

**Full Length Research Paper****Unveiling Freshman Program Dynamics: Student Expectations and Implementation Status in Haramaya and Dire Dawa Universities**

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The purpose of this study was to analyze the current status and students' expectations in freshman program implementation at Haramaya and Dire Dawa universities. A convergence parallel mixed method research design was employed. A total of 493 respondents (320 students, 166 instructors, 2 directorates, and 6 coordinators) were included in the study. Students and instructors were selected using simple random sampling and freshman program directorates and coordinators were selected using purposive sampling. The data were gathered through a questionnaire and interview. Data were analyzed using descriptive (percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (t-test, and correlation). Qualitative data were analyzed by using content analysis. The results revealed that the current practice of the freshman program was at a moderate level ($CM=3.19$, $CSD=1.23$) of implementation and affected by many challenges. The freshman program implementation moderately ($M=3.14$, $SD=1.29$) fulfilled the student's expectations. The study revealed students' expectations difference ($t(318) = 2.480$, $p=0.014$) between the two universities in the implantation of freshman programs. Therefore, the practice of freshman programs and students' expectations in the programs were within the range of moderate status in the two selected Universities. To improve the implementation of freshman programs, universities can consider providing adequate resources, enhancing classroom management systems, and providing training for both students and instructors.

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1. Introduction

Higher education is a postsecondary educational level that is provided to students at undergraduate and graduate programs which enables learners to acquire advanced academic and professional

knowledge, skills, values, ethics, and competences (MoE, 2020). It typically includes universities, colleges, and other institutions that offer academic programs leading to degrees or certifications. Higher education has an important role in shaping the future of the world's society in terms of sustainable development by generating

new knowledge, contributing to the development of appropriate skills, and increasing sustainability awareness (Zaleniene & Pereira, 2021). In higher education, postgraduate programs include master's degrees, doctoral programs, and professional degrees. Undergraduate degrees represent the first initial level of higher education and encompass a range of disciplines. Undergraduate programs are typically structured based on the year of study. The first year is referred to as freshman year, followed by sophomore year, junior year, and senior year (Wade, 2020).

A freshman program in higher education is a transition program from high school to a university, organized as one of the academic wings to balance these differences, and designed to help first-year students acclimate to the new academic environment and its requirements to make the most of the exciting university experiences (Dire Dawa University, 2021). In Ethiopia, freshman programs were first implemented in the 1960s when the country's higher education system began to expand. The program is introduced to strengthen the educational foundations of students, offer strong remedial courses in basic subjects, giving university teachers the chance to evaluate students on a full-year basis, and helping students to make informed choices concerning their fields of specialization at the end of the year (Trudeau, 1968). According to the Education and Training Policy (1994), the freshman program of undergraduate university education has been moved down to the second cycle of secondary education and offered as preparatory programs. However, the freshman program was reintroduced in recent years, after being banished from university curricula for nearly two and a half decades, as stated in Ethiopia's Education Development Roadmap (2018-30) (MoE, 2018). The reintroduction of the freshman program is expected to help improve the quality of education and prepare students for the challenges they face in their future careers.

The full year of the freshman program focused on offering general and preparatory courses before students chose their areas of study in their second year. The grades students earned in their first year also determined whether they would be allowed

to study their choice of program during their second year. The introduction of the freshman program will help students to take good quality basic courses that can contribute to unity (MoE, 2018). The freshman program is expected to improve the quality of education and better prepare graduates for the job market (Wondwosen, 2019). It is designed to help first-year students by providing them with special attention and supportive courses, as well as allowing university students to get more time (three-year degree programs into a four-year degree program) and space to successfully meet the requirements of any degree program (MoE, 2023).

In Ethiopia, few studies have been conducted with a focus on first-year students in higher education. Some studies have examined adjustment problems among first-year students, academic performance, the effectiveness of the program, and the experiences of students from emerging regions. These studies have highlighted the importance of the freshman program in addressing adjustment difficulties, supporting students' academic performance, and providing a unique support structure for first-year students (Aklilu, 2018; Girma, 2004; Anbesaw, Beyene, & Kefale, 2022; Tesfamariam, 2018). These studies focus more on the adjustment problems first-year students experience than the implementation of new freshman programs. It also specifically focuses on the experiences and adjustment problems of first-year students from Ethiopia's emerging regions.

