

## A Retrospective Analysis of Student Ethnic Diversity Management in the Ethiopian Higher Education System and Implications<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The main purpose of this study is to examine the trends of treating socio-cultural differences of students in the Ethiopian education systems retrospectively and find evidence-based explanation with regard to the level of effectiveness of the current multicultural management approach in addressing societal diversity needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Ethiopia. In the study, qualitative data collected from ranges of policy-strategy documents and reports of intergroup relation scenarios were used to explicate student intergroup relations at higher education and developmental changes of student identity quest towards promoting pressing justice and rights issues in societies. The findings showed that during the Imperial and the Dergue regimes, assimilation and integration strategies were employed respectively to bring about social cohesion. Nevertheless, these approaches did not bring about the envisaged peace and tranquillity among student population; rather these were followed by the overthrow of the governments. The present EPRDF led government, with the assumption to resolve this long-standing diversity issues, installed multiculturalism with the motto: 'unity within diversity'. However, ethnic, linguistic and religious based mistrust, stereotypes and hostilities persisted at university environments. The multicultural approach was neither found to be effective in fully addressing the multifaceted ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity issues which are equally vital in the society nor in bringing about lasting peace. Now the campus confined student flashpoints have eventually transformed to social movement for justice and rights in the society. The study findings suggest that unless the root cause of student mistrust, stereotype and hostility which manifest at educational institutions is fully addressed at societal progressive change in educational policy alone would hardly establish cohesive society. The study implies that in order to mitigate identity-based hostility at educational institutions as well as its development into identity oriented social movement, a transformational diversity management policy that goes beyond the affirmative multicultural approach, in which equality in all forms are fostered and both differences and commonalities are equally valued and celebrated, should be provisioned and be critically implemented at national level with the motto: "I am, because we are!".

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## Introduction

Enrolment of diverse students is inescapable in most of the present higher education institutions. More importantly, the non-disability social diversity issues have become common in the current student population of higher institutions not only because of societal mobility and massification of education and internationalisation of higher education, but also because of progressive changes in access to and equity of educational opportunities.

Now, admitting diverse student population has often been considered as a major success of managing and celebrating diversity at higher institutions. Gurin (1999) (in Fries-Britt, Younger and Hall 2010: 183), however, contends that managing diversity should not be measured solely by the enrolment of a diverse student population or, even the installation of specific diversity related programmes into a curriculum; rather it has to be measured by the appropriateness of the approaches applied to address aspects of diversity in the context. Inappropriate management processes installed in an institution may enhance intergroup differences and instil mistrust and suspicion that could become a potential for inter-group conflicts (Cox (1994) in Dancy II 2010: 86). In this regard, Gupta (2006), (in Onsmann 2010: 109-110) complains that *the biggest problem of the 21<sup>st</sup> century [education] is rapidly expanding diversity, along with stubbornly persistent inequities in terms of status and power based upon caste, race, ethnicity, class, language, citizenship or region.*

In most cases, local students of a country are seen as homogeneous and their socio-cultural differences have often been overlooked with the assumption that the differences are less significant and have less impact on their educational success. It is argued that labelling different ethnic groups into a homogeneous crude general category would lead to loss of sight to important uniqueness and differences which could not be less than discrimination (Gillborn 1990: 5). Cross (2004: 407) also contends

that there seems to be significant differences between the diversity issues of students at national level and that of student cohorts at international level. In a multicultural country where students come together for higher education from diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds and are ostensibly considered as homogenous, there might be diversity concerns that might transcend the international minority-majority treatment. Where the identity of an individual or a group is not recognised, students may not feel at ease and they may console themselves within identity boundaries. Thus, they would hustle with both the social and academic challenges. Biggs and Colesante (2004:129) contend that particularly in the early years of campus life *students from different groups consistently avoided contact with one another before, during, and after class sessions. They sat and talked in different camps with others like “themselves”*. Particularly, in non-racial multicultural contexts where social, economic and political differences in the society dictate social relationships, ethnic, linguistic and religious variables would determine forms of inter-group interaction in teaching and learning environments.

### **Statement of the problem**

It has been contended that in a multicultural country a governance system applied in a society is often promoted in the schooling system. Shizah & Abdi (2005: 242) argue that *policies and legislation on education are based on the historical, political, and ideological persuasion of the ruling party at any given time*. This theoretical assumption holds true to Ethiopian governments where the governance systems prescribed for the society have been dictating the nature of the educational systems.

Ethiopia is a country of diverse cultures and ethnic groups and is signified as a multicultural country. Ambissa (2010: 23) contends that *diversity along ethnic, linguistic, religious and many other markers is the reality of Ethiopian societies*. There are more than eighty-six ethnic communities which are referred to as nations, nationalities and peoples

in the *Constitution* of the country (FDRE 1995: 7). These ethnic nationalities have recorded both peaceful co-existence and intergroup hostile historical scenarios ever since the early times to the present; and identity-based repressions and conflicts have been part of their collective history (Tjeldvoll, Welle-Strand & Bento 2005: 62; Balsvik 2007: 37-38).

Ethiopian regimes at different times such as that of Emperor Hailesilassie I (1930-1974) and the Dergue (1974-1991) regimes including the present EPRDF government employed different policy strategies to address socio-cultural differences of the society in their education systems. The Imperial and the Dergue regimes used assimilationist and integrationist policy strategies respectively whereas the EPRDF has used a multicultural policy. In addition, they employed different course programs which they believed would augment the attainment of the policy strategies. For instance, during the era of Emperor Hailelessilassie I the education system included *Moral and Ethical Education* into the curriculum to make students comply with assimilation policy practised then (Trudeau 1964: 26) whereas the Dergue used *Political Education* to inculcate students with the socialist ideology so that they would not pay attention to ethnic, linguistic and religious differences (EPMG 1977: 125). However, both systems did not bring peace, tranquillity and social cohesion envisaged in their policy statements and to the contrary the former was overthrown by uprisings developed from student movements while the latter was ousted by social movements mainly organised by identity-based student groups (Balsvik 2007:16). In order to mitigate these backdrops, the EPRDF government has explicitly set a multicultural constitutional policy framework which it believes responds to the long-standing diversity issues in Ethiopia. The multicultural policy has been supplemented by a cross-cutting course, *Civics and Ethical Education*, which has been given across all levels, at schools as well as at higher education institutions, with the aim of fostering good citizenship and multiculturalism (FMOE 2005: 25; Saint 2004: 86; FMOE 2002: 33).

