Research Article

Reputation of Addis Ababa University in the Eyes of Students: A College-Level Perspective from Teacher Preparation Programs

Amanuel Gebru Woldearegay [ID]

School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Correspondence should be addressed to Amanuel Gebru Woldearegay; amanuel_gebru@yahoo.com

The evidence base continues to confirm the leveraging effect of reputation in higher education as an important strategic resource influencing a university's visibility, attractiveness, credibility, impact, and competitive position nationally and internationally. From their expressed interest in their relative national and continental rankings, Ethiopian universities seem to have started sensing the relevance of their reputational position. In this article, we report a mixed methods study of the reputation of Addis Ababa University using data from a random sample ($N = 153$) of teacher training students of science, social science, and humanities and languages backgrounds under the College of Education and Behavioural Sciences (CEBS). A piloted and validated university reputation scale with open-ended items was used to illicit student opinion. In addition to descriptive statistics, inferential designs that involved correlation and ANOVA procedures were employed. Ratings for global reputation, quality of academic programs, quality of external performance, and emotional engagement are reported. Limitations and directions for further research are indicated.

1. Introduction

While the marketization of higher education may stir controversies, it has been powerfully argued that universities need to be market players, strategically positioning themselves to shine in the higher education industry [1]. Following the line of argument, many universities now find themselves under increasing pressure to adequately stay competitive in the effort to meet or exceed the needs of students, staff, and the public. More than ever before, they now need to demonstrate reputation capital or risk 'social exclusion' [2] should they be perceived as failing to meet desirable standards. The reputational concern of universities is becoming clearer by the day as they face a multitude of stakeholders demanding a competitive partner.

In several countries, universities are presently modeling themselves on corporate entities and being managed like businesses (for quite some time, the philosophy driving much higher education has been utilitarianism which has drawn heated debate and controversy). The times mirror the hegemonic idea of the 'utilitarian university' and thus in a blunt sense "colleges are turning into businesses where customers-in this case, students-expect to be satisfied. They have come to regard their professors as service providers" [3]. A values-based education has indeed got considerable appeal but "some values exist only if there are (or were) social practices sustaining them" [4]. For a general philosophical discussion of reputation, see [5]. For a philosophical understanding of reputation from a moralist perspective, see [6]. For a critical discussion of the idea of a university and the debates and stresses of utilitarianism and reflections on attendant moral philosophy, see [7, 8]. Now students are customers and higher education is a service. Discourses indicating changes in the mission and role of universities are emerging [9]. There is growing accountability pressure on universities asking they justify investments, compete productively, energize national development by fostering business and industry, and help countries compete [10]. The winds of accountability are coming to Africa's universities albeit at a slow pace.

In Ethiopia, previous studies have addressed diverse domains of Addis Ababa University that have included institutional historiography [11], student activism [12], academic freedom [13], values [8], and reforms [14] but none have addressed the reputational standing of the University. Nonetheless, considering the history and significance of Ethiopia's premier institution of higher learning, interrogation in the direction of reputation as a global normative parameter in modern higher education would be a desideratum, extending the range of studies as well as enhancing the visibility of university reputation as a new agenda.

What is now known as Addis Ababa University was established in 1950 as the University College of Addis Ababa and subsequently revamped and renamed Haile Selassie University in 1961 [11]. Following the popular revolution in 1974, which brought the end of the reign of Emperor Hale Selassie, the University took its present name Addis Ababa University [15]. While Ethiopia has seen rapid expansion of universities in recent decades, Addis Ababa University, as the nation's oldest and biggest institution of higher learning, continues to enjoy superlative national reputation in the country's system of over fifty public and private universities. It is also consistently ranked as one of the top African flagship universities. In 2020-21, Addis Ababa University was in the top 5.7% Best Global Universities according to the Center for World University Rankings and the second best in Eastern Africa [16]. The rankings tend to use indices that are generic and are short on details of multidimensional subjects such as university reputation.

The paper attempts to provide fresh insight into different dimensions of reputation in higher education as well as a more general reputational picture as they relate to Addis Ababa University. As the higher education landscape in Ethiopia changes, Addis Ababa University will continue to experience competition for attention and attendant challenges of maintaining its position while new universities compete and manage to encroach on its areas of historic advantage. However, the subject of reputation appears to be new to the context of Addis Ababa University as focus has been in large part on uncritical reception of rankings by Ethiopian and international bodies. However, a full understanding of reputation in university contexts is important to keep abreast of rapid developments and act in the right direction through policymaking and other interventions.

Whilst reputation is a cross-cutting subject studied in accounting, economics, management, organizational studies, marketing, and sociology [17], in this study, the most relevant perspective is related to the function of public relations in the special context of higher education. Reputation being an asset that is often an outcome of information and relational management, it is a core subject that falls under public relations or corporate communications. Public relations has relevantly been described as a "developer of goodwill, builder of public opinion, perception manager, and reputation manager" [18]. These functions are crucial in the more specific domain of university public relations where reputation continues to take center stage as a critical strategic resource that needs constant self-monitoring and environmental scanning to help a university retain its societal relevance and attractiveness to a multitude of stakeholders, including employers, industry, and donors, but most relevantly students, who are invariably drawn by parameters of quality. Studies seem to suggest that perception of quality is more important than quality itself, pointing to the need for continuous reputation building, using public relations tools [19–21]. Further exploration of the literature shows the variegated characteristics of reputation as they relate to higher education as well as the associated gaps and controversies.

