

Structures of Authority in Ethiopian Universities

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Authority is an important topic of research in the field of higher education. The main discussion of this paper centres on explaining the authority scheme of Ethiopian universities from a sociological point of view using Weber's model of authority structures. It gives due emphasis to presenting a comprehensive view of the three ideal types of authority; traditional, charismatic and rational-legal. The dynamic relationship between these types of authority within higher education institutions (HEIs) is analysed both as a source of cooperation and tension. The paper also compares the authority structures within the Ethiopian context based on time factor and institutional diversity. It also reflects on the contrast between this context and the general European higher education environment. Finally, the paper's concluding remarks suggest the need to improve the relationship between the types of authority in a manner that promotes the academic development of students. It also attempts to predict the future direction of Weber's theory by analysing the question of authority structures

Keywords: authority; Ethiopia; Max Weber; ideal type; sociology.

Introduction

The study of authority in higher education falls within the longstanding thematic focus on steering and governance of HEIs (Teichler, 2005). This is a typical area in which the interdisciplinary nature of higher education studies is easily noticeable despite the relative dominance of management and public administration disciplines.

Authority is the right to perform or command that allows its holder to act in certain designated ways and to directly influence the actions of others through orders. This authority can take different forms. To provide a deeper explanation, the most famous and readily available typology of authority is provided by Max Weber. Though his work is firmly rooted in the sociological inquiry into unveiling ideal typical social actions and their bases of legitimacy, its application in different fields of specialisation such as politics, economics, business, history, religion, and philosophy is commonplace.

It is undoubtedly the case that authority structures affect a wide range of institutional aspects. In HEIs, for instance, managerial and financial autonomy, teaching and learning, decision making, stakeholder participation, academic freedom, educational quality, classroom management, and student assessment and grading are highly influenced by complex webs of institutional authority dynamics. Indeed, universities are also composed of various groups such as academic staff, students, administrative staff, technical support staff, and others that engage in particular forms of authority relationships. A number of important external stakeholders including employers, governmental and non-governmental organisations, quality assurance agencies, business and industry, and the broader society also are part of this structure. The understanding of power relations in university contexts is therefore highly crucial since power is useful in order to achieve effective control and coordination in the activities of people and groups in organisations including HEIs (Birnbaum, 1988).

The literature review indicated that Weber's authority types have been widely applied in business and industrial organisational settings (Houghton, 2010; Langlois, 1997; Miner, 2006; Vibert, 2004) often with a selective focus on either of the three types; namely traditional, charismatic or rational-legal. In other words, placing the conceptual framework in the context of HEIs has been accorded scant attention. In the meantime, a comprehensive discussion becomes essential as the empirical reality involves mixtures, adaptations, modifications and interplays of the three ideal types of authority (Whimster, 2007; Giddens, 1995; Sronce, 2003; Brown and Scase, 1994; Watson, 2008).

Finding academic works on higher education that cover the dynamics of these authority types under a unified theme of discussion are scarcely available despite exceptions to the works of Birnbaum (1988) and Clark (1998; 2004). Against this background, the application of Weber's theory in the context of HEIs and presenting a comprehensive view to capture the theory in its entirety becomes particularly important. As far as Ethiopian higher education is concerned, existing studies on the topics of leadership, management and institutional capacity building (e.g. Mehari, 2010; Aschalew, 2011; Higher Education Systems Overhaul, 2004; Hunde, 2008; Endeshaw, 2010; Pankhurst, 2010; Tsegay, 2011; Gebremeskal, 2011) have focused on giving system-level

understanding, thereby insufficiently addressing institutional authority dynamics as well as lacking the perspective of professor-student power relationships.

This paper hence attempts to answer two key questions: 1) How can the authority structure of Ethiopian universities be explained using Weber's model of authority? and, 2) How do these models of authority interact with each other?

