

The State of Educational Research in IER (1967-1998)

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1. Introduction

Although IER started as an Educational Documentation Center by the Faculty of Education in 1967, its pace of growth had been thwarted by the creators themselves as evidenced by their lack of commitment and institutional support after they created it (Yusuf, 1986). The unfavorable and sometimes hostile opinion of University authorities toward the Center, in particular, and toward the field of Education in general, has resulted in slowed down development of the Center (Yusuf, 1983).

It was also very important to note that the field of Education had suffered dire consequences in the hands of University authorities in the 1970s. In addition to being less remunerative in the hierarchy of professions in the society, teacher trainees in AAU were looked down upon by their student colleagues reflecting--in part--the attitudes of some professors and, in turn, resulting in a failure to attract academically competent candidates to the field of Education.

All these states of affairs had negatively impacted the development process of the Faculty of Education and the Research Center (now IER). Arising from lopsided training-opportunities of University staff, the Institute had suffered from severe shortage of trained researchers. Facilities and staffing of these institutions until very recently were very inadequate. Many AAU academic staff had a problem of internalizing the need for professionalization of teachers, a lack of vision. They demonstrated distorted views of the requirements of Teacher Education Programs. They viewed the field of education not from the vantage point of the developmental needs of the country, but from the point of view of academic parochialism and egoistic interests.

Contrary to the attitudes of some academics in AAU and elsewhere, however, the positive role of education in national development has now attained a status of near consensus among Ethiopian educationalists. Operationalization of the

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mission—education for development—in AAU would take the form of strengthening the two organizations, the Institute of Educational Research (IER) and the Faculty of Education (FOE). There is now a tremendous need of trained educationalists and teachers--in the whole country--both in quantity and quality.

An equally tremendous need also exists in educational research which is an integral part of the educational process. Through research, education can be vitalized by continuous provision of scientific information for developing and overhauling the system of education (including the system-parts). There is a great potentiality in IER for development and dissemination of indigenous knowledge to the final beneficiaries.

2. IER Research and Publications

Although small in size and functioning in the context of a thwarting environment--for a long time--IER had produced 320 research results since its establishment (since 1967). About half of these (145 articles) are produced by IER full-time staff. The remaining articles are authored by faculty members from different teacher training colleges (see Table 1). Only 76 of the 320 research products remained unpublished. The bulk of the research (244 papers) had been published in the various journals of IER. Table 1 demonstrates the distribution of IER research and publications.

Table 1: IER research and publications (1967-1998)

no	title	IER staff	others	total
1	The Ethiopian Journal of Education	48	110	158
2	IER-Flambeau	22	5	27
3	IER Proceedings	21	29	50
4	IER Research Projects	54	22	76
5	Admas	3	6	9
6	total	148	172	320

2.1 The Ethiopian Journal of Education

It can be observed from Table 1 that the Ethiopian Journal of Education (EJE) which is one of the reputable scholarly journals in the Addis Ababa University is the earliest of IER journals (it started in 1967), albeit ups and downs in its life

cycle. Since then, it has published 158 scholarly articles that were being used for *Teaching and Reference Materials*. Post Graduate students have recently been the most important beneficiaries of these publications. Some of the articles were also found to be useful to development of educational policies as, for instance, was the case in the development of the **Education and Training Policy** during the period of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia in 1994. A third of the 158 publications were authored by IER staff. A systematic study of the quality, relevance and coverage of these articles in EJE, yet remains to be studied in the near future. Already, preparations are underway.

2.2 IER-Flambeau

IER-Flambeau is the youngest journal in IER. It started in 1990. Initially, it used to publish all sorts of educational stories and school reports. Sometimes, it used to look like a specialized newsletter. Through an evolutionary process, however, it has now attained a status of a professional journal (by consistently publishing scholarly articles).

About 16 issues consisting of 27 articles have been published since the establishment of the Journal. Flambeau articles are always fresh as the time gap between submission of an article and publication of this article is narrow contrary to refereed journals whose time gap could be as wide as two years.

Article selection for publication in IER-Flambeau is handled by the Publication and Public Relation Unit of IER, of course, involving all IER editors. It can be argued that this Journal is almost exclusively used by IER-researchers as about 90 percent of the article-contributions come from them (see Table 1).

2.3 IER Proceedings

IER Proceedings emanate from conducting conferences, workshops, symposia, etc. IER started these activities in 1981. Only five Proceedings resulting from five conferences were produced over the 28-year period. A total of 50 papers appeared in these proceedings. IER staff contributed slightly less than 50 percent of these publications. The frequency of conference preparation and Proceeding-publishing has been relatively low in IER as the task is a relatively expensive

process usually demanding external funding sources in addition to the funds provided by the Research and Publication Office of the University.

2.4 IER Research Projects

Included in the category of Research Projects are all types of research activities conducted in the Institute in collaboration with Ministries, Regional States, organizations, Professional Associations and international universities. Most of the studies focused on Applied Research by aiming at addressing problems that require immediate remedial intervention. The *Educational Research Database Project* and the *Child Development Research* are two examples that are currently undertaken by IER both independently and collaboratively with Oslo University. Research consultancy which had often been carried out by the request of Ministries, Regions, and NGOs had been the source of some income to the Institute.

About 70 percent of the 76 research projects demonstrated in Table 1 were conducted by IER staff. The rest are contributed by Faculty staff. It is sad, however, that most of these research products remain unpublished although accessible to users in the IER Library—which to date has documented about 23,000 titles.

2.5 Admas

Admas was an Amharic medium Journal established in 1979 and discontinued in 1980. During its two-year-life span, however, Admas had published two issues with nine scholarly articles. The motivations for its creation and instant-discontinuation nevertheless remain secret to this writer. It was also observed that Admas was created when EJE was inoperative, an event which lends itself to doubts of the motivations for this drama.

