

Imperatives of Multicultural Education in Ethiopia: Reflections on Awareness, Practices, and Challenges in Our Higher Learning Institutions

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Abstract

Historically speaking, multiculturalism and multilingualism evolved in a number of ways: migration (voluntary and involuntary); the indentured policies pursued by the former British Empire; the African slave trade; policy of guest workers in Europe; the immigration policy followed by the US; war and conquest (incorporation/annexing of conquered people), etc. In light of the diverse culture and linguistic background of many societies, mechanisms to amicably respond to it should be put in place, where citizens consciously understand the value of living together by sharing their values with each other. In particular, diverse societies have moral obligations to nurture their citizens to become responsive and tolerant in multicultural environments. Despite this truism, however, educational enterprises have become targets of criticism for failing to respond to students' needs of diverse social, economic, cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. Thus, a call for an education system that can accommodate (celebrate) diversity should have been designed which came to be known as multicultural education. The genesis of multicultural education goes back in history in response to the civil rights movements and as an expression of the challenges by minority groups against an unequal treatment of students in educational settings. It is understood as an educational reform endeavor to bring about equity for all students who come from different social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The FDRE Constitution (1995) upholds the equality of citizens' culture and languages. The Education and Training Policy (1994) also guarantees the respect and use of multilingual education, specifically in primary schools. The objective of this reflective paper is, therefore, to uncover some of the attributes of multicultural education in enhancing mutual understanding and tolerance among children and the youth and its implications to Ethiopia. It tries to shed lights on the nexus between the FDRE constitutional provisions of multicultural education, status of awareness, practices and challenges in Ethiopian higher learning institutions and provide a hint to the way forward.

Keywords: multiculturalism, multicultural education, diversity, constitution, cross-cultural competence, equity pedagogy, and transformative school curriculum policy.

1. Multicultural and Multiculturalism: Historical background and Rationales

1.1 Conceptual background

It is important to understand the interrelated terms "multicultural" and "multiculturalism". 'Multicultural' is a demographic variable, while 'multiculturalism' (also MC) is a normative variable (Tiryakian (2004). Though each appears distinct, in practice, they are complementary in having consequences for the public and private spheres. Multicultural refers to an empirical demographic condition to a society composed of two or more ethnic groups, each having their own cultural traits and also overlaps with other groups. Tiryakian maintains that the relationship between the groups or ethnic communities may be on par or may stand in a hierarchy, making social inequality in wealth, educational status, political influence, etc. In the West, from ancient Rome to a wide variety of historical periods and across civilizations, the central tendency of the public sphere has been strengthened and legitimized, while at the local/ community level, cultural diversity may be allowed. It is a pity that modernity could not give solution to the public/ private sphere dichotomy. Instead, one culture, the culture of the state in the public sphere, diverse or multicultural situations continued to prevail in the private sphere as 'normal'.

On the other hand, the public sphere domination of culture was so evident while marginalizing the private sphere cultures. This was used as an instrument for establishing national identity. One critical cultural complex according to Tiryakian is that of language. The formation of modern nation-states, especially in the case of France and Great Britain and also Spain, called for imposing a uniform culture over the territory of the state. Except with its variations, from one social setting to another, the process of building the public sphere culture and marginalizing the private one was all complementing the birth of modern states at the beginning of the 19th century, with modern nations by the beginning of the 20th century. Major institutions, especially education, took a decisive and defining role while intellectuals of the public sphere kept imposing a policy of what in retrospect might be traced as "monoculturalism". This took place partly by means of coercion and various ways. In consequence, symbols such as the national anthems, monuments, secular holidays, heroes, children's story books, etc. embedded in voluntary everyday 'banal nationalism' (Billing 1995; Tiryakian 2004).

Gradually, a 'paradigm shift' in the West began to take shape, a tendency of acknowledging, accepting,

and welcoming the presence of 'others', referring to the minorities and immigrants in the public sphere. In other words, a gradual change of attitude from one dominant ethnic or national group began to be reflected. The demographic composition of the population, such as gender issues also brought about remarkable challenge to the public sphere, where women began to step out from being confined to the private sphere to increased freedom of access to the public institutions. In general, it can be said that two factors ushered in the culmination of the foregoing dichotomies in the developed world such the US: the breakdown of gender segregation enhanced women's enrolment in higher education; 'Women's Studies' got acceptance for the first time in academic institutions.

What is multiculturalism? It is the attitude or ideology that considers the presence and co-existence of cultural diversity into a given social, political and cultural set up. It is also an idea that advances the equity of cultural norms and that citizens should not be disadvantaged as a result of wanting to exercise their cultural norms. Hence, multiculturalism is against one (mono) or "high" cultural attitudes which perpetuate symbolic importance for one group and symbolic violence for another (Bourdieu 1991). It was meant to redress the deprivation of minority immigrants that the public sphere had to come up with mechanism known as multiculturalism. Rex (1998) examined that the major challenge of multiculturalism to the public sphere was not only cultural but also economic and political. In consequence, multiculturalism came as a response to monoculturalism on one hand and as political and economic aspirations on the other, on the part of the immigrants and minority communities within the nation's border.