This study aims to address the limited research on the status of the freshman program and students' expectations in terms of personal and social development, democratic values, socialization, and future life expectations stemming from the implementation of freshman programs in Ethiopian higher education. Additionally, it focuses on the effectiveness of the freshman program. Previous research has not adequately examined the status of freshman program implementation or the expectations and needs of these students; thus, the focus of this study is unique. Additionally, this study aims to fill the gap in research on the implementation of freshman programs in Ethiopian colleges, particularly in the

eastern region. The research design of this study, a convergence parallel mixed method, is also different from previous studies (Wondwosen, 2019; Aklilu, 2018; Girma, 2004; Anbesaw, Beyene, & Kefale, 2022; Tesfamariam, 2018). In terms of geographical distribution, the focus of the previous studies was on the central and northern Ethiopian universities than the eastern universities. Therefore, this motivates the researchers to conduct the study.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the current implementation status and students' expectations in the freshman program at Haramaya and Dire Dawa Universities. The study aims to assess how well the program meets students' needs and expectations in terms of personal and social development, democratic values, socialization, and future life expectations. By examining the students' expectations of the freshman program, the study aims to answer the following questions:

- How fully were the freshman programs implemented at Haramaya and Dire Dawa Universities?
- How effectively do the freshman programs at Haramaya and Dire Dawa Universities meet students' expectations?
- Are there notable differences between Haramaya and Dire Dawa Universities in meeting students' expectations regarding freshman program implementation?

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the research titled "Unveiling Freshman Program Dynamics: Student Expectations and Implementation Status in Haramaya and Dire Dawa Universities" aims to provide a theoretical foundation for understanding freshman program implementation and the extent to which students' expectations are met in these universities. This framework draws on relevant ideas and concepts to guide the research and give an angle through which to look into the topic at hand.

Albert Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is one theoretical perspective that can be

applied to this research. SCT stresses the mutual relation of individuals, their surroundings, and their behavior. Social cognitive theory (SCT) is a form of interpersonal approach that explains active and continual learning through observation of others (Govindaraju, 2021). SCT may help explain how students' expectations are formed by their observations of the implementation of freshman programs and the social pressures they face in the setting of this research. Individuals learn by observing and modeling, according to SCT. Students' expectations about the implementation of freshman programs might be influenced by their classmates', staff members', and other stakeholders' experiences. These observations can form their ideas about the program's effectiveness and quality, which can affect their degree of satisfaction and fulfillment of expectations.

Eccles and Wigfield (2002) created another useful theoretical framework, the Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT). Individuals' motivation and involvement in a specific activity are influenced by their expectations of success and the value they place on that activity, according to EVT. As the primary components of motivation, EVT distinguishes between learners' expected success (expectancy) and the extent to which they place value over the topic (value). As essential characteristics of motivation, EVT distinguishes between learners' expectations of success, anticipation, and how much worth they place on the topic, value (Lee and Bong, 2019). In the context of this research, EVT can help explain the extent to which students' expectations are realized in the implementation of freshmen programs. Students' expectations of success in the freshman program, according to EVT, might be influenced by their perceived competency, previous academic experiences, and the value they place on the program. Students are more likely to have higher expectations and be satisfied with program implementation if they regard themselves to be competent and believe that the program will give relevant learning experiences.

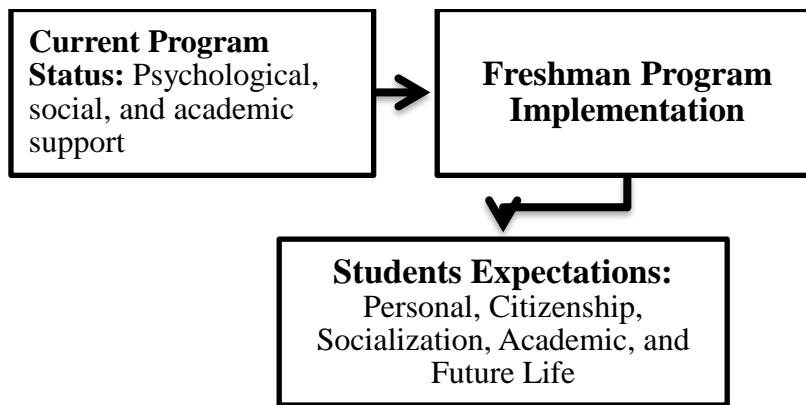


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Figure 1 indicates that the implementation of the freshman program becomes effective when there is an adequate support system (social, psychological, and academic), effective communication and collaboration among stakeholders (students, instructors, and leadership), and fulfillment of students' expectations regarding personal and social development, academic progress, and future professional life. Therefore, effective implementation of freshman programs enhances students' success and expectations during the critical transition to university, improves field selection, increases retention rates, and helps students improve academic performance through competition. Additionally, it enhances students' engagement and interactions with peers and faculty, aids in their understanding of campus environments and resources, supports the development of self-confidence, and raises awareness regarding their chosen field of study in the second year.