Though the concept is broad, the term authority, in this paper, is mainly used to refer to the certain level of influence exercised by university professors over their students. In some parts of the paper, the concept is in some ways also treated as the influence that members of the university community (professors and students) exercise over the wider society. A professor, or an academic staff, here, is understood as a member of an institution of a public university employed in the capacity of teaching and research. They have authority because students recognise that their power over the teaching-learning process is legitimate. The focus of this paper is thus to briefly describe the basis of commands issued by university professors and obedience by students in Ethiopian universities using the theory of Weber. It also highlights authority structures that take place at higher levels, for instance, between university communities and societies, and at medium levels, for instance relationships involving internal university faculty and university management. However, the focus of the discussion is on the phenomena of the professor-student relationship taking place in the context of a university compound, whether in a lecture room, office, laboratory, library, meeting and graduation hall and other places.

Theoretical Framework

Weber observed that every social institution incorporates certain forms of authority structures (Marsh, 2006; Williams, 2003). Hence, he started by drawing a sharp distinction between power and authority, or *domination* (*'Herrschaft'*). The former is understood as the probability that orders will be followed even against the will of over whom it is exercised. The latter however is seen as a legitimate and acceptable exercise of power (Guess and Skinner, 1994; Ritzer, 2011; Marsh, 2006). The concept of legitimacy provides the important distinguishing characteristic despite the apparent similarity between power and authority. As was evident in his sociology, Weber was clearly more interested in understanding and analysing the foundations on which

authority is legitimatised over whom it is exercised. In defining traditional, charismatic and rational-legal bases of authority, Weber therefore sheds light on the understanding of authority pervasive in every institution. These different forms exist in different kinds of organisations, and they have different effects on the responses of organisational participants.

Prior to proceeding to a detailed discussion, the general assumption and fundamental concepts of each ideal, typical basis of legitimacy need to be explained according to how Weber conceptualised them. *Traditional authority* is founded on the conventional belief in the sanctity of long-established traditions and the acceptance by those subject to them (Weber 1921; 1968). It demands the unquestioning acceptance of the distribution of power in accordance with the dictation of such customs. The virtue of leaders' traditional authority governs subjects who justify its legitimacy on the claim that the phenomena have always been the same over a long period of time. On the other hand, *charismatic authority* rests on the devotion of followers to the (real or perceived) exceptional quality of leaders and normative orders sanctioned by them (Guess and Skinner, 1994). Such authority is based on loyalty to a leader who is generally considered to possess some kind of exceptional qualities which are hardly found among ordinary individuals. Charisma, as a unique quality, is a peculiar characteristic that supersedes tradition and law. In such systems, the words and actions of the leader are deemed entirely important. Weber however assumed that charismatic authority is the least stable, referring to its limitedness to a particular setting and time (Robbins and D'andrea, 2000; Marsh, 2006). It is also difficult to maintain for a long time as well as to transfer to another person. The third type, *rational-legal* authority, rests on a belief in the lawfulness of rules and regulations and the right of those elevated to legal positions through such rules to exercise authority (Weber 1921; 1968). The dissemination of power among individuals and groups in a society firmly adheres to the specifications of legal charters. The essence of legitimacy through enacted rules is hence characterised by bureaucracy. Neither the customs (traditional authority) nor the leader (charismatic authority) is significant. Instead the emphasis in systems based on such an authority type solely concentrates on the legal rules.

Though the three types of authority are presented as ideal types with sharp distinctions, Weber was duly cognisant of the fact that in the real world, any particular form of

authority involves the amalgamation of all three (Ritzer, 2011; Miner, 2006). These overlapping structures often engage in constant interaction involving cooperation, tension and sometimes conflict.

In general historical terms, Weber argued that pre-industrial societies are highly associated with traditional and charismatic forms of authority whereas rational-legal authority is particularly a phenomenon of modern society. The existence of science and technology in the contemporary world accelerates the rationalisation process by which formal rules are increasingly adopted into various natures of social arrangements (Marsh, 2006). Taking this into account, this paper shows whether these assumptions materialise as Weber's theoretical model is examined in the context of Ethiopian public universities.

