

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Place of diversity in the current Ethiopian education and training policy: Analysis of Cardinal dimensions

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**The purpose of this paper was to investigate to what extent the diversity dimensions are addressed in the current Education and Training Policy. To that end, document analysis was employed. The major diversity dimensions were analyzed based on their cardinal features. The study demonstrated that there is an ambitious need to address issues of diversity into the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy. Nevertheless, there are missing dimensions in the document. Moreover, the specific elements of the dimensions are not exhaustively treated. Implications which are believed to advance fair representation of different groups based on the identified dimensions are indicated in the article.**

**Key words:** Document analysis, diversity, education and training policy, diversity dimensions.

## INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is said to be one of the oldest nation in the world with rich mosaic composition of society. However, different writers claim there are challenges related with amalgamation of diversified groups. According to Semela (2012), for instance, the reality in the country demands the adoption of democracy and the acknowledgement of both individual and group identity. He further calls for more intercultural understanding and respect for people with different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. Wagaw (1981) similarly explicated how the amalgamation of the different interests, expectations and ambitions of the various diversified groups determine both the immediate and long-term stability of the country. Ethiopia, as a country in which more than 80 ethno-cultural as well as linguistic groups (Semela, 2014) live, it

is important to formulate policies to address diversity at all levels of education to make accessible to its citizen in a fair way. This is because of the fact that education especially in the 21st century underpins the assumption that goes beyond discipline based information transfer (Masemann, 2007).

To put into effect such ideals, one would expect formulating education policy that entertains diversity as an important preliminary step. One fairly common justification for addressing diversity in policy document emanates out of a recognition that the diversity of a population and the rates of cross-cultural interaction, both in local and across the globe is increasing dramatically. It could be argued, therefore, that the education and training policy is expected to be responsive to diversity.

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This espouses that texts are not only signify how reality is constructed but also influence the creation of knowledge that society has accepted as legitimate and truthful (Apple and Christian-Smith, 1991).

When the current government came to power in 1991, reconfigured the country into different states based on ethnic dimension of diversity (Semela, 2014). In association with state formation, new constitution was also promulgated in 1995. It enshrines diversity issues as “the government shall have the duty to support, on the basis of equality, the growth and enrichment of cultures and traditions that are compatible with fundamental rights, human dignity, democratic norms and ideals, and the provisions of the constitution” (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia-hereafter FDRE, 1995, Article 91). In addition, the same constitution underscores “education shall be provided in a manner that is free from any religious influence, political partisanship or cultural prejudices” (Article 90). Similarly, the Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia pinpoints “... to provide education that promotes democratic culture, tolerance and peaceful resolutions of differences that raises the sense of discharging societal responsibility” (FDRE, 1994, p. 10).

This implies that the policy developed for the country is expected to address the diverse needs and nature of the Ethiopian society in addition to entertaining core international issues. This, in turn, is expected to contribute to the efforts being made by the government to ensure sustainable development in the country (Egne, 2010). Nonetheless, researches conducted on diversity practices (Hussein, 2008; Kenea, 2010) show that the Ethiopian education system is not sensitive to the diverse nature of the country. In this study, however, the intention is to scrutinize the provisions of diversity issues in the current Ethiopian Education and Training policy. The close investigation of the matter would help to know whether diversity is exhaustively addressed in the policy document as promulgated in the constitution. In short, the article attempts to answer the following basic question: How do major diversity dimensions addressed in the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy?

## **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF MAJOR DIVERSITY ISSUES IN ETHIOPIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM**

To understand the current education system, it would be meaningful to demonstrate the historical overview of the policies. Accordingly, the education policies of three regimes are presented below consecutively. According to Negash (2006), Ethiopia has experienced three systems of political governance, each distinguished by its education policy since 1940s. The first system of governance was the Imperial system that started soon after WWII and lasted until 1974; the second was the military/socialist system that lasted until 1991. The third

and current federal system of governance became fully operational after 1994. The major features of the triple governments adumbrated separately as follows.