In Ethiopia, a literature study indicated that research on diversity issues is very scarce and limited to specific institutions. Abebaw and Tilahun (2007: 49-68) studied the diversity challenges of students at Bahir Dar University. They collected data from selected participants from the university's administration, teaching staff and student unions by means of individual and focus group interviews. The findings showed that diversity challenges have considerably increased over time at Bahir Dar University and pointed out that the institution did not have planned strategies to manage diversity related on-campus conflicts. The study considered the diversity management implementers' perspectives and involved views of service providers and did not analyse policy provisions and implementation strategies which guide the practices of the implementers. It did not also take into account the views of students who might have been affected by challenges pertaining to diversity.

In Ethiopia, in spite of the multicultural policy and implementation provisions, student intergroup mistrust, suspicion and stereotypes and the concomitant identity-based student flashpoints have persisted at different higher institutions. On-campus student intergroup conflicts and identity-based student protests have become not only a common phenomenon but are often associated with quest for justice and rights of an identity group (see Mengisteab 2001; Balsvik, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to retrospectively examine the trends of addressing student socio-cultural differences through policy provisions in the Ethiopian educational systems and to find evidence-based explanations as regards the prospect of the multicultural policy in adequately responding to ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century Ethiopia. Hence, the study attempts to bridge an observable research gap between policy provisions and implementation practices of managing student diversity at higher institutions.

*Research questions*

This study attempts to provide explanations for the following pertinent questions:

1. How progressive have the educational policies of different Ethiopian regimes been in addressing the diversity needs of students?
2. Why do student intergroup mistrust, stereotype and flashpoints persist in the Ethiopian higher education despite the stated multicultural policy and curricular provisions?
3. What social and political imperatives underlie the development of policy framework for managing intergroup relations in the Ethiopian higher education institutions?

*Within-country identity issues in education processes*

Global literature on diversity studies show that student differences have been addressed through approaches such as intercultural, cross-cultural, multicultural, pluralist; inclusive and special needs and citizenship education approaches (Glazer 1997: 8; Figueroa 1999: 283). However, literature also emphasise that the theoretical foundations of these approaches are largely rooted within the racial, ethnic, and cultural majority-minority, native-immigrant and ability-disability paradigms that are less comprehensive to adequately address the multifaceted within-country non-disability idiosyncrasy diversity issues (issues of different social groups which are indigenous to a country with sustained antagonistic relationship attributed to ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences) and co-existence issues of multicultural and multi-ethnic countries in Africa (Abdi & Cleghorn 2005,p. 19 Plafreyman 2007,p. 2).

The versatile diversity issues of within-country are often seen in terms of geo-social and politico-historical factors. Geo-social factor refers to a situation where students attend their pre-university education within their

cultural context more often in their mother tongues and by and large live within geographically demarcated region and culturally homogeneous community. In this situation students may lack adequate cross-cultural education opportunity which would help them to cope with diversity encounters, and to succeed in diverse higher education environment (Fries-Britt, et al 2010: 183). The politico-historical factor refers to a situation in which students might be stereotypical and prejudicial towards others which could often be attributed to conflict based political and historical societal relationships. This politico-historical relation of societies of a country may manifest when students with sentiment of otherness come together in an institution, such as university education. This relational gap might perpetuate suspicion, mistrust and tensions among student population and may become a cause for conflict which could affect the smooth running of teaching and learning processes. In this case, diversity issues might transcend a majority-minority affair and all groups may equally miss educational opportunities that the social engagement could offer.

In the context where institutions comprise varied forms of differences, understanding ones' identity as a self and the vice versa is likely to be constructed with existence of others. In this regard, Stets and Burke (2000: 224) emphasise that *through the process of self-categorisation or identification, an identity is formed*. The process of self-understanding involves not only looking at oneself inwards but also outwards cross-culturally for establishing uniqueness. As Bell (2002: 4) contends, *the process of cross-cultural understanding is a reciprocal act whereby I must enter into a real dialogue with the others, and recognise myself as "other" to them*. Therefore, understanding the roles of socio-cultural features in an educational context might give an insight into the behaviour patterns of both an individual and a group in intergroup interaction situation as well as of the nature of social relationships in the society. That could be why Ituarte and Davies (2007: 74) argue that *individuals' perceptions of themselves and others shape their campus experiences in ways which may influence their educational achievement*. Where educational environments are welcoming, the diverse cultural

perspectives and knowledge which students encounter would be an academic input and would make the learning environment enjoyable and academically productive. Thus, students would benefit academically as well as socially from the diversity experience. Harper and Quaye (2009: 2) advise that *educators and administrators must be strategic and intentional about fostering conditions that compel [all] students to make the most of college, both inside and outside the classroom.*

### *Ethnic, Linguistic and Religious Diversity Variables*

In this study diversity issues are limited to ethnic, linguistic and religious differences and are referred to as non-disability socio-cultural differences used as identity markers. Ethnicity, language, and religion are parts of socio-cultural values and often reflect the collective existence of an identity group. Based on these identity indicators, a group could be identified as an ethnic, linguistic, and/or religious entity (Taylor, Peplau & Sears 2006: 10; Schmid 2001: 37; Claassen 2000: 30). Scholars confirm that these diversity variables are equivalent to race in establishing identities in educational institutions (Pattman 2007: 475; Taylor, et al 2006). This, however, implies that homogeneity in terms of one or more than one of the variables does not necessarily mean homogeneity *per se* because other differences could be causes of differentiation.

The conceptualisation of an ethnic group as a “nation” and “nationality” has been dubious because they vary in meaning from context to context. Ethnicity is often used as a sociological descriptive term to define a group as a people who have common features such as language, religion, custom and history while “nation” and “nationality” often designate an ideological frame of thought linked to the betterment of a group of people who share ideological views (Human 2005:16; Van Niekerk 1999: 13; Anderson (1983) in (Human 2005: 16). Hence ethnicity is used in this study rather than “nation” and “nationality” to refer to group of people who claim of having common features.



