Chapter 8
Graduate Employability and Responsiveness: The Need for Aligning Policy Directions and Institutional Readiness in Ethiopia

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Abstract This study was conducted to examine the level and nature of responsiveness that Ethiopian public and private higher education institutions exhibit toward graduate employability. The study was conducted using national data available on 13 public and private institutions. The findings reveal that, despite the encouraging trends of an expanding higher education sector, there are serious concerns about the ability of universities to respond to the demands of the labor market and employers. While the policy directions appear to recognize the impending challenges of graduate employability, many institutions have not yet developed the readiness to respond to such demands in an organized and efficient manner. In the absence of the needed structures, systems, and learning experiences within and outside universities, the institutional capacity to influence graduates' employability will remain restricted. This suggests the need for broadening the existing conceptualization of employability, encouraging greater university-employer interaction and adopting proactive schemes within and outside of institutions as the basis for improving institutional responsiveness toward graduate employability.

Introduction

Successful and appropriate graduate employability is a benefit and a responsibility for all stakeholders—graduates, employers, higher education institutions, governments, and the economy at large. Failure to equip graduates with the necessary skills, attributes, and competencies can have adverse consequences such as unemployment, low wages, job dissatisfaction, low productivity and less competitiveness of a given economy (Badillo-Amador & Vila, 2013; Mateos-Romero & Salinas-Jiménez, 2018; Tamrat, 2019b)—While it would be most appropriate for all stakeholders to join together to improve graduate employability, there appears to be inordinate demand on higher education institutions (HEIs) to produce the graduates with the profile that

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the industry needs. In fact, HEIs' failure to provide the right type of graduates appears to be a point widely shared across the huge body of literature available on the subject (El Mansour & Dean, 2016; Hodges & Burchell, 2003). The cause of such failures is often attributed to academia's limited role in designing employability strategies and policies and reluctance toward systematically and actively engaging in activities that can provide better inputs and outcomes (The Gallup Organization, 2010; McArthur et al. 2017).

Ethiopia is endowed with a rich history of religious education that surpasses 1700 years. However, the Ethiopian higher education sector is a relatively young system with 70 years of experience under its belt. The first modern higher education institution in the country, the University College of Addis Ababa (today Addis Ababa University), was established with a handful of students and staff in 1950. Until the 1960s, the government played a significant role in absorbing the limited number of graduates that came out of the various educational establishments across the country. Serious challenges to graduate employment began to surface only in the late sixties, driven by a variety of socio-economic and demographic changes. This included, among others, the rise in the number of primary and secondary graduates, the decline in GDP, and the nature of the private investment, which demanded little skilled human capital, thereby contributing to a high rate of unemployment among high school graduates (Asayehegn, 1979).

New changes in the job market and the unprecedented expansion of the education sector over the last two decades have further exacerbated the challenges of graduate employment. Currently, there are 50 public higher education institutions and over 300 accredited private higher education institutions that enroll more than a million students at the tertiary level (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2018). Both public and private higher education institutions produce over 160,000 graduates per year. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions similarly churn out around 100,000 graduates annually. The unemployment rate for post-secondary graduates in general is reported as 14% (World Bank, 2016) but the figure could be higher given the rising incidence of unemployment across many sectors. For instance, a study conducted by the former Ministry of Youth and Sports indicated that 480,000 university and technical, vocational education and training graduates in Ethiopia were still looking for jobs in 2017. Employers also report difficulty in finding workers with the required preparation expressing their dissatisfaction about the ability, skills, and competence of graduates. According to Beyene & Tekeleselassie (2018), employers are most often dissatisfied with graduates' practical skills, appropriate work ethic, and readiness to learn. They often attribute graduates' lack of technical skills and non-technical skills to the poor preparation at higher education institutions.

On top of other factors, addressing graduate employability requires institutional responsiveness to the new demands of the job market. However, little is researched about how much and in what ways institutions are responding to the demands of graduate employability. This chapter seeks to address this gap through a close examination of national policy directions and the level of responsiveness Ethiopian HEIs exhibit toward the demands of graduate employability. The chapter begins with a literature review to develop an institutional responsiveness framework and discusses the

various mechanisms of institutional responsiveness and theorizations about employability which will serve as the spine for the study. Following the method section, institutional responsiveness at different dimensions of the higher education system will be reported with a link to various theorizations about employability (Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Holmes, 2013).