### **Imperial period (1941–1974)**

This regime had run the education system of the country for more than three decades. Like other sectors, education system during this time was characterized by the centrality as a vehicle of progress. Though there are arguments, it is said to be civilization that inspired his majesty to give due concern for education. He heavily employed education as a means of coercive assimilation to create Amharanized central government (Kebede, 2006). As the last emperor of Solomonic dynasty, he made Amharic as medium of instruction in Primary school (1-3 grade) and the sole Ethiopian language after he came from exile which marked the huge expansion of education in privileged provinces (Wagaw, 1979). Bandyopadhyay and Green (2008:6) superbly put the emperor's real interest towards homogenisation based on linguistic and religious dimensions as:

*Perhaps the best example of a regime that promoted religious and linguistic homogenization was Haile Selassie's of Ethiopia, where Amharic became the sole language of primary education in 1943 and literature was banned in all other languages. In a particularly clever move Selassie also required missionaries to use Amharic: since they were already predominately located among non-Amharic speaker they thus became the “work horses of Selassie's national integration project.*

The above quotation depicts how brutal the regime was in suppressing not only the use of vernacular languages in the formal education system but also the literature produced in other nationality languages. Moreover, missionaries were also forced to use Amharic to preach the mass, in most cases, who were unable to speak Amharic in many parts of the country where they were sent to teach. With regard to education, the official and state religion was orthodox Christianity. Other denominations of Christianity were instrumental in the assimilation process as they were using Amharic as medium of formal communication. Followers of other religions were not allowed to exercise any sort of religious practices.

Alemseged (2004)'s statement espouses the aforementioned narrations in the sense that the system was meant to facilitate the assimilation process at the expense of quality of education. The influence of Amharic was not limited to local languages only; it jostled English as medium of instruction in primary education and junior high school throughout the country during the early 1960s. Above all, as the writer explicated, beyond the use of language education, teaching of selective history

which applauded only the dominant group was a good example of assimilation policy of nation building during imperial Ethiopia.

### **Dergue period (1974-1991)**

As the government of socialist ideology, Dergue's policy was not serious about making language, religion and other dimensions of diversity top concern of that time. However, in the name of unity, it maintained Amharic as the official language of all sorts of formal communication. In fact it did not seem affiliated with one ethnic, linguistic or religious group. The fundamental aim of education, as expressed by the Ethiopian government in the early 1980s, was to cultivate Marxist-Leninist ideology in the young generation, to develop knowledge in science and technology, and to integrate and coordinate research with production so as to enable the revolution to move forward and secure productive citizens (Negash, 2006). This broad objective was later summarized into three slogans, namely, "Education for production, for scientific research, and for political consciousness." Some specific aims of this educational system were:

1. Eradicating illiteracy through the provision of universal education to the public masses.
2. Providing schooling to help citizens develop their consciousness, participating in class struggle, and using the principles of Marxism and Leninism.
3. Enabling students to acquire and own progressive cultures so that they abide by the principles of socialist morality and discipline.
4. Providing education that would enhance scientific research and practice so that students would be able to integrate theory with practice, know their environment, and the society in which they live.
5. Providing education that liberates the society from primitive systems of production by producing manpower trained in various professional disciplines.

The imperial assimilation policy was replaced by a new version of "Ethiopia Tikdom"-literally means "Ethiopia first" slogan. As a result, practically, it was during this period that Amharic as a sole of medium of instruction gained much privilege. There was no state religion unlike the previous regime. Moreover, the recognition and practice of other diversity dimensions such as ethnicity, gender, age and economic status were very minimal.

### **Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) Government-1991-current**

The education system of the current government is quite different from the previous two regimes at least in two major ways: the first one is that its formation is based on

one of the major dimension of diversity-ethnicity/Ethnic federalism. Therefore, the purpose from the very beginning was to recognize and provide full right all citizens in this regard. The other fundamental difference is that diversity is a superstructure for unity unlike the previous regimes taking diversity as a threat to national unity. The assimilation approach of previous governments in the nation building process only led to armed struggles by ethno-nationalist movements and eventually EPRDF came to power in 1991. Thus, it became clear that the Ethiopian unity was only rest on the acknowledgement and recognition of the existing differences. Strongly believing this, FDRE constitution was ratified in 1995 fully granting the right to self-determination up to secession. Astonishingly, Article 39 of the FDRE constitution states:

1. Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession.
2. Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history.
3. Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to a full measure of self-government which includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits and to equitable representation in state and Federal governments.

### **The basic concept of diversity and its dimensions**

The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies (Cengiz, 2009). Therefore, diversity is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.

Diversity as a value entails the notion of an inclusive society, with a vision of providing all citizens irrespective of major social and economic differences and structural discriminations based on ethnicity, class, gender, religion, disability, and etc. These are common problems that should be counteracted with working national policies and constitute a major concern for Ethiopia. This study, therefore, is based on the assumption that diversity education requires reforming the structural, procedural, substantive, and evaluative tenets of the educational enterprise to reflect the social, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic pluralism of a given society (Gay, 1995).

