# State of Multiculturalism Among Undergraduate University Students in Ethiopia

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# Abstract

Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have sense of belongingness. Acceptance of others cultural identity gives a feeling of security and self-confidence making them open to and accept diverse cultures (Berry, 2001). Multiculturalism is expected to have positive effects on ethnic group identification and intergroup relations. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess the state of multiculturalism among undergraduate university students in Ethiopia. To achieve the objective of the study cross sectional research design was employed. A total of 771 participants (484 males and 287 females) were sampled from four government universities. The combinations of multistage cluster sampling, stratified simple random sampling, simple random sampling and purposive sampling procedures were employed to select the sample participants. The Amharic and English versions of the questionnaire which includes a scenario (a case) and 10 questions portray the notions of multiculturalism and related concerns of the university students were presented. The collected data were analyzed using frequency percentage and Chi-square. The findings of the study indicate that there is a healthy relationship and tolerance, acceptance of diversity and intercultural sensitivity among the majority of target group university students. Finally, implications and recommendations were forwarded. **Keywords:** Multiculturalism, interethnic conflict, university students.

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#### Introduction

By and large multiculturalism has gained increased attention nationally and internationally, as we recognize the complexity of negotiating cultural identities socially and politically. Multiculturalism is about groups and group identities. It is a 'social-intellectual movement that promotes the value of diversity as a core principle and insists that all cultural groups be treated with respect and as equals' (Arends-Toth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Berry, 2001).

Multiculturalism is defined differently and takes different forms in, for example, schools, organizations, and countries. Multiculturalism is simply defined as the co-existence of different cultural groups in one country or state. Similarly Arends-Toth & Van de Vijver (2003), Berry et al. (2002), and Berry (2001) explained multiculturalism as a phenomenon of coexistence of several cultures within the same political framework as well as equal chances and opportunities for all. For Banks (1997) in United States of America, multiculturalism is a position that rejects former practice of assimilation and the "melting pot" image as an imposition of a mainstream culture, and instead prefers such metaphors as the Glorious Mosaic in which each cultural group in the population maintains its uniqueness.

Actually the meaning of multiculturalism depends heavily upon the context in which it is regarded. For instance, in context of Ethiopia the issues of multiculturalism is highly popularized with the advent of EPRDF (1991) led government. In Ethiopia multiculturalism denotes acceptance of the existence of diverse language identities, religions and accommodation and promotion of this diversity and includes respect for individuals (Abera Hailemariam, 2010) rather than a slogan of "one language, one religion, one flag and one people".

While in the United States - America, multiculturalism is viewed as a social and political movement and position that holds differences between individuals and groups to be a potential source of strength and renewal rather than of trouble (Verkuyten, 2005). It values the diverse perspectives people develop and maintain through varieties of experience and background stemming from racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation or class differences in the society (Verkuyten, 2005; Banks, 1997). In such a way, it strives to maintain the ideals of equality, equity and freedom on which the United States values, and includes respect for individuals and groups as a fundamental principle to the success and growth of the nation.

The philosophical base for multiculturalism particularly in education is cultural pluralism (McCormick, 1984), and the need for the provision of educational equity for students (Banks, 1981). Multiculturalism also initiates the use of materials, activities and experiences that are authentic, interdisciplinary, multidimensional, comprehensive, and integrative and that employ both cognitive and affective skills that should be used to help students understand ethnic differences and cultural diversity (Verkuyten, 2005).

In other words, the philosophical intention of multiculturalism is to bring a reform movement which addresses

inequity and discrimination which result from race, religion, ethnic, sex, culture, language, age, exceptionality, and socioeconomic status of students (Banks, 1997; McCormick, 1984). In different countries, people have been considered as if they have no culture of their own and belief, as if their culture is incompetent and as if they are not equal human beings with the rest of the society they are living with. According to Fowers & Davidov (2006) multiculturalism is usually built upon the already established principles of the politics of equality and respect for all.

In general, multiculturalism advocates equality and fairness to all citizens of all cultures, social classes, gender and religions that every citizen enjoys equal opportunity in education and other services (Sahin-Jian, 2006). Multiculturalism promotes the value of diversity as a core principle, and insists that all ethnic groups have a right to their own culture.

Concerning the historical emergence of the notion of multiculturalism and the major countries in which the multicultural movements primarily existed Parekh (2006) indicated that the early 1970's marked the emergence of the multicultural movement at first in Canada and Australia and then in the U.S.A., U.K, Germany and elsewhere. It has now begun to dominate the political agenda of even France, the strongest position of the nation state which takes no official note of its citizens' ethnicity, culture and religion.

Initially the ideology of multiculturalism was recognized between 1960s and 1970s by small number of academicians, social workers, and activists of blacks' rights and immigrants' welfare, especially in the United States of America and Australia. However many scholars have written about the cause of the emergence of multicultural education in different words but nearly with the same reasons (Gay, 1983).

Gay (1983:79) points out that the following three forces attributed to the emergence of multicultural education programs, these are:

- 1. The civil rights movement of 1960s and 1970s of USA and Australian immigrants had brought awareness of cultural differences and the need for social change.
- 2. Formerly prepared school textbooks were analyzed by critics for stereotyping images, miss-interpretations and outright omission that they posed about minority groups, and
- 3. Cultural difference begins to be considered as enriching rather than deficit to be eliminated.