3. Methodology

3.1 Description of the Study Area

In the eastern part of Ethiopia, there are five public universities: Haramaya, Dire Dawa, Oda Bul-tum, Jigjiga, and Kebir Dehar University. Among these, two universities: Haramaya and Dire Dawa were selected using purposive sampling due to specific criteria: their implementation of the freshman program, their proximity to the researchers' work area, and considerations related to time and budget constraints. Haramaya University is a public research institution located in

the Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia, approximately 510 kilometers east of Addis Ababa. It is recognized as one of the first-generation research universities in Ethiopia. In addition to its teaching mission, Haramaya University is committed to professional development, community engagement, research, and collaboration with local and international universities and organizations. Dire Dawa city administration was established in 1902 years. Dire Dawa University is located in the industrial and commercial city of Dire Dawa, which is located 515 km east of Addis Ababa. It is a young higher education institution, that established and started its teaching and learning activities in the 2007 academic year. Therefore, the study was conducted in two universities (Haramaya and Dire Dawa universities) because they implement freshman programs.

3.2 Research Design

The researchers used a pragmatic worldview to examine the freshman program implementation because the pragmatic paradigm uses pluralistic approaches, methods, and multiple sources of data to derive knowledge about the problem and to answer research questions. Pragmatism gives valid recognition for different perspectives, interests, and forms of knowledge, which is important in the context of implementing freshman programs that involve diverse stakeholders and perspectives. The study was utilized a convergent parallel mixed method design in which both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed. A mixed-method research design entails more than just gathering and evaluating both

types of data; it also entails combining both methodologies such that the total strength of a study is stronger than either qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The purpose of this form of research is that both qualitative and quantitative research, in combination, provide a better understanding of a research problem or issue than either research approach alone. It is an approach in which two data sets are combined to get a complete picture of the issue being explored and to validate one set of findings with the other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). While both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods have merit on their own in educational research, some researchers have pointed out the benefits of mixed methods research for the ability to collect and analyze both hard numerical data along with a more complex narrative account adding both.

3.3 Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Techniques

The study population of this study were the instructors who teach the freshman students, students attending and passed through the freshman program and freshman administrating bodies (freshman program directors, coordinators, and registrar head) in two public universities (Haramaya and Dire Dawa University). From the two selected universities, College of Social Science and Humanities (Dept: English, History, Geography, Civic and Moral Education, Logic and Critical Thinking); College of Computing and Natural Science (Biology, Math's, chemistry, and Physics); College of Education and Behavioral Science (General psychology and Inclusive education); College of Computing and Informatics (emerging technology) were selected by using purposive sampling techniques because they provide the course for freshman students.

To determine the number of sample respondents for this study, a formula developed by Kothari (2004) and recommended by Cohen et al., (2007) was used. Accordingly, from 9140 (Haramaya University=4328, Dire Dawa University = 4812) freshman students that attended and passed through the freshman program 369 (Haramaya University =175, Dire Dawa University =194)

freshman students were selected by using simple random sampling. From 366 instructors (Haramaya University =185 and Dire Dawa University =181) that provided the course for freshman students, 179 (Haramaya University =91, Dire Dawa University =88) were selected by using stratified and simple random sampling. This is because there were different subdivisions in the population and variations in the population size of different strata (universities, colleges, departments, and freshman students' stream). Six freshman program coordinators and 2 program directorates were selected by using purposive sampling techniques from two selected universities. Therefore, these are information-rich persons about the implementation of the freshman program.

3.4 Instruments of Data Collection

Questionnaire: For the variable's current status of freshman program implementation, the researchers developed questionnaires. Regarding student expectations on freshman program implementation the questionnaires were developed based on the student academic expectations scale (Deaño et al., 2015, Diniz et al., 2018) and other literature. The questionnaires used five-point scales as 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'undecided', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree' to measure students' expectations by four subscales (personal and social development, quality of being democratic, socialization, and future life expectation). The close-ended questionnaires were prepared based on Likert scales. On the other hand, the open-ended questionnaires were targeted to give freedom for participants to express their experiences and views about the implementation of the freshman program.

Interview: Semi-structured interview was used as a method of data collection to get pertinent information (current status and students' expectation of freshman program implementation) from the freshman program coordinators and directorates of Haramaya and Dire Dawa University. Semi-structured interview guide approach, the researcher conducts his/her interview with a pre-

determined set of questions or issues for all interviewees that serve as a guideline for ensuring that all relevant issues are addressed (Creswell, 2009). This instrument provides in-depth accurate information and the researcher has the chance to ask questions for clarification as well as observe it.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

The items of the questionnaire were checked and rechecked by colleagues for their face and content validity. The pilot study was conducted at Oda Bultum University. The respondents of the pilot test were not included in the actual study. Thus, the questionnaires were distributed to 20 instructors and 20 students. After the distributed questionnaires were returned from a pilot study, some necessary modifications (improvements) were made on a few items. The coefficient of Alpha (α) was 0.86 for implementation status and 0.86 for students' expectations of freshman program implementation which is good.