1.1. Literature Review. Investigation into reputation issues in higher education being recent, relevant studies are limited [22]. The definitional landscape itself is evolving as more research and conceptualization have led to more perspectives emerging. But most centrally, the perspective of the principal stakeholder is often invoked. Thus, reputation is best defined as "the aggregation of a single stakeholder's perceptions of how well organizational responses are meeting the demands and expectations of many organizational stakeholders" [23].

The most comprehensive discussion of definitional aspects of corporate reputation is addressed by Barnett et al. [24]. According to their review, analysis, and assessment of the relevant definitional literature, it is perceptually evaluative to which they add their own definitional contribution. Their definition is more specific and helps identify related constructs as separate domains that include identity, image, and capital. In a recent review of the literature, Money et al. [25] examined the historical trajectory of corporate reputation, research lacunae, causes, and antecedents and indicated directions for further interrogation. Walsh et al. [26] conceptualized reputation from the single stakeholder angle of the customer and demonstrated important causal threads involving customer satisfaction, and loyalty. A contribution of the study includes delineation of antecedent and outcome factors which can be related to context of reputation issues in higher education, centering on the student body as the stakeholder of supreme import. The earlier work of Fombrun and Van Riel [27] addressed key issues of how reputations develop, their functions, effects, and their demonstrated benefits and dangers, and indicated directions to better manage reputations.

A key text on reputation as well as the definitional diversity, measurement and theoretical landscape is Walker [28]. Through analysis of relevant work in top-rated journals, the author concluded that reputation is defined and conceptualized multidimensionally variously, is target-specific, and may be stakeholder-type dependent. Further, in relation to higher education, the nature of reputation can be defined, conceived, and assessed in ways that reflect the nature and function of a university. As a result of multipronged focus on the definition, conception, and assessment, the literature on reputation and university systems has been on the increase. Taxonomies of the literature indicate four strands with distinctive focal areas. The classification considers the epistemological, ontological, axiological, and methodological aspects of the studies [29, 30].

The first in the line is studies that focus on the instrumental role of reputation as a driver in the higher education market [31, 32]. The line of argument draws attention to reputation as an enabler of a competitive edge. Focus, therefore, is on how reputation can aid a university's standing in terms of attracting students across the disciplinary and divisional terrain. The literature in this stream, seems to consider reputation in a relative sense, as undynamic and further appears to assume the construct is a destination or a fixture.

The second category in the literature is studies that seem to dwell on a set of factors that are credited to influence and even decide a university's reputational place [33]. The conceptualization in this line is that there are taxonomies of dimensions, that together constitute a higher order of reputation [34]. These facets are captured in the measurement literature, targeting a corporate body's reputation. These attributes are often the inputs in models and measurements of a university's relative standing.

Thirdly, there is a line of studies that considers reputation to be perceptual and evaluative pictures stakeholders of all categories have of a corporate body, that are based on the routines of events and records of performance, giving publics mental shortcuts for reputational evaluation of an organization. In regard to a university, the implication is that assessments of its performance will shape its personality as perceived by the publics.

Finally, the literature on reputation management seems to capture more recent developments. In this regard, the global trend of university brand management projects a distinctive mark in this line of the emerging literature [35, 36]. Based on business and market models, universities are investing in brand development as they seek to curve out a distinctive place in the thick university market. This trend has been called the marketisation of universities [37]. Naidoo [38] noted that "the perception of higher education as an industry for enhancing national competitiveness and as a lucrative service that can be sold in the global marketplace has begun to eclipse the social and cultural objectives of higher education, generally encompassed in the conception of higher education as a 'public good'". In this arena, universities are hard at work trying to capture perceptions of current and prospective students as consumers [39].

There are three constructs that warrant separation because they are often misused synonymously. First is identity, which "has traditionally referred to the physical ways an organization defines itself, which can include logos, typography, colors, signage, packaging, annual reports and uniforms amongst others" [40]. But it is also about corporate individuality, denoting uniqueness in declared aims and values [41], which is perceptually shared by the institutional workforce [42] and subsumes "the company's strategy, philosophy, culture, and organizational design" [43]. Image, on the other hand, is "an internal picture projected to an external audience" [28] and is therefore based in corporate roots and can be self-defined as desired or constructed [44]. Normatively, the construct refers to "the mental picture of the company held by its audience what comes to mind when one sees or hears the corporate name or sees its logo" [43].

The reputational picture can also emerge from an evaluation of service experience. In assessments of students' totality of experience in the university environment, a number of desiderata may be considered which can have relevance to different students based on their expectations and needs. In a program of longitudinal management, student support services are core elements that impact student perceptions [45]. Thus, auxiliary services in administrative and logistical arenas can come into the equation in shaping student perceptions of reputational standing. While apparently the focus is on the quality of instruction and academic experience, support services can add to or detract from the level and quality of academic services and experiences [46]. Thus, computing services and library services as lodging and boarding can directly affect a student's academic and even pedagogical experiences and interpretations, with one experience affecting another related experience. Student choice of a university has been influenced by such factors [47, 48]. Thus, in many scales there is a service construct, tapping relevant credentials of a higher education institution [49]. The dimensions may be better understood from a theoretical vantage point.