Theorization of Employability and Institutional Responsiveness

According to Holmes (2013), there are three distinct ways in which graduate employability can be conceptualized and theorized. The first is what is termed as the possessive approach. This approach is dominant across many systems and assumes that employability can be defined in terms of certain characteristics and attributes. In this approach, graduate skills and attributes are treated as though they are meant to be possessed and later used in the job market and the task of HEIs is to ensure that the question of mastery of defined skills and attributes by graduates is addressed (Holmes, 2013; Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2015). However, the approach is argued to provide no explanation for a variety of differences in employment outcomes between graduates from particular demographic, cultural or economic groups.

The second approach views higher education as a system structured to reinforce existing social positions and argues that social phenomena such as employability get meaning and are shaped by a web of relationships in a given context (Delva et al., 2021). This is best explained through Bourdieu's concepts of social field, habitus and capitals whose interplay is considered to have a critical impact on employability (Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). According to Bourdieu (1998), a social field can be understood as the contexts in which an individual or institution functions; habitus denotes individual or institutional actions taken based on the social field; and capital refers to the resources that individuals or institutions possess or have access to. Clark and Zukas (2013) note that Bourdieu's thinking tools—habitus, field and capital—may contribute to a better understanding of individuals and their employability than the perspectives held by the possessive approach. In particular, Bourdeau's sociological studies of inequalities helps to move beyond a focus on disembodied knowledge and skills whilst providing a framework for considering issues of class and gender as well as issues of personality and motivation (Clark & Zukas, 2013; Ingram & Allen, 2019).

The process perspective on graduate employability refers to the mechanisms in which individuals transition from university to the workforce and assumes that "individuals are not mere pawns in a game, just 'victims' of a system stacked in favour of the few and against the many but creatures whose futures are affected by the decisions and actions they take" (Holmes, 2013, pp. 548–549). According to this approach, after building on skills and attributes acquired in gaining a degree, individuals begin to develop a graduate identity which they present to 'gatekeepers'/recruiters and

managers (Holmes, 2013). A critical element in this process is the emphasis given to career self-management and associated behaviours such as career exploration, guidance seeking and networking (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2015).

The above discussion suggests that subscribing to the notion of graduate employability that is solely linked to one specific approach such as basic skill acquisition demanded by employer groups may not be always the right thing to do (Clarke, 2017). It can be anticipated that the specific forms of institutional responsiveness can be influenced by the aforementioned and other conceptualizations which can have broader implications for policy and- or institutional operation.

Institutional Responsiveness

According to Wedekind (2012), responsiveness refers to "the degree to which an educational institution responds to external factors in determining its offerings." The concept entails the factor or set of factors the institution responds to and the nature of the response or responses given. The link between responsiveness and employability is foregrounded in the critical role institutions are expected to play in addressing labor market needs and preparing employable graduates. When it comes to employability, the new role of higher education and its relationship with the economy, the labor market, and society in general are often articulated as manifestations of responsiveness (Kruss, 2004). At the earliest stages, this assumption was resisted as inappropriate on the grounds that the purpose of HEIs should focus more on addressing the broader goals of producing well-rounded citizens (Mtawa et al., 2019) than settling for this myopic conceptualization.

With the increasing demand of the labor market and the advent of neo-liberal tendencies (Sin et al., 2017), HEIs have succumbed to the demands of aligning educational practices with the needs of the labor market and society. In fact, as noted by Boden and Nedeva (2010), the neo-liberal orientation in higher education has engendered a discursive shift from traditionally viewing graduate employment as an aspect of institutions' relationship with the labor market, and one where they enjoyed a significant degree of discretion, to a performative function of universities, shaped and directed by the state, which is seeking to supplant labor markets. As a result, new employability models that assume a direct link between higher education and the labor market are emerging both in institutional expectations and in changing practices (Kruss, 2004; Tran, 2016).

Aside from being spurred on by neo-liberal tendencies and the support of supranational agencies and networks such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank, there appears to be a moral obligation on the part of HEIs which should support this pursuit. In the current context, where leaving individuals 'without' employability would considerably diminish their life chances (McCowan, 2015), universities are required to equip graduates with job-specific skills that are specified, monitored, and incentivized (Boden & Nedeva, 2010). However, it should be noted that, despite its increasing acceptance, there are

arguments portending that the employability "agenda" should not be promoted to the extent that it undermines the core function of universities: the production of well-rounded citizens. Hence, it is suggested that universities' instrumental value should exist alongside their intrinsic value, rather than being replaced for otherwise the purpose of higher education and the distinction between higher and vocational education will be eroded altogether (Kinash et al., 2016; McCowan, 2015). Kruss (2004) captures the challenges of universities in adjusting to their new roles in the following way:

> Universities are experiencing the tension between promoting the model of indirect employability of the past and developing a new model of direct employability to their general programs. Their professional programs continue to operate in terms of the past model. Institutions have put in place, to differing degrees, new strategies, and mechanisms that promote a model of direct employability congruent with that of the other constituencies, but large swathes of their educational activity continue to be driven by the traditional model of indirect employability (pp. 94–95).