3.6 Data Analysis

The scores of each item were organized, statistically compiled, and entered into SPSS 24 to perform descriptive statistics (percentage, mean score, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics. Moreover, inferential statistics (Independent sample t-test, correlation,) were used to analyze the significant differences between the responses of respondents by sex, stream, relationship among subscales, and selected HEIs on the implementation of the freshman program. The data collected from the interviews and open-ended question items were analyzed by using content analysis.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics		Research participants			
		Instructors		Students	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Sex	Male	144	86.7	250	78.1
	Female	22	13.3	70	21.9
	Total	166	100	320	100
Stream	SSS	-	-	184	57.5
	NSS	-	-	136	42.5

3. Results

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

A total of 548 (179 instructors and 369 students) were involved in filling out the questionnaires and 486 (166 instructors and 320 students) filled and returned the questionnaires to the researcher. Accordingly, 166 (HU=86 & DDU=80) out of 179 instructors (93%) and 320 (HU=158 & DDU=162) out of 369 (87%) students' questionnaires were filled properly, returned successfully, and included in the study. So, the questionnaire had 89% successful rate of returning. From the total of 8 interviewers that should be contacted for the interview (all interviewers have participated). So, the interview was 100% successfully conducted. Participants were also given open-ended questions in the questionnaires. Then the calculated average mean was interpreted by using the level of agreement as very low [1.00-1.80], low [1.81-2.60], medium [2.61-3.40], high [3.41-4.20], and very high [4.21-5.00].

As indicated in Table 1, the majority 144 (86.7%) instructors and 250 (78.1%) students who participated on the study were males and the remaining 22 (13.3%) instructors and 70 (21.9%) students were females. This wider gender gap among respondents may be due to historical gender inequality in access to education in our country, Ethiopia.

	Total			320	100
Age	16-20	-	-	208	65
	21-25	-	-	110	34.4
	30-35	-	-	2	0.6
	Total			320	100
Location of secondary school	Urban	-	-	138	43.1
	Semi-urban	-	-	70	21.9
	Rural	-	-	112	35
	Total			320	100
Year of Study	1 st	-	-	104	32.5
	2 nd	-	-	14	4.4
	3 rd	-	-	86	26.9
	4 th	-	-	116	36.3
	Total			320	100
Note: SSS= Social Science Stream, and NSS=Natural Science Stream					

Regarding the students' stream, 184 (57.5%) students were from social science stream whereas 136 (42.5%) students were from natural science stream. Regarding the age of the participants, the majority of the students 208 (65%) were within the range of 16-20 years old whereas 110 (34.4%) were within the range of 21 to 25 years old. This indicated that the majority of the students are at their young right age to join higher educational institutions. Regarding the students' secondary school location, the majority 138(43.1%) and 112 (35%) students attended their secondary school education the urban and rural schools respectively whereas 70

(21.9%) students attended secondary education in semi-urban schools. Regarding the year of students in the university majority 116 (36%) were 4th year, 104 (32.5%) were 1st year, 86 (26.9%) were 3rd year and 14 (4.4%) were 1st year.

4.2 Practice/General Status of the Freshman Program Implementation

Regarding the effective implementation of the freshman program, the two respondent groups namely, instructors and students were asked to rate the extent of freshman program practices.

Table 2: practice of freshman program

No	Items	Instructors (N=166)		Students (N=320)		Total (N=486)	
		M ₁	SD ₁	M ₂	SD ₂	CM	CSD
1	Organize welcome ceremony/program for a freshman student.	3.41	1.12	3.26	1.25	3.32	1.21
2	Provide orientation for a freshman student.	3.45	1.22	3.45	1.22	3.45	1.22
3	Create awareness of university policy guidelines/ legislation, freshman curriculum, and others	3.45	1.00	3.41	1.29	3.42	1.20
4	Provide academic support programs (e.g., library, laboratory, learning-assistance resources)	3.43	1.18	3.32	1.29	3.36	1.26
5	Arrange training for students on policy materials implementation.	3.01	1.05	3.12	1.29	3.08	1.22

