



Wisdom at the Source of the Blue Nile

A Brief History of Bahir Dar University

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Bhair Dar

A Brief History of the Polytechnic Institute

This is a brief history of two academic institutes whose merger led to the birth of Bahir Dar University. It was prepared on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the former Polytechnic Institute. The Institute was the result of a bilateral agreement between Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union. In the summer of 1959, Emperor Haile Sillase paid an official visit to Moscow and held discussion with the Soviet premier, Nikita Khrushchev. The visit was attended by the signing of an agreement between the two leaders. By that agreement, the Soviet government pledged to give Ethiopia economic and technical aid. As a gift to the Ethiopian government, the Soviets also decided to build a special technical school. Thanks to the Soviet support, the emperor laid the corner stone for the foundation of a technical school in Bahir Dar on 30 December 1961.

The construction of classrooms, offices, dormitories (with 400 beds), a library, and a multi-purpose auditorium was completed in a matter of 18 months. On 11 June 1963, the emperor came back to Bahir Dar to inaugurate the Bahir Dar Technical High School. Because of the heavy soviet involvement in construction and training activities, the technical school was sometimes known as the “Moscov School” by the local people.



Emperor Haile Sillase inaugurating the Technical School on 11 June 1963.

Initially, it was planned to admit best students who had successfully passed the eighth grade national examination with flying colours all over the county and train them for four years in five fields of study: Agro-Mechanics, Electrical Technology, Industrial Chemistry, Textile

Technology and Wood Technology. Accordingly, 232 students were admitted for a four year training program. Possibly because of the gender bias of the time, all trainees were solely male students. It was highly unfortunate that female students were prevented from joining the school in the first five years.

When training commenced in September 1963, there were 10 Ethiopian and 14 Russian instructors to teach major area courses. In addition, 12 Ethiopian and 2 Indian teachers were employed to offer general academic subjects like Amharic, English, Mathematics, Physics and History. Soon after the beginning of classes, it became abundantly clear that the courses offered were too advanced for students who had just completed their junior secondary education. Not surprisingly, that resulted in high attrition rate. Among the 232 trainees, 65 students (about 28%) were academically dismissed from the school at the end of the first academic year. Of the remaining 167 students, 50 were promoted with probation.

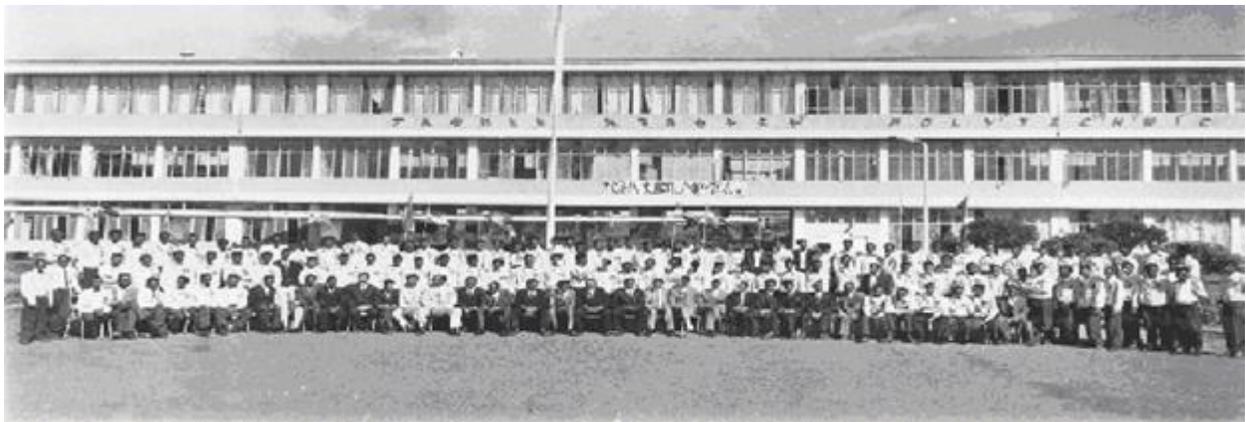
By way of redressing this serious problem, the school conducted an urgent study and revised its admission policy. It soon decided to admit students who successfully completed their tenth grade with high scores in English, Chemistry, Mathematics, and Physics. For further screening, the school prepared an entrance examination. In September 1964, the school thus admitted a second batch of 351 students who completed their tenth grade and passed the entrance examination. At the same time, the Technical High School was renamed the Polytechnic Institute (PTI).