Application of Weber's types of authority structure to Ethiopian higher education

The explanation of authority structures in Ethiopian universities from the sociological view of Weber's authority types and how these interact with each other is supported with evidence gathered mainly from interviews, reviewing literature, and autobiography. A total of eleven in-depth interviews were conducted with respondents from seven European countries; Germany, Finland, Belgium, Austria, England, Norway, and Sweden. The respondents were selected purposively for their prior experience of teaching in Ethiopian universities, and were attending postgraduate and PhD studies in European universities at the time. Accordingly, the researcher believed that the respondents had a good vantage point to give an account of and compare authority structures of the two contexts. Three of the interviews were conducted face-to-face while eight of them were made possible using electronic media such as Skype. Each of the interviews lasted between 40 minutes and an hour. The narratives presented in the paper are a few selected stories from interviews, which are used by the author as examples to help clarify points of discussion. On the other hand, relevant secondary information was collected through reviewing research, books, policy and proclamations and news articles. In addition to this, the author also drew on his personal experience as a member of faculty in an Ethiopian university and as a postgraduate student in Finland.

a) Traditional Authority

Traditional authority characterises a system in which the practice of power is considered legitimate so long as it is established upon the belief in the sanctity of age-old customs and patterns of behaviour. Such a type of authority has been exercised by Ethiopian public universities over the general public. It is possible to explain this from external and internal viewpoints.

Externally, a handful of universities in Ethiopia have been accorded a high level of respect by society for they are believed to be centres where scientific knowledge is produced, preserved, and disseminated. The data from interviews show that such a heightened outlook applies to university or university-sanctioned persons such as regular instructional faculty, clinical faculty, supplemental and research faculty, postdoctoral fellows, graduate student instructors, graduate student research assistants, preceptors, and graders. The respect also extends to university students. Universities are considered as streams of most revered intellectual ‘top’ minds. Respondents explained that the proportion of educated persons in the population of Ethiopia is very low and the majority of uneducated people hence look up to the few HEIs and their small number of intellectuals (Milkias, 1976; Yesus, 1966). A verse from a popular wedding song also shows the socio-cultural attitude towards university teachers, *'yegna mushira kuri wesadat astemari'* [Amharic] which can be literally translated into *'proud be up on you! our bride! for it is the teacher who is taking you as his lawful wife!'*. Once again the proverb *'yekelem abat ke welaj abat yibeltal'* [Amharic] means *'A master of knowledge is greater than a biological father'*. Universities, in the eyes of society, have been metaphors for sources of development, civilisation, and social change (Wodajo, 1960; Wodajo, 1961). Such a prestigious value attached to higher education thus has enabled universities, and their professors and graduates, to exercise influence over the general public, and hence enjoy the privilege, in collaboration with politicians, in setting the direction of societal development.

Observing universities internally, it is important to note that the infamous collegial decision-making is the typical instance in which the strong influence of traditional authority is felt in campuses. Cipriano (2012) also discusses the situation in which faculty members can become actors in taking charge of academic matters in an environment where respect, transparency and trust are enhanced. University professors

are highly respected by everyone on campus and academic freedom lies at the heart of their interest. It is this longstanding value that underpins the existing legal obligation of every institution to guarantee and cultivate the culture of social responsibility in its academic community through the exercise of academic freedom (FDRE, 2009, Art 16).

The professor-student relationship also witnesses such a state of affairs. There is a strong norm in Ethiopian academia that the professor takes the role of a ‘master’, ‘boss’, ‘giver’, ‘donor’, ‘source’, ‘evaluator’, and ‘expert’, while the student becomes the ‘slave’, ‘subordinate’, ‘receiver’, ‘needy’, ‘destination’, ‘evaluatee’, and ‘amateur’. Until only recently, campus students had to rise from their seats when the professor entered the class. As a result of this, the traditional rights of powerful universities and professors are accepted, or at least not challenged, by students and the general public. Interviews indicate that this is particularly true for Ethiopia’s pioneering *senior* universities rather than the *junior* and *newly established* ones.¹

The view of universities as systems embedded in a mosaic of traditions and symbolic representations of hierarchical authority can be reaffirmed in various instances. If a graduation ceremony, for instance, is taken into account, manifestations of ritualistic asymmetry are marked by the distinctive academic robes, or gowns and mortarboards worn by scholars; seating arrangements where faculty sit on stage with special guests; graduation recessional; commencement addresses; prizes and awards and others. At the end of this academic festival, it is essential to cast special attention on the prerogative words of the rector officially conferring degrees upon the recipients with all the rights, privileges and obligations. The rector also formally admits graduates to the fellowship of educated women and educated men with the ceremonial moving of tassels from the right to the left side of the mortarboard. It is through rituals of such nature that universities receive anyone who comes to their domain seeking scientific knowledge and send off graduates to the world of work with academic blessings.