Language is not only an important medium through which information is retrieved, processed, interpreted and evaluated and through which thoughts are shared but is also a means through which one demonstrates belongingness and membership to a linguistic group (Jarvis 2006: 58). Language plays an important role in the process of knowledge construction and is often given a central position *in the teaching and learning process* (Van Rensburg and Lamberti (2004: 69). This implies that the success of a student in learning mainly depends not only on his/her understanding of the subject matter, but also on his/her ability to reflect on the learning experiences by means of available linguistic resources with fellow students. In this regard, Goldstien (2003: 126) contends that *learning to negotiate across linguistic differences ... is a life skill that all students living in multilingual communities need to develop*. The mutual respect and understanding that would emanate from such action would establish sustainable inter-group cohesion which is one of the ultimate goals of education in a multicultural society. However, inter-language interaction among different language groups would depend on the role of a particular language in the inter-group communication processes which, in turn, would also influence identity formation. Where multilingualism is not seen as an advantage, where each language group tries to stick to its own language domain, each group may remain aloof to the cultures and languages of counterparts. Linguistic differences could tighten in-group connection and become a blockade to interaction with out-group students. As Schmid (2007: 166) notes, *language binds groups together and it is a powerful instrument for promoting internal cohesion and providing an ethnic or national identity* which would ultimately augment mistrust and suspicion amongst different linguistic groups.

Religion is one of the diversity factors and plays a pivotal role in social development of students. Since religion influences the spiritual growth of individuals in terms of providing meaning to life, a sense of self-control over situations, and building self-esteem, it is likely to influence the teaching learning processes (Craft, Moran, Foubert & Lane 2011: 92-93). In addition, since students often start to develop their religious path

from their early childhood, it is likely to have a serious impact on their lives as it constitutes a reason for their social inclusion and exclusion (Sharabi 2011: 220).

In a religious stereotypical context, adherence to the same religion creates homogeneity among followers in which the differences of religions foster a sense of otherness. Dawson (2007: 464), for instance, in his study on a South African school, found that *religious differences can also be a centrifugal force, causing deep divisions*. Divisions could lead students to develop a sense of otherness and might encourage them to dissociate themselves from an out-group religious social environment in the educational learning processes. However, satisfactory student interreligious relationships are determined by the equal treatment of different faiths. In a religious diversity welcoming environment where all faiths are seen as equal, religion could serve as a promoter of a social bond serving positive identity formation and it could even become a basis for mutual trust among different religious groups. In multicultural population contexts, ethnicity, language and religion are salient variables in the construction of identity. The review highlighted that these variables play a significant role in the establishment of interpersonal and inter-group relationships of students and impact educational processes.

#### *Multicultural Policy Frameworks of Addressing Intergroup Relationships*

The current global environment by itself may dictate higher institutions to incorporate diversity issues, such as managing ethnic, linguistic and religious matters that are significant at national and regional levels, into education policy statements (Robinson 2009: 238) with the assumption to rectify inequalities perceived by disadvantaged groups in the society through educational processes. A study in Canada, for instance, showed how the increase in the social diversity in the country forced educational institutions to adopt an educational policy that explicitly address student diversity (McCown, Driscoll, Roop, Saklofske, Schwean, Kelly, & Haines 1999: 98). The current trend shows that different multicultural countries

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employ a multicultural approach which has been considered as a panacea to address diversity related student intergroup relationships (Ituarte and Davies 2007: 87; Sefa Dei and Asgharzadeh 2005: 219-240). Nevertheless, as indicated earlier, the multicultural approach is concerned with affirmative practices of facilitating learning opportunities of minority students within the main student population (Fries-Britt, et al 2010: 184).

In contexts where higher education programmes focus on producing professional and skilled manpower for the field of work; student diversity issues might be given less attention. However, different education policy researchers and analysts underscore the need for including diversity issues into an educational policy in general and higher education in particular. It is contended that an exclusive emphasis on economic and professional skills may relegate the humane and socialisation aspects of education that would contribute for the holistic development of students. Claassen (2000: 42) argues that a curriculum that aims at developing the wholesome of students should incorporate citizenship education and global knowledge and skills. He argues that both aspects should be integrated to enable students to be more efficient in both professional and social skills (see also Onsman 2010: 197). Hoppers (2000: 7) in this regard, underlines that education should strive for the formation of the *whole human being* as well as for the improvement of the living standard of the individual and the society at large. This would mean that since educational institutions are expected to promote societal aspirations, the educational policies, missions and visions that govern their practices need to reflect and address not only the demand for manpower in the labour market but also the production of socially capable manpower who would effectively work in the dynamic socio-cultural environments. In this regard, Gropas and Triandafyllidou (2011: 114) who reviewed the policy dimensions employed to address diversity issues in the European, Australian and American education systems warn that

intercultural education policies may be plural in the letter of the law but rather assimilatory in their daily practice thus reflecting more strongly the dominant understandings of national identity of a given country than the more general principles of respect for, and recognition of, cultural diversity. [. ....]. A successful intervention in education policy with a view to pluralising the classroom and valuing cultural diversity needs to be supported by more general policies of intercultural dialogue and respect for diversity as well as targeted measures of lifelong training of teachers and educators.

The argument implies that explicitly stated diversity policy statements need to go with the diversity dynamism in the society. Through this dynamic process, a policy may corroborate the progressive aspirations and changes in the society.

#### *The Development of Student Intergroup Flashpoints into Student Activism*

Students of higher institution often organize themselves in different formal and informal forms for various purposes. They may be organized in terms of academic, regional (district/county), ethnic, and secondary school alumni associations (Byaruhanga 2006: 26). The formal organizations are official and recognized by institutional organs as far as they align with policies whereas the informal ones may not be official and may be subtle in nature and may not be recognized in the same way and may be presumed as threat. Students use these forms of organizations to support related development activities as well as to struggle against perceived injustice and discrimination attributed to their identity forms in their institutions and their localities. In other words, some groups may organise themselves to rectify malfunctions of institutional organs of a specific institution while others may focus on broader issues such as injustice and rights issues in the society. Gupta (2006), (in Onsmann 2010: 109-110) stresses that *the biggest problem of the 21<sup>st</sup> century [education] is rapidly expanding diversity, along with stubbornly*

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*persistent inequities in terms of status and power based upon caste, race, ethnicity, class, language, citizenship or region.* Franklin (2003: 108) who reviewed the development of African American student activism for equality of African Americans in the United States concludes that in the 20th century social and political activism that underlie the dominant patterns and trends for social reform and change have been attributed to student activism. Altbach (1993) in Byaruhanga (2006: 31-32) explains that

Student activism [...] manifests itself as a minority phenomenon, rarely engulfing the entire student body [and] students are a force that is easily mobilized, given their awareness of issues, their locale as a group on one campus, and their relatively easy access to media and to significant elite. [...] In most cases, student activism appears to be concerned more with issues pertaining to the larger society—political, economic, social—and less with campus-specific issues. [...] The outcomes of student activism take different forms: social and political transformation, as well as university reform. [...]