6	Create conducive environments that guide program practice.	3.12	1.11	3.15	1.27	3.13	1.22
7	Make classroom instruction student-centered.	2.90	1.00	3.16	1.27	3.07	1.19
8	Provide psychosocial support programs (e.g., counseling services, mentoring programs).	2.99	0.99	2.98	1.29	2.99	1.29
9	Create smooth relationships within the university community.	2.95	1.04	3.05	1.23	3.01	1.23
10	Guide, follow, and provide support and timely feedback for the students.	3.11	1.02	3.06	1.26	3.07	1.18
11	Create inclusive cultures and a common understanding of university culture (teamwork approach).	3.26	1.01	3.05	1.38	3.13	1.27
12	The instructor's ability to communicate the course content effectively.	3.50	1.14	3.11	1.32	3.25	1.28
13	Implement continuous assessments to improve students' achievement.	3.37	1.01	3.28	1.27	3.31	1.19
Grand mean		3.21	1.07	3.18	1.28	3.19	1.23

As indicated in **Table 2**, the extent to which the university organizes a welcome ceremony/ program (CM=3.32, CSD= 1.21), provides academic support programs (e.g., library, laboratory, learning-assistance resources) (CM=3.36, CSD= 1.26), arrange training for students on policy materials implementation (CM=3.08, CSD= 1.22), university create conducive environments that guide program practice (CM=3.13, CSD= 1.22), make classroom instruction student-centered for freshman students (CM=3.07, CSD= 1.19), provide psychosocial support programs (e.g., counseling services, mentoring programs) for freshman students (CM=2.99, CSD= 1.29), creating smooth relationships within the university community (CM=3.01, CSD= 1.23), guide, follow, and provide support and timely feedback for the students (CM=3.07, CSD= 1.18), create inclusive

cultures and a common understanding of university culture (teamwork approach) (CM=3.13, CSD= 1.27), the instructor's ability to communicate the course content effectively (CM=3.25, CSD= 1.28), and implement continuous assessments to improve students' achievement (CM=3.31, CSD= 1.19) were practiced with in the range of medium level.

Concerning, the extent to which the university provides orientation for a freshman student (CM=3.45, CSD= 1.22), and creating awareness of university policy guidelines/ legislation, freshman curriculum, and others (CM=3.42, CSD= 1.20) for freshman students were practiced in the range of a high level.

Table 3:

Table 3: Independent sample t-test result of freshman program practice between university

Dependent Variables	Group	N	M	SD	df.	t-value	p-value
Implementation of the freshman program	HU	244	43.39	9.69	484	4.124	.000
	DDU	242	39.82	9.36			

Independent sample t-test result shows that there is a statistically significant difference between HU (M=43.39, SD= 9.69) and DDU (M=39.82,

SD=9.36, $t(484) = 4.124$, $p=0.000$, 95% CI) on the freshman program current practice. However, the actual difference in the mean scores between

the universities were extremely small ($\eta^2 = .3$)
Now a day, freshman program has been implemented in all Ethiopian public higher education.

Regarding the issues the current freshman program implementation one of the freshman program directorates said that:

In Dire Dawa University starting from 2012 EC the freshman program are implemented all in all 100% but the implementation of the program differs from department to department from the natural science stream to the social science stream even if from instructor to instructor. In our university, we provide social and psychological support, guide and provide training for the students joining the freshman program for the first time. The majority of instructors assigned to freshman program courses used student-centered pedagogy (modern method of teaching), implement continuous assessments, advice students and provide timely feedback for their students. Therefore, the extent of freshman program implementation in our university is rated within the range of high level (DDUFPD1).

The others program coordinator asked about the current freshman program implementation in his

university. He said that:

I think freshman program is essential to assure the quality of education in a higher learning institution. Because of this our country MoE and our university give serious attention for the freshman program. Freshman program in our university running in a good manner, instructors from each department provides courses and necessary support for freshman students within freshman program schedule/plan. Support staff and others stakeholders highly involved in the implementation of freshman program. Since there are some issues related with university and students that affect the implementation freshman program, I rated the current practice of the freshman program within the range of medium level (HUFPC2).

The university has to identify student characteristics and needs, set priorities among these areas of need and support, identify available resources, evaluate a variety of successful programs, and

implement a formal comprehensive retention program that best meets institutional needs in order for the program to be effective. Regarding freshman program implementation, other freshman program coordinators said that:

In our university to make the freshman program implementation very effective there are 1 freshman program directorate, 1 associate directorate and 8 freshman program coordinators (2 stream (SSS and NSS) coordinators, 4 common course coordinators and 2 class representative coordinators). This structure makes the freshman program implementation in our university very effective. At the beginning, the first year of the first semester the university provide orientation and other discipline and professional support for students joining the institution. There are a series of follow up regarding classroom teaching learning and students' assessments using the platform of the freshman program directorate. Therefore, the freshman program structure in our university contributes a lot for freshman program implementation (DDUFPD1).

This interview result shows that the freshman program implementation structured in the way they are easily implemented. Regarding the implementation of freshman

program one associate freshman program directorate said that

In our university the freshman program implementation started in the year of 2012 EC and the implementation of the program shows improvements from year to year. Currently the im-

plementation of the freshman program in our university is effective. Regarding the implementation of freshman program our university participated on national conferences and share good experiences for other university. Research also conducted on freshman program implementation national indicated that our university have good experiences on structure and managements system of freshman program implementation more than other university in our country (HUFPAD1).