There is further need for clarification involving another construct, prestige, which is often inadequately clear in reference to reputation. The distinction between prestige and reputation does not seem to have drawn a lot of definitional and psychometric interest. However, the limited literature seems to show that the two are akin but different from a connotative perspective. While prestige relates to the positive ascriptions arising from reputational success, reputation is understood to be a more neutral construct [50]. Recent literature examining the constructs is work that interrogates their relevance in the context of Malaysian universities [51]. However, it seems more conceptualization and measurement are needed to better understand the constructs.

But most of all, a review of the global university reputation literature shows that there are significant empirical gaps as African universities in general and Ethiopian institutions of higher learning in particular do not seem to have received attention as institutions that need to manage how they are perceived by their principal stakeholders, who in themselves need to be theoretically approached to meaningfully fill any knowledge void in the field of higher education reputation management.

1.2. Stakeholder Theory. Stakeholders are constituencies that are symbolically and actually important to an organization's survival. In higher education, the chief stakeholders are students that are the primary reason why an institution is created and whose voice is able to exert considerable leverage in much that is related to the place of the institution. Normatively, students rate their institution and decide the relative standing of the institution in matters of reputation, principally based on their experience of the university's relevant services. However, there are also other stakeholders that excert influence on the reputation of a university. Relevantly, scholars have

developed a matrix of stakeholder power [52], according to which organizations including universities can determine the potential impact of each stakeholder. This classification would place students at the top of the matrix as they can decide the place of the institution in terms of their approval or disapproval, which in a market context can mean much [53]. Stakeholder theory would further posit that different constituencies are likely to rate reputation differently while there may be points of convergence [54].

1.3. Measurement of Reputation in Higher Education. Different scales of reputation may tap different constructs, which have included rigor in admission and alumni performance; academic staff quality, resources, rankings, and effectiveness of leadership have been some of the measurement targets [55]. The performance of faculty as demonstrated in research productivity, consulting, and patents held by faculty [56] have featured centrally as parameters of reputational prominence. However, criticism has attended almost all measures as failing to provide a comprehensive picture of what constitutes higher education, which must include an institution's mission and objectives [57]. While it regards ranking as important, the European Universities Association, for instance, rejects the idea of equating rankings with quality [58].

However, rankings are inescapably present and higher education institutions continue to strive to be more visible, credible, and desirable than others as good reputational standing may help. The recommended desiderata are consideration of mission statements, methodological transparency, and a clear presentation of considered factors. Poor reputational standing can harm faculty morale [59] even though sometimes evaluations of higher education can fail, producing false negatives or false positives [60]. Nevertheless, student testimonials are central, since students are the most important stakeholders.

1.4. Instrument. The study used an 11-item rating scale (supplementary material) that tapped (a) quality of academic performance (QAP), (b) quality of external performance (QEP), and (c) emotional engagement (EE) as essential parameters of university reputation [61]. The university reputation scale had psychometrically valid reports of the essential traits of a reliable diagnostic measure as demonstrated by structural equation modeling fit indices. It was adapted from the generic reputation scale initially developed by Fombrun and Gardberg [62] and continues to draw further psychometric interest.

1.5. Ethical Considerations. In accordance with normative protocols, 1. informed consent was obtained from the respondents, 2. their dignity and wellbeing were protected at all times, and 3. the study's data was anonymised and confidentially treated throughout the study.

2. Methods

The study employed a mixed methods design. The use of mixed methods survey in this study is justified by substantive and theoretical considerations. It is rooted in the understanding that ambiguities require a multiple diagnostic toolset. Accordingly assisted by configuration theory it examines the varied student experiences that include academic, pedagogical, communicational, and logistical dimensions [63] which no single standard set of quantitative items of a questionnaire may be able to capture. Thus, the reputational exploration of diverse student relevant concerns subsumes more than a scale can fully handle as reputation represents a dynamic mix of factors including context that can have spillover effects [64]. Based on Abbott [65], "all too often general linear models have led to general linear reality, to a limited way of imagining the social process." In the context of complex data realities, qualitative data can therefore come in handy in remedial ways. Thus, the study includes the use of open-ended items to a measurement scale that would help to validate statistical data.

2.1. Research Questions
　　RQ1: what is the level of reputation of Addis Ababa University?
　　RQ2: what is the magnitude and direction of correlations among constructs measuring reputation?
　　RQ3: are biographical differences related to reputational assessments?
　　RQ4: what student perspectives on the reputation of AAU feature most prominently?
　　RQ5: what strategies are recommended to enhance AAU's reputational standing?

2.2. Sampling. The College of Education and Behavioral Sciences was purposively selected because opinion was sought from trainee teachers. Further sampling was based on a classification of the institution's trainees as a system of streams followed by the application of simple random sampling methods [66]. Accordingly, trainee teachers were *r* sampled using stratified sampling methods to help capture perceptions of the university from the different strata of disciplinary backgrounds. Thus, natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities strata and students were included as perceptual data sources. The sample involved 50% of all sections.

2.3. Findings and Discussion

2.3.1. Profile of Respondents. As shown in Table 1, respondents were 153 trainee teachers, of whom 81 (53%) were male and 72 (47%) female. They were aged 20–29 (39%), 30–38 (34%), 40–49 (21%), and 50–59 years (4%). Participants covered academic divisions of natural sciences (27%), social sciences (28%), and languages and humanities (44%).

TABLE 1: Demographic profile of the respondents.