Institutions respond to the labor market demands through a variety of mechanisms, tasks, and activities that are considered to be key in enhancing graduate employability. These responsibilities comprise various roles that pertain to identifying employability skills, enhancing the mobility of graduates and university faculty, and facilitating the transitional phase for new graduates. Concrete expressions of the commitment and initiatives taken by HEIs include the development of employability programs and strategies, the introduction of relevant components within university courses and curricula, institutional systems, close engagement with employers, integration of careers and employability services into single student support arrangements, setting up of career departments or offices, studies focusing on the identification of employability attributes, and other careers and employability-related activities (Helyer & Lee, 2014; Lowden et al., 2011; McCowan, 2015; Shivoro et al., 2018).

Wedekind (2012) conceptualizes responsiveness and employability as the dynamic interaction of a set of variables and outlines four broad thematic areas through which responsiveness to employability can be realized: linkages between educational institutions and external sectors such as local employers; the curriculum delivered in the colleges; transitions to work, tracking students and examining destinations; and policy and implementation. Institutional awareness of the challenges of employability and responsiveness towards these activities is crucial for aligning their efforts with the labor market needs. We explore below these common manifestations of responsiveness toward graduate employability.

Linkage and Partnership

University-Industry (U-I) linkage primarily aims to enhance students' work-readiness and can occur in different forms such as work placements, internships, guest speakers, recruitment drives, or practical projects of various types (Tran, 2016). As noted by Tran (2016), it is a useful way "to increase university responsiveness for the

economy, to bring authentic lessons from the market into the university curriculum, to enhance skills desired by contemporary employers, and thus, to enhance employability for students and graduates" (p. 66). Links forged between industries and universities allow the preparation and provision of tailor-made courses, continuous professional development (CPD), and running jointly developed undergraduate/postgraduate programs. For instance, Yorke and Knight (2006) suggest that the full spectrum of pathways to embedding employability in the curriculum features a number of overlapping approaches that include using work-based curriculum components, adopting employability-related modules, and work-based learning in parallel with the curriculum. Higher education institutions are most often expected to define and deliver skills and attributes that respond to today's fast-changing work environment and incorporate them into their programs, but the participation of employers in this task is often regarded as critical. According to Minocha and others (2017), employers' recognition of university-employer collaborative initiatives also serves the purpose of bridging the gap between institutional curriculum and employers' expectations. Despite an increasing number of curricular and pedagogic developments undertaken to address graduate employability, the extent to which these have been embedded across the sector is unknown (Lowden et al., 2011). So is the impact of these developments on both employers and academia.

Relationship with employers is also critical in terms of enhancing employability. As noted by Fahnert (2005), internships are crucial for learners to experience the actual work environment, in addition to developing subject, transferable, and career skills through the curriculum. The practice demands institutions' active involvement in assigning student interns to appropriate workplaces, supporting them, and closely monitoring their performance. It requires employers to grant permission for student placements, and more importantly, to get involved in monitoring student progress and providing constructive feedback. Employer readiness to assume active responsibility in U-I linkage not only helps graduates to develop new skills but also to develop confidence that would help them respond to the various demands of their jobs. Staff from universities or industries could also interact, exchange information, or share experiences to identify the skills needed in the workplace. Martin (2000) argues that institutions are increasingly involved with the provision of continuous development for professionals in the industry and have a definite comparative advantage in this domain over all other providers. This can be seen as a platform for knowledge transfer since it raises the skill levels of the workforce in business and helps universities gain access to the latest developments in professional practice. In contexts where the level of employer participation remains passive, the whole process of internship and externship can be endangered. With the increasing consideration of universities as potentially attractive partners for business, U-I linkage is being realized in the form of contracted or collaborative research, consultancy services, technology transfer, and commercialization of intellectual property (D'Este et al., 2005; Perkmann & Walsh, 2007) which will not be treated in this paper.