Though significantly reduced, there was still considerable attrition rate among the second batch of students. Of the 351 students, 54 (15.38%) failed to promote to the second year. Those who completed the first year general education courses were required to choose their field of specialization. The remaining three years were devoted to intensive specialized training in the five fields of study. In September 1966, the Institute launched Metal Technology as the sixth field of study.



The first building of the Institute

On 1 July 1967, a colorful ceremony was held to mark the graduation of the first batch of 151 technologists.



The first graduates of the Institute, (1 July 1967)

Soon after this historic ceremony, the Institute undertook a thorough curriculum revision and decided to phase out the four year training program. A two year college level training program was designed and launched in September 1968. Then, the Institute sent invigilators to all high schools throughout the country to administer an entrance examination to select interested applicants from among those who passed the Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination

(ESLCE). By September 1968, 585 students who passed the entrance examination were admitted to the Institute. Until June 1972, however, the two training programs were run in parallel until students admitted for the four year program complete their studies.

On 15 August 1970, Emperor Haile Sillase was back in Bahir Dar for the third time. The 1970 graduates were fortunate to receive their diplomas from the hands of the emperor. In the commencement speech he delivered on the occasion, the Emperor underlined the need for continued Soviet support to run the Institute, the heavy responsibility of the graduates to play a leading role in the country's development. One would think that the Emperor entrusted the graduates to play a key role to emulate the Japanese type of development, when he remarked:

The dramatic and admirable progress which Japan has been able to achieve in less than three decades, especially, after World War II enabled her to be among the ranks of the leading industrial nations of the world. There is a lot that we in Ethiopia can learn and adapt from the Japanese experience in this regard. This is why we have given great importance to our recent visit to Japan... If we in Ethiopia are set in the right direction, the question of accelerated development will no doubt be self-generating. ... It is, therefore, essential that you the graduating class should in your future assignments think and work more for the benefit of your country and people than for your individual interests. Because of the importance we attach to this institute, we always watch your progress closely and with keen interest. We often come to this place not only to award diploma but also to remind you of the heavy responsibilities and obligations that await you.

Although the Emperor stressed the responsibilities that graduates should shoulder, he did not mention the problem of their employability. One serious and persistent challenge that the Polytechnic trainees confronted in the wake of their graduation was the dreadful problem of unemployment. Following the graduation of the first batch, it became evident that the job market could not absorb all the technologists trained by the Institute. As a result, many of the Polytechnic graduates were forced to seek jobs in areas unrelated to their field of specialization. A significant number of them ended up in the teaching profession in junior and senior high schools.

In an attempt to alleviate the problem, the Institute took several concrete measures. One such measure was an aggressive campaign to create awareness among potential government and private employers. Once the Institute identified as many potential employers as possible, it

dispatched letters announcing the graduation of technologists in six fields of specialization. These letters carried graduate profiles of all the training programs. The identified employers included sugar, cement, cotton and textile factories, breweries as well as government and private business and industrial firms.

This aggressive correspondence was followed in 1970 and 1971 by personal visits to those possible employers. During such visits, the Institute's administration attempted to find out not only the training needs of the potential employers but also their evaluation of the Polytechnic graduates if they had already employed some of them.

Industrial establishments like the Bahir Dar Textile Mills, the Wonji and Metehara Sugar Factories, the Cotton Company of Ethiopia, the Indo-Ethiopian Textiles Share Company and the Sheba Ethiopian Tej Sahre Company responded positively. They expressed their readiness to employ agro-mechanics, electrical technologists and industrial chemists. At the same time, a considerable number of factories kept on turning their deaf ear to the Institute's call and made it clear that they had no vacancies whatsoever for the Polytechnic graduates.

Although some of the technologists were employed by those companies and factories mentioned above, a larger proportion of the graduates were still either unemployed or had to do other jobs unrelated to their training.