Regarding the roots of such a high level of respect, data collected from interviews point towards some possible explanations. First, mastering a body of scientific knowledge compels the obedience of those who lack it. Second is the sacred religious and cultural values learned through the country’s 1,700-year tradition of elite education linked to the Orthodox Church (Saint, 2004). A famous proverb by church school students, ‘*bene*

guroro atint yikerker, be yeneta guroro teji yinkorkor [Amharic], translated as *'let the bone get stuck in my throat, and let the best beverage run through my teacher's throat'* explains the influence of such powerful behavioural expectations. Third, high level respect also arose as the first Ethiopian university professors were fortunate enough to have been trained and attended higher education abroad. Fourth, the fact that the first secular higher education started during the Imperial regime also contributes to the institutionalisation of a respectful tradition. Culture matters a lot (Vibert, 2004). On the other hand, respondents also explained that the overwhelming majority of most professors teaching in Ethiopian universities follow the traditional mode of academic life, which they themselves experienced as students in Addis Ababa University and Haramaya University, the most senior institutions. Respondents also indicated that students may fear university professors for the simple reason of not risking their grades by intentional or unintentional displays of disrespect.

Narrative 1. A respondent working as a university professor in the southern part of Ethiopia recalls the time he was invited to arbitrate a landlord quarrelling with his spouse. The respondent wondered how they chose him for such a challenging responsibility while there were well respected elders in the neighbourhood often known for such tasks. Nevertheless, he equally felt honoured.

All respondents, however, stressed that the degree of respect is gradually eroding nowadays due to a number of factors. The expansion of universities has meant that university professors and students are no longer seen as 'elite', 'unique', and 'chosen'. The massification of secular education intensified a scientifically guided code of behaviour that opposes the traditional and religious mode of thought. The deteriorating quality of university teachers and students is particularly wearing away the confidence that society rests on HEIs. It is now common to see professors with poor commitment in doing their jobs as they often are busy moonlighting to support their meagre salaries. Students thus express their dissatisfaction with not receiving proper education, which in turn weakens the base for mutual respect. Respondents also made the case that though the establishment of universities is considered a source of economic development and an employment opportunity by society, the increasing societal discontent with university students 'polluting' society's decent way of life with unhealthy practices such

as student prostitution, use of illegal drugs, and sexual harassment are further dwindling the accorded revered outlook.

b) Charismatic Authority

In contrast to traditional authority, charismatic authority is based on the personal devotion of followers to an extraordinary leader. Under these circumstances, authority is legitimately exercised by an individual who is viewed by the enthusiastic followers to possess special, superhuman, or heroic characteristics. In this regard, Ethiopian public universities also have their stories to tell.

Interview accounts show that professors and university managers at various levels, who are considered to have exceptional qualification, academic excellence, quality publications, lecturing and research skills, commitment, ethics, persuasive speechmaking skills, won prestigious awards, and other talents, also enjoy charismatic leadership among fellow faculty and students. For instance, academic unit deans are elected for their fellow department colleagues' belief in their outstanding administrative, organisational, and leadership talent. They are thus agreed to be the best match for the job. The works of Birnbaum (1988) and House (2005) also explain that such leaders encourage followers' performance through their visionary messages and symbolic values and acts. According to respondents, these kinds of people are often opinion leaders in the academic and administrative spheres of collegiality.