1.2 Multicultural Education: What it is and means

Scholars hold consensual views on the historical emergence of the term, "multicultural education", which dates back to the civil rights movements of the early 1960s in the West. Prominent proponents including Banks (1997), Sleeter (1996), Bennet (2003), and Olson (2003) argue that the genesis of the concept, on *multicultural education* came about both in response to the civil rights movements and as expression of the challenges by minority groups against the unequal treatment of students of color and other minority groups in educational and related institutions. As explained in Bonsan (2015), while many credit the 1950s civil rights movement as the origin of multicultural education, scholars such as George W. Williams, Carter G. Woodson, W. E. B. Dubois and Charles H. Wesley had previously denounced discriminatory practices, stereotypes, negative images of African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The scholars were concerned about restoring or portraying positive images of African Americans. Their scholarship contribution is known as the early ethnic studies movement. To Nieto (2009), the early phases of multicultural education developed in the United States of America was a response to the civil rights movement and then expanded to other countries, such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. Many scholars ascertain that Canada was the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy in 1971, in an attempt to bring unity through diversity (Banks, 2009; Day, 2000; Nieto, 2009; Parekh, 2006). As noted by Nieto (2009, p. 13).

Thus, multicultural education can be understood as an educational reform endeavor to bring about equity for all students who come from different social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Nergeny and Herbert 1995). To the views of Taliaferro (1999), multicultural education meant to restructure the curricula and educational institutions in order to support students from diverse background to benefit from equal educational opportunities. Such school reforms strongly challenge and reject discrimination of any sorts in schools and society, and thereby affirm pluralism. It may also be from this basic understanding that Banks (1997) characterizes the subject as a means to recognize unity in diversity.

Vavrus (2002) also argues that multicultural education is a reform that strives to create conditions within schools in a bid to fostering equality for all students. Hence, its fundamental goal "is to reform the school and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social class-class groups will experience educational equality" (Banks 1993d, 3). The scholar argues that the underlying assumption is the recognition that hegemonic racial, ethnic, and social-class favor the schooling opportunities for students from privileged backgrounds. Furthermore, multicultural education reform also bases itself to exploring factors that contribute to student under-achievement within broader school reform efforts. To this end, Nieto (1997) explains the functions of multicultural education as follows:

It permits educators to explore to systematic problems that lead to academic failure for many students...(multicultural education) fosters the design and implementation of productive learning environments, diverse instructional strategies, and a deeper awareness of how cultural and language differences can influence learning. School reform with a multicultural perspective thus needs to begin with an understanding of multicultural education with a *sociopolitical context* (p. 389).

The above beliefs by Nieto vividly shows that a multicultural education reform provides a socially conscious antidote to the hitherto school programs narrowly organized around the mainstream standards and assessments. In general, it can be argued that since the whole philosophy of multicultural education is undergoing reform in the educational provision process, this is what good schools need to do in the face of

diverse student and teachers backgrounds they have. It is also in this way that schools bridge the cultural gaps inherent among students, teachers, etc. to minimize the negative impacts of educational programs (Chisholm 1994; Fullinwider 1996).

One of such dire reforms has to be in the teacher education programs. According to Vavrus and Ozean (1998, 1040), one of the limiting factors for multicultural content integration is that teachers view multicultural education as “not applicable” and feel “too pressed for time to just ‘change’ the curriculum” to include multicultural education. They also rationalize that their students are “stuffed” and it is both a burden and affects the quality of their students’ learning. Vavrus (1994) found some of the misconceptions towards multicultural education by teachers. Some teachers are unaware of the need for multicultural content integration to result in asserting value neutrality toward multicultural concepts. They also fear that they misunderstand and convey mistaken political and social values implying that teachers lacked both conceptual and pedagogical skills preparation to respond to their pupils through systematic curriculum transformation or social action. This leads to the assumption that teachers, for a number of reasons, have not been found affirmative toward transforming existing curriculum into a multicultural construct.

In consequence, it leads to teachers’ professional resistance or avoidance against multicultural perspectives. Vavrus and Ozean (1998) thus concluded that the spill-over effect was that an insufficient knowledge base of student and teacher avoidance in attempting transformational and social actions approaches. According to scholars, recent trends of reforms in the education sector have also played their role in diminishing multicultural education concerns for equity. For example, Carlson (1997) argues that reforms targeting and emphasizing measurable outcomes based on test scores for the individual child on some subjects (e.g. reading and mathematics) over nearly other curricular contents. Thus dominant educational reforms structured around a model of meritocracy treat the individual as removed from the social forces, which central to multicultural education. Harsch, Koppich, and Knapp (1998) explain that issues that affect group identity and cultural differences are either downplayed or ignored.

Education systems must not themselves lead to exclusion simply via academic competition as academic underachievement may sometimes become irreversible and leads to social marginalization. According to Delors (1996), academic failure is the cause of some forms of violence or individual maladjustment that tear the social fabric. However, transformative multicultural education reform challenges the assumptions of meritocratic reforms in a society where people of different socioeconomic, cultural and educational backgrounds face an unequal access to services. To this end, the scholars believe that a teacher education program curriculum that strives to become multicultural in outlook and practices should grapple with notions of individualism and meritocracy where dominant groups hinder the learning opportunities of students from socially marginalized groups (Vavrus p.31). This leads to the assumption that teachers, for a number of reasons, have not been found affirmative toward transforming existing curriculum into a multicultural construct.

1.3 Multicultural Education and Its Rationales

Had it not been for the cause of historical and political misfortunes in last century, societies have been and still are multicultural. Consequently, it is now imperative to accept this natural fact that diversity and multiple loyalties as a valuable asset. Education for pluralism is considered as a safeguard against violence. It is also a principle for the enrichment of the cultural and civic life of present day societies, especially in the current social, economic, political and cultural contexts. That is why Banks (2001) considers multicultural education as a new paradigm in the 21st century. UNESCO (1996) also believes that the education system has the explicit task of preparing citizens for broader social goals. Hence, education for tolerance and respect for other people is a prerequisite for democracy and should be regarded as an on-going enterprise. The primary goal of multicultural education is to design a system of education and instruction process that are culturally and socioeconomically relevant to and inclusive rather than exclusive so that students from diverse backgrounds become part and parcel of the education enterprise that we endeavor to impart.