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
	20–29	60	39
Age	30–39	53	34
	40–49	33	21
	50–59	6	4
Gender	Male	81	52.6
	Female	72	46.8
	Social S	43	27.9
Stream	Natural S	42	27.3
	Humanities and languages	67	43.5

TABLE 2: Descriptive statistics for constructs.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
QAP1	152	1.00	5.00	3.0395
QAP2	150	1.00	5.00	3.2267
QAP3	152	1.00	5.00	3.3355
QAP4	153	1.00	5.00	3.4510
QAP5	150	1.00	5.00	2.5533
QEP1	153	1.00	5.00	3.1569
QEP2	152	1.00	22.00	3.3882
QEP3	148	1.00	5.00	3.1014
EE1	151	1.00	5.00	3.1788
EE2	147	1.00	5.00	3.0000

TABLE 3: Descriptive statistics (construct means).

	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Variance
Global reputation	153	3.1435	0.67483	0.455
QAP	153	3.1248	0.75551	0.571
EPP	153	3.2135	0.96094	0.923
EE	151	3.1788	1.27586	1.628
Valid N (listwise)	151	—	—	—

2.3.2. Descriptive Statistics. Tables 2 and 3 present a breakdown of the descriptive statistics for the different dimensions of university reputation: quality of academic performance (QAP), quality of external performance (QEP), and emotional engagement (EE).

As shown in Table 3, the means for the constructs of university reputation are close. The three dimensions of reputation and the global composite score are within a close range.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the dimensions of university reputation and a composite score of reputation. All correlations between constructs as illustrated in Table 4 are significant. Thus, the global reputation has significant correlations with quality of academic performance ($r = 0.874$, $p < 0.01$), quality of external performance ($r = 0.682$, $p < 0.01$), and emotional engagement ($r = 686$, $p = 01$). Also, quality of academic performance is significantly correlated with quality of external performance ($r = 0.343$, $p < 0.01$) and emotional engagement ($r = 0.520$, $p < 0.01$). Quality of external performance has significant relationships with emotional engagement ($r = 0.190$, $p < 0.05$) and EE is correlated significantly with quality of academic performance ($r = 0.520$, $p < 0.01$). The strength of the relationship between the facets of university reputation and the composite global reputation is also significant as illustrated in Table 4. Overall, there was a strong positive correlation between the dimensions of university reputation and a global facet of reputation. Scale reliability was sufficient at 0.732.

ANOVA tests were further conducted to determine the effect of demographic factors on individual and global facets of university reputation. As shown in Table 5, a main effect of age was found for global reputation, $F(4, 148) = 3.530$, $p < 0.01$; quality of academic performance, $F(4,148) = 3.157$ $p < 0.05$; and emotional engagement $F(4,147) = p < 0.05$. Quality of external performance produced no significant effect. Similarly, there was no effect of gender (Table 6). However, global reputation produced an effect $F(5,148) = 4.615$, $p < 0.01$. Except for emotional engagement (EE), the two other constructs of quality of academic performance (QAP) and quality of external performance (QEP) produced statistically significant academic-stream-based differences as shown in Table 7.

Reputation score means by stream are presented in Table 8.

2.4. Qualitative Report. While close-ended items of the questionnaire provided focused information, open-ended items led to more varied responses that liberally described the experiences of respondents more broadly, extending the scope and adding depth to the data, enabling one to hear respondent voices. Methodological guidance from Kurasaki [67] on the creation of coding that involved annotation, sorting annotation, and thematic labeling was used, followed by Popping's [68] procedures of intercoder comparison.

An inspection of the responses to the open-ended questions of the survey asking student opinion on aspects not raised in the close-ended items revealed mixed results. The following are the themes that emerged from the student opinions. They are sprinkled with illustrative quotes.

(i) Support facilities

(ii) Social life

(iii) Campus physical environment

(iv) Schedule issues

(v) Administration and other support staff

(vi) Teaching staff

Respondents were fairly satisfied with pedagogical services but they were critical that schedules were not often respected and information was either unavailable or inadequate. "As AAU is big and complex, there has to be a proportionate supply of timely and correct information." They were equally critical of calendar changes that they considered happened too often, causing disruption to their own schedules.

However, students were impressed with AAU in terms of its wealth of diversity of educational offerings that they said was unmatched by other establishments in Ethiopia as well as the richness of library and digital resources. One said "there is a lot more to choose now than before." This

TABLE 4: Correlations between facets of reputation.

		Global rep.	QAP	QEP	EE
Global reputation	Pearson correlation	1	0.874**	0.682**	0.686**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	—	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	153	153	153	152
QAP	Pearson correlation	0.874**	1	0.343**	0.520**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	—	0.000	0.000
	N	153	153	153	152
QEP	Pearson correlation	0.682**	0.343**	1	0.190*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	—	0.019
	N	153	153	153	152
EmE	Pearson correlation	0.686**	0.520**	0.190*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.019	—
	N	152	152	152	152

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 5: ANOVA (age-based).

		Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Global reputation	Between groups	6.029	4	1.507	3.530	0.009
	Within groups	63.191	148	0.427	—	—
	Total	69.220	152	—	—	—
QAP	Between groups	6.821	4	1.705	3.157	0.016
	Within groups	79.939	148	0.540	—	—
	Total	86.761	152	—	—	—
QEP	Between groups	3.796	4	0.949	1.028	0.395
	Within groups	136.563	148	0.923	—	—
	Total	140.359	152	—	—	—
EE	Between groups	13.517	4	3.379	3.114	0.017
	Within groups	159.534	147	1.085	—	—
	Total	173.051	151	—	—	—

TABLE 6: ANOVA (gender-based).

		Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Global reputation	Between groups	0.573	2	0.286	0.626	0.536
	Within groups	68.648	150	0.458	—	—
	Total	69.220	152	—	—	—
QAP	Between groups	2.085	2	1.043	1.847	.161
	Within groups	84.676	150	.565	—	—
	Total	86.761	152	—	—	—
QEP	Between groups	0.274	2	0.137	0.147	.864
	Within groups	140.085	150	0.934	—	—
	Total	140.359	152	—	—	—
EE	Between groups	0.607	2	0.303	0.262	0.770
	Within groups	172.444	149	1.157	—	—
	Total	173.051	151	—	—	—

resource growth does affect reputational standing positively [69].

The provision of AAU's service quality was a central theme which drew comments that seemed to generally favorably rate pedagogical quality while opinion pertaining to socioacademic interaction, involving students and faculty tended to be more critical. Another theme was related to student treatment by support units, which participants described as requiring more thought, given students are core customers. Their ratings of student support facilities and services seemed to indicate areas requiring intervention. For instance, support staff were not adequately respectful as comments seemed to suggest. One respondent summed it up: "They have to do something about that offending service." "It costs little to offer service with a smile."

Respondents were impressed with AAU's visual aspects, which they described as special, mentioning in particular, landscape peculiarities, infrastructural improvement, and

Table 7: ANOVA (stream-field-based).

		Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Global reputation	Between groups	7.676	4	1.919	4.615	0.002
	Within groups	61.544	148	0.416	—	—
	Total	69.220	152	—	—	—
QAP	Between groups	9.872	4	2.468	4.751	0.001
	Within groups	76.889	148	0.520	—	—
	Total	86.761	152	—	—	—
QEP	Between groups	9.286	4	2.322	2.621	0.037
	Within groups	131.073	148	0.886	—	—
	Total	140.359	152	—	—	—
EE	Between groups	4.855	4	1.214	1.061	0.378
	Within groups	168.196	147	1.144	—	—
	Total	173.051	151	—	—	—

Table 8: Global reputation means by stream.

Stream	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Social sciences	3.0525	43	0.55851
Natural sciences	3.4874	42	0.56067
Languages and humanities	—	66	0.73959
Other	2.7000	1	—
Total	3.1435	153	0.67483

beautification work taking place. Students seemed satisfied with AAU's tranquil and peaceful character, allowing smooth academic life while they were critical of the university's social climate, which studies show is a reputational factor [70].

The comments in general had to do with aspects of institutional reputation, which is according to scholars of higher education reputation, an opinion about service experience which is both affective and cognitive as well as relationship-based [71]. Beyond service experience, students also value the emotional association with the institution. As one trainee said, "It would be a pride to have AAU on my CV". This is an important aspect of what has been called the prestige factor, which is becoming vital for universities [72]. While students seem to have utilitarian evaluations for the most part, they are also interested in the human dimensions of higher education, including respect and recognition.

3. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the reputational standing of Addis Ababa University in terms of the perspectives of trainees as principal stakeholders. In more specific terms, the aim was to determine the level of reputation in general and in regard to specific facets. The findings indicate that Addis Ababa University has received a generally modest score of 3.1435 ($M = 3.1435$, $SD = 0.67483$) on a five-point scale. Also, scores for facets of quality of academic performance, quality of external performance and emotional engagement were modest. These may validate Finch et al.'s [73] idea of reputational interdependence where some attributes may impact other attributes in reputational evaluations.

The reputational angles of the social sciences, languages and humanities, and natural sciences divisions were significantly different, with natural sciences students providing higher ratings of the reputation of the university ($M = 3.4874$, $SD = 0.56067$). Except for quality of external performance, age produced a significant effect on all other dimensions of university reputation, suggesting age was important in perspective-taking. Male and female students did not differ in their ratings, which may suggest that the university has addressed gender issues as important social justice concerns, improving the educational experiences of female students.

Interdimensional correlations were in most cases positive and strong, showing the scale had important validity in addition to reliability. Thus, the subscales of quality of academic performance, quality of external performance, emotional engagement, and the composite factor of reputation were significantly positively related.

Since the construct of reputation in higher education has been conceptualized in a variety of ways and these varied conceptions have led to varied measurement instruments [74], about which there are serious arguments [75], results need to be interpreted cautiously. Further, it is difficult and perhaps unnecessary to use national rankings in the context of the present data as rankings are often based on a broad set of criteria, not just student perspectives. Further, rankings are sensitive as yearly Times Higher Education Supplement reports indicate rankings are not stable and different institutions produce different rankings because they use different methodologies. The present findings do not negate AAU's national or African rank or the rankings by global bodies as the present study did not undertake a comparative study. Neither do the findings substantiate the 2019 AAU board's scathing statement on the state of AAU as communicated publicly [76]. Studies have shown that older universities often enjoy competitive advantages as a similar study of Malaysia's oldest university showed [77]. Viewed from Porter's five forces model [78], Addis Ababa University would be poised to continue to have an advantage over other universities that have more recently emerged on the higher education scene although clear signs are it is important to remain competitive and address reputation concerns.

4. Conclusion

Corporate reputation has emerged as a relevant category in the higher education management literature with an academic face. Thus, in recent times, universities as

organizations of a special character have been under growing pressure to demonstrate competitive qualities and constantly monitor their reputational standing. As an important asset, competitive reputation can define a university as an academic organization and influence its performance. It can enhance credibility and marketability of the universities services such as education and consulting and research and development to all stakeholders.

