Ethiopia: Ethiopian education continues to improve, but awareness of future skills remains limited

Ethiopia’s education system has improved dramatically over the past three decades, with school attendance and completion rates increasing considerably since the mid-1990s. This has yielded tangible results, including an increase in the national literacy rate from 27% in 1994 to above 50% today. This improvement is largely the result of government investment. According to the latest available figures, over 27% of Ethiopia’s government expenditure is devoted to education—one of the highest percentages in the world—and this figure has been above 20% since at least 2006. Children aged 5 to 16 receive ten years of free, mandatory education; upper secondary education (years 11 and 12) and higher education are optional and require the payment of tuition fees. Education is delivered in three languages to most students. The language of instruction is the mother tongue at the primary level and English at the secondary and tertiary levels, and the study of Amharic is mandatory nationwide (this is a non-native language for 70% of Ethiopians). It is also mandatory to study an additional Ethiopian language in most areas (usually students’ native language).

However, Ethiopia remains one of the world’s poorest countries, with 90% of the population living on less than US$5.50 a day. Development in education—as in all other spheres—is also severely hampered by rapid population growth, political instability, political violence and inter-ethnic conflict. As a result, Ethiopia continues to perform below both the global average and the average for less economically developed countries across many educational metrics. Teaching resources are scarce, and many schools lack electricity, let alone computers or an Internet connection. There is also a dearth of good teachers, as low salaries and poor working conditions make the profession unattractive. Although regulations require upper secondary teachers to hold postgraduate degrees, this condition is often waived; even at the university level, teaching staff often only have undergraduate degrees. There are also massive regional discrepancies in the quality of education and in the proportion of children attending school, with rural areas performing much worse than urban centres on both counts.

With the government struggling to provide basic educational necessities, limited attention is given to future skills, soft skills, critical thinking or problem-based learning. Assessments exist, but they focus only on testing. There is also no career counselling or assistance with job-seeking at state educational establishments. Making information such as curricula and assessment frameworks publicly available is not a high priority, and the Federal Ministry of Education’s website has not been operational for several months.

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<td>Overall alignment</td>
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<td>Policy environment</td>
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<td>Teaching environment</td>
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Ethiopia has a national education strategy for 2015–2020 that covers upper secondary education. The strategy includes action plans and milestones for implementation and assigns responsibility to specific state bodies. It emphasises civic education but does not mention digital skills, critical thinking or information-based learning. A new strategy is under development for 2020–24.

Ethiopia has a federal quality assurance framework, which was introduced in 2015. This framework does not address future skills but aims to make qualifications to the country’s socio-economic needs. Curriculum guidelines are not available online, and the Federal Ministry of Education’s website has not been operational for several months. The ministry describes the curriculum as encompassing future skills, critical thinking and general life skills. For most students, education is delivered in three languages, with mandatory study of English, Amharic and students’ native language.

National examinations are held in the fourth, eighth, tenth and twelfth years of school (the latter three signalling the end of primary school, the end of lower secondary school and the end of upper secondary school, respectively). Assessment frameworks are not available online, and the Federal Ministry of Education’s website has not been operational for several months. There is no evidence of student-centred feedback.

On a scale of 0–100, Ethiopia receives a raw score of 72 for government effectiveness risk, indicating that the political culture is unfavourable and that there are clear barriers to the effective operation of businesses in the country.

Youth unemployment in Ethiopia is 2.8%.

All teachers at the upper secondary level must have a master’s degree, and at least one of their degrees must be relevant to the subject(s) they teach. There is no requirement for in-service training, but such training is available. The available training does not significantly address future skills.

The average salary for an upper secondary teacher at a public school in the country’s largest city is $4,585 per year in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms. The average salary for a professor at a top public university is $10,098 per year in PPP terms.

Initial government funding of education per upper secondary student as a percentage of GDP per capita is 31.6%. Initial government funding of education per tertiary student as a percentage of GDP per capita is 264.8%.

There is no career counselling or assistance with job-seeking at state educational establishments at any level.

The Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports encourages children and young people to participate in sport, volunteerism and community activities. It facilitates the establishment of youth organisations and supports youth activities.
University–industry co-authored publications account for 3.1% of total research publications in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia has no strategy to promote broadband Internet access in schools or libraries. The national education strategy mentions a desire to increase Internet access in schools, but many schools do not even have electricity.

On a scale of 0–1, Ethiopia receives a raw score of 0.656 for gender equality.

On a scale of 0–10, Ethiopia receives a raw score of 7.4 for future optimism.

On a scale of 0–4, Ethiopia receives a raw score of 3 for operational business risk for property rights protection. On a scale of 0–4, Ethiopia also receives a score of 3 for operational business risk for freedom of association.

On a scale of 0–4, Ethiopia receives a raw score of 3 for operational business risk for official corruption.

On a scale of 0–10, Ethiopia receives a raw score of 2.65 for civil liberties.

There is no evidence of any government-led anti-bullying campaigns in Ethiopia. On a scale of 1–10, Ethiopia receives a raw score of 2.5 for religious tolerance.

On a scale of 0–100, Ethiopia receives a raw score of 44.8 for its overall performance in the Yale Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2018.

*Note: Overall scores presented in the table are the normalised scores (scale of 0–100). Overall scores for each indicator have been calculated by normalising the raw scores for each sub-indicator and applying individual weights. Please refer to the Index workbook for indicator and sub-indicator descriptions.