One major importance of multicultural education is what scholars in the field emphasize as cultural understanding and also cultural competence. Cultural understanding refers to the knowledge and promotion of one’s as well as others cultural values and norms in order to reduce prejudices and stereotypes. These help to foster positive and harmonious intercultural exchanges (McCarthy and Willis 1995). Banks (1993a, 2001b) considers such attributes as “contributions” and “additive” approaches to our multicultural knowledge in a school’s curriculum. The scholars contend that this will equip citizens with cultural competence, where valuing cultural pluralism should have a central place in the school curricula. Cultural competence is a set of cognitive, behavioral and effective/motivational components that enable individuals to effectively adapt to intercultural environments. Cultural competence also plays significant roles in prejudice reduction dimension and cross-cultural exchanges in a culturally diverse society (McCarthy and Willis 1995). This leads individuals and groups to acquire cultural sensitivity (awareness, appreciation and caring about others culture). Since cultural competence challenges assimilationist views and strives for the prevalence of equitable schooling environments,

it induces a paradigm shift both in the school as well as teacher education /training programs (Vavrus 2002). However, cautious note has to be made here that one needs to assert both the right to be different and at the same time responsiveness to the common universal values (Delors, p. 60). Multicultural education, therefore, should not create precedence where the cultural values including languages of individuals would restrict (imprison) their social, economic and related opportunities. This is quite relevant in multicultural societies such as Ethiopia where cultural values need not serve as a wall rather than being transparent.

Multicultural education is, therefore, can be considered “a total school reform effort designed to increase educational equity for a range of cultural, ethnic, and economic groups (Banks 1993c, p. 6). Its goals are multidimensional which includes content integration for an inclusive education at all levels of curricula, multicultural knowledge construction processes, prejudicial discrimination reduction, an equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure for all children and youth (Banks, 1993d, 2001b). It also provides teachers with acquisition of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that serve all children and youth, especially students whose interests have been historically marginalized by institutions and people in privileged positions. In order to attain this purpose, cultural responsive and relevant teachers need to undergo professional development from institutions committed to multicultural education reform (Gay 2000; Irvine 1992, 2001; Ladson-Billings 1995b).

Educators and policymakers need to know that today’s citizens need to develop what is popularly known as “*cross-cultural competence*” (3C) or “*inter-cultural competence*”. A person who is cross or interculturally competent captures and understands, in interaction with people from other cultures, their specific concepts in perception, thinking, feeling and acting. Much more of earlier experiences, today’s citizens have to be free from prejudices and there is an interest and motivation to continue learning. In consequence, organizations from fields such as diverse as business, health care, government security and developmental aid agencies, academia, and non-governmental organizations have all sought to leverage 3C in one guise or another, often with poor results due to lack of rigorous study of the phenomenon and reliance on “common sense” approaches based on the culture developing the 3C models in the first place. For instance, the U.S. Army Research Institute, which is currently engaged in a study of the phenomenon, defines 3C as: “A set of cognitive, behavioral, and affective/motivational components that enable individuals to adapt effectively in intercultural environments”. But we need to know that cross-cultural competence does not operate in a vacuum. One theoretical construct posits that 3C takes into account language proficiency, and regional knowledge to be distinct skills that are inextricably linked, but to varying degrees depending on the context in which they are employed.

1.4 Education as medium of cultural assets and liabilities

Many of us may not notice the role of education as medium of our culture, both in positive or negative ways. Nevertheless, it is equally important to understand that both ways have got significant influences on the coming generations, as whatever culture passes to the next generation affects everyone’s life or destiny. As a result, Plato in his famous work, *Republic*, warns: “if left to its own devices, society is apt to transmit cultural liabilities to the next generation instead of cultural wealth” (Martin, 2002, 1). According to Plato, two of the liabilities were cowardice and impiety. For Martin, such liabilities include slavery, torture, domestic violence and hatred (be it of race, religion, gender, ethnic, or sexual orientations, etc), which are not innate but which are learned. They all are culture, not nature. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1979) considers such cultural liabilities or cultural miseducative in the extreme.

In consequence, Martin further argues that societies, groups and institutions within them, can be educative, but can also be sadly miseducative. “*Cultural miseducation occurs when so many cultural liabilities or such devastating ones are passed down that a heavy burden is placed on the next generation; or alternatively, when invaluable portions of the culture’s wealth are not passed down: ‘when the sin of omission and commission are conjoined’*” (Martin, p. 5). To avoid the twin sins of omission and commission, we need to know the full extent of cultural assets and liabilities whose solution is to be found in education. If the older generation does not persuade its educational agents to prevent existing cultural liabilities from being passed down to the future generation, it may well place the next generation in cultural bankruptcy. This cultural debt (cultural poverty), if not interfered with, will result in violence, consumerism, racism, etc. (Martin 2002, 66). On the other hand, the problem of education of citizens is not confined to schooling; for society at large educates in numerous ways, some planned, but most unplanned. Beginning with the truism that culture is too vast to be entirely transmitted to future generations and noting that culture itself is composed of what is called “cultural wealth” and “cultural liabilities”, Martin confronts the age-old, vexing problem of how to maximize the transmission of the former while minimizing the transmission of the latter (1999, 4-10, 16).

Indeed, society’s cultural wealth is one that does not include any human atrocities whatsoever. Representations of immoral deeds and evil practices (historical, psychological, or philosophical...artistic, photographic, or theatrical portrayals) can not, in strict sense, be considered wealth of cultures. According to

Martin, Nazi concentration camps and the uses to which they were put, though were creations of culture (not nature), by no stretch of imagination do they constitute part of the wealth of culture. However, it is important to note that the artifacts of the camps, the victims and perpetrators, and the scale of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D. C., can be said cultural wealth as they depict immoral cultural narrations in order that visitors can connect to the victims of the story (Martin p. 16). Nevertheless, such human atrocities put all of us in debt as there is no way to undo what the perpetrators have once committed.