Since societal diversity issues are context specific, not all but some of the above characteristic features which are associated to university reform, political involvement of students in the developing world and social and political transformation may be common to student activism in the developing world. Zhao (2001: 331) states that student activism at different times which have been suppressed or controlled have been culminated with less success but have stayed latent until they get conducive social environment to burst into full blown revolution whereas others have been transformed to the level of armed struggle which brought down different repressive regimes. For instance, as a result of student activism and protest revolutionary change had occurred in countries such as South Africa, Ethiopia and Central African Republic (see Byaruhanga 2006: xvii).

## Research Design

This study attempts to assess the effectiveness of the management and related policy framework used to address student differences related to ethnicity, language and religion in the Ethiopian education systems across a historical line as a background to examine the present multicultural approach. Since the study is a policy research which tries to briefly examine the effectiveness of policy provisions employed for managing student differences in the Ethiopian education systems by different regimes retrospectively and assesses the prospects of the present multicultural approach and practices, it exclusively employs the qualitative research method to collect documentary sources that were used to extrapolate answers to the research questions posed in section two. Regarding the use of qualitative methods for investigating multicultural policy framework, Merriam (1988) in Bowen (2009: 29) suggests that for historical and cross-cultural research, relying on prior documentary sources may be the only realistic approach. Merriam suggests that qualitative methods are effective for identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion which may not be readily apparent in other research approaches (Bowne 2009: 29-30). In addition, Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006: 422) point out that analysing written documents can provide insights into how things have become the way they are in institutions. Thus, for this study document analysis was employed to examine and draw meanings and understanding about institutional activities from documentary sources (Corbin & Straus 2008: 13). As this study dealt with a historical educational policy overview, explanatory published documentary sources were selected for the study on availability basis longitudinally across times. Accordingly, the diversity addressing mechanisms used during Emperor Hailesilasse I and the Dergue eras were reviewed retrospectively as a background to locate the prospect of the present multicultural policy provision, which is the focus of this study, in addressing student socio-cultural diversity in Ethiopian higher institutions.

For the study, relevant documentary sources which explicitly or implicitly underlie the education policies of the Hailesillasié I, the Dergue and the EPRDF regimes were identified from the educational era of 1940s up to 1994. The EPRDF era which was the focus of the study and for which the multicultural policy was explicitly stated in the *Higher Education Proclamation no, 650/2009 (FDRE 2009)* was used as a basic frame of reference in analysing the present diversity management scenarios in the Ethiopian higher institutions. Since institutional legislations and implementation guidelines of Ethiopian public higher institutions have been drawn from the *Higher Education Proclamation*, the legislative and implementation guidelines pertaining to addressing diversity needs of students are by and large similar (see Hailemariam 2016). Hence, for the study in order to minimise redundancy and unnecessary repetition, the 2013 of AAU (Addis Ababa University) and other diversity related guidelines which were issued in line with the *Higher Education Proclamation no, 650/2009* were selected for analysis as a representative case for the study.

This study specifically focuses on documented reports of identity related incidents at higher institutions irrespective of provisions enshrined in the *Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (1994)* and the *Higher Education Proclamation no, 650/2009* to examine the magnitude of diversity related issues and the appropriateness of the multicultural approach for addressing the issues in the Ethiopian higher institutions.

Initially, the study was designed to cover the years from 1994, the time since the issuance of the *Ethiopian Education and Training Policy*, up to 2013, before the time identity-based conflicts spread outside higher institutions and got shaped into identity-based public protests in different regional states. However, it was observed from documentary sources that identity-based student intergroup conflicts in higher institutions were less visible and less reported from 1994 up to 2000 whereas they were transformed to ethnic-based social movements outside campuses in most parts of the country after 2013 that the study was confined to cover only campus-based student intergroup conflicts between the years 2000

and 2013. Therefore, the study was limited to identity attributed hostilities surfaced in campuses without observable pressures from outside the institutions and which were reported in the selected newspapers.

Documentary data to illustrate the in-campus ethnic, linguistic and religious based student intergroup hostilities and incidents were collected from newspapers. The data from newspapers were selected because the papers are public documents that report incidents to inform such flashpoints to the general public and it was believed that the public nature of the data would augment the objectivity and trustworthiness of the data. At first, the study was planned to cover identity related student flashpoints in the Ethiopian higher institutions from both government affiliated and private print media for trustworthiness and reliability. Nevertheless, it was found that such student hostilities were either remained unreported or reported disregarding identity attributions of the student flashpoints in the government affiliated newspapers. As a result, private weekly newspapers were identified as sources for the study. Accordingly, the private newspapers which were published continuously on regular basis and which covered higher education student conflicts during the time set for study were selected for analysis. The sustainability of the publication of the newspapers was also considered as an additional measure of the trustworthiness of the data collected from them. Accordingly, *Addis Guday*, *Addis Neger*, *The Reporter* (the Amharic version), and *Tomar* which were active and published under government recognition were purposefully selected for analysis to explain intergroup hostilities reported from 2000 up to 2013 academic years. The data included interviews made by the news reporters with university management bodies, instructors and students. The data which reported ethnic, linguistic and religious related intergroup hostilities in different higher education were selected purposefully and translated from Amharic to English and thematically analysed and interpreted against the provisions given in the Higher Education Proclamation, Legislation and Guidelines set by the EPRDF government pertaining to addressing the diversity variables of the study. The information given by the management bodies and instructors were juxtaposed and analysed



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with student interview data in the newspapers to corroborate as well as to enhance the validity of the study.

In short, the data analysis starts with a brief historical overview of strategies used to address student socio-cultural differences in the Ethiopian education systems ever since the introduction of formal education in general and higher education in particular. The systems were categorised under Emperor Hailesilassie I and the Dergue eras with the assumption that the practices were compared with the present explicitly stated multicultural policy to assess progresses made in terms of promoting inter-group understanding and developing social cohesion among multicultural student population so as to examine the effectiveness of the multicultural approach of treating socio-cultural differences of higher education students in the multicultural social setting.

### **Data Analysis**

In this section, policy documentary sources pertaining to addressing student differences in the past regimes were analysed under the Emperor Hailessilasie I and the Dergue regimes while the present was analysed under the EPRDF subsection. The implicit policy assumptions of the past regimes were studied as a background explanation for the present explicit multicultural policy framework. The present policy scenario was studied to illustrate the interplay of policy and practice in the implementation of the multicultural policy framework. The policy and practices analysed under the past and present were synchronised in the discussion section to draw the developmental trends of addressing non-idiosyncrasies differences in the study context.