Curriculum Responsiveness

Central to both student employability and the responsiveness of institutions is the curriculum. Within the responsiveness literature, curriculum responsiveness appears to be mostly discussed as the critical route for accommodating the demands of employability (Sin et al., 2017; Wedekind & Mutereko, 2016). According to Wedekind and Mutereko (2016), the curriculum is the medium through which knowledge is selected, translated, and transferred since it represents both the official intentions of an educational institution and the lived experience of teaching and learning of the participants within the institution. A study of the curriculum in all its dimensions thus provides a productive lens for making sense of the various forces at play in the processes of developing student employability through responsiveness. According to Moll (2005), a responsive curriculum must take account of a range of factors: economic responsiveness (employers, the market); cultural responsiveness (ethnic, cultural, religious, and learning-styles diversity); disciplinary responsiveness (the disciplinary community that generates new knowledge through research) and student responsiveness (the needs of the student). In a similar vein, Wedekind and Mutereko (2016) argue,

> At a broader level, curricula need to respond to policy requirements (regulative and symbolic) such as labor laws, affirmative action, or health and safety regulations that employers may not always identify. Similarly, social, cultural, and environmental issues require responses in the curriculum that enhance capabilities and competence in the expanded sense but may not be identified by employers. Finally, the institution itself needs to respond to a range of internal dimensions such as its human and physical resources, managerial capacity, and location in developing its curriculum. (p. 4)

Based on Moll's (2005) suggestions, Wedekind and Mutereko (2016) further contend that the five contextual dimensions that create drivers of responsiveness are: (1) Employers (as drivers of both demand and supply with regard to labor and education and training), (2) Students/workers/job-seekers, (3) Policies and regulations, (4) Societal and environmental issues, and (5) Education & Training organizations.

Transition to Work, Graduate Tracking and Student Destinations

Understanding the transition process from college to work can be considered as an important element of responsiveness toward graduate employability. Improvement in graduates' employability cannot be judged only by what happens at universities but also by what goes after graduation if a comprehensive process of the training and employability patterns need to be understood. In fact, the increasing focus on employability as a measure of study program effectiveness requires that higher education institutions collaborate with past graduates and employers in study program reviews (Kinash et al., 2016; Nudzor & Ansah, 2020). Graduate tracking, which

involves collecting information on graduates' career development can help understand, monitor and improve HEIs' performance and alignment with labour market needs (Wedekind, 2012). It often provides information regarding typical career trajectories of graduates as well as higher education program relevance and development (Senekal & Munro, 2019). Tracking graduate information can also help to examine the quality of jobs, the length of the job search period, graduates' job satisfaction, and the match between competencies and job requirements, in addition to analyzing the impact of graduate characteristics and program design on labor market outcomes (Wedekind, 2012). In doing so, the practice of tracking university graduates offers a unique opportunity to contextualize employment outcomes and develop an in-depth understanding of the nature of employment, underemployment, and unemployment (Cuadra et al., 2019) with a view to improving future performance.

Another related source of knowledge that could enhance graduate employability but rarely tapped in many contexts is the use of alumni associations. Apart from being important sources of resources, alumni have a useful role to play in mobilizing graduates to contribute to their professional success through mentoring, structured, paid placements, support during application and interview processes, and facilitating access to professional networks (Bridge Group, 2016).

Policy and Implementation Framework

The type of institutional responses adopted toward graduate employability can be influenced by the policy and implementation framework set. Policy frameworks of graduate employability can be designed at regional, national, sectoral (e.g., education), or institutional level. For instance, the European Commission policy emphasizes the role of higher education in equipping graduates with the knowledge and core competencies they need, as well as the importance of embedding practical experience in learning programs and engaging employers and labor market institutions in the design and delivery of study programs (Wedekind, 2012). Policy directions could also encourage public authorities to put in place and use information and planning at the system level in order to improve graduate employment outcomes using practical tools such as skills demand and labor market forecasts, graduate tracking and surveys, guidance and counseling initiatives (Wedekind, 2012) (Fig. 8.1).

Arguably, the foregoing discussion shows the considerations any scheme of responsiveness should make if success on this front is to be achieved. Based on the conceptual framework given above, the following section offers an overview of the research design, which will be followed by major findings and conclusion of the study.