The investigation is designed in terms of the comprehensive understanding of diversity education involving approaches that promote the understanding of the diversified groups' identity embedded in their cultures, histories, values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours to shift from ethnocentric to ethno relative perspectives (Bennett, 1995). This indeed requires among other measures, reforms of educational policies. The essential elements of the policy through the phases of planning, implementation and evaluation are expected to entertain the needs and existing merits of all the beneficiaries. Accordingly, in the document issues of cultural, ethnic, religious, gender and other related dimensions of diversity that help school children learn about themselves and others are given top priority for the analysis. In Ethiopian context, policy provisions of diversity issues such as mutual respect, tolerance, living in harmony, equality, liberty, justice and moral values weigh important place in building pluralistic society which fits to the contemporary thinking of scholars in the area are also tested with empirical evidences (Banks, 2004; Benett, 1995).

As diversity is about more than just differences, the new diversity paradigm defines it as the process of creating and maintaining an environment that naturally enables all participants to contribute to their full potential. The following model can be helpful to make crystal clear what it means to enable all persons to contribute their full potential to the society.

### Primary dimensions

The inner circle shows the primary dimensions of diversity -- those that are fundamental to a persons' self-concept or core self. These dimensions, though not necessarily visible, are unchangeable in that they are not a matter of choice. They form the basis on which people make instantaneous judgments about one another, often through the process of stereotyping. Here a person's primary dimensions of diversity are described as core because they exert an important impact on our early socialization and a powerful, sustained impact through every state of life (Figure 1).

### Secondary dimensions

The outer circle consists of secondary dimensions of diversity. These are aspects of a persons' identity that are important to a definition of self, but are not as fundamental as the primary dimensions.

This study focuses on four major diversity dimensions:

**Ethnicity:** Identification with and feeling a part particular racial, national, or cultural group and observance of that group's customs, beliefs, and language.

**Language:** A body of words and the systems for their use

common to a people who are of the same community or nation, the same geographical area, or the same cultural tradition.

**Gender:** Either the male or female division of a species, especially as differentiated by social and cultural roles and behavior.

**Religion:** set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a super human agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.

### METHODOLOGY

As explained in the introductory part, the purpose of the study was to scrutinize thoroughly diversity issues treated in the current Education and Training Policy document. To this end, qualitative content analysis was employed to study the issues with reference to the meanings, contexts and intentions contained in the policy document. Research using qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text (Tesch, 1990). Qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings (Weber, 1990). These categories can represent either explicit communication or inferred communication. The goal of content analysis is "to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314). Since the existing theory or research literature on a phenomenon is limited, the Conventional content analysis approach was employed. Here coding categories are derived directly and inductively from the document taking in to account the major diversity dimensions treated in the study viz. Ethnicity, religion, language and gender. Accordingly, we employed Dey's (1993) circular process of qualitative analysis: Describing, classifying and connecting the elements of the identified dimensions.

Regarding the material, the document is the working Education and Training policy promulgated in 1994 under the then Transitional Government of Ethiopia. The document has four major parts viz. Introduction, objectives, overall strategy where all important issues of educational policy are treated and finally the areas of special attention and action priority.

The units of analysis, in this study, are words, phrases, statements as they relate or refer to the tenets of diversity such as ethnicity, gender, linguistics and religion. Words and sentences in articles, sections, topics, and paragraphs are also investigated in search of meanings that deal with the diversity dimensions of the study. Then, it is followed by the interpretation and implication of the meanings and messages bearing essential characteristics of diversity management such as equality, tolerance, mutual respect, ethno relative thinking, harmony, conflict management and resolution, and other related issues.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part of the study presents the major components of diversity dimensions and their placement in the current

education and training policy. Accordingly, the identified dimensions are: Ethnicity, language, gender, and religion. Moreover, equity and democratic cultures that bind all dimensions of diversity are treated separately.

### **Ethnicity**

These days ethnicity is a buzz word in the contemporary world, especially in developing nations, so called underdeveloped countries by affluent western countries. Like most African states, Ethiopia is ethnically diverse. However it is not the result of colonialist design; rather resulted from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century territorial expansion of the empire of Abyssinia (Vander, 2007). As the contemporary language of ethnicity is usually a political language in disguise, the current government of Ethiopia has declared ethnic identity the ideological basis of political organization and administration, and has also been enshrined in the Federal Constitution of the country.

In Education and Training Policy, ethnicity as an independent dimension is not clearly mentioned. However, it is implied in the objectives. For example, the third general objective (Article 2.1.3.) quoted "Bring up citizens who respect human rights, stand for the well-being of people as well as for equality, justice and peace, endowed with democratic culture and discipline". If there is equality, by implication there are diversified groups meant for it among which ethnicity is one of the dominant dimensions. Moreover, for ethnic identity is a fundamental ideology of the country, most of the features are manifested in the language as another pillar diversity dimension. Therefore, issues treated under language in the policy document are also reflections of ethnicity and ethnic group for two of them are usually inseparable in Ethiopian context.