#### *The Imperial Era*

The introduction of western education in general is strongly attached to Minelik II (1896-1912), because the first government school was opened

in Ethiopia in the late 1880s known as *Minelik Secondary School*, though there had been missionary schools before that school in western part of the country. Documentary sources attest that ethnic, linguistic and religious biases were decisive in that the school reflected the Coptic Christian religion as did the government of the Amhara culture and the school was established to produce trained country leaders from the children of chiefs and the nobility who were mainly from the Amhara ethnic group which predominantly followed the Coptic Christian (FMOE 2002: 1; Krylow 1994: 23). This could imply that the students were presumably considered homogeneous in ethnic, linguistic and religious terms since they were mainly recruited from Amhara royal group and that social differences were assumed to be insignificant at that stage of the education system (Alemayehu & Lasser 2012: 53).

Emperor Hailesilassie I was seen as a patron of change amongst his then intellectual groups that he was able to overthrow the legitimate heirs of Minelik II (Balsvik 2007:13). During his era, the initial schooling system was further developed and more schools were opened and significant progressive changes were attained in expanding education from late 1920s up to 1974 and student homogeneity had declined and schools started to accommodate students of heterogeneous backgrounds though the non-Amhara children were expected to be assimilated into the Amhara culture. With regard to language, Amharic constitutionally enjoyed the privilege as a national language and was taught as the language of unification since 1880s (*The Report of the Education Sector Review: Challenges to the Nation* 1972: III-3; MOE 1984: 7).

During the Hailesilassie I era, not only schools were expanded but also some colleges and a university was established. These institutions were governed by policy objective which dictated that Ethiopian students had to be Ethiopianised in character and Christianised in religion (Abebe & Pausewang 1994: 35; Krylow 1994: 231). Thus, during the regime, *all talented students, whether from the poorest socio-economic background or from the nobility, had equal opportunities* for education at all levels as far as they accepted the religious (Coptic Christian) and linguistic

behaviour expected of them (De Stefano & Wilder 1992: 10). It should be noted that the policy was also applicable to the then higher education environment since it was mandatory for students to score a pass mark in Amharic in order to join the university.

In general, the main aim of education during Minelik II and Hailesilassie I periods was to Ethiopianize the content of education and to promote the 'national language', Amharic, as the medium of instruction at all levels (see *The Report of the Education Sector Review: Challenges to the Nation 1972: III-4*). These inequality issues instigated student protests which were mainly led by the then university students that the Emperor who had been once seen as pioneer of change amongst his educated counterpart was overthrown by student movements which resulted in the emergence of the 1974 popular revolution (Balsevk 2007:15-16). However, the Dergue snatched the power from the popular movement that the then students organised themselves into identity-based rebels and became rebellions to fight the Dergue regime.

### *The Dergue Era*

The whole educational processes during the Imperial era were truncated by the 1974 revolution which brought the Dergue regime to power. The word *Dergue* is an Amharic concept used to refer to the *Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces* (Military government) which ruled the country from 1974 up to 1991. The regime proclaimed socialist education philosophy and declared that it abolished the feudal assimilationist education system that had burgeoned social, cultural and religious inequality in the country. Dergue claimed that it revamped an education system that brought about equitable education to all people.

In light of the decree, literacy teaching materials were produced in 15 Ethiopian languages using Ge'ez or Amharic characters by the government for the first time for a nationwide literacy campaign. In line with this development, Dergue also proclaimed that *the Ethiopian*

*Democratic Republic ascertains the equality, development and respect of the languages of the nations and nationalities (EDR 1988: 18).* Indeed, it made a significant reform to the education system compared to the monolithic religious and linguistic based assimilationist educational policies of its predecessor. The number of schools and students showed a significant increase (De Stefano & Wilder 1992: 15-16) that it could be assumed that compared to the Imperial era, different ethnic groups in the country had more access to education. This would mean that the educational opportunity paved the way for students from different socio-cultural backgrounds to come together for higher education.

Dergue claimed that it abolished social stratifications attributed to ethnicity, language and religion which had prevailed in the social setups of the Imperial era both in the education system and in the society at large. The Dergue *Constitution*, Article 35 sub article (1), stated that *Ethiopians regardless of their ethnic, gender, religion, type of employment, social and other differences are equal in front of the law (EDR 1988: 34).* This constitutional decree was also reflected in the education system that students from other linguistic backgrounds were not openly humiliated for using their mother tongues in informal communication situations at school compounds as used to in Imperial regime. It also succeeded in secularising the education system as opposed to the modus operandi of the earlier regime.

With regard to higher education institutions, the Dergue regime declared a socialist education policy through the *Higher Education Institutions Administration Proclamation No109/1977 (EPMG 1977)* which was meant to enforce the instrumentality of higher education in the fight against capitalism and in the development of socialism. The proclamation declared that the aim of higher education institutions was *to teach, expand and publicise socialism ... and to make every effort to develop and enrich the country's cultures free from imperialist and reactionary content (EPMG 1977: 125).* Thus, the production of literacy booklets in the 15 Ethiopian languages and the educational opportunity provision set on equality basis could be considered as a step forward in

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addressing diversity issues in educational institutions during the Dergue era (De Stefano & Wilder 1992: vi).

However, the regime was criticised for a number of setbacks in its strategies of addressing student differences in the education sector. Although it claimed it had brought a revolutionary change in education system, its policy framework was criticised for remaining similar to that of the Imperial regime (TGE 1994: 2). In fact, some diversity issues were addressed by following the footsteps of the earlier government. For instance, even though Amharic was relegated from national language to the level of office language, it remained not only the medium of instruction up to junior secondary school but also the means to success for getting employment opportunities in the country after graduation (Saint 2004: 84).

#### *The EPRDF Government Multicultural Approach*

The EPRDF was organised from among student rebellion groups of the Imperial era who succeeded to oust the Dergue regime from power. In its turn, the EPRDF government has explicitly set national constitutional, legal and policy framework which it believes responds to the long-standing diversity issues in Ethiopia. One of the policy responses related to the education sector was the endorsement of the *Ethiopian Education and Training Policy* (1994) which stipulated a multicultural framework for treating student differences parallel to the socio-cultural treatment practices in the societies (TGE 1994: 6). This section aims to describe the study context by reviewing documentary data which specifically deal with ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity issues in the higher education context since the pronouncement of the *Ethiopian Education and Training Policy* (TGE 1994).