In general, society has the responsibility to transmit cultural values and norms just like as biological life to reweave the social fabric. In this regard, John Dewey's (1916/1961) view is vivid when he commented this: "Unless pains are taken to see that genuine and thorough transmission takes place, the most civilized group will relapse into barbarism and then into savagery" (pp.3-4). Although Dewey knows that transmission of culture from one generation to another gives way to an individualistic perspective, individual beings are also social creatures and the community should play a central role to shape it. Dewey values schools as one method of cultural transmission. Thus the question of what to teach or the question of curriculum selection becomes important. This becomes evident in a situation where dozens and dozens of disciplines and each of them needs separate governance (Ozick 1987). Hence, two main strategies may be opted for: curriculum relevance (a cultural wealth curriculum) for school and society, and entrusting various institutions to shoulder such wider responsibilities. Our schools have to become homes where the three Cs (care, concern and connection) hold sway (Martin 2002, 96). Hence, besides educational agencies, all formal institutions and informal groupings in the society are to be entitled the guardians of cultural wealth. These guardians can ensure to maximize the transmission of cultural wealth rather than do cultural liabilities.

1.5 Globalization and Multicultural Education

The concept and understanding about globalization is not only different among scholars but also contradictory sometimes. Critical theorists argue that ..."global issues remain mostly an unrealized and hoped-for goal" (Banks 2001a, 14). Furthermore, to Macedo and Bartolome (1999), ambiguous human relations approaches to multicultural and global education that focuses primarily upon cultural tolerance make obscure global economic disparities. The global dimension of multicultural education generally shies away from taking an overt transformative stance on moral implications of unequal material and political resource distributions. In consequence, critics of globalization tend to counter the purported advantages of global standardization and homogeneity.

On the other hand, it is important to look at the two-side arguments of globalization: its liberating potential through global solidarity and its oppressive qualities through corporate globalization (Vavrus 2002). The historical links between globalization and colonialism are also related to what is known as *Eurocentrism* and *Eurocentric* concepts of progress, development, civilization, and 21st-century expressions of manifest destiny. According to Jameson (1998b), globalization is less a specialized field of study and more "a space of tension" between transitional domination and uniformity and the liberation of local culture from hidebound state and national forms (pp. xiii-xiv). In other words, while one aspect of globalization incorporates the quest for international profit to standardize cultural differences and subordinate populations, its other side of the scale reveals a capacity to free politically dominated groups from parochially and internationally sanctioned acts of oppression, global solidarity for emancipation. That is why globalization is said to carry a seemingly paradox between oppression and liberation. For example, a global document such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) can provide a global solidarity foundation for fundamental freedoms to oppressed populations.

Moreover, other forms of universal standardization such as an advocacy and application of corporate globalization can have dire consequences for historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups (Vavrus 2002). As a result, both multicultural education and globalization are defined within the conceptual matrices that encompass status quo maintenance of privileged populations as well as transformative possibilities for the emancipation of subordinated populations from cycles of oppression. In this vein, Mahalingam and McCarthy (2000) note that transformative multiculturalism favors local-global concepts where difference, plurality and solidarity prevail against oppression versus projects of a global economy as inevitable and necessary. Nevertheless, Jameson (1998a) contends that separating culture from economics and politics, and more specifically, human rights from property rights is a counter productive and "banal distinction" (p. 70).

1.6 The role of Schools and the Society in Multicultural Education

It is evident that throughout the world, the main purpose of education is to create social links between individuals on the basis of shared values, norms and experiences. According to Delors (1996), education is a means to produce citizens who can play active role in the society. While multicultural education is expected to transform the educational and instructional processes toward an active engagement of all students for knowledge construction, the education system, the school community and the larger society will have turn diversity into a

constructive contributory factor of mutual understanding between individuals and groups. This important mission saves the likely breakdown of social ties in the modern societies (Delors, p. 54).

However, role assigned to formal schooling in many countries has been to fashion good law-abiding citizens who will share a single national identity and who will be loyal to the nation-state. This has inadvertently resulted in the marginalization and destruction of distinct people's cultures, religions, languages, beliefs or ways of life. Furthermore, it is forcefully against the will and interest of the people in charge which makes them subordinate to the interest of the state and the dominant society. But education in the present era has to be flexible and accommodative of the diverse beneficiaries at stake. Multicultural education, therefore, addresses the specific needs of culturally distinct communities in all settings. To the view of Stavenhagen (1986), *multicultural education enlightens people about diversity and respect for others*. In consequence, it becomes necessary to rethink the objectives of what it means to educate and to be educated; to redesign the contents and the curricula of educational institutions; to develop new teaching skills and methods; and to stimulate the emergence of new generations of teachers/learners which could fulfill these ideals and visions. Schools have to also ask themselves whether they are moving in this new direction of bringing up their young and adult citizens.

That is why prominent critical pedagogues argue that a truly multicultural/pluralistic education is based on a philosophy of humanistic pluralism, which inspires educational transformation to take place. However, it is also important to see that there are still doubts about the value of multicultural education or the notion of cultural pluralism. Some fear that this may lead to the crystallization of separate identities, the strengthening of ethnocentrism, and the ramifications of ethnic animosities, and finally, to the disintegration of existing nation-states. According to Stavenhagen, however, this only takes place in situations when "ethnic diversity goes unrecognized or is suppressed" (p.232). Hence, it is only through education, multicultural education, in which a truly civic culture can be shared by all that differences will cease to beget inequalities and distinctiveness no longer generate enmity. In such a world of view, ethnic identities will belong to a purely private domain (e.g. like religion in modern secular states), and should be of no threat to public policies or public domains. According to UNESCO (1986), *in a diverse society, all members should understand that it is not by relegating people of distinct cultural values to the backroom that democratic and humanistic values can be fostered. It is rather important to know how to foster a democratic civic culture, based on individual human rights, and encourage the mutual respect for the culture of others on the recognition of the collective human rights of all people in our borders and around the globe*.