It is common to observe students taking their favourite professors as their role models out of a heartfelt admiration to the uncommon, outstanding, academic and personal qualities considered to be exhibited. Dr. Aklilu Lemma (a Pathobiologist who discovered medication for bilharzia), Dr. Zeresenay Alemseged (a Paleoanthropologist who discovered the earliest known skeleton of a hominid child named '*Selam*'), Prof. Kinfu Abraham (an outstanding educationalist, diplomatic and political historian), Dr. Tewelde Berhan Gebre Egziabher (a leader in developing the science of botany in Ethiopia; global biological diversity conservationist; a representative of Africa in international environmental negotiations), Engineer Kitaw Ejigu (a top Spacecraft and Satellite System scientist at NASA and a political leader), *balambaras* Gebrehiwot Baykedagn (a renowned public administration and economic philosopher; and pioneering trade management officer), Dr. Eleni Zaude Gabre-Madhin (a well-respected

economist and the main driving force behind the development of the Ethiopian Commodity Exchange), St. Yared (the most distinguished creator of melody and composer in Orthodox Christian schools and art institutions), Maitre Loret Afewerk Tekle (a most celebrated legend in art campuses for his paintings on African and Christian themes as well as his stained glass), and Laureate Tsegaye Gebremedhin (an art school legend Poet Laureate, playwright, and art director) can be considered a few of the renowned charismatic leaders in Ethiopian academia.

The disciplinary orientations, worldview, style of speaking, personal aesthetic, gesture, courage, sense of humanity, even handwriting of charismatic professors are taken up by students, thereby manifesting a degree of influence. However, significant lessons are learnt from both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ charismatic leaders: positive characters are internalised while undesirable traits are watched out for.

Narrative 2. A respondent was extremely enthusiastic while explaining what an intelligent role-model her political science professor was. She described the professor as a responsible mentor who was always punctual, committed, confident, polite, fair, and transparent. She mentioned that the professor respected students like ‘human beings’ and shared his experience with them, while other professors often did not. She also claimed that she learned how to question the frequently taken-for-granted knowledge from his scholarly discussions. Finally, she described her effort to become an excellent professor like him and sometimes finds herself unconsciously impersonating him while giving lectures.

Respondents added that as much as these academicians are beloved by students for their humane treatment and value to students, they also face opposition from fellow faculty for they are thought to have compromised the longstanding tradition of maintaining the essential gap between students and faculty.

Data collected from interviews indicated a trend of relative decline of such authorities compared to the past. In comparison to the *Junior* and *Newly Established* universities, it is in the *Senior* universities where outstanding charismatic academicians and university managers are relatively more concentrated.

c) Legal-Rational Authority

Rational-legal authority is derived from the legitimacy of enacted rules, according to which officials who assume certain positions in organisations can exercise corresponding amounts of authority. Officials in bureaucratic positions carry out their legally mandated responsibilities by giving orders and acting in a manner prescribed by formal regulations.

Education managers at national, regional, zone, and other levels exercise a legal-rational authority by virtue of clearly written and codified national education policy, higher education proclamations, decrees, senate legislations and other sets of rules as well as established offices. By the same token, rectors, vice-rectors, college deans, academic unit deans issue orders commanding those that fall within their span of control. For instance, a department dean can instruct his academic staff to deliver courses, prepare modules, and conduct community service duties. Organisational procedures such as recruitment, promotion, demotion, dismissal, and any sort of communication take place in accordance with impersonal rules. Thus the defining elements of bureaucracy, such as the specialised division of labour, hierarchy of authority, impersonality, written rules of conduct, and promotion based on achievement and efficiency (Vibert, 2004), become common working principles. Universities also screen, register and issue identity cards to students, by means of which their admission is legalised and their subjugation to formal authority of university management and professors is obliged.

On the one hand, university professors also exercise such power over their students. Requirements on course syllabi, student attendance and punctuality, examination, and grading are some examples of the legitimate rights of professors. The professor in the modern academic collective, according to Clark (2006), achieves success and legitimacy according to meritocratic criteria. Objectivity and anonymity play key roles in such administrative procedures. It thus guides the formal relationship between the two and promotes fair treatment and efficient undertaking of professional duties.