The socio-cultural differences in the country have been given recognition and legitimacy in the *Ethiopian Transitional Government Transitional Charter* of the 1991 and the subsequent, the *Ethiopian Federal*

*Democratic Republic Constitution (FDRE) (1995)*. Both the *Charter* and the *Constitution* uphold the equality of nations and nationalities and their cultures including languages and religions. The constitutional rights to be different anchor the policy frameworks that regulate the functions of all sectors, including the education sector. This implies that socio-cultural diversity issues have been positioned within a multicultural paradigm and the constitutional provisions attempt to address various diversity concerns in the country in terms of “unity within diversity”. The explicit statement of the multicultural constitutional provision with regard to socio-cultural diversity of the peoples could be considered as a significant development compared to the previous regimes which emphasised on assimilation and integration.

The *Constitution* of the present government defines the concept “ethnic group” as a

nation, nationality and people ... who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identity, a common psychological makeup, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory (FDRE 1995: 97).

In order to address ethnic, linguistic and religious identity issues of “nations and nationalities” (which are referred to as ethnic groups in this study), it has established ethnic based regional states (De Stefano & Wilder 1992: 15). This was an underlying difference between the past regimes and the EPRDF government.

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The *Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (1994) and the Higher Education Proclamations*

The *Ethiopian Transitional Government Transitional Charter* provisions and premises informed the formulation and implementation of the *Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (1994)*. The policy has brought about a significant change in the whole education system, including the higher education system. Concerning language, it stipulates the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction for primary education. As a result, now more than 24 languages are used as medium of instruction for primary and junior secondary education and some languages are taught as subjects in high schools and higher educational institutions. For instance, during the data collection, some widely spoken languages which have been considered as oral languages such as Afan Oromo and Tigregna have been given as study disciplines at bachelor and master's degree levels at Addis Ababa University as well as at some other higher institutions.

The implementation of the *Ethiopian Education and Training Policy* in higher education was supplemented and guided by the *Higher Education Proclamation no 351/2003 (FDRE 2003)* and *Higher Education Proclamation no, 650/2009 (FDRE 2009)*. For instance, according to the proclamations, the entry assessment score for students from the "emerging regions" should be lower than that for students from the relatively affluent regions. The "emerging regions" refers to peripheral regional states and disadvantaged linguistic and ethnic groups who were assumed to have little access to education compared to the relatively affluent regional states. It has been claimed that the policy has set an equitable education strategy that responded to diversity issues at higher institutions by providing remedial and affirmative measures for students from the disadvantaged regions, social groups and individuals. Since the provisions of equitable access and institutional services are provided on identity bases, it could be assumed that the education system has emphasised affirmative strategy of multicultural approach to address diversity issues in higher institutions, including Addis Ababa University.

In the *Higher Education Proclamation, no, 650/2009 (FDRE 2009: 4979-4981)* Article 4 sub-article 8 and Article 7 sub-article 11 dictates that the aim of Ethiopian higher education is to promote a “multicultural community life” and to value “democracy and multiculturalism”. The proclamation underlines decentralised equity education for all social and cultural groups in the country in order to make higher education equally accessible to all ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups (FMOE 2005: 6; FMOE 2010: 80). Although there were no statistical figures to substantiate the argument for Addis Ababa University, it has been argued that access to higher education for those regions which did not have adequate access to higher education in the past has been enhanced and that both the *Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) 2010/11-2014/15* and the *Education Sector Development Programme IV (ESDP IV) 2010/11-2014/15* emphasise on equity of higher education (FMOE 2010: 64; MOFED 2010: 91).

The above affirmative provision is meant to increase student composition at various higher institutions, and that the government has planned to continue to provide allowances for those which it considers as disadvantaged social groups. The approach seemed to be inherently consistent with the multicultural policy premises. It is affirmative in that the provision targets the disadvantaged groups. Since an affirmative approach attempts to bring about equity by treating differences exclusively, it may fail to bring about mutual understanding between the advantaged and the disadvantaged groups; it might be argued that the practice could rather perpetuate differences by nurturing differences.

*Diversity Issues Since the Issuance of the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (1994)*

In the study context, student inter-group conflicts were characterised by interpersonal misunderstandings between two or more individuals from two or more ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Ethnic based hostilities which manifested in the form of stereotyping, prejudice and discriminatory acts, as well as preferential treatments were recognised



by management, instructors and students of universities (see *Addis Guday 2012: 8-10; Addis Neger 2007: 3*). It was reported that the then president of Addis Ababa University commented that

he believed that there were ethnic suppressions in his university that he wanted to eradicate that from the University ... he explained that lecturers and students who come from different nations and nationalities should be able to reflect their identities openly and with pride. [He pointed out that] the identities and benefits of nationalities should be reflected not only in the activities of universities but also in research studies as well as in the curricula. He said 'We will try to create different recreational activities, organisations and associations which show the life styles of different societies' (The Reporter 2003:30).

The above comments seem to underline the prevalence of identity issues in the university and how the issues could affect different activities of the university community. It also shows diversity sensitivity of the commentator. The president recognised not only the magnitude of the problem, but also sought how to mitigate the issues through institutional activities, research, curricular and co-curricular activities. The recommendation he suggested, "*the identities and benefits of nationalities should be reflected not only in the activities of universities but also in research studies as well as in the curricula*" and the recreational activities he recommended as a means of intervention seemed to be in line with the multicultural policy stipulated in the *Higher Education Proclamation*. Accordingly, some universities established different co-curricular and recreational activities to mitigate the identity related student intergroup in-campus hostilities. Hailemariam (2016) in his study summarised the co-curricular and recreational activities established at three universities in the years 2009-20011 following the multicultural poly of the Proclamation as shown in the Table below.