Hence, schools and the society in general should play significant roles in appreciating not only the diverse cultural values and realities closer to their life styles, but have to also understand that the other side of the coin. That is, we have to make sure that problems in the social environment are not left behind school gates. We have know that social issues such as poverty, hunger, violence, drugs, etc. enter into classrooms with school children. As a response, teachers need to cope with these problems with the means they have and help their students understand all of these crises and seek individual and collective solutions. To this end, teachers have to adapt their relationship with learners by switching their roles from what Delors (p.144) characterizes as "soloist" to "accompanist". This is a real transformative move from dispensing information to helping learners seek, organize, and manage knowledge rather than moulding them. Such a transformative approach helps two important functions. First, it brings school contents to have close bearing (e.g. ethnic and cultural groups, critical social and environmental challenges, etc) from the margin into the center of school curriculum. Second, the transformative approach curriculum helps learners to seek knowledge by themselves. They will have opportunities to get acquainted with knowledge construction and application from different perspectives (Banks (1997).

However, the exercises toward accommodating diversities had taken its due courses. For instance, in the US, accommodating the presence of "others" was so gradual in the public spheres. Women's Movement began to take shape. Women also began to step out from being confined private sphere to increased access to public spheres in the US. This also led to various change of attitudes in the public spheres, where participating in elections and appointment in high-ranking public institutions have gradually become realities of day-day phenomena. According to these changes also brought about two major consequences in the US: the breakdown of gender segregation followed by women's enrolment in higher education and the beginning of "Women Studies" in academic institutions. Moreover, the declining fertility of women (especially white women) and the vast pattern of immigration from many parts of the world all proved that there is no point to deny the existence of diversity.

In a global context, the rapid expansion of communications networks brought about producers and consumers together from different continents and regions. Moreover, with the help of the communications technology, past unrelated events from far away places appeared to be near to us at the same time in all of our homes. All of these made the prior assumptions of many modern nation-states as culturally homogenous to stop thinking that does not hold true now. As a result, the facts differ in that mono-ethnic states are the exception rather than the rule (Stavenhagen 1986). Indeed, the idea of the mono-ethnic, culturally homogenous nation has

been used more often than not in disguise of the need for evolving into an ethnocentric entity, where a single majority or dominant ethnic group imposes its own vision of “nationhood” upon the rest of society (*Ibid.* p. 230). While this state of affairs is prone to contradiction and conflicts among members of various groups, scholars strongly argue that many of the current conflicts between the former in many parts of the world are inherent in the way the modern nation-states manage diversity, ethnic diversity in particular, within their borders (Stavenhagen 1986). The problems are directly reflected in the social, cultural and educational policies adopted by states with regard to the various peoples, nations, and ethnic groups that live within their borders.

One of the most important roles assigned to formal schooling in many countries has been to fashion good law-abiding citizens who will share a single national identity and who will be loyal to the nation-state. However, the other side of this measure resulted in the marginalization and destruction of distinct people’s cultures, religions, languages, beliefs or ways of life. Furthermore, it forcefully and against the will and interest of the people in charge makes them subordinate to the interest of the state and the dominant society. It is because of the foregoing critical facts that education in the present era has to be flexible and accommodative of the diverse beneficiaries at stake. Multicultural education, therefore, addresses the specific needs of culturally distinct communities in all settings. To the view of Stavenhagen (1986), multicultural education enlightens people about diversity and respect for others. In consequence, it becomes necessary to rethink the objectives of what it means to educate and to be educated; to redesign the contents and the curricula of educational institutions; to develop new teaching skills and methods; and to stimulate the emergence of new generations of teachers/learners. The importance of learning environments in higher education learning institutions conducive to instilling the essence of equality, co-existence, reciprocity, and trust among students from diverse backgrounds. A university composed of diverse students is essential not only to the intellectual well-being of individual students but also to the long-run health of a nation (Gurin 1999)

1.7 Attempts and process of multicultural education in Ethiopia

Education in Ethiopia, traditional education in particular, has a relatively long history: believed to be as early as the introduction of the main religions (Christianity and Islam). Before the advent of modern education, the Church had a virtually monopoly over the education in the country (Perham 1969; Bowen 1976; Tekeste 1990, 2006). In the beginning of the early 20th century, Western type of education was introduced with the concessions made by the then Emperor with the Church. This was found necessary that the traditional education could not pass the diplomatic test of the time. However, despite a century long journey, access to education has been much lower even by an African standard until very recently (Tekeste 1990, 2006; Woube 2002; Dereje 1991, 2010).

Recently, the country has undergone major sociopolitical, economic and cultural reforms. This has now endured for nearly three decades. One major area of the reforms focused on the education sector. This marks the coming to force of the Education and Training Policy in 1994. The policy, beyond playing a redressing role of past limited access to education, inequity, inefficiency, quality and relevance, one of its objectives was framed as follows: “To bring up citizens who respect human rights, stand for the well-being of people, equality, justice and peace, endowed with democratic culture and discipline” (ETP 1994, 7-8). One of the major policy reforms, which could also be regarded as historic about the new education and training policy is the medium of school instruction. The policy boldly made clear that primary school children of the nation could learn in their mother tongue. Under the policy’s “Language of Education” (3.5) section, the following statement heralds that: “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). Indeed, this bold political and pedagogical measure has significantly contributed to the unprecedented access to and school enrolment surges in the nation when post-1994 education enrolment statistics is seen.