The other respondents in the same university asked about the structured and managements of freshman program implementation. He stated that:

Structure of freshman program in our university includes: 1 directorate, 2 associate directorate, 3 coordinators, 1 head of registrar and 1 course chief in each department provide course for freshman program. Regarding the freshman course implementation there is not enough course instructors to cover the course on time. The implementation of freshman program shows improvements from year to year, special the implementation of the program is high in the year of 2014 (HUFPD4).

The other program coordinators regarding the current practice of freshman program stated that

Freshman curriculum is a new curriculum in our country and contribute a lot to enhance quality of education. Before the freshman program, the students graduate from the university with low quality in terms of knowledge of the subject matter and confidence to serve society. Many students who graduated from the university didn't know what learned in the university. I appreciate the government for introducing the freshman program in our country educational system because there is high competition among the students, and students work hard to compete with other students and to join field of study. Moreover, we fully implement university policy, students' code of conduct and other guideline to make the implementation of the program effective and to minimize students cheating. The freshman program structure and management system in our university are appropriate for the effective implementation of the program (HUFPC3).

Other respondents indicated that in our university top management gives special attention to the freshman program. There are day-to-day discussions with top management regarding freshman program issues. The directorate provides orientation at the beginning of each semester for the instructors who provide courses for the freshman program and discusses with the course chair and classroom representative on different issues regarding the freshman program.

One of the respondents indicated that to make the freshman program implementation effective the university work with different directorate in the university. For instance, the delivery directorates provide training to freshman students on life and study skills They also work with the international student directorate and the women's, youth, and children directorates provide special tutorials for female and international students by selecting competent instructors.

The results from the open-ended questionnaires about the status of freshman program implementation in two selected universities were also incongruent with the results from the interview data. The participants indicated that the majority of instructors provide special tutorials for female and low-achiever students to enhance their achievements. Another informant said that "the freshman program implementation in our university is good but there are not enough laboratories. This means the number of freshman students is not proportional to the university practical laboratory."

Other informants said that "because of large/high numbers of students (60-70) students in the classroom, it's difficult to implement student-centered teaching-learning process and continuous assessments. Therefore, the implementation of freshman program is not as such effective." Many re-

spondents indicated that freshman program policy and guidelines were not fully implemented by the freshman program stakeholders. This qualitative data shows that the current status of freshman program implementation was not effective because the program was affected by many challenges.

4.3 Student's Expectations in Freshman Program Implementation

Regarding the student's expectations about the implementation of the freshman program, the student respondents were asked about their personal and social development, quality of being democratic, socialization, and future life expectations.

Table 4: Student's expectations in freshman program implementation

No	Item	N	Students	
			Mean	SD
1	Personal and social development (EPD)			
1.1	Take the academic opportunities to improve my identity, autonomy, self-confidence, etc.	320	3.02	1.39
1.2	Develop my personality (characteristics or qualities that form my distinctive character).	320	3.19	1.27
1.3	Gain confidence in my potential.	320	3.19	1.19
1.4	Acquire skills to be a more responsible and Autonomous person	320	3.19	1.27
2	Quality of being democratic and sense of citizenship (EDC)			
2.1	Understand how I can contribute to improving the world and society.	320	3.16	1.37
2.2	Take a critical view of the world and think about how to transform it.	320	3.20	1.26
2.3	Becoming a committed citizen toward the problems of contemporary society.	320	3.07	1.37
2.4	Contribute to the improvement of the human condition or the well-being of people.	320	3.18	1.28
3	Socialization and interaction (ESI)			
3.1	Live and socialize with a new group of friends.	320	3.14	1.39
3.2	Working with other students in class time will be important to my learning	320	3.21	1.22
3.3	Achieve a level of education similar or greater than that achieved by my parents (or older siblings).	320	3.12	1.22
3.4	Have a group of friends with whom I can relax	320	3.00	1.27
4	Expectations for future life/ career development (EFL)			
4.1	Have better career opportunities in the labor market.	320	3.14	1.21
4.2	Get training to have a good job in the future.	320	3.18	1.44
4.3	Ensure a satisfactory professional career after the course.	320	2.99	1.32
4.4	To meet the expectations of my parents or family	320	3.27	1.29
	Grand Mean	320	3.14	1.29

As indicated in **Table 4**, the student's expectations regarding personal and social developments from the freshman program (M=3.14, SD = 1.28), the expectation of quality of being democratic and a sense of citizenship within the university community and society (the students entering the university have a medium expectation to become a democratic, role model and wellbeing individual and used global trends and

knowledge to solve their country problems) (M=3.15, SD = 1.32), the expectation of socialization and interaction with university community and society (M=3.12, SD = 1.28), and expectation of students for future life from freshman program implementation (M=3.14, SD = 1.32) were within the range of medium levels.