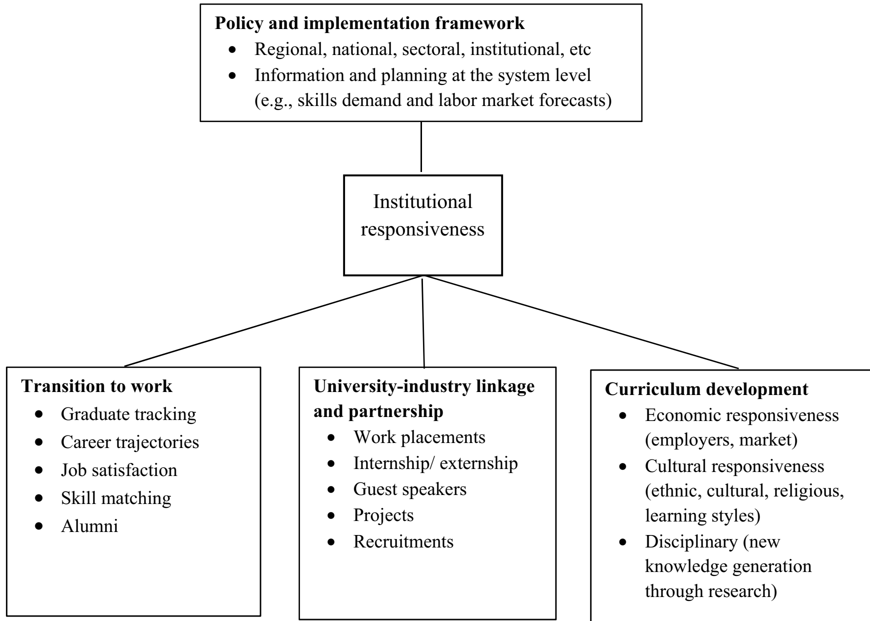

Fig. 8.1 Institutional responsiveness framework (Developed from the literature)

Research Design

The study follows a qualitative approach and uses document analysis as its primary means of data collection. Thirteen quality audit reports produced by the Ethiopian national Higher Education Relevance and Quality Authority (HERQA, 2016) were purposely selected as the sample of the study. These data were made available in the public domain by HERQA. The data comprise information about seven public and six private institutions audited by the Agency in the year 2017. While the public institutions are all universities, the private ones have the status of college as designated by the Agency.

The specific sections of the quality audit reports related to *program relevance and curriculum*, *student progression and graduate outcomes*, and *outreach activities* were carefully extracted from the quality audit reports of the 13 institutions selected. All relevant data were identified and compiled for each university before any analysis was made. In addition to extracting all available information for each institution, an interpretation of the meaning of the extracts has been made through a deductive process of reflecting on how the data relate to the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2012).

The national data corpus has been analyzed following the major stages of collecting the data, exploring and coding it, using codes to form a description of the central phenomena, grouping the codes to form broader themes, and finally

interpreting and analyzing the data (Creswell, 2012). The nature of responsiveness exhibited at the institutional level has been grouped by adopting Wedekind's (2012) model, which considers linkages and partnerships; curriculum; transition, destinations and tracer studies; and policy directions as major manifestations of graduate employability and responsiveness.

Findings and Discussion

A checklist was developed to chart the level of responsiveness exhibited at each of the institutions, as shown in Table 8.1. Specific discussions are given after the table following the major themes identified for analysis. All institutions were purposely identified by numbers to keep their identity anonymous.

Table 8.1 Responsiveness checklist for sample institutions

HEI	Provision for curriculum development	Formal link with employers	Availability of career office	Data on graduate destination	Employer feedback	Tracer study	Alumni
College 1	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
College 2	√	×	×	×	×	×	×
College 3	√	×	×	NA	NA	NA	NA
College 4	?	?	×	×	×	?	×
College 5	√	×	×	×	?	×	×
College 6	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
University 1	√	√	×	×	×	×	×
University 2	√	×	×	×	×	×	×
University 3	√	√	×	×	×	?	×
University 4	√	?	NA	×	×	?	×
University 5	√	?	NA	×	×	×	×
University 6	√	?	NA	×	×	×	×
University 7	√	?	×	×	?	×	×

Key √ = system available; × = system not available; ? = system available but not satisfactory; NA = information not available