Furthermore, the series of education sector development programs (ESDPs) that evolved from 1997/8 to date (GTP Two), have also, reiterated the need for upbringing citizens who are aware of the need for respecting human rights and standing for peace. For example, the following two ESDP emphases can be cited as cases in point: “producing good citizens who understand, respect and defend the constitution” (ESDP II, 2001/2002-2003/4) and “producing responsible and competent citizens” (ESDP II, 2005/6-2009/10).

In addition, among the focus priority programs in the General Education sub-sector, access to quality basic education is one of them. This is supposed to make sure that all children, youngsters and adults with particular emphasis acquire competences, skills, values and attitudes to enabling them participate fully in the social, economic, and political development of Ethiopia... (ESDP IV, 2010, p. 67). Similarly, the First Five-Year Plan (Growth and Transformation Plan) committed itself to narrowing gaps in access to and equity between both sexes, rural-urban, and regions (p. 104). In the secondary education, priority focus was on female students, rural youth, emerging or past underserved regions and their native populations (GTP 2010, 105). Similarly, the General Education Package (1999 E.C), in one of its objectives had committed itself to the following student learning profiles: *Graduate from any level of education is expected to be imbued with and acquire necessary knowledge and skills; love for the nation and work, democratic thinking, commitment to justice and good*

governance and to effectively shoulder entrusted responsibilities (GEP, p.11, (trans.).

The Curriculum Framework for the Ethiopian Education (KG-12) in May 2009 further identified a set of values that guide educational actions in this level of studies. It emphasizes that the major principle that schools should uphold is the bringing up of citizens who respect cultural heritages and diversity as “*Ethiopia has diverse cultures that contribute to the colorful tapestry, which our country’s young people will be educated in a way that respects this diversity while unifying them into one country*” (p. 5). In consequence, some of the values to be instilled in the students include: *national and international heritages; unity within diversity of their country; respect for themselves (their own) and for others; equality between all sections of the society; the environment and to care for it; and respect the values and cultures of their people, etc. (Curriculum Framework 2009, 6).*

In addition to, and even before all of the foregoing provisions, a decisive and unhesitatingly declarations was made by the Constitution of the land (1995), which is the first in the history of the land, as it relates to the recognition of the diverse cultural values of nations, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia. The FDRE Constitution article 39, articles 1 and 2 specifically confirm this. Equally deserving provisions and elaborations have also been made by the Cultural Policy of the FDRE which came to force in 2003. It further notes: *Cultural themes shall be included into the educational curricula with the aim of integrating education with culture and thereby to shape the youth with a sense of cultural identity....Education programs reflecting the various cultures of the country shall be broadcasted by mass media institutions in order to promote the cultural knowledge of the peoples of Ethiopia (FDRE Cultural Policy 2003, 36).*

2. Discussions and the way forward

This part particularly discusses some of the limitations and gaps of multicultural education in Ethiopian schools in general and our higher learning institutions in particular. Though domestic research outputs are either scanty or inaccessible, I will depend on some of the available secondary data, some direct and indirect observations and interactions made with the academia and graduate students. To begin with, the sociopolitical changes took place in the country since the early 1990s has brought about fundamental departures when seen in light of constitutional and different policy provisions. Even with this level of commitment, many hitherto “un invincible” state of affairs of peoples in this country, have been boldly tampered with. For instance, critical political issues such as federalism and self-government, language and religion freedoms and related cultural issues have been attended to though all of such undertakings are not always in their rosy sides.

On the other hand, the following main questions may be raised and get answers: To what extent do national policies and legislations have supported the facilitation of multicultural education provision in Ethiopia? Are major stakeholders such as teachers, school principals, and higher learning institutions leadership aware of such dire needs? Can what have been done so far match with the aforementioned provisions and needs for multicultural education? What needs to be done? While there is no magic bullet for all of these questions, one critical point may be raised for discussion. That is, there is a missing-link between the aforementioned constitutional provisions and the level of awareness and actions in commensurate with the former. Most people seem to ‘know’ it but not obliged to do it and adhere to because it is a civilized way of life in this 21st century, as one of the post-modernist imperatives to ensure harmony, peace and understanding among citizens. It is only that can create a social capital that in turn ensures stability and development.

But there is still a grey area in our education system in general and curricula in particular when it comes to multicultural education. While we have managed to realize multilingual education in primary schools (though with some variants), some languages are made to continue unto high schools as a subject and also as area of research in higher learning institutions. Nevertheless, it may not be clear for everyone whether such developments are mere orders or as natural or normative growth to adhere to. Moreover, the fact that some parents and students shy away from pursuing their primary education in their own languages in some of the urban centers in the country testifies that there is lack of positive conceptualization about the subject under discussion. For an inquisitive mind, this may not be the only reason. Two buttons could be touched upon or speculated which are contrasting. The first could be associated with sheer denial of the equality of languages which was evidenced in the post-Soviet Union Baltic states where the so-called ‘dominant’ linguistic community in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania had hard time to believe that time has already come to conform to the reality. Second, there are some who seemed ‘to lose hope’ and tend to believe the latent dynamism which nobody can determine is a game changer. It is with this minor argument that interventions so far made to imbue citizens with multicultural and cross cultural understanding and practice is not consistent and deep-to-skin transformation desired. For instance, Bonsan (2015) in his dissertation has characterized the efforts made in Ethiopian secondary school teachers’ education as:

a ‘sporadic’ (emphasis added) and fragmentary treatment of issues of diversity in the secondary teacher education policies, curricula and institutional practices. In other words, the expectation that the Ethiopian government’s diversity-oriented policies have been effectively transferred and reflected in the country’s secondary teacher education system is not realized. It can be concluded that the current

Ethiopian secondary teacher education system is not designed in a way which acknowledges the country's multicultural, multilingual and multiethnic characteristics and/or in line with the diversity-driven policies (p. vii).