Narrative 3. A respondent described an interesting incident that took place in an examination hall in Arba Minch University. He was supervising a final exam for summer public health students when he caught a student who was copying answers from a short note concealed beneath his seat. The professor then stapled

the note to the student's exam sheet and signed on it for later judgment. After a careful cross examination of the university disciplinary rules and regulations, the professor finally gave the student an 'F' grade as an appropriate punishment for his misconduct.

On the other hand, students too have a number of responsibilities to shoulder in the teaching-learning process. They have to attend classes and respect the lawful authority of any academic staff in the leadership and management of the teaching-learning process, whether in lecture halls or anywhere on the premises of the university. Their interaction with professors requires due respect and students are expected to refrain from any unlawful acts. Students are encouraged to maintain standards of academic performance for each course in which they are enrolled as determined by the respective professor. Meanwhile, students have the right to free inquiry in pursuit of freedom of expression in the process of learning and conducting research. They are also entitled to fair treatment in all respects of the professor-student relationship and to an environment conducive to stimulate learning. For instance, the evaluation of students by their professors should solely be on an academic basis consistent with norms provided by the university's academic standards, and receive redress against unfair evaluation. Students in all public universities in Ethiopia participate in a system of evaluating the performance of professors and academic programs. Such activities have become standard practice to gain insights into the strengths and weaknesses of professors, the usefulness of courses, teaching materials, and other features of courses.

In the same way as Weber predicted, interview results indicate a trend of a quick rise in the bureaucratic form of rational-legal authority in Ethiopian public universities. Unlike traditional and charismatic types of authority that are historically common in universities of various statuses, bureaucratic authority is increasingly becoming dominant in all of the *Senior*, *Junior*, and *Newly Established* universities.

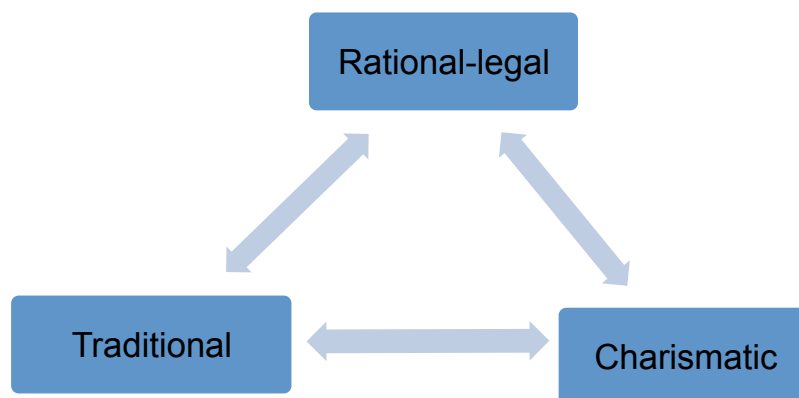
Lægaard and Bindslev (2006) argue that the development of bureaucracy can be considered the natural result of expansion and diversification of higher education. In this case, bureaucracy becomes, at least as claimed by Weber (1921/1968), the 'best' administration tool for its greater stability, precision, reliability, and discipline in comparison to other forms of management.

Furthermore, respondents believed that increasing political recruitment and assignment of university managers and students, often with politically-oriented assignments, can partly explain such trends. This becomes evident if one takes a look at the composition of university Boards, which are the highest governing body of a public university. Boards have seven members out of which four, including the chairperson, are directly appointed by the Ministry. The remaining three are confirmed by the Ministry upon the nomination of the president, who him/herself is appointed by the Ministry [FDRE, 2009, Art 44(1/d), 45(1-3), 52(1)]. Yizengaw (2003) also apparently reaffirms the fact that the Ministry exercises rigorous oversight and extended regulatory provisions over educational institutions. Consequently, Ethiopian public universities are becoming highly bureaucratized.

Relations between the three models of authority

Although each type of authority has been discussed as parallel structures, they often overlap in the real world. As highlighted in the introduction, Weber recognised the existence of important interplay between them. Any discussion of authority missing this critical point is doomed to failure in displaying a comprehensive image of how organisations function in the real world. Such dynamics have equally been a source of cooperation and tension in different circumstances.