The problem of unemployment continued to haunt not only the graduates but also those who were still undergoing training. Mainly due to unemployment related problems, it could be said the Institute witnessed lots of ups and downs in its initial years. Having anticipated a similar unemployment fate like their predecessors, students boycotted classes and put forward a number of demands to the Institute's administration. Among other things, they asked for a change in the nomenclature of their diploma, granting of scholarship, issuance of visas to work outside Ethiopia, the allocation of additional budget for food and introduction of improved menu and the lifting of fasting food during the Lent.

In an attempt to placate student protest, the Institute decided in its meeting held on 26 November 1971, to make changes in the nomenclature. Accordingly, it declared that the diploma to be awarded to graduates was equivalent to junior college education.

The decision, however, failed to mollify the protest from students. In December 1971, they sent a petition to the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts. In their petition, they urged the Ministry to take urgent measures to solve the problem of unemployment. Lack of satisfactory response from the Ministry ignited a more aggressive protest. Students tried to take the Institute's administration into their hands. On 23 January 1972, they sealed off all offices and closed entrance and exit gates.

The problem was so serious that the Institute requested assistance from the Bahir Dar Awrajjja Administration and the local police force. The latter in turn reported the case to Lt. General Yilma Shibeshi, Commander of the Ethiopian Police Force as well as the ministers of Interior and Education.

In collaboration with the local police force, the Institute identified 36 ringleaders and militants and sent them to Debre Markos for military punishment. Then *Fitawrari* Kebede Desta, Governor of Bahir Dar Awrajjja, gathered the remaining students in the auditorium. He told students to stop their unlawful activities and resume their training. But most students wouldn't give in. Instead, they insisted that they would continue to boycott classes unless the punishment against the 36 students was lifted. That was rejected by the Institute and the meeting ended without any agreement. Of the 220 students, 187 of them remained defiant and they were forced to leave the campus. Only 33 students agreed to resume their training. However, the training program was disturbed once again by those 36 students who returned from Debre Markos after a one month military punishment. Soon after their arrival, they realized that 187 students had already left the campus. Out of the 36 returnees, 25 students petitioned the Institute to give them money for their trip to Addis Ababa. They expressed their determination to ask for the emperor's pardon to bring back all the 187 students. Once again, the Institute rejected their demands. Then they boycotted classes and left the campus. It was only in 1974 that training programs returned to normality.

Student Enrollment (1963 – 1971)

Academic Year	No of Sections	Promoted	Failed	Total
1956 E.C (1963/64)	8	171	61	232
1957 E.C (1964/65)	15	297	54	351
1958 E.C (1965/66)	18	411	25	436
1959 E.C (1966/67)	26	605	11	616
1960 E.C (1967/68)	25	597	22	619
1961 E.C (1968/69)	27	516	9	525
1962 E.C (1969/70)	24	441	20	461
1963 E.C (1970/71)	22	308	5	313

Graduates of the Institute (1967 – 1971)

Academic Year	No of Graduates
1967	151
1968	121
1969	135
1970	182
1971	151
1972	30
Total	770

The other problem was the shortage of qualified Ethiopian instructors. In order to solve the problem, the Institute began to employ graduates with outstanding results as technical assistants and instructors. After a one year experience, the employees were granted scholarship by the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts to pursue their studies mainly in the United States.

Following the outbreak of the Ethiopian Revolution in 1974, more scholarship opportunities were available for the academic staff because of Ethiopia's ideological alignment with the Eastern Bloc communist states. As a result, many instructors left for the former Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Yugoslavia, Rumania, Poland, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia to pursue their studies. Between 1979 and 1988, 60 instructors were sent to various Eastern Bloc countries for further studies. Of these, 7 instructors left for PhD, 49 for MSc and 4 for BSc studies.

On the other hand, ideological solidarity helped the Institute to attract more instructors from the Soviet Union. During the 1986/87 academic year, for instance, there were 31 Ethiopian and 19 Russian instructors.

It was also after 1974 that the Institute began to admit a significant number of female students. Between 1979 and 1985, two more administrative and curriculum changes were made. In 1979, the Ministry of Education handed over the administration of the Polytechnic Institute to the Commission for Higher Education. Six years later, the Institute raised its training program to three years and began to award advanced diploma to its graduates.