Bonsan (2015) further confirmed that the results of the content analysis revealed that elements of multicultural education are missing in most of the Ethiopian secondary teacher education curricula. In other words, whereas a curriculum of a teacher education program of a country characterized by diversity is expected to be designed based on the diverse cultures of the country, Ethiopian secondary teacher education curricula are found to have little relationship with the country's diverse cultures. This means that the diversity-oriented policies of the country are not effectively incorporated into the national secondary teacher education curricula. A number of scholars (Adamu, 2013; Dugassa, 2011; Kebede, 1999; Mebratu, 2011; Negash, 2006; Semela, 2012; Wagaw, 1999) in Bonsan argued that education which does not take into account the socio-cultural perspectives of the country for which it is designed cannot bring about the intended societal changes. Hence, many research results revealed the absence of the representation of the diverse Ethiopian cultures in the secondary teacher education curricula. Bonsan further cautions that "under such circumstances, there is less possibility for the student teachers to get in-depth awareness of the ethno-cultural diversity awaiting them at their place of assignment. This has serious implications for Ethiopian secondary teacher education policy makers, curriculum designers, practitioners, and other stakeholders" (2015).

Indeed, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to match the changes so far made with the grand promise of the Constitutions' Preamble: We the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia committed to *...building a political community... ensuring lasting peace...continue to live with our rich and proud cultural legacies... our common destiny can best served by rectifying historically unjust relationship and further promoting our shared interests... to live as one economic community...* This argument, however, does not lead to something which discredits the measures so far taken and the changes that have come along. The point is to show that the promises of the constitution with regard to multicultural awareness at macro-level and the young generation in particular needs to be re-examined and much faster change and activities are awaited to bring about attitudinal restoration in our youths and the general public.

This limitation may not be confined to primary and secondary levels of education. It may even be something seriously undreamt subject in our higher learning institutions, the larger public, students and teachers. Though difficult to be conclusive due to lack of limited research, such attitudinal misconceptions cannot be ruled out from some political circles which lack certainty and go for reversal at times. The moral of the story is that apart from the provisions and since it bears constitutional and other policy underpinnings, many of the academia, political and other segments do not seem to take for granted that multicultural education and its resultants, such as pedagogical equity, cultural sensitivity and tolerance is a norm in today's world rather than an exception.

It is, in particular, more important to link this same critical concern to our higher learning institutions. Our higher learning institutions are 'miniatures' of the diverse nation, Ethiopia. As rightly explained by (Yirga & Bejital 2007), in Ethiopia, diversity among students increases as one goes from primary schools to higher education institutions. Thanks to the educational expansions in the country, all the youth of the nation meet at the university, perhaps for some, the first time with their respective diverse cultures and university mates. But Bonsan witnessed that "many instructors of Ethiopian higher education institutions often demonstrate insensitivity to issues of diversity" (p.21). Consequently, it is difficult, if not impossible, to think that the civic and ethical education that we provided to these youths in their primary and secondary schools alone can make them exercise the desired inter-cultural interactions which can neutralize or avoid frictions and disagreements among themselves.

A study by Adamu (2013, 92) in Bahrdar University in Bonsan (2015) has clearly revealed the type of relations our university students construct and its academic setbacks are as follow: "prejudice, stereotypes and ethnocentrism, language and ethnicity-based friendship, political party membership, and ethnic composition are the key factors that impede the development of positive intergroup relations in the diverse student population of the university". Semela (2012) also found a similar finding that in Africa conflicts usually target school children and young people in higher education institutions. While multicultural education could have partly served as an antidote to reducing such stereotypic tensions it is not offered even as a common course which could have given students an opportunity to exchange their views and why tolerance is more important than intolerance for their common wellbeing in the university and the nation at large. Banks (2010) views that multicultural education views the school as a social system that consists of highly interrelated parts and variables. In order to bring about educational equality, all major components of the school must be substantially changed. But paradoxically enough, there may be courses that bear no much relevance but being offered for the fulfillment of the set credit hours in some of our higher learning institutions.

In the absence of all such fundamental orientations, where the students are not made to know themselves and others and respect for others is a reciprocal democratic culture, how can one dare say that incidents of intolerance and vented conflicts in our university youths are labeled as 'inappropriate' and

sometimes condemned to 'incivility'? If we think in this narrow sense of civility, we have unintentionally committed what a famous multicultural scholar (J.A. Banks 2006) had to say: "*multicultural societies are faced with the problem of constructing nation-states that reflect and incorporate the diversity of its citizens and yet have an overarching set of shared values, ideals, and goals to which all of its citizens are committed. Diversity and unity must be balanced in multicultural nation-states*" (p.208). The scholar puts the potential repercussion into our mouth and tacitly makes us to think twice what and how to address this pressing issue in time as we do not fail, as diverse society, to manage ourselves.