Figure 1: Relationship between the models of authority



a) Cooperation

The data collected in interviews indicate that when traditional and charismatic influences become compatible with legal-rational authority, the overall effectiveness is

improved. The combined effect of a lawful command with revered traditional values and extraordinary personal attributes contributes a lot to the development of successful university administration. This gives professors and university managers a multidimensional tool for the efficient execution of professional duties. Many respondents also described that it is the values and individual talents of those who assume positions of power that determine whether the implementation of impersonal rules are actually going to be effective.

Narrative 4. In one of the interviews, a respondent spoke about an exceptionally persuasive orator, a university president, who managed to quickly pacify a crowd of protestors of a particular ethnic group of students. The students were getting out of control due to an ethnically provocative book, which an English folklore professor unintentionally suggested his students to read. While narrating the incident, the respondent gave the entire credit to the president who did an excellent job in restoring order without the involvement of law enforcement officers.

In this case, the position of being a university president (rational-legal); persuasive speech making skills (charismatic); and respect and obedience from students (traditional) were combined to restore peace and order in the campus. The above narrative indicates how a well-matched reinforcement of the three ideal types of authority can enhance the functioning of administration in HEIs.

b) Conflict and Tension

In contrary to augmenting cooperation, a clash of different authority types may weaken organisational performance and lead to its eventual destruction. If university personnel rely on deriving their authority from customary values and their own exceptional personal qualities instead of the provisions of enacted rules and regulation, they may promote behaviour deviating from formal expectations. Leaders under such circumstances disregard legal frameworks that are put in place. The commitment of officers to legal bases of authority as a result declines. The spread of this pattern of behaviour may severely impede the capacity of HEIs to enact proper legal control over core organisational functions and the entire organisational domain. According to Sronce (2003), such incompatibilities may result in a decoupling of the innate essence of

contemporary HEIs and their corresponding base of authority. This is due to the exercise of authority derived from non-legally sanctioned rules in the arena of bureaucratic organisations. The breach of the expected bond between authority and structure may expose HEIs to external shocks such as punitive legal measures by government bodies and pressure from external stakeholders, eventually leading to organisational collapse. Meyer and Rowan (1977) also noted the decoupling of formal and informal practices when stated activities in an organisation do not match the actual results.

Narrative 5. A respondent recalls a strange event during writing his master's thesis at Addis Ababa University. The professor in charge of advising his thesis ordered him to take a research topic that he personally wanted disregarding the one the respondent had already started working on. Strikingly odd, when the respondent tried to defend his position by explaining the progress he had made, the professor unequivocally 'terrorised' him by staring at his eyes and telling him that challenging his decision as a university professor was a short cut to scoring an 'F' grade in the thesis.

In the above example, the traditional authority of the professor dominated his rational-legal authority. While he could have used it for good, he instead sought to breach his formal duty, at the same time denying the lawful right of the student. The professor visibly acted outside the provisions of the university legislation by relying on age-old academic values legitimatising the behaviour of a professor as a 'master', 'boss' and one who knows best, while students are reduced to humbly respecting and accepting the judgement of their mentor.

What makes the Ethiopian higher education authority scheme unique is that students' politeness and respect for professors are over-emphasised, thereby wrongly compelling students to be reserved, take everything taught for granted, not question or challenge professors, and pretend to please them. Such an unnecessarily wide gap thus deprives the invaluable consultation and sharing of experience available to students. As scholars who have years' of experience of studying and teaching in both systems, respondents were asked to compare student-professor codes of interaction in Ethiopian and European universities. All of them agreed that the Ethiopian university platform of

interaction has been very conservative, repressive, and authoritarian while in Europe the interaction takes a more liberal and equitable shape. They also said it was initially challenging for them to get used to this relatively democratic way of interaction. Therefore, the student-professors relationship should be improved in order to achieve positive and long-lasting implications for academic and social development of students in Ethiopian public universities.

Conclusion

Weber's model of authority structure is an invaluable and a highly crucial theoretical framework that helps better understand how universities in general and Ethiopian public universities in particular operate. This paper thus reaffirms the central role sociology plays in the interdisciplinary arena of higher education studies.