2.6 IER-Newsletter

The IER-Newsletter whose data doesn't appear in Table 1 has been established in 1993. It now provides current educational information in IER, the Faculty of Education, the University and the Ministry of Education. Although its frequency and distribution, hitherto, has been haphazard, there are now plans to make it a

monthly publication. IER-Newsletter has been the most inexpensive publication in IER as all activities including printing have been done inside IER itself. An in-house printing has been made possible in IER using the technology of scanners and electro-stencils.

3. Temporal Distribution of IER Publications and Research

A temporal analysis of research and publication activities in IER demonstrates that EJE had the longest life span, about 32 years (1967-1998). The remaining publications are either young or short-lived—as the case of Admas (see Table 2). Unpublished research projects, especially those in the form of consultancy are very recent phenomenon. Their temporal distribution is not, therefore, covered in this report. As per its promise to publish two issues annually, EJE was expected to produce 64 issues over the defined period. It, however, happened that EJE had undergone a process of several interruptions resulting in failures to meet the requirements. For instance, no issue was produced during the 1976-1981 six-year period. Moreover, there was no consistency in meeting the publication requirements in the early history of the Journal. The Journal started to publish more frequently only after 1989 as 11 issues were produced during the 1991-1998 period, a figure which is only three issues less than the expected figure.

Table 2: Temporal Distribution of IER Research and Publications (1967-1998)

No	Year	EJE	Flambeau	Proceeding	Research Projects	Admas	Total
1	1967-1970	4	-	-	-	2	6
2	1971-1980	9	-	-	-		9
3	1981-1990	5	2	3			10
4	1991-1998	10	14	2			26
5	total	28	16	5		2	51

It is not, therefore, surprising to observe a zero-output of educational research publications during this critical period of 1976-1981, when many important activities were in limbo as the result of the "Revolution". The improvement in the rates of publication at the present decade might suggest a correlation with improvements in the administrative support by the University. The size of IER academic staff which remained negligible up to 1980 (only 2 academic and 4

administrative staff existed in the 1967-1980 period) was increased to a high of 10 professionals in 1998 which is also partially caused by the merger of the Testing Center staff in 1987.

The Journal (EJE) now tries to keep pace with the requirements of publishing two issues per annum, thanks to the *Commission for Science and Technology* which still remains instrumental to the provision of funding to the Journal from SAREC funds (for covering publication expenses). A major obstacle observed at the current period is a shortage and lack-of-motivation-of article assessors. This problem had revealed itself in delays of feedback and reluctance to assess. Material incentives are identified to ameliorate the intensity of this problem in the Ethiopian context, albeit the controversial nature of this motivation.

Admas was the second oldest journal in IER (1979). The remaining research and publication activities in IER were very young, starting only in the early 90s but with sustained growth patterns.

4. Contribution of Current IER Academic Staff in Research and Publication

It should be clearly understood that the size and type of IER academic staff has been changing from time to time as a result of horizontal and vertical mobility. The present staff which involves two new recruits does not also involve two highly experienced staff members who are now in their study leaves for a terminal degree. This was reflected in the anomaly between the research output of IER staff indicated elsewhere in this paper and that depicted in Table 3.

The current research staff of IER has a research output of 126 papers (see Table 3) about half of which are published. It can also be observed that 28 percent of the staff has produced 61 percent of the research output. This impropportionate distribution can partly be explained by the relatively longer years of experience in the University of researchers with higher academic ranks. The distribution gets highly skewed when only publications are considered. Eighty-six percent of the published materials are authored by, again, 28 percent of the staff.

One could, therefore, safely conclude that given the experience and institutional support of researchers, the educational institutions can produce a

Table 3: Research and Publications by Current Active IER Staff

rank	No.	published	unpublished	in progress	total
Assoc. Prof.	2	43	39	5	77
Asst. Prof.	1	3	9	2	14
Lecturer	4	4	21	-----	25
total	7	50	69	7	126

tremendous amount of scientific information which could be helpful for national development. It is also obvious that the research output observed in the various tables in this paper was produced in spite of financial constraints and not because of financial reasons.

5. The Need and Current Research Activities at IER

It goes without saying that he who possesses information possesses power. And this can best be achieved through research because it is the only way of generating reliable information.

Identification of research problems, conducting and dissemination of research products are the major concerns of IER. Through research, educators can indigenize knowledge, curriculum and learning-teaching methodologies. Through educational research curriculum designers and implementers could be empowered. The capacity of the Federal, Regional and Local systems can be enhanced through research.

IER is currently undertaking two important research projects, **Child Development Project** and **Educational Research Database**. Both are planned to be completed in 2000. The former is intended to generate information for intervention in child development practices of Ethiopia with an aim of improving the traditional practices. The latter registers the educational research studies with their contents, the research methods, and coverage of the education field, etc. in the whole country over a 25-year period with an aim of providing easy access of educational researchers to all indigenous educational literature. After completion

of the project, a multi-media dissemination strategy will be adopted including the Internet.

The Development of Aptitude Test for entrance to college is one of the future projects of IER. It is believed that the test will help institutions to recruit candidates for college or employment in addition to other diagnostic methods.

Distance Education is one of the items in the current research agenda of IER. Already understanding has been reached with **Oslo University** for conducting research on *Infrastructure Building for Distance Education*. The funding source is expected to be NORAD or NUFU.

6. Conclusion

It is understandable that research in our country, in general, is in its embryonic stage. The situation is worse in the case of educational research. Its development is hampered by *dependency*. The direction of educational research has often been made subject to the source of funding. It is believed that government investment in educational research will have returns that transcend short-term benefits.

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