ing-teaching process in the University. Its efforts to develop aptitude tests to replace the ESLCE or design appropriate admission criteria based on scientific measurement did not materialize. It could not realize the lofty aims of improving the objectives and overall format of the Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination (ESLCE) Its impact in the development of University curriculum through designing proper examination system was insignificant. Furthermore, the University Testing Center was not able to develop and enhance the professional competence of its junior researchers. There was no training and scholarship opportunity offered to its staff. The fact that the former Testing Center was simply preoccupied with the administration of foreign tests such as TOEFL and GRE, where little professional or material input was gained by the University, was found insufficient for the continued existence of the Center as an independent unit.

These and numerous other fundamental problems were raised in the meeting of 4th February 1988 held in the Office of the President. There was an absolute consensus among the participants that such a status quo could not be allowed to continue and some kind of an immediate action should be taken to salvage the Center.

The whole discussion evolved on the basic spirit of how to salvage the ailing Testing Center. The President of Addis Ababa University, Comrade Dr. Abiy Kifle, insisted that there was a need for a strong unit of test and measurement services that would enhance research on educational testing projects curriculum development the creation of effective and efficient testing services and so on. Priority should be given to the redefinition of the objectives and identification of research priority areas for the Testing Center. Emphasis should be put on the need for new administrative structures for the Center.

Finally in that historic meeting, it was decided that a two man committee comprising of Dr. Yusuf Omer Abdi, Director of IER and Dr. Mekonnen Yimer, Dean of the Faculty of Education and the former Director of Testing Center, be appointed to draft a proposal on the future objectives, administrative management, priority research areas and so on, and submit its findings in one week.

Consequently another meeting was held on Feb. 14, 1988 to finalize the proposed plans of action for the Testing Center. This particular meeting was chaired by Dr. Mekonnen Dilgassa, Academic Vice President. The proposed plan of action (17 page document) presented by the two man-committee was studied, commented upon and improved. The final version of the proposal was then submitted to President Abiy Kifle for consideration and policy decision.

Presidential Decision

- On April 20, 1987, one historic Presidential Circular (Ref. No. 43 11/413/87) was issued formalizing the "merger of Testing Center and the IER." The summary of the Presidential decision is presented as follows.

In as much as the objectives and activities of the Testing Center and those of the Institute of Educational Research overlap to a very large extent, it has been decided to put the Testing Center as a Unit under the umbrella of the IER. Under this new structure it will be called "the Unit of Test and Measurement Services."

In the same Presidential Circular it was decided that the Institute of Educational Research (IER) will have three Departments: (1) Educational Research and Training Unit (2) The Unit of Test and Measurement Services, and (3) General Service Unit. The roles and responsibilities of each Unit or Department were clearly specified by the President. Subsequently the historic merging of IER and the former Testing Center became formal and functional.

Achievements of the Unit of Test and Measurement Services One year after its integration

Perhaps one year would appear to be by far inadequate for an infant to grow or for an old Institute to rejuvenate. However, it would be fair to present the humble achievements and salient features of the former Testing Center or the present Unit of Test and Measurement Services.

1987 workshop

The first and logical step that was undertaken was to organize a Workshop on the integration of the educational, test and measurement research activities. The justification and significance of the proposed Workshop was

a) The merging of the former Testing Center and IER has necessitated the formulation of integrated research activities in education, pedagogics, test and measurement services.

b) The need to solicit the professional assistance of senior researchers in the soul searching exercise for the effective utilization and implementation of IER's new mission.

The Workshop had one general objective namely that of facilitating and enhancing the Institute of Educational Research's objectives of integrating educational pedagogical test and measurement research activities. A number of specific and highly relevant objectives were also identified. About 30 professionals, educator researchers, pedagogists, teachers and policy makers participated in the Workshop which was held in the town of Nazreth (99 kms. East of Addis Ababa) between July 3 to 5, 1987. The Workshop, was a success and it enabled the IER to clearly visualize its new mission and responsibility and helped it in designing appropriate mechanisms and strategies for the implementation of its objectives. The following were some of the action taken as a result:-

1. Steps were taken to redefine the job description of each and every former member of the Unit. As far as possible, an effort was made to put the right person in the right place or job. Positive steps were also taken to integrate the material resources available in the Institute. Such centralisation and integration of offices and equipment, enhanced efficient and effective use of the available material resources.
2. Actions were taken to implement IER man-power training program. One former member of the Testing Center was sent to India for higher training. Three other junior members were encouraged to participate in short term training programmes (workshops, seminars, computer training program ect.) There is now a plan to send one other person to Finland for advanced training.

3. An immediate action was taken to evaluate forty three educational, vocational and occupational tests now in use by the unit. The result of such an assessment in the validity and reliability of the available tests have easily convinced us that we need new alternatives and better scientifically produced tests. In a short period of time, over one hundred such tests and with alternate forms will be put into use.
4. The undertaking of research on test development was given more emphasis than ever before. Ethiopian oriented standardized tests of personality, interest, aptitude, scholastic ability, and vocational or career oriented tests are included in some of the research projects related to test development.