In its glorious past, the Institute has produced best minds who won international fame. Some of the high profile graduates of the Institute include the late Qitaw Ejigu, a former chief engineer and scientist at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the United States, Ato Daniel Mebratu, owner and manager of Dan Technocrat, Ato Seyoum Mesfin, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and the current Ethiopian ambassador to China, Ato Birhanu Mewa, former president of the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce, Engineer Gizachew Shiferaw, assistant professor at the Addis Ababa Institute of Technology.

The Institute had also able directors and deans who contributed a lot to its success. Below is a partial list of the deans and directors who led the Institute between 1963 and 1989.

Directors and Deans of the Polytechnic Institute

No	Name	Term of Office
1.	Dr. Bekri Abdullahi	1963 - January 1964
2.	Ato Yifru Gebeyehu	January 1964 - 1965
3.	Ato Million Belete	1966 - 1968
4.	Ato Sileshi Mulatu	1968 - 1969
5.	Ato Beyene Bekele	1970 – 1974
6.	Ato Tibebu Kidane	May 1974 – December 1974
7.	Ato Tesfaye Bahru	1975 – 1978
8.	Ato Shibabaw Belay	1978 – 1984

9.	Ato Befekadu Mesfin	1985 – 1986
10.	Ato Gebeyehu Ayalew	1986 - 1989

Finally, it is worth acknowledging the Institute's contribution to the country's development in general and the growth of Bahir Dar in particular. The graceful offices and classrooms of the Polytechnic Institute were the first multi-storied buildings in Bahir Dar. The establishment of the Institute gave warmth and life to the growing resort city.

On the other hand, some outstanding students of the Institute were able to invent extraordinary products like a pedal drive boat, a vehicle and a small train.

A Brief History of the Academy of Pedagogy

A decade after the establishment of Haile Sellase I University, the Imperial Government of Ethiopia signed an agreement with the United National Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to set up another higher education institution. To that end, two experts from the University of London came to Ethiopia and conducted a feasibility study. In their report submitted to the Ethiopian government, UNDP and UNESCO, they suggested the establishment of a college known as Academy of Pedagogy in Bahir Dar. That came into effect in 1972 with the foundation of the Academy at the cost of 5.5 million Birr. At the time of its establishment, the Academy was planned to be the best model higher education institution in the field of Pedagogy for the whole African continent

The study also outlined the contents and objectives of the training program. According to the study, the Academy was intended to train:

- Teacher educators for Teachers Training Institutes;
- Supervisors of teachers in primary schools;
- Organizers of in-service education for primary school teachers;
- Community development officers, and
- Organizers of adult education.

In an attempt to offer a more practical-oriented training program, the original study recommended the establishment of a Teacher Training Institute (TTI) and a model primary school in the same campus. According to the study, students were supposed to reside in campus during their first, third and fourth years. But throughout the second year they would be attached to TTIs and Community Development offices. During the first half of the year of attachment, students were required to teach at the TTIs. The remaining time was to be devoted for community development activities like studying the history and geography of the local area, getting acquainted with customs and traditions of the community, surveying agro-industrial activities, public health projects and conducting environmental studies. The data to be collected

during the year of attachment would be used as a guide to prepare new curricula that may take into account Ethiopia's rural economy.

The Academy was intended to pass through three stages: preliminary, initiation and Ethiopianization. The preliminary stage included the inauguration of the Academy, the appointment of a principal and a chief technical advisor and the training of Ethiopians. During the initiation phase, an external evaluation of the training program would be carried out following the development of courses and the graduation of the first batch. In the third stage, Ethiopianization of the institution would be effected through the systematic replacement of expatriates by Ethiopian professionals.

The Academy of Pedagogy was placed under the then Ministry of Education and Fine Arts. In 1972, the ministry appointed Ato Matewos Gessese, as the first national director of the Academy of Pedagogy whose title was soon changed to principal. Soon afterwards, the Academy in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts set the criteria for admission. Accordingly, trainees were expected to be primary school teachers and directors with teaching experience of three years. In addition, they had to sit for an entrance examination and show up for interviews. The entrance exam and the interview were set in order to assess their language command, evaluate their professional competence and their capacity for leadership.