Ethiopia has a unique cultural and religious landscape that promotes a tradition of politeness and respect. This foundation has bestowed Ethiopian public universities and their intellectuals with honour, though continuously eroding. Exceptionally talented and outstanding professors, as well as administrative staff, often become opinion leaders, the examples of whom are passionately followed by many. Rational-legal authority is also at the centre of Ethiopian universities, whereby the assignment of responsibility and accountability follows a legally established structure.

Temporally speaking, traditional and charismatic types of authority were relatively dominant in the past; however, the bureaucratic, legal-rational type is increasing. Taking diversification into account, it is in *Senior* universities that the power of traditional and charismatic leadership has been strongly felt. On the contrary, bureaucracy and administration by written rules has been relatively typical of *Junior* and *Newly Established* universities.

However, these types of authority, in reality, overlap. The healthy combination of these types promotes cooperation and effectiveness in university compounds while the existence of tension and incompatibility fosters conflict between professors and students, professors and university management, and students and university management. The dark side of this adverse authority relationship serves as fertile ground for delinquency and breaching of institutional regulations.

In comparison, the culture of Ethiopian higher education has been found to be more conservative, unfairly distancing professors from students, whereas Europe has a relatively more liberal nature. Though the situation in Ethiopia is improving, there is a long way to go. In relation to this matter, there is a need to expend great effort towards realising the provisions of the education and training policy of Ethiopia regarding the necessity of ensuring participatory and proper professional relations in the activities of all involved in education (FDRE, 1994). Instead of favouring excessive domination, it is imperative for university professors in Ethiopia to allow their students to interact with them on a fairer ground throughout the teaching-learning process in order to enhance the academic and personal development of students. It is also highly important for professors to use every basis of legitimacy at their disposal for the development of a harmonious working environment. There is a need to abandon and transform a conflicting fusion of authority by tradition, charisma, and rules in favour of an amicable co-existence which promotes improved efficiency in carrying out professional duties.

Looking into the future, the literature and the results of this study show that organisations of the world are witnessing a rise in the bureaucratic form of authority. Likewise, the future trend also appears to follow a similar path. It is therefore fair to conclude that Weber's theory of authority may likely continue to be of paramount importance in explaining administration through formally endorsed legal frameworks. This is because the key to unlocking the principles and philosophical underpinnings of such authority structures originates from the conceptual framework forwarded by Weber. In contrast, interpretation of the other two types of authority may not revitalise for years to come.

With its interdisciplinary character, the paper generally contributes to the development of knowledge in the field of higher education by shedding light on the concept of authority and showing what goes on inside institutions. It also helps to better understand authority relationships in the context of Ethiopian higher education. In this regard, it enhances the discussion of the cultural, psychological and legal settings within which Ethiopian universities function. The paper also seeks to initiate discussion and further studies on the topic.

Notes

¹ The expansion process of Ethiopian public universities (owned by the Ministry of Education), for the purpose of this study, is broadly categorized into three main phases taking chronology, resources and infrastructural features into account. The categorisation however excludes sector-based government universities (owned by other Ministries) such as Ethiopian Civil Service University, Defence University College, Telecommunication & Information College, and Kotebe College of Teachers Education. Those public universities currently under construction and all private institutions are also not included.

Senior Universities, established before 2004, include Addis Ababa University, Arba Minch University, Bahir Dar University, University of Gondar, Haramaya University, Hawassa (Dehub) University, Jimma University, and Mekelle University. Except Addis Ababa University, most were initially founded during the early 1950s as colleges providing training in specialised subjects but later upgraded to a university status with diverse disciplinary programs.

Junior Universities, established between 2004 and 2009, include Axsum University, Ambo University, Debre Birhan University, Debre Markos University, Dilla University, Dire Dawa University, Jigjiga University, Mada Walabu University, MizanTepi University, Samara University, Walaita Sodo University, Wollega University, Wollo University, and Adama University.

Newly established Universities, established after 2009, include Addis Ababa Science and Technology University, Asosa University, Bule Hora University, Debre Tabor University, Metu University, Wachamo University, Welkite University, Woldiya University, and Adigrat University.

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