**Table 1: List of in-campus co-curricular and recreational activities**

Types of co-curricular and recreational activities in the universities			
1	Student Union or Council: AAU Student Council, ASTU (Adama Science and Technology University) Student Council, and DBU (Dbre Berhan University) Student Council		
2	Clubs		
2.1	Exclusive clubs		
	AAU	ASTU	DBU
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Association of students with disability</li> <li>GAASO (Gumii Aadaafi Asoosama Saba Oromoo) (Oromo Culture and Literature Club)</li> <li>Hibir Culture Club (Amhara)</li> <li>Ti'amot Club (Tigray)</li> <li>Gender club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GAASO Club (Oromo)</li> <li>Hibir Culture Club (Amhara)</li> <li>Tamra Wubet Club (SNNP)</li> <li>Ti'amot Club (Tigray)</li> <li>Somali Student Club</li> <li>Girls Club</li> <li>Association of Students with Disability</li> <li>Gender Club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GAASO Club (Oromo)</li> <li>Hibir Culture Club (Amhara)</li> <li>Tamra Wubet Club (SNNP)</li> <li>Ti'amot Club (Tigray)</li> <li>AWI Development Association</li> <li>Gaeda'o Association</li> <li>Amhara Regional Youth Network Association</li> <li>Gender Club</li> </ul>
2.2	Inclusive clubs		
2.2.1	Institutionalised inclusive clubs		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic and Professional Interest clubs,</li> <li>African Initiatives</li> <li>Arts and Performance Club,</li> <li>Awareness and Advocacy Club,</li> <li>Anti-AIDS and Literature Club</li> <li>Community Service Clubs,</li> <li>Literature club,</li> <li>Multicultural Activities or Clubs</li> <li>Peace Club</li> <li>Special Interest Club, etc...</li> <li>Sports and Recreational Club,</li> <li>Volunteer and Service-Related Activities or Club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anti-AIDS &amp; Literature club</li> <li>Anti-Corruption Club</li> <li>Peace Club</li> <li>Human Rights Club</li> <li>Charity Society</li> <li>IT Club</li> <li>Space Science</li> <li>Science and Technology Club</li> <li>Environmental Protection &amp; Beautification Club</li> <li>Foreign Relation and Country's Image Building Ambassadors Club</li> <li>ASTU Bridge Team</li> <li>Model United Nations (MUN-ASTU)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental Protection &amp; Beautification Club</li> <li>Anti-drugs Club</li> <li>Peace Club</li> <li>Know Your Country Club</li> <li>Anti-AIDS Club</li> <li>Anti-Corruption Club</li> <li>Charity Society</li> <li>Scout Club</li> <li>Cultural Club</li> </ul>
2.2.2	Festivals and events		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inter-college Sport weeks</li> <li>Nations and Nationalities Day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Colour Day</li> <li>Culture Day</li> <li>Nations and Nationalities Day</li> <li>Inter-College Sport Weeks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nations and Nationalities Day</li> </ul>

The co-curricular and recreational activities listed under 2.1 emphasised identity-based self-expression activities whereas the activities listed under 2.2 focused on non-partisan practices and seemed to be used to create opportunities in which students from different backgrounds come together for collective interests. Nevertheless, in spite of these diversity addressing provisions, documentary sources indicate that student intergroup flashpoints continued in different universities.

Some management bodies associate the conflicts to misconduct and improper acts of some lecturers during teaching learning activities. A management official in an interview with a local newspaper argued that

lecturers should see all students equally and fairly. From the perspective of the University community, if there is someone who discriminates [against] students in terms of ethnicity, religion [and other aspects], he is discriminating [against] himself and then he is putting himself in another world. I cannot teach the student or I cannot continue teaching while humiliating the student for his identity or language. In this regard I feel that there are some problems with us, the lecturers, not only in this University [but also in other universities]. Some of us have difficulty to accept and respect student identity, religion and others. This is my general observation (Reporter 2013: 14).

A similar understanding was reflected by a lecturer which concurs with the view of the preceding management official: “lecturers should treat students equally and fairly. In this regard I do feel that there are problems with [some lecturers] ... Some of us might fail to respect and accept the identity, belief and other uniqueness of students” (*The Reporter* 2013: 14).

The comments given by students on the unfairness of identity-based treatments by lecturers also corroborates the views of the university management and instructors quoted above. A university student

reported to a news journalist that “a lecturer provided special hand-outs to students from his identity background on which most of the exam questions were based and that those students obtained the best grades. It was only those students who were provided with the hand-out that scored best grades” (*Addis Guday* 2012: 10). These comments suggest that discriminatory treatments in the teaching and learning processes could lead to dissatisfaction which might develop into mistrust and thereby develop to intergroup hostilities between the beneficiary and the disadvantaged groups.

Another cause for student intergroup hostilities was related to an ordinary disagreement or misunderstanding between two individuals from different backgrounds. Documentary sources indicated interpersonal conflicts that involved two individuals from different social groups could be developed into intergroup violence and hostility at different universities (see *Addis Guday* 2012: 8-10; *Addis Neger* 2007: 3). This could be explained by two similar episodes. One of these was an ethnic based conflict surfaced at the ASTU (Adama Science and Technology University) when two students, one from Ethnic group 1 and the other from Ethnic group 3 backgrounds, disagreed on the choice of TV channel in December 2011 (*Addis Guday* 2012: 10). It was reported that the disagreement between the two individuals immediately took the shape of ethnic conflict and resulted in death of a student, injuries of 11 students, imprisonment and dismissal of some students. The second was an episode reported by Asmamaw in *Addis Guday* (2011: 1). Interviewing a lecturer at Bahir Dar University, Asmamaw reported that a conflict between a student from Ethnic group 3 and a campus police who was presumably from Ethnic group 2 background was transformed into ethnic conflict between the Ethnic group 2 and Ethnic group 1 students; latter the conflict was further escalated to the extent it pulled the ethnic group 1 students of the University into the conflict (*Addis Guday* 2011: 1).

Some student inter-group conflicts were attributed to ethnic stereotypical attitude and diminutive acts (*Addis Guday* 2012: 9). The conflict may

take the form of a diminutive and reclusive attitude towards an out-group member/s. Such an attitude could manifest in and outside the classroom when a student, a group of students or lecturers display stereotypical attitudes towards an individual or a group. In 2001, for instance, *Tomar*, a weekly newspaper, reported a conflict between Ethnic group 1 and Ethnic group 3 student groups at AAU when a Ethnic group 3 student referred to a community from Ethnic group 1 background in the Ethnic group 3 Regional State in derogatory term which had long been outlawed nationwide (*Tomar* 2001:1). The incident resulted in campus-wide ethnic violence between the Ethnic group 1 and Ethnic group 3 students. A similar incident occurred when a Ethnic group 3 lecturer at the Mekele University used a pejorative expression reflecting a negative attitude towards the Ethnic group 1 in a classroom which instigated conflict between the Ethnic group 1 and Ethnic group 3 students (*Tomar* 2003: 6).

The ethnic conflicts were sometimes coupled with language-based hostilities. In the study context hostilities attributed to linguistic issues often emerge when an individual or a group displays stereotypical attitudes towards the language of another group. One of such a manifestation was shown in *Addis Neger* (2007: 22), which reported that some students from the Ethnic group 2 ethnic group attempted to forbid the Ethnic group 1 student group not to use their language in the dorm because they were suspicious about the intent of the language users. This was viewed as a reflection of stereotype attitude by the counterpart group and consequently the disagreement evolved into a violent interethnic conflict (*Addis Neger* 2007: 22).