The Academy was empowered to recruit 100 trainees each year from all the 14 administrative regions. Among primary school teachers and directors, 98 and 100 trainees were selected through entrance exam and interviews for the first and second batches respectively. Later on, the Academy began to admit high school graduates with a GPA of 2.00 in the Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination starting from the 1976/77 academic year. However, the Academy was forced to suspend its training program as a result of the National Development through Cooperation Campaign which required all high school and college students as well as their teachers to go to the countryside to teach peasants about the new socialist ideology. But before the *Zemetcha* was launched, the Academy screened the first two entries from Addis Ababa and the 14 administrative regions. The table below shows the first three batches of students selected from all the administrative regions between 1973/74 and 1976/77 academic years.

Number of Selected Trainees

No.	Administrative Region	1966 E.C (1973/74)	1967 E.C (1974/75)	1968 E.C (1975/76)	1969 E.C (1976/77)	Total
1.	Addis Ababa	5	5	-	6	16
2.	Arsi	1	2	-	5	8
3.	Bale	1	4	-	5	10
4.	Begemidie & Semen	6	8	-	8	22
5.	Eritrea	4	6	-	5	15
6.	Gamo Gofa	2	2	-	4	8
7.	Gojjam	7	5	-	6	18
8.	Hararge	3	7	-	12	22
9.	Illibabor	-	1	-	2	3
10.	Kafa	11	8	-	6	25
11.	Shewa	20	17	-	12	49
12.	Sidamo	6	4	-	6	16
13.	Tigray	15	14	-	4	33
14.	Wollega	8	7	-	10	25
15.	Wollo	9	10	-	10	29
Total		98	100	-	103	301

Source: BDU Archives, File No. 1/4/1, Academy of Pedagogy Principal to all administrative regions, 04/01/1966 E.C.

Among the 98 trainees selected for the first entry, 94 students managed to register for the first year courses. Out of these only 2 were female students. Since construction was still underway, students and instructors were temporarily housed at the Polytechnic Institute throughout the 1973/74 academic year. Then in September 1974, they were transferred to the new campus. Classes went smoothly in the first three months. However, problems began to crop up following

the declaration of the Development through Cooperation Campaign by the new military government in December 1974. Of the 100 trainees screened for the second batch, only 83 showed up for registration and only five were female. In the same academic year (i.e., 1974/75), the TTI which was supposed to accommodate 550 trainees every year, admitted only 177 students for the first time. Soon afterwards, however, the *Zemecha* disrupted all training programs and that lasted for two academic years.

As the national campaign came to a close in the summer of 1976, the Academy began preparations to readmit those students who had already been registered before the *Zemecha*. Out of the 83 and 94 first and second year students only 67 and 18 students came back to resume their training respectively. Within a matter of a few days, the number of first year students declined to 58. Five students are reported to have disappeared without a trace and four others withdrew. As disappearance of students continued, the Academy reported the serious problem it faced to the Gojjam administrative region public security department. In another letter to the Ministry of Education, the Academy stressed that the training of 18 second year students was just a wastage of financial and human resources.

One may ask as to why students were unusually disappearing and withdrawing from campus in the beginning of the 1976/77 academic year. Several factors can be pointed out for the decline of interest among students to pursue their education. Primarily, the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Party (EPRP) was not only opposing the Derg' *Zemecha* program but also agitating its members and supporters to suspend their education and join the struggle against the military government. One of its favourite slogans was "Education after Revolution!" Secondly, once the EPRP began urban terrorism against the military government, its members were afraid of the Derg's retaliatory measures. As a result, they went into hiding before the "Red Terror" which engulfed the Academy. Finally, the government had already announced scholarship opportunities offered by the Easter Bloc Communist states for high school graduates. For many students, it was much better to pursue their studies abroad and stay away from home during those violent years of the revolution. Interestingly, the Academy would write letter of support for students who withdrew officially in order to apply for scholarship in Communist countries.