Table 5: Correlation results

		EPD	EDC	ESI	EFL
EPD	Pearson Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
EDC	Pearson Correlation	.581**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
ESI	Pearson Correlation	.590**	.521**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
EFL	Pearson Correlation	.522**	.544**	.624**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	

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

b. Listwise N=320

The correlation between all the subscales were moderate and strong but positively r (320) ranges 0. 522 to 0.624. These findings indicated that there are strong and moderate correlational relationships between the student’s expectations in all subscales (EPD, EDC, ESI, and EFL) regarding the implementation of the freshman program.

The result of Pearson product-moment correlation (r) shows that there are significant (p=.000, p<0.05) relationship between the sub-scale of student’s expectations.

Table 6: Independent sample t-test result of natural and social science stream student’s expectation from the implementation of freshman program

Dependent Variables	Group	N	M	SD	df.	t-value	p-value
Implementation of freshman program	NSS	184	51.17	13.57	318	1.051	.294
	SSS	136	49.44	15.84			

Independent sample t-test results show that there is no statistically significant difference between the social science stream HU (M=51.17, SD=13.57) and natural science stream (M=49.44,

SD=15.84, t (318) = 1.051, p=0.294, 95% CI) on the student’s expectation on implementation of freshman program.

Table 7: Independent sample t-test result of student’s expectations on implementation of freshman program between universities

Dependent Variables	Group	N	M	SD	df.	t-value	p-value
Implementation of the freshman program	HU	158	52.47	16.05	318	2.480	.014
	DDU	162	48.46	12.73			

Independent sample t-test results show that there is a statistical significance difference between the HU (M=52.47, SD= 16.05) and DDU (M=48.46, SD=12.73, t (318) = 2.480, p=0.014, 95% CI) students’ expectation on the implementation of

freshman program between universities. However, the actual difference in the mean scores between the universities were extremely small ($\eta^2 = .28$, which is around Cohen’s cut point for small effect size, .2).

Higher learning institutions have offered the best platforms and learning ecosystems to enrich students' character development. True education is to inculcate into the students' knowledge and behavioural values that are conducive to national development and to draw these potentialities that

enable them to become responsible citizens within the society. Regarding to the extent do students' expectations are fulfilled the implementation of freshman programs in the two selected universities, one of the freshman program directorates said that:

Majority of students joining our university have high expectation from their university education but we are living in third world country everything in our country was not going depend on the needs and interest of students. Because of placement exam and other competition, the students didn't get the department/field of the study they want to join. Not only this there is a problem with students' expectation, almost all students who score high or low-grade points they need to join medicine but this is not possible. Therefore, students' expectation in freshman program implementation in our university affected because of reality exist on the ground (DDUFPD1).

The students' major expectation of their university education is in line with the central purpose of the university which is to educate and to develop an individual as fully as possible. One of

freshman program associate directorate stated that:

Students' expectation has its own scale of measurements. As a freshman directorate we have no bench mark to measure students' expectation in our university but from what I observed day to day students have need and interest on some courses such as courses related to English language, critical thinking, life skills, general psychology, and social anthropology enhance students' expectation for future life (HUFPC2).

University education is expected to create 'all round' individuals with a range of sensibility and responsibility. The students joining university expected the university to assist them in developing

both their academic and social skills. Other respondents stated that:

We don't say every instructor and all students are equal. If the students are learned by competent instructor the student's future expectation from freshman program is high. Therefore, student expectation is somewhat depended on the commitments of program stakeholders. The big challenges affect student expectation is not during the freshman program implementation but after freshman program the time the students select field of study. Not all students get the field of study he/she expect. This is based on the students achievements/score during the freshman program. The university also consider in take capacity of all field of study. This may affect students' expectation (HUFPAD1).

Regarding to students' expectation in implementation of freshman program other respondents

said that:

In Ethiopia regarding student expectation freshman program gives good opportunities for many students who comes from rural area and low-income family. Many students join the university by scoring passing marks on the entrance exam and after they take the freshman program join medicine by scoring high marks on the freshman program. I think the freshman program 90% fulfilled students' expectations for their future life development (HUFPC1).

Regarding students' expectations in the implementation of the freshman program, other respondents said that our expectation from the university stays so minimal because of different factors.