The present study introduced the construct into the scholarship on the Ethiopian public university system, taking Addis Ababa University as a particular case. More importantly, the study explored student perceptions of the university, taking a sample of trainees from the College of Education and Behavioural Sciences. Using the conceptual literature, empirical studies and a measurement instrument, the study established perceptions of students as the principal stakeholder group who rated the institution in reputational terms. Subdimensions indicated areas of specific interest that together lead to a more global construct of reputation in higher education. The modest ratings underlying the constructs indicate the university needs to introduce a program of reputation management as Ethiopia's Flagship University. Reputation as the driver of university performance needs to be internalized so there are ripple effects on diverse aspects of the university as a national actor that needs to play a more important regional role.

4.1. Study Contributions. This paper makes several contributions to the literature. First, it adds to the limited body of research examining the state of university reputation and the link between dimensions of university reputation. In this manner, it enhances our understanding of reputation in the public university system as a set of dimensions addressing internal university performance, external stakeholder perception, and affective factors relating to the university as a human entity. Whereas previous generic reputation research has addressed industry outside of higher education in relation to the variables of interest, there is scant attention paid in nonwestern university systems generally and African universities in particular, giving the present study an important contributory role. Another important dimension peculiar to this study is its focus on the Ethiopian state higher education sector, which has surprisingly drawn no previous research commitment despite the growing number of universities that is now in excess of fifty. Consequently, this study can help to ignite reputational interest in Ethiopian universities, where there is likely to be competition for a national role in the various areas of science and technology as well as humanities and social studies fields. There is also the intention in Ethiopia to have an important share of the African higher education market, which requires that Ethiopian universities shine and stand out among peers to be able to draw students from across the region.

4.2. Limitations and Potential Avenues. The subject of reputation is still under continuing conceptual refinement and methodological sophistication. The present study has used a sample from Addis Ababa University to establish notions and perspectives on the university's reputation. The students were trainee teachers working toward a pedagopgical qualification in the tight summer program. Their circumstances could be different from those of regular students and therefore their reputational perceptions of the university could be different. Therefore, the results need to be interpreted with caution in view of the sample characteristics. The largely descriptive and correlational design employed in this present study may be taken to further heights using larger samples that favor and require more diagnostic procedures with enhanced explanatory and predictive powers. Research in the area is important not only because of its novelty but considering the weight of the issue as a subject that addresses competitiveness and excellence in university standing, which is in line with national policy objectives. In view of the import attached to reputation, research with more samples from all colleges and institutes of the flagship university is necessary to have a bigger picture. At a later stage, more universities may be studied to have even more understanding of the national university system and how it compares regionally and continentally.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

Supplementary Materials

University Reputation Scale. (*Supplementary Materials*)

References

[1] L. Wedlin, "University marketization: The process and its limits," *The University in the Market*, vol. 84, pp. 143–153, Portland Press, London, England, 2008.

[2] S. S. Amsler and C. Bolsmann, "University ranking as social exclusion," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 283–301, 2012.

[3] J. J. Selingo, *College (Un) Bound: The Future of Higher Education and What It Means for Students*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston, MA, USA, 2013.

[4] J. Raz, *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 1999.

[5] G. Origgi, "A social epistemology of reputation," *Social Epistemology*, vol. 26, no. 3-4, pp. 399–418, 2012.

[6] D. Sperber and N. Baumard, "Moral reputation: an evolutionary and cognitive perspective," *Mind & Language*, vol. 27, no. 5, pp. 495–518, 2012.

[7] N. Cekic, "Utilitarianism and the idea of university: a short ethical analysis," *Filozofija I Drustvo*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 73–87, 2018.

[8] S. Kenaw, "The idea of a university and the increasing pressures of utilitarianism: a critical reflection on Addis Ababa University," *Ethiopian Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 35–61, 2003.

[9] H. Etzkowitz, A. Webster, C. Gebhardt, and B. R. C. Terra, "The future of the university and the university of the future:

evolution of ivory tower to entrepreneurial paradigm," *Research Policy*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 313–330, 2000.

[10] B. Clark, "The entrepreneurial university: new foundations for collegiality, autonomy, and achievement," *Higher Education Management*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2001.

[11] H. Ahmed, "Addis Ababa university," *Cahiers D'études Africaines*, vol. 46, no. 182, pp. 291–312, 2006.

[12] R. R. Balsvik, "Addis Ababa university in the shadow of the derg, 1974-1991," in *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*pp. 259–272, Trondheim, Norway, 2009.

[13] A. Asgedom, "Higher education in pre-revolution Ethiopia: relevance and academic freedom," *The Ethiopian Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 1–45, 2005.

[14] A. Asgedom and T. Hagos, "Governance reforms in higher education: Ethiopia," in *Proceedings of the Policy Forum on Governance Reforms in Higher Education in Africa*, Nairobi, Kenya, May 2003.

[15] M. Semru, "The development of higher education in Ethioipa," *Pices*, vol. 1, pp. 215–231, 1981.

[16] AAU, "Addis Ababa University ranks in the top 5.7% in the world and the 1st in Ethiopia," AAU, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2020, http://www.aau.edu.et/blog/addis-ababa-university-ranks-in-the-top-5-7-in-the-world-and-the-1st-in-ethiopia.