On the other hand, the 18 second year students were resolute to pursue their education at the Academy and they expressed their firm determination in a letter to the Academy's

administration. Then they organized themselves as “Fighting Comrades of the Revolution” and opened their office within the Academy’s premises. They almost took over the Academy’s administration and began to act as full time cadres of the military government. They turned the auditorium’s basement into detention room where suspected EPRP members and other opponents were kept for interrogation. They became so powerful that they forced the college community to attend a general meeting at the auditorium that lasted until midnight to expose EPRP members.



The auditorium, one of the first buildings of the Academy

On another occasion, they forced instructors of the Academy and the TTI as well as other staff members to put their bicycles at their disposal. They tried to justify that they needed as many bicycles as possible for revolutionary activities. At other times, they used their self-declared political power to for arm-twisting purposes. They, for instance, forced some instructors to change all the grades to “A”s. As they took more academic, political and administrative affairs into their hands, the College’s administration was very much confused and frustrated. For some time, the students continued to terrorize the college community. Sometime later, however, the then principal of the Academy, Ato Ayele Meshesha (later Dr), put an end to the domination of

the college community by student cadres. In a general meeting he convened for this purpose, he boldly told the cadres that they had no place in the Academy's administration. His speech was welcomed with a rapturous applause.

Although the Academy managed to overcome political problems, it still faced other daunting difficulties. One of the main problems was the fact that the qualification of the academic staff was not up to the required standard. In other words, the great majority of the Academy's instructors were BA or BSc holders. Mainly because of the critical shortage of MA/MSc and PhD holders, the bachelors were assigned to teach courses from second to fourth year. Still worse, the expatriates who came from Communist states like Cuba and the German Democratic Republic had no experience of teaching at the university level and had serious language problems. For instance, of the nine Cuban instructors, only three could teach in English. The other six instructors were teaching in Spanish and the whole lecture had to be translated into English. To the Academy's dismay, all the Cuban instructors had been high school teachers.

In addition, the Academy had no charter or legislation of its own for several years. As a result, it lost its sense of direction. As early as 1974/75, students were able to appreciate this serious problem and lamented in their resolution: "Our regret has no bounds when we discovered that the Academy has no legislation of its own and does not know where it is heading."

The existence of three separate institutions in a single campus was another source of administrative problem. In addition to the Academy and the TTI, a junior science collage was also established in the same campus in 1978 with its own dean. However, in January 1979, the three institutions were brought under the administration of the then Dean of the Academy, Ato Abraham Hussen. Even then, the three institutions continued to run training programs without legislation or a charter.

Then in January 1980, the Academy was brought under Addis Ababa University together with the TTI and the Junior Science College. The Academy was subsequently renamed "Bahir Dar Teachers College" in November 1980.

Despite this restructuring, the College came under strong pressure from its graduates to revise its curriculum. The first curriculum revision was made in the summer of 1976. Accordingly, trainees were to take Pedagogy as their major and choose one of the four fields of study (i.e.,

Amharic English, Geography and Mathematics) as their minor. But that did not solve the problem in the job market. Only a small number of graduates could work in their major area of specialization and be absorbed by the TTIs. A great majority of the graduates were forced to teach in their minor areas. They complained that they lacked self-confidence to teach in secondary schools in their minor areas. For instance, of the 347 graduates, only 51 of them were working in their major areas of training. The problem was solved by revising the minor area courses to be taken as composite major. In other words, graduates would be able to specialize in two major areas and may teach in one of the two major areas. This was made possible through the relentless efforts of Dr. Demisse Manahlot, the then Dean of Bahr Dar Teachers College.

Dr. Demisse also wrote several letters to Dr. Duri Mohammed, the then President of Addis Ababa University to solve another serious problem. According to the original training objectives set by the Ministry of Education, the TTI in Bahir Dar had to admit 550 students every year. By 1980, the maximum accommodation capacity of Bahir Dar Teachers College was 950 students. If the TTI was to admit 550 students each year, they would claim more than 50 percent of all the dormitories and other facilities. In that case the college could not admit more than 400 students for other diploma and degree programs. Dr. Demisse suggested three options to solve the problem: to transfer the TTI trainees to Gondar; to reduce their number to 200; or to admit high school graduates from Bahir Dar, train them for a year in the evening program and employ them as primary school teachers. To the satisfaction of Dr. Demisse, the TTI students were transferred to Gondar and Nazareth in 1984.