4. Discussion

The effective implementation of freshman programs at universities is a critical period for easing the transition into college life. It enhances comfort in interactions among peers and faculty, fosters a better understanding of oneself and others, improves academic achievement, and increases degree attainment (Evensen, 2017). Findings from both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that the current practices of freshman program implementation at two selected universities fall within a medium range. This indicates that the programs at Haramaya and Dire Dawa universities are not fully effective. As these programs are relatively new, they face numerous challenges that hinder their implementation.

To enhance the success of freshman programs, universities should consider adopting new strategies, such as peer mentoring, academic support, career services, and experiential learning (Fishman, Ludgate, and Tutak, 2017). These initiatives can help create a supportive environment that promotes student success and well-being. However, it is essential to recognize that the effectiveness of these strategies may vary based on the university's culture and student demographics.

The implementation of freshman programs in higher education plays a vital role in helping students transition from high school to college, develop essential academic skills, and establish a foundation for future academic success (Clearinghouse, 2016). According to the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (2018), the freshman program was introduced with the intention of improving graduate competence and the quality of education. However, its current implementation is hampered by various challenges that must be addressed to achieve its intended goals.

The positive expectations of freshman students are crucial in explaining the success of first-year

students and positively influencing their future (Araujo et al., 2019). These expectations significantly impact the implementation of freshman programs. Kuh (2008) noted that freshman year experience programs are influential in enhancing student success and facilitating a smooth path to graduation. The findings indicate that the implementation of the freshman program moderately meets student expectations. This moderate fulfillment underscores the need for universities to carefully consider and address the individual needs and ambitions of their students when planning and executing these programs. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of fostering an environment that encourages not only academic improvement but also personal and social development, democratic principles, citizenship, socialization, and career advancement.

To capture students' expectations regarding the freshman program, four sub-variables were utilized: expectations for personal and social development, democratic quality and sense of citizenship, socialization and interaction, and future life/career development. This comprehensive framework reflects various elements of student expectations. Supporting this, Bucurean (2018) noted that the expectations of first-year students can significantly influence their behavior and approach to forming connections with others.

The study findings revealed that most first-year students entering the university have expectations. However, fulfilling these expectations requires meeting certain criteria, which only some students can achieve. In the two selected universities, quotas are set for all fields of study, potentially impacting students' expectations concerning the freshman program's implementation. Baik et al. (2015) found that 89% of first-year students understood their reasons for attending university, and 67% were eager to be there. These results indicate that students highly value both intrinsic and utilitarian aspects of university education; failure to provide expected levels of learning assistance can lead to dissatisfaction.

Correlation analysis revealed strong and moderate relationships among students' expectations across all subscales (EPD, EDC, ESI, and EFL) regarding the freshman program's implementation. This suggests a clear interdependence among these expectation subscales. Furthermore, independent sample t-test results indicated a difference in expectations between students at Haramaya University (HU) and Dire Dawa University (DDU) regarding the implementation of the freshman program. However, the actual difference in mean scores between the two universities was minimal ($\eta^2 = .28$), indicating a small effect size (Cohen's cut point of .2).

It is important to note the contrasting perspective presented by Kandinko and Mawer (2013), who argue that universities should provide opportunities for students to become independent and enjoy their experiences, indicating that students may have conflicting views on this matter.

5. Conclusions and Implications

The study found that the existing implementation status of the freshmen program at Haramaya and Dire Dawa universities was moderate and affected by a variety of challenges. There were gaps in the current implementation status of the freshmen program between the two universities but with a small effect size. University education is expected to create 'all-round' individuals with a range of sensibility and responsibility. The finding of the study indicated that the freshman program implementation moderately fulfilled student's expectations. Hence, we conclude that the students entering university have moderately fulfilled their expectations from the freshman program implementation. Furthermore, the implementation of the freshmen programs moderately met students' expectations, with variances in students' expectations across the two universities also observed, but with a small effect size. Overall, the practice of freshmen programs and students' expectations in the programs were reasonable in the two selected universities.

The findings of this research have implications

for both universities and the wider educational community. There are clearly concerns hindering the implementation of the freshman program, and proactive actions are required to overcome these challenges. To improve the implementation of programs, universities can consider providing enough resources, enhancing classroom management systems, and providing training for both students and instructors. Furthermore, the disparities in student expectations between the two universities show the necessity for tailored approaches to satisfy the unique needs of each institution's students. By addressing these challenges and matching the curriculum with students' expectations, universities can better assist first-year students' successful transition and academic achievement, thus contributing to Ethiopia's overall educational quality. It is advisable for researchers to examine the underexplored aspects of the freshman program, including the appropriateness of the freshman curriculum for student development, the teaching-learning schedule of the freshman program, and the practice of freshman students' field or department selections.

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Conflict of Interest

We hereby declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this research. All sources utilized in this study have been accurately cited and acknowledged in the text. The researchers accept

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