National Policy Directions and Expectations

The issue of graduate employability has lately drawn important policy and strategic considerations in Ethiopia both at national and institutional levels. To begin with, the country's constitution (FDRE, 1995) recognizes the role of the government in creating job opportunities: "The State shall pursue policies which aim to expand job opportunities for the unemployed and the poor and shall accordingly undertake programs and public work projects." The constitution further states that "The State shall undertake all measures necessary to increase opportunities for citizens to find gainful employment" (FDRE, 1995; p. 14). Ethiopia's national policy agendas and development policies similarly identify the improvement of employment opportunities and economic development as one of their major goals. One of the earliest development plans of the incumbent government, "The Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty" (PASDEP) 2005/2006–2009/2010, for instance, identifies job creation as one of the major pillars of the country's poverty reduction and economic development strategies (MoFED, 2006). Job creation through private sector development and focused programs on small and medium enterprises has been articulated as one of the pillar strategies of the PASDEP (MoLSA, 2009). In a similar vein, the country's most recent Growth and Transformation Plans I & II (MoFED, 2010, 2016) identify generating employment for the expanding labor force as the major development objectives of the Ethiopian government. According to these plans, expanding employment and reducing poverty is to be achieved through the development of the manufacturing industry, promotion of private investment, micro and small enterprise development, and natural resource conservation and development (MoFED, 2016, p. 113).

Another important mechanism devised along the same line has been the creation of a national Employment Policy (2009) prepared to facilitate the coordination of employment creation and labor administration across all sectors and sections of society. Ethiopia's employment policy identifies enhancing social welfare, accelerating economic growth, and achieving political stability as the three important objectives that drive improvement in employability (MoLSA, 2009). The specific actions suggested to be taken as regards the demand and supply side of employment generation include: accelerating private sector development for employment generation; ensuring effective and efficient public sector employment; improving and raising labor productivity and improving labor administration, and strengthening labor market institutions (MoLSA, 2009).

Apart from setting broad policy frameworks, the government has been involved in addressing the employment challenges of the country through the introduction of various initiatives. One of these mechanisms relates to encouraging more privatization as a means of driving growth and job creation. A major component of the government's approach in this regard has been attracting large-scale foreign direct investment (FDI) in export-oriented light manufacturing sectors through the rapid expansion of a series of industrial parks. Recently announced reforms, including the

opening of key economic sectors in telecommunications, energy, aviation, and logistics for private foreign participation is regarded as a new phase in Ethiopia's economic transformation. Another national initiative is the establishment of the Investment and Job Creation Steering Committee led by the prime minister and primarily geared toward the creation of three million jobs annually and the improvement of the investment climate (Tamrat, 2019a).

The above is a clear manifestation of a new shift and commitment toward addressing the employability challenge and responsiveness as a policy goal. However, these positive policy directions do not necessarily indicate the form institutional responsiveness should take, how it should unfold, or what mechanisms can be put into place to promote it (Kruss, 2004). The sections below examine commonalities and variations at the level of policies and institutional actions.

Institutional Strategies and Directions

Within the education sector, both Ethiopia's 2019 Higher Education Proclamation and the country's Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) V (MoE, 2015), the Ethiopian Education Development RoadMap 2018–2030 (MoE, 2018) recognize the importance of graduates who have the requisite skills and technical knowledge. For instance, Ethiopia's Higher Education Proclamation (FDRE, 2019) stipulates that higher education institutions should prepare knowledgeable, skilled, and attitudinally mature graduates in sufficient numbers and of required quality within relevant fields and disciplines for the country to become internationally competitive. Similarly, the country's Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) V (2016) recognizes the importance of graduates with the appropriate skills and technical knowledge and assumes that academic institutions should equip graduates with relevant industry knowledge, up-to-date specialized skills and competencies, and work-ready attitudes that would help them succeed in the world of work. These directions set expectations for institutions to become more directly responsive to the labor market through a skill-oriented intervention mechanism.

Furthermore, since 2018, the Ethiopian government, through its Ministry of Education, has embarked upon a new plan to improve the employment of university graduates with a specific target of creating degree-relevant employment for 80% or above of graduates within one year (Tamrat, 2018). The new plan identifies the core issues that influence low graduate employability as questionable teacher quality, poor quality graduates, and weak linkages with industry on the basis of which the scheme aims at improving institutional responsiveness. The contents of the curricula, assessment schemes, and students' poor language and communication skills have also been identified as key areas of improvement. It can be assumed that this new direction provides a significant backdrop for considering the ways in which a higher education policy centered on responsiveness is beginning to shape expectations and practices in the Ethiopian higher education sector.