[17] I. Smaiziene and R. Jucevicius, "Corporate reputation: multidisciplinary richness and search for a relevant definition," *Engineering Economics*, vol. 2, no. 62, 2009.

[18] J. G. Hutton, M. B. Goodman, J. B. Alexander, and C. M. Genest, "Reputation management: the new face of corporate public relations?" *Public Relations Review*, vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 247–261, 2001.

[19] C. Dijkmans, P. Kerkhof, and C. J. Beukeboom, "A stage to engage: social media use and corporate reputation," *Tourism Management*, vol. 47, pp. 58–67, 2015.

[20] T. Gatfield, M. Barker, and P. Graham, "Measuring communication impact for university advertising materials," *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1999.

[21] T. McCorkindale, M. W. DiStaso, and C. Carroll, "The power of social media and its infl uence on corporate reputation," *The Handbook of Communication and Corporate Reputation*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 497–512, 2013.

[22] B. A. Watkins and W. J. Gonzenbach, "Assessing university brand personality through logos: an analysis of the use of academics and athletics in university branding," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 15–33, 2013.

[23] S. L. Wartick, "The relationship between intense media exposure and change in corporate reputation," *Business & Society*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 33–49, 1992.

[24] M. L. Barnett, J. M. Jermier, and B. A. Lafferty, "Corporate reputation: the definitional landscape," *Corporate Reputation Review*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 26–38, 2006.

[25] K. Money, A. Saraeva, I. Garnelo-Gomez, S. Pain, and C. Hillenbrand, "Corporate reputation past and future: a review and integration of existing literature and a framework for future research," *Corporate Reputation Review*, vol. 20, no. 3-4, pp. 193–211, 2017.

[26] G. Walsh, V.-W. Mitchell, P. R. Jackson, and S. E. Beatty, "Examining the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation: a customer perspective," *British Journal of Management*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 187–203, 2009.

[27] C. Fombrun and C. Van Riel, "The reputational landscape," *Corporate Reputation Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1–16, 1997.

[28] K. Walker, "A systematic review of the corporate reputation literature: definition, measurement, and theory," *Corporate Reputation Review*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 357–387, 2010.

[29] S. Lloyd, "Triangulation research to inform corporate reputation theory and practice," *Corporate Reputation Review*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 221–233, 2011.

[30] S. Lloyd, "Corporate reputation: ontology and measurement," Doctoral Dissertation, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand, 2007.

[31] R. Chun, R. Da Silva, G. Davies, and S. Roper, *Corporate Reputation and Competitiveness*, Routledge, London, UK, 2005.

[32] M. Dachyar and F. Dewi, "Improving university ranking to achieve university competitiveness by management information system," in *Proceedings of the IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering*, Bali, Indonesia, March 2015.

[33] J. Ressler and R. Abratt, "Assessing the impact of university reputation on stakeholder intentions," *Journal of General Management*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 35–45, 2009.

[34] A. Kusumawati, "A qualitative study of the factors influencing student choice: the case of public university in Indonesia," *Journal of Basic and Applied Scientific Research*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 314–327, 2013.

[35] C. Chapleo, "Exploring rationales for branding a university: should we be seeking to measure branding in UK universities?" *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 18, no. 6, pp. 411–422, 2011.

[36] C. Jevons, "Universities: a prime example of branding going wrong," *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, vol. 15, no. 7, pp. 466-467, 2006.

[37] M. Molesworth, E. Nixon, and R. Scullion, *The Marketisation of Higher Education*, Routledge, London, UK, 2010.

[38] R. Naidoo, "Repositioning higher education as a global commodity: opportunities and challenges for future sociology of education work," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 249–259, 2003.

[39] M. Molesworth, E. Nixon, and R. Scullion, "Having, being and higher education: the marketisation of the university and the transformation of the student into consumer," *Teaching in Higher Education*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 277–287, 2009.

[40] J. Dalton and S. Croft, *Managing Corporate Reputation: The New Currency*, Thorogood, London, UK, 2003.

[41] G. Martin and S. Hetrick, *Corporate Reputations, Branding and Managing People: A Strategic Approach to HR*, Butterworth, Oxford, UK, 2006.

[42] H. Burke, J. Ronald, G. Martin, and C. L. Cooper, *Corporate Reputation: Managing Opportunities and Threats*, Gower, Aldershot, UK, 2011.

[43] E. R. Gray and J. M. T. Balmer, "Managing corporate image and corporate reputation," *Long Range Planning*, vol. 31, no. 5, pp. 695–702, 1998.

[44] T. J. Brown, P. A. Dacin, M. G. Pratt, and D. A. Whetten, "Identity, intended image, construed image, and reputation: an interdisciplinary framework and suggested terminology," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 99–106, 2006.

[45] A. Caruana and M. T. Ewing, "How corporate reputation, quality, and value influence online loyalty," *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 63, no. 9-10, pp. 1103–1110, 2010.

[46] J. F. Volkwein and K. V. Sweitzer, "Institutional prestige and reputation among research universities and liberal arts colleges*," *Research in Higher Education*, vol. 47, no. 2, pp. 129–148, 2006.

[47] T. S. Dagger, P. J. Danaher, J. C. Sweeney, and J. R. McColl-Kennedy, "Selective halo effects arising from improving the interpersonal skills of frontline employees," *Journal of Service Research*, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 488–502, 2013.

[48] I. Price, F. Matzdorf, L. Smith, and H. Agahi, "The impact of facilities on student choice of university," *Facilities*, vol. 21, no. 10, pp. 212–222, 2003.