Although documentary data referred for the study show that religious hostilities were not as frequent as ethnic and linguistic hostilities, there have been noticeable religious based student mistrusts and suspicions at some Ethiopian universities. The conflicts were manifested in different forms. Firstly, some of such incidents surfaced when a certain religious group was of the opinion that another religious group enjoyed special privileges from the government or the university administration. In 2012,

for example, the Muslim students at DBU complained that the University outlawed wearing clothes displaying religious identity on campus, whilst their Orthodox Christian counterparts were allowed to wear the *Netela* (a cotton wrap cloth) on campus while on their way to and from church services (*Addis Guday 2012: 10*). It was reported that this alleged preferential treatment resulted in mistrust, not only between the complaining student group and the University administration but also between the two religious groups.

### **Discussion**

The study highlights that ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity variables seem to be equivalently significant in the Ethiopian context. It also demonstrates that the policy framework for addressing these diversity variables has developed from the assimilation and integration in the past to multicultural approach. The treatment of socio-cultural differences of students by different Ethiopian governments, retrospectively seen, has steadily grown from the early assimilationist and integrationist or “Ethiopianisation” positions of the Imperial and the Dergue regimes respectively to the “multicultural” approach of the present EPRDF government. This shows that the perspectives of the Ethiopian governments for addressing student socio-cultural differences has steadily developed from a total neglect of student differences during the Hailesilassie era to an extra emphasis on specific diversity issues by the present EPRDF government. For instance, social differences related to ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences had neither been recognised during the Menilik II (1886-1912) era nor during the Hailesilassie I (1930-1974); whereas these issues were given superficial recognition during the Dergue regime (1974-1991) but have been highly emphasised by the EPRDF government since 1994. The persistence of student intergroup, mistrust, suspicion and hostility in spite of the multicultural affirmative practices of addressing differences by the EPRDF government, might affirm the hypothesis that the affirmative multicultural strategies which emphasises on discriminatory treatment of

differences is likely to perpetuate differences and could not bring the envisaged social cohesion at the institutions

The analysis seems to suggest that the in-campus causes for student hostilities could originate from organisational practices, student intergroup mistrust and conflict seem to be invariably observed among the Ethnic group 2, Ethnic group 1 and Ethnic group 3 student groups and stereotypical attitudes and prejudices shown to others by an identity group could either be tolerated with contempt by subject group or develop into intergroup hostility. This situation may show that the multicultural management paradigm which has been used to manage indigenous majority and migrant minority relations in the western world might not be able to resolve mistrust, suspicion and hostility among competing within-country identity groups.

As shown in the study, the three governments have grappled with diversity issues pertaining to ethnicity, language and religion. Nevertheless, none of them have brought a lasting solution to this outstanding diversity issue. Although ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity issues are underlying realities in Ethiopia, the Imperial and the Dergue regimes had failed to address them unequivocally that they had been truncated one after the other, one way or another, by uprisings emerged from within student protests. The recent conflict scenarios which were described in the study pointed to a similar outcome. The situation has developed into social, economic and political questions in the society. In other words, identity issues have now been transformed from an ordinary student intergroup flashpoint to a societal level quest for social, economic and political rights (similar to that of the social movements in the seventies) which could be addressed through transformative conflict management strategies than the multicultural management approach so as to bring about a lasting political settlement in the country.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed at assessing the magnitude of progressive development of Ethiopian educational systems in terms of addressing student differences in educational policies, implementation guidelines and the concomitant effects on establishing student cohesion in higher institutions. The findings showed that although progressive changes have been made in addressing students ethnic, linguistic and religious differences by different regimes in different forms, campus-based intergroup conflicts have eventually given way to a broader struggle for social, economic and political justice in the society.

This shows that student intergroup hostilities are not inherent characteristics of multicultural students and can easily be managed where fair and equal treatment prevails. This could be achieved through a provision of cross-cultural development for a multicultural work environments and collective citizenship. Firstly, since the students are citizens of a country, the policy provision and the increase in student composition would presuppose the need for a more accommodative societal policy framework that would uphold equality in all forms, avoid antagonistic relations and promote reciprocal understanding amongst groups. It could be argued that when students are able to cross their ethnic, linguistic and religious boundaries and live cohesively, they would develop multiple perspectives which enhance their social skills required in a diverse society. In other words, in the Ethiopian context, since higher institutions could not escape admitting diverse student population, the policy framework that deals with diversity issues at educational institutions is expected to go beyond the customary management practices and be responsive to diversity reality in the society.

Secondly, the decline of in-campus student intergroup hostility and its subsequent transformation to rights issues of respective identity groups outside seems to predict that student intergroup mistrust and hostility at educational institutions in terms of ethnicity, language and religion in the study context could be rooted in perceived identity-based



dissatisfactions reflected in the society. This might imply that identity realities in the society would ultimately determine student intergroup relations in campuses. A tentative conclusion could be that unless the root causes of inequality at the societal level are fully addressed in a meaningful way to all, a progressive policy change at higher institution hardly takes out the country from the long-standing vicious circle of conflict. In short, the inter-group social development strategies of the present Ethiopian education and the social system simultaneously need to be transformed from the affirmative multicultural approach of “unity within diversity” to an all-inclusive transformative diversity management system in which students learn not only “I am, because you are” but also to the equal celebration of diversity: “I am, because we are”.

### **Recommendation**

The following tentative recommendations are forwarded as alternative approaches for overcoming the present tensioned diversity climate:

- A national diversity management policy framework for educational institutions should be put in place in order to rectify presumed inequities perceived by concerned student cohorts.
- Universities should institutionalise diversity management strategies in which students reciprocally experience the significance of others for self-realisation.
- The present multicultural policy should be reviewed from a diversity management perspective to guide institutional diversity management in terms of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation practices.
- Diversity planning and implementation in terms of staffing and service provision should serve as a tool for measuring quality of the universities.
- The universities should propose strategies to the MOE for integrating transformative intercultural education into pre-university education programmes in such a way that students

learn the real meaning of equality: a reciprocal understanding of otherness.

- Since such a study requires a thorough and wider investigation at national level to come up with commendable recommendations at the national level, a further study should be conducted at country level in order produce a general framework for policy makers concerned with diversity issues.

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