### **Language**

Language plays vital role on students' learning and achievements; major aspect in the education system. In this regard Banks and Banks (1997) explicated in clear statements "Language, as a system of communication, is an indispensable bridge for sharing knowledge, skills, values and attitudes within and across cultures...It has tremendous power as the paramount instrument of cognitive development, and it can open or close the door to academic achievement"(p.272). Although Ethiopia is a multilingual country, a single language (Amharic) had been the medium of instruction at the elementary school level throughout much of the country's history. In relation to this, the current Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia dictates the importance of languages especially mother tongues, one form of diversity education, to learn and construct meaning out of the content. The policy, in Article 2.2.12, states the recognition given to vernacular languages as media of instruction in schools. Moreover,

article 3.5.1 affirms the aforementioned intent and here it goes "Cognizant of the pedagogical advantage of the child in learning in mother tongue and the rights of nationalities to promote the use of their languages, primary education will be given in nationality languages" (p.23). Above all, the issue of language is boldly written in one of the fifteen objectives stated in the document as "To recognize the rights of nations/nationalities to learn in their language...." (p.10). This is completely different from the previous practices where only one language used as a medium of instruction which is pedagogically not advisable for learners, particularly elementary, to understand the contents at optimum level (Benson, 2004). In general, the political changes of the ninety-nineties in country were associated with a broad education reform and a transition from the use of only Amharic and English as media of instruction to a state where multi-lingual approach came in to being. Currently, 25 local languages are said to be in use at primary level as medium of instruction (Seidel and Moritz, 2009).

### **Gender**

Gender equality is a core development objective in its own right. It is also smart economics. Greater gender equality can enhance productivity, improve development outcomes for the next generation, and make institutions more representative (World Bank, 2011). The 1994 Ethiopian education and Training policy confirms the existence of gender related problems in the country and calls for the comprehensive relentless effort to change societal biases, stereotypes and prejudices through education. The policy acknowledges the contribution of females to development endeavours and encourages this attitude to be cultivated in the society at large through the process of education. Article 2.2.13 of the policy as stated in the document posits the issue as one of the objectives and stated as "To gear education towards reorienting society's attitudes and values pertaining to the role and contribution of women in development" (p.11). Moreover, the section of the policy that deals with Curriculum under overall strategy also suggests the preparation and development of curriculum and textbooks need to consider matters related to gender. It is written in Article 3.1.3 as "...ensuring that the curriculum developed and textbooks prepared at central and regional levels...give due attention to...gender issues" (p.12). It can be deduced, therefore, that the education and training policy has given due concern to gender breaking the patriarchal traditions in Ethiopian culture. It enhances female and women participation not only in education but also in other development sectors.