[49] M. J. Bitner, "Servicescapes: the impact of physical surroundings on customers and employees," *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 56, no. 2, pp. 57–71, 1992.

[50] J. M. Sharp, E. H. Shin, and L. F. Smith, "A network analysis of departmental prestige based on the origins of faculty degrees," *Behavioral Science*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 12–25, 1982.

[51] J. Ahmad and N. Ismail, "Prestige vs. reputation: significance to improve public perceptions towards Malaysian university," *Media Watch*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 119–133, 2020.

[52] R. E. Freeman, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1984, http://www.google.lt/books?hl=en&lr=&id=NpmA_qEiOpkC&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=Freeman,+R.+E.+1984.+Strategic+management:+A+stakeholder+approach.+Boston:+Pitman.&ots=6_kiJ4Q8ON&sig=E8QTaGPyDCpMv5EkPib SJp7-gf4&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false.

[53] M. E. Clarkson, "A stakeholder framework for analyzing and evaluating corporate social performance," *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 92–117, 1995.

[54] J. A. Karrh, "Evaluating belief strength and consistency in the assessment of university image," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 1–9, 2001.

[55] P. V. Larsen, "Academic reputation: how U.S. News & world report survey respondents form perceptions," *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 155–165, 2003.

[56] AUBR, *Assessment of University-Based Research Expert Group (AUBR). Assessing Europes University-Based Research, K1-NA-24187-EN-N*, p. 151, European Commission, Brussels,-Belgium, 2010, http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/docs/en/areas-of-actions-universities-assessing-europeuniversitybased-research-2010-en.pdf.

[57] F. Worthington and J. Hodgson, "Academic labour and the politics of quality in higher education: a critical evaluation of the conditions of possibility of resistance," *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 1-2, pp. 96–110, 2005.

[58] F. Van Vught, *Mapping the Higher Education Landscape: towards a European Classification of Higher Education*, Springer Science & Business Media, Berlin, Germany, 2009.

[59] HEFCE, *Future Support for Teaching Enhancement and Widening Participation: Consultation on Changes to the Teaching Funding Method*, Higher Education Funding Council for England, Bristol, England, 2008.

[60] E. Minelli, G. Rebora, and M. Turri, "How can evaluation fail? The case of Italian universities," *Quality in Higher Education*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 157–173, 2008.

[61] S. W. Alessandri, S.-U. Yang, and D. F. Kinsey, "An integrative approach to university visual identity and reputation," *Corporate Reputation Review*, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 258–270, 2006.

[62] C. J. Fombrun and N. Gardberg, "Who's tops in corporate reputation?" *Corporate Reputation Review*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 13–17, 2000.

[63] L. Sajtos, H. Kreis, and R. Brodie, "Image, brand relationships and customer value," *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 51–74, 2015.

[64] D. D. Bergh, D. J. Ketchen Jr, B. K. Boyd, and J. Bergh, "New frontiers of the reputation-performance relationship: insights from multiple theories," *Journal of Management*, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 620–632, 2010.

[65] A. Abbott, "The causal devolution," *Sociological Methods & Research*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 148–181, 1998.

[66] E. A. Panacek and C. B. Thompson, "Sampling methods: selecting your subjects," *Air Medical Journal*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 75–78, 2007.

[67] K. S. Kurasaki, "Intercoder reliability for validating conclusions drawn from open-ended interview data," *Field Methods*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 179–194, 2000.

[68] R. Popping, "In search for one set of categories," *Quality & Quantity*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 147–155, 1992.

[69] B. M. Oldfield and S. Baron, "Student perceptions of service quality in a UK university business and management faculty," *Quality Assurance in Education*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 85–95, 2000.

[70] R. Bennett and R. Ali-Choudhury, "Prospective students' perceptions of university brands: an empirical study," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 85–107, 2009.

[71] R. F. Krampf and A. C. Heinlein, "Developing marketing strategies and tactics in higher education through target market research," *Decision Sciences*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 175–192, 1981.

[72] M. Sung and S.-U. Yang, "Toward the model of university image: the influence of brand personality, external prestige, and reputation," *Journal of Public Relations Research*, vol. 20, no. 4, pp. 357–376, 2008.

[73] D. Finch, S. McDonald, and J. Staple, "Reputational interdependence: an examination of category reputation in higher education," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 34–61, 2013.

[74] H. F. Moed, "A critical comparative analysis of five world university rankings," *Scientometrics*, vol. 110, no. 2, pp. 967–990, 2017.

[75] A. F. J. Van Raan, "Fatal attraction: conceptual and methodological problems in the ranking of universities by bibliometric methods," *Scientometrics*, vol. 62, no. 1, pp. 133–143, 2005.

[76] AAU, *Announcement from AAU Administrative Board–Revitalizing Addis Ababa University*, AAU, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2019, http://www.aau.edu.et/blog/announcement-from-aau-administrative-board-revitalizing-addis-ababa-university/.

[77] S. Munisamy, N. I. Mohd Jaafar, and S. Nagaraj, "Does reputation matter? Case study of undergraduate choice at a premier university," *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 451–462, 2014.

[78] M. A. King, "A strategic assessment of the higher education industry: applying the Porter's five forces for industry analysis," in *Proceedings of Southeastern Decision Sciences Institute Annual Conference*, Baltimore, MD, USA, November 2008.