As a multicultural nation, citizens need to develop sufficient awareness and competence. Inter- or cross-cultural competence includes cultural appreciation, cultural literacy, cultural adaptability, cultural expertise, cultural awareness, intelligence and understanding. Cross-cultural competence encompasses sets of cognitive, behavioral, and affective components to adapt effectively to inter-cultural environments which our university youths need badly to develop. Lack of knowledge of another culture unintentionally may expose to confusions and uncalled-for offense against people of another culture. In Ethiopia, citizens need to develop cultural sensitivity which enhances awareness, appreciation, and caring about another culture. University youths, more than any other segments of our society, need to nurture and practices such knowledge and skills. We must note that constitution, policies and directives will not implement themselves unless people act on them and take their initiatives. Hence, parallel to our geographic university expansions, we need to empower our university youths to broaden the culture of co-existence and respect for others' culture and move towards a common national agenda of reducing poverty, contribute to the prevalence of good governance and do away with corruption which affects all citizens regardless of whom they are and the nation at large. However, it is important to lightly shade lights what a group of graduate students in Addis Ababa University (2011) conducted in their short surveys for their term papers in Addis City Administration in limited primary and secondary schools.

Graduate students found that the subject of multicultural education is not known as such among teachers and school administrations. Moreover, issues of diversity and culture are only remembered during the annual nations, nationalities and people's day. In the rest of the year, "it simply remains a political rhetoric". The findings further noted that teachers are "cautious" not to tamper with matters related to the subject for fear of political dubbing and uncalled-for 'polarization' among their academic colleagues. They made clear that there is a deliberate retreat on the part of teachers. The graduate students' appraisal of the status of multicultural education AAU is a "paradox", in the sense that there is loose pedagogical organization of the subject and weak personnel management, not in conformity with the multicultural and multilingual reality on the ground (in the country). Students were also found refrained from discussing the issue as it appears somewhat revered or a subject they are waiting to know and discuss from their teachers. The parents of the students may also be one of the causes for the silence so long as they may not know how to address it or caution their children not to air out even what is sometimes casually discussed at home.

The graduate students' finding also revealed that "while there is appreciation of diversity among many of the nations' population, what diversity requires is not usually faced head-on", implying a clear lack of will and concrete initiatives by some circles or groups. The findings further went to describe that for some of the students, past stereotypes targeting their language or culture may be one of the hindrances not to open the issue's Pandora's Box. In fact, distorted assimilationist notions that used to match diversity to threat rather than an asset or beauty may not be expected to relinquish over night unless a continuous education and re-education takes place. No one is naïve to think that such age- old notions that used to advocate subscribing a "melting pot" view instead of asserting a different identity but for a common humanity will diminish without strenuous education and advocacy. The notion of 'cultural uniformity', the antithesis of cultural diversity (UNESCO 2001), cannot envision that cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature.

3. Conclusion

While naturally and also constitutionally endorsed as a multicultural and multilingual nation, Ethiopia has to minimize the hitherto canon of conservative multiculturalism, which. Strongly upholds the assimilationist notion of addressing issues of cultural diversity and where schools attempt to assimilate minority students into the mainstream culture (Jenks et al., 2001; McLaren, 1994; Nylund, 2006; Rhoads, 1998). The conservatives deliberately ignore cultural differences to ensure homogeneity (Jenks et al., 2001) as well as to control other ethno-cultural groups in order to maintain the status quo (Al-Haj, 2002). As explained by Nylund (2006, p. 29), conservative multiculturalism purposely marginalizes and dismisses the cultural differences of students. Similarly, Rhoads (1998, p. 40) suggests that "a conservative interpretation of multiculturalism tends to stress courses on diverse cultures as support offerings to be added to an already established canon".

The nation needs to pursue the antithesis of the aforementioned philosophy which is a critical multiculturalism claims that issues of educational equity and excellence can be addressed through raising critical as well as transformative questions (Jenks et al., 2001; Leeman & Reid, 2006; Nylund, 2006; Rhoads, 1998). According to Rhoads (1998, p. 41), critical multiculturalism combines issues of cultural diversity and the

emancipatory nature of critical educational practices which are taken from postmodernism, critical theory, and feminism. Turner (1993, p. 413) states that “critical multiculturalism seeks to use cultural diversity as a basis for challenging, revising, and relativising basic notions and principles common to dominant and minority cultures alike, so as to construct a more vital, open, and democratic common cultural approach to multicultural setting.

4. The Way Forward

- a) Based upon the constitutional and policy provisions, it is important to organize a broad-based multicultural awareness (multicultural literacy) education which mainly hinges on the re-thinking of the ideal “We are diverse and once again we renew that our cultural assets are the basis of our harmony, peace and development”. This reinforces the commitments entered in the preamble of the FDRE constitution by the Ethiopian nations, nationalities and peoples. The Day of the Ethiopian Nations, Nationalities and Peoples should carry this emblem high not only through open festivities and cultural demonstrations but also through researched conferences in its eve so that the twin objectives of raising awareness and celebrations contribute to enhanced cultural understanding, tolerance and respect among the people to laying the solid foundation of social capital in the country.
- b) Education institutions in general and higher learning institutions in particular need to shoulder a unique national responsibility to nurture and produce democratic citizens who have acquired tolerance and respect for each others, and any person from near and afar.
- c) In the face of expanding in number and geographical locations, Ethiopian higher learning institutions and the magnitude of diverse student backgrounds is unprecedentedly growing each with the diversity they had to harbor. In response a diversity-sensitive curricula, such as multicultural education management cannot be an option but remains a dire necessity to respond without much undue.
- d) Higher education institutions in this diverse nation, Ethiopia, should timely understand that a multicultural education intervention is not more costly than the usual and frequent waste of invaluable academic programs and sometimes invaluable material and life-costs, simply due to misconceptions of who we are, and what all of us can do for each and all of us.
- e) A renewed institutional and curricular support have to be extended to all educational institutions and particularly to that of higher learning institutions in order that departments specializing in multicultural education are opened and become functional in each of the university and the subject is offered as common course to all students who pass through higher learning programs.

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