The above directions appear to suggest that the policy directions set in the Ethiopian context mostly concentrate on the development of skills and attributes of graduates. The tradition appears to be in keeping with the possessional approach toward employability (Holmes, 2013) with little attention paid to other wider perspectives and views that influence graduate employability. This myopic understanding of the process of employability not only affects the responses given by institutions and the system at large but also encourages intervention mechanisms on a limited area of operation and scale. Notwithstanding this limitation, the success of such policies is often determined by how intentions are realized at the level of institutions. Following Wedekind's model (2012), we examine below how the various components of responsiveness are realized in the institutional setup of public and private institutions in Ethiopia.

Linkages and Partnerships

The data collected indicate that linkage and communication between institutions and employers are in most cases limited, short-lived, informal, and highly unstructured. This must have been a hindrance to enhancing job opportunities for prospective graduates. The following excerpts indicate the situation:

> There are not many systematically organized and established links between the university and potential employers to facilitate graduate employment. The University does not have strong links with external stakeholders that may employ its graduates and has not made efforts to increase the employment prospects for students. (University A)

> The EQA (External Quality Audit) team noted that apart from informal links aimed at student apprenticeship/internship programs, no formal link exists between the College and potential employers of its graduates. (College A)

> Employer respondents remarked the absence of linkage, lack of knowledge about the types and levels of programs undertaken. They added that there should be different exposures for students to visit field related organizations. (University F)

Linkages are often initiated for limited functional needs, such as student internships. This has created a condition whereby efforts toward creating job opportunities for graduates and getting feedback useful for institutional improvement are constrained.

> The University has no formal contacts with employers to collect feedback on its graduates and to take appropriate action based on obtained feedback. (University C)

The lack of a structured system and formal link with industries appears to be two of the most common deficiencies institutions are exhibiting. Most of the institutions investigated do not have formal mechanisms for coordinating graduates' internship and linkage with potential employers. If at all there are any efforts geared towards this end, it does not often take place through offices dedicated for the purpose.

> The College does not have a career advisory service and support systems to graduating students looking for employment. (College B)

Apart from creating unnecessary knowledge gap on both sides and undermining potential benefits, the unstructured and haphazard responsive mechanisms used by Ethiopian HEIs are arguably impacting the success of graduates in mastering the needed skills and augmenting their employability opportunities.

Curriculum Responsiveness

While the literature on responsiveness identifies curriculum as one of the key areas, the data collected suggest serious gaps as regards the practice of Ethiopian institutions. In most of the institutions, the lack of guidelines, absence of responsible units, and lack of regular review of curricula were found to be common.

> There was no adequate evidence of the existence of systems or written procedures for program initiation, approval, monitoring, and review that was explicitly put in place. No records and written reports or guidelines are found to show the existence of a well-organized, consistent and sustainable system is in place to coordinate and manage curriculum issues. (University C)

This apparent lack of efficient practice in curriculum development and renewal is an indication of limited institutional readiness and capacity to address the challenges of the time. Another major deficiency observed is the lack of institutional practice in defining skills, competencies, and attributes that graduates need to master. This task forms a critical component of responsiveness to graduate employability (Tamrat, 2019b).

> The College's curricula fail to map the stated graduate profiles (attributes) into graduate-level competencies in terms of subject knowledge and skills, transferable skills, and attitudes that the learner would acquire. (College A)

An equally worrying trend is the limited participation of stakeholders in the curriculum development process:

> None of the College's documents has set a clear demand requiring the participation of stakeholders in the curriculum development and review process. (College F)

One of the challenges given as an excuse for lack of dynamism within the public sector is the fact that institutions are expected to use nationally accredited harmonized curricula, which gives them little room to make changes and improvements, even if they wish to:

> The [curriculum] committee currently works only on course delivery activity; that is, they just mainly work on identifying and arranging which course is to be delivered by which professionals. The committee also said they have become nominal because since the University is using the nationally harmonized curriculum, they do not know to what extent they are entitled to modify it. (University F)

It can be seen that the activities undertaken by most of the universities lack the needed comprehensiveness, rigor, and external consideration, which is an indication of the poor responsiveness exhibited by institutions. Apart from affecting institutional autonomy, such system-level impediments have their own impact in terms of responding to the changing needs of the labor market and the outside community. Coupled with little institutional readiness, such failures can thus be a serious hindrance to achieving the objectives set at national, sectoral, and institutional levels.

Employer Feedback

The practice in most of the institutions is suggestive of deficiencies in collecting appropriate feedback from relevant stakeholders.