### **Religion**

As one of the most sensitive area of human life, religion

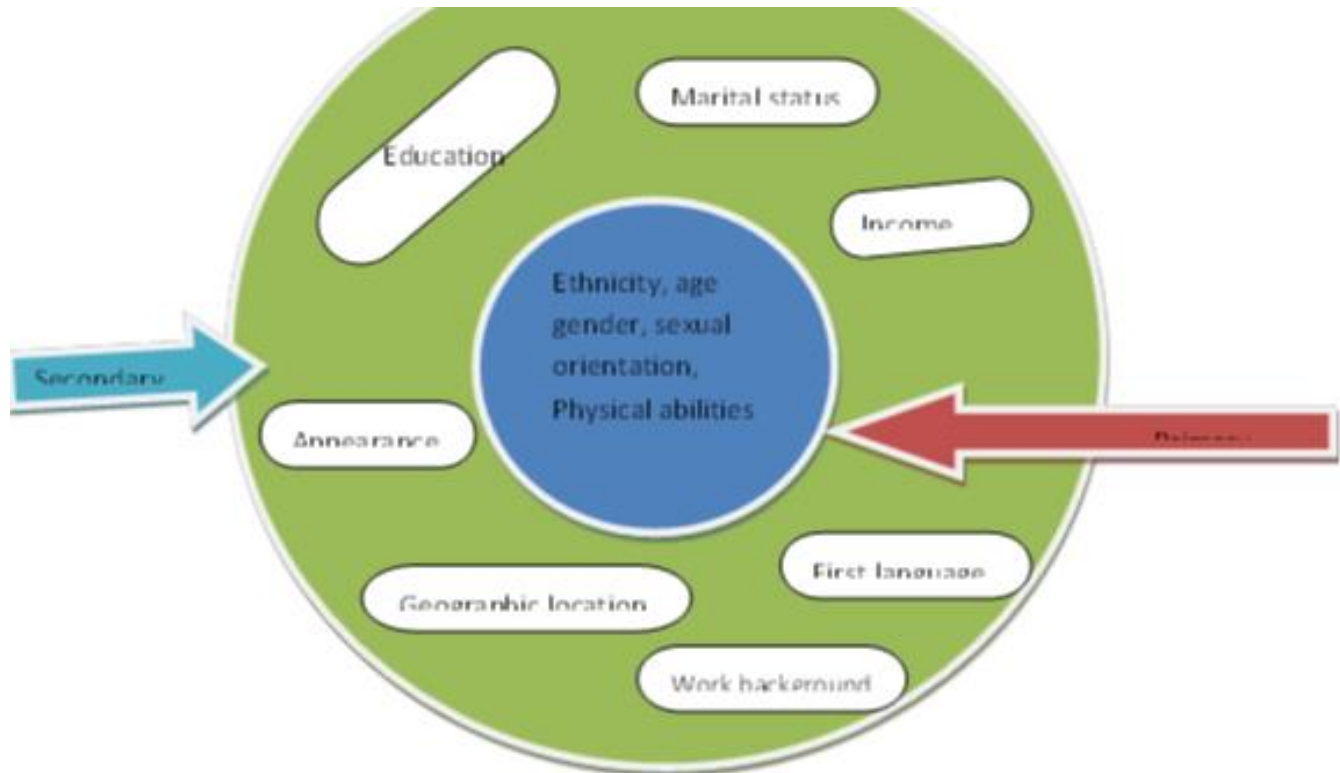


Figure 1. Dimensions of diversity (Adapted from Martyn, 1996).

has very pressing influence not only on education but also on all daily activities of our endeavour. In Ethiopian case where the society is so diverse and different, the policy is necessary and overdue to give full expression to the invocation of religion in the constitution and the principles governing religious freedom. In this regard, the 1994 Ethiopian education and Training policy dictates in Article 2.2.7 that school should provide secular education in the country as the constitution proclaims the separation of state and religion in Article 11 as “state and religion are separate, there shall be no state religion, the state shall not interfere in religious matters and religion shall not interfere in state affairs”. It seems evident that in public schools where no particular religious ethos should be dominant over and suppress others, the government ensures and protects the equal rights of all students to have their own religious views.

### Equity and democratic cultures

At a rhetorical level, many people favour equity because of the essential values of fairness and opportunity the concept suggests. Similarly, democracy, popular term at least at abstract level, often deals with justice, equality and human right (Banks, 2004). Both terms are truly

fundamental to realize pluralistic society. The Ethiopian Education and Training policy posits the importance of equity in Article 2.2.3 as “To enable both the handicapped and the gifted learn in accordance with their potential and needs” (p.9). As for the democratic cultures, the *Introduction* part of the policy states, “Education...plays a role in the promotion of respect for human rights and democratic values, creating the condition for equality, mutual understanding and cooperation among people” (p.1). This clearly depicts the role of education in enhancing respect and tolerance among the citizens. The document further reiterates the issue in the General Objectives on Article 2.1.3 as “Bringing up citizens who respect human rights, stand for the well-being of people, as well as for equality, justice and peace, endowed with democratic culture and discipline” (p.7). Similarly, the idea stated in the Specific Objectives addresses diversity vividly. It says “To provide education that promotes democratic culture, tolerance and peaceful resolution of differences and that raises the sense of discharging societal responsibility” (p.10). This expression is further supported by the provision in Article 2.2.10 that specifies “To provide education that can produce citizens who stand for democratic unity, liberty, equality, dignity and justice, and who are endowed with moral values” (p.10).

## Conclusion

Diversity issue is the top concern of many nations. It recognizes differences between people and acknowledges that these differences are a valued asset. Because of this, it seems there is a tendency to inculcate diversity issues in all sectors of human development endeavour. To this end, the study investigated the responsiveness of the 1994 Education and training policy of Ethiopia in terms of its provisions of diversity of various dimensions. As presented in the discussion, most of the major diversity dimensions such as ethnicity, language, gender and religion are articulated. Nevertheless, some of the dimensions are missing. For example, ethnicity as one of the major component is not explicated very well (Figure 1). Moreover, the dimensions are not treated separately so that their place in the document would be easily understood. Revitalizing, therefore, diversity issues of the policy through various strategies is a timely call for representation of different groups and identities creating a fertile ground for equality and equity of all citizens.

## Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflicts of interest.

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