Dr. Demisse was also instrumental in solving the chronic shortage of text books and reference materials. Thanks to his persistent efforts, the library secured 2,160 books worth \$75,000 USD from UNDP. In addition, the library received many books from various embassies and private agencies.

It is now 40 years since the foundation of the Academy of Pedagogy. Like that of the Polytechnic Institute, the Academy has also produced high profile graduates like Dr. Tsehay Jemberu, a former President of Bahir Dar University, Dr. Ababayehu Aemero, a tenured professor at the George Washington University, and Professor Yalew Endawoke, the former Academic Vice President of BDU and the current President of Woldiya University.

Academic Staff Profile

Academic Year	Diploma	BA/BSc	MA/MSc	PhD	Total	Expatriates	G.Total
1966 (1973/74)	4	10	7	-	21	11	32
1967 (1974/75)	4	10	7	-	21	13	34
1968 (1975/76)	4	10	9	-	23	-	23
1969 (1976/77)	4	7	11	-	22	4	26
1970 (1977/78)	2	13	11	-	26	-	26
1971 (1978/79)	3	25	10	1	39	-	39
1972 (1979/80)	3	25	11	1	40	16	56
1973 (1980/81)	2	31	9	1	43	10	53
1974 (1981/82)	1	25	6	1	33	1	34
1975 (1982/83)	2	24	5	1	32	7	39
1976 (1983/84)	2	38	8	1	49	11	60
1977 (1984/85)	10	43	9	1	63	8	71

Student Enrollment (Excluding the TTI)

Academic Year	Diploma			Degree					G. Total
	1 st Year	2 nd Year	Total	1 st Year	2 nd year	3 rd Year	4 th Year	Total	
1966 (1973/74)	-	-	-	94	-	-	-	94	94
1967 (1974/75)	-	-	-	83	94	-	-	177	177
1968 (1975/76)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1969 (1976/77)	-	-	-	58	18	-	-	76	
1970 (1977/78)	120	-	120	94	47	-	18	159	279
1971 (1978/79)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	301	301
1972 (1979/80)	67	252	319	91	130	89	47	357	676
1973 (1980/81)	72	58	130	44	80	125	NA	249	379
1974 (1981/82)	87	55	142	40	40	70	124	274	416
1975 (1982/83)	93	76	169	70	35	31	71	207	376
1976 (1983/84)	131	83	214	32	62	33	33	160	374
1977 (1984/85)	319	234	753	82	33	56	34	205	958

The Birth of Bahir Dar University

Prior to the establishment of Bahir Dar University, the Polytechnic Institute and the Bahir Dar Teachers College upgraded all their diploma programs to a degree level in 1996. Then in May, 2000, the two colleges were united to form Bahir Dar University. While the former Polytechnic Institute became the Engineering Faculty, the Bahir Dar Teachers College was renamed the Faculty of Education. In less than a decade, new schools, faculties and colleges came into existence. At the Engineering Faculty, all departments were raised to school levels in 2010. Then, a year later, they evolved into two technology institutes.

The main campus also witnessed the emergence of new faculties and colleges. In the meantime, student enrollment jumped to over 45,000 in all the regular, continuing and distance education programs. By 2010, therefore, BDU was the leading university in the country in terms of student enrollment followed by Addis Ababa and Jimma universities. Likewise, the budget for the construction of new campuses skyrocketed to 1.3 billion Birr in 2010/11. Even though BDU is just 13 years old, it currently runs 65 undergraduate and 67 postgraduate programs, a commendable and prideful achievement by any standard! In addition, the University has 1,420 academic and 3,154 administrative staff members. In terms of research, BDU is making big strides towards backing one of the leading research universities in Africa in 2025. So far, it has established 11 research centers.

At present there are two academies, one school, three institutes, three faculties and four colleges. These are:

- Maritime Academy
- Sports Academy
- School of Law
- Institute of Land Administration
- Institute of Technology (IoT)
- Institute of Technology for Textile, Garment and Fashion Design (IoTex)
- Faculty of Humanities,
- Faculty of Education and Behavioural Science
- Faculty of Social Science

- College of Agriculture and Environmental Science
- College of Business and Economics
- College of Medical and Health Science
- College of Science