> So as to ensure program relevance … the involvement and feedback of external stakeholders (such as alumni, professionals, employers and international experts) are of great importance. This will help any HEI to collect constructive feedback from stakeholders during program development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. [However] when it comes to this University, stakeholders' involvement is minimum. (University C)

Even when efforts are made to involve stakeholders, including students and instructors, it is often cosmetic, piecemeal, and irregular:

> It was noted that internal stakeholders/teachers/ give feedback on the developed curriculum rather than engage in the whole process. Students, on the other hand, involve irregularly in commenting on courses and their consistent involvement is not ensured. Furthermore, the team observed that other stakeholders are not completely involved in curriculum review and evaluation process. (College B)

As noted earlier, this appears to be primarily an outcome of the limited efforts made in the creation of appropriate structures and systems that can respond to emerging needs.

Transition, Destinations, and Tracer Studies

As may be seen in Table 8.1, the practice of conducting tracer studies is a rare phenomenon across most of the institutions studied.

> The university does not have mechanisms in place to systematically collect and disseminate data on student progression, graduate destinations, and employer satisfaction. (University B)

The apparent lack of data management systems in many institutions appears to be affecting the design of useful strategies that help to address deficiencies. In a similar vein, many HEIs suffer from the apparent lack of data on the destination of their graduates and the level of satisfaction employers have towards graduates.

Some claim to collect such information on an informal basis, but the overall pattern is indicative of the lack of a formal and organized system to do this:

> The university does not have a strong system in place to systematically collect and disseminate data on graduate destinations and employer satisfaction so that it may be used to feedback into program improvement. (University E)

While alumni associations could serve as a good source of information, support and feedback, owing to their reach sources of experience, resources and networks, literally none of the institutions appear to have succeeded in setting up such associations and offices. These limitations must seriously affect the possible lessons institutions could draw from tracking their graduates.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter examined the nature of institutional responsiveness toward graduate employability through the lens of policy, linkage, curriculum, and graduate tracking and outcomes. The findings suggest serious concerns about the ability of Ethiopia's universities to produce the right type of graduates that can respond to the demands of the job market. While the needs for addressing graduate employability are widely acknowledged at the policy level, the institutional readiness to respond to the demands of the labor market appears to be at its infant stage yet. The majority of institutions exhibit some forms of responsiveness but, unfortunately, most fail to address initiatives such as facilitating graduates' transition to work, collecting and disseminating relevant data, and tracking the employment progress of graduates. This appears to be in line with other findings in the developing world where higher education curricula, resources, and services are not optimally suited to support employability and employment outcomes (Kinash et al., 2016). It is true that graduate employability is not solely dependent on what the institution does (Sin et al., 2017). However, given that HE institutions are being held more accountable in the context of the governmental employability agenda (Fahnert, 2005), what happens at the institutional level should be a core issue of concern.

In the absence of the needed structures, systems, and learning experiences within and outside the university, the institutional capacity to influence the employability of graduates will remain restricted or meaningless. This suggests the need for greater university-employer interaction and the adoption of proactive institutional approaches as the basis for improving responsiveness toward graduate employment outcomes. As noted earlier, the response to graduate employability in Ethiopian HEIs should assume a variety of interventions and mechanisms that would facilitate graduates' improved access to the job market. However, the efforts made so far appear to give more emphasis to the identification and development of essential skills and attributes only. The findings are particularly indicative of limited initiatives made to consider the impact of factors like social positioning and graduate identity that

can affect graduate outcomes and the responses deployed towards this end (Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Holmes, 2013). This suggests the need for an organized and broader form of responsiveness toward graduate employability. It is recommended that, together with addressing current deficiencies in the system, Ethiopian institutions should do more in incorporating the wider conceptualizations of employability in their responsiveness schemes. Such a broader and integrated view helps to identify areas of individual responsibility (for students and graduates) and areas for potential collaboration between universities, employers and industry groups (Clark, 2017). It also calls for more proactive behaviors on the supply side (i.e. students/ graduates and universities) and enabling/engaging behaviors on the demand/policy side (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2015).

At the level of implementation, broadening existing policy perspectives, aligning policy directions and institutional readiness, and undertaking proper follow-up and incentivization for greater university-employer interaction may be key to improving institutional response to the graduate employability agenda. Conversely speaking, negligence in attending to these demands not only derails the national goals set about graduate employability but it can also have serious implication in terms of threatening the very existence of the institutions themselves for failing to respond to one of the timely agendas of the day.

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