Likewise, multiculturalism according to Fowers & Davidov (2006) is a logical extension of the politics of "recognition" and participation. By this means, the issue of blacks' equality, immigrants' welfare, and minority communities' right activists, and motivated scholars seek to find the solution for the forgotten groups and developed the belief that all citizens should respect the cultural heritage of themselves and the others equally. So, respecting one's culture helps to develop pride and self-esteem of those undermined by the mainstream society and these motives were initiated to design multicultural education as a means to develop positive attitude of minority as well as majority society members towards equality and its implementation was started in USA for first time (Fowers & Richardson, 1996). Generally, multiculturalism is a response to the political rights movements of minority groups and immigrants. Especially in educational context it is targeted to make the ground favorable for participation of all students to show their perspectives according to their cultural understanding. It helps the undermined to cope with others in educational achievements and also assists them to be equipped with social action orientation in the later career. Because of these reasons, some American educators begin to recognize the need to address culturally diverse learners' learning styles and started to teach to respect and accept others besides developing all learners' educational performance by means of multicultural education (Fowers & Richardson, 1996).

# Models of Multiculturalism

There are various models of multiculturalism (Goldberg, 1997) considering majority and minority relationships. Examples of these include:

- i) The liberal multicultural model: All are equal in law: society emphasizes the sameness (equality), the value and freedom of the individual. This social strategy stems from the individual, not the group, and the public sphere is neutral regarding ethnic and cultural differences. Culturally specific qualities are preserved at the private individual level.
- **ii)** The pluralistic multicultural model: This emphasizes cultural diversity. Individuals in various cultures preserve their specific cultural qualities; the public sphere considers their group identities. Those from the majority group are expected to be familiar with specific signs, ways of life and minority behavioural patterns; and those from minorities familiar with the dominant culture.
- iii) The critical multicultural model: Both individual and group specific qualities are considered changeable. They are dynamic, determined and adapted to meet the social conditions and needs. This form of co-existence attempts to integrate different groups. The different 'non-dominant' identity is not a limit or barrier for participation in political, economic, cultural or other spheres of social life (Goldberg, 1997; Taylor, 1994). It seems that the multicultural state of the contemporary Ethiopia's coincided with this model.

In Ethiopia, diversity is a significant distinguishing feature of the country. Different sources show that in

Ethiopia there are around 80 ethnic groups with distinct language and cultural composition (CSA, 2008). Vaughan (2003) describes Ethiopia like many other nations of Africa, is highly multiethnic and multilingual country. It described as 'a museum of peoples'. Levine (1974) assumed Ethiopia as a country of extra-ordinary ethnic diversity each of which deserves to be studied in its own terms.

Actually from historical standpoint, multiple identities are not unique to Ethiopia, but a characteristic of many large (and not so large) states. Within the majority of modern states, a multinational character is a historically established reality (Edmond, 2005).

Cognizant of this fact the current government of Ethiopia has been attempting to maintain the nation on the basis of ethnic federalism as well as cultural, language, and political autonomy at regional and sub-regional levels. The regional autonomy sub-section indicates specific ethnic and regional rights included in accommodating perceived demands of major ethnic groups. Ethnic federalism institutionalized ethnic groups as fundamental constituents of the state (Habtu, 2003).

In general as compared to the past, the present constitution seems to guard the cultural rights of citizens and nations and nationalities. This constitutional right leaves no doubt to foster a culturally diverse nation. Thus, multiculturalism is indispensable for Ethiopians to live together respecting their differences and to build "Unity in Diversity" (Abera, 2010).

In contemporary Ethiopia, the issues of ethnicity and multiculturalism are highly popularized than earlier times. Particularly universities are places where young people of many ethnic backgrounds, social class, religious and political affiliations come together in campuses.

Studies conducted in some universities like Addis Ababa, Hawassa, Adama and others have accounted unhealthy relationship among some sections of students especially between those from the dominant ethnic groups such as Oromo, Amhara and Tigray is common (Abera Hailemariam, 2010; Abera Teferi, 2010; Asefa, 2009; Tilahun, 2007). More often than not minor disputes between individuals escalate into a bigger fighting which involves students aligned along ethnic lines (Abera Hailemariam, 2010; Tilahun, 2007). Thus, this study would address the state of multiculturalism among undergraduate university students in Ethiopia.

# **Materials and Methods**

To achieve the purpose of the study this study is principally organized around a cross-sectional survey research design. Data was collected from four Universities: Adama Science and Technology, Addis Ababa Science and Technology, Addis Ababa, and Madda Walabu. The universities were purposefully selected from various generations and sizes of universities: Addis Ababa Science and Technology University is from the new and small universities, Madda Walabu University is from the medium size and young universities, Adama Science and Technology is from old and large and finally Addis Ababa University from the very large and very old universities.

#### Population, sampling procedures and sample

The target population of this study has been university students of regular program of both sexes from different ethnic backgrounds of Addis Ababa Science and Technology, Madda Walabu, Adama Science and Technology and Addis Ababa universities. For this study, the combinations of multistage cluster sampling, stratified simple random sampling and simple random sampling were employed to select respondents. The survey has used the single population proportion formula to determine the sample size.

In order to address non-responses, the sample size had increased by a non-response insurance factor. Thus, allowances of 10% non-response rate make a total sample of 421. Furthermore, the single population proportion formula is valid only for simple random or systematic random sampling method; but the sampling technique that is used for this study is multistage cluster sampling technique. Therefore, the calculated sample size has to be multiplied by D which is the design effect resulting with N = Dn where N is the sample size for cluster sample, n is the sample size obtained from the calculation and D is the design effect. The design effect (D) provides a correction for the loss of sampling efficiency resulting from the use of multistage cluster sampling instead of simple random sampling. Hence, by considering the design effect of 2 the number had been multiplied by 2 and the total number of students taken for the study was 842. The average response rate for this study was 92% (771).

#### Instruments for the study

To achieve the objectives of this study, the required and relevant information was gathered through questionnaire. The Amharic and English versions of the questionnaire were extensively used and preferred to other tools for its simplicity for such large sample size and for the nature of the study. The questionnaire includes a scenario (a case) and 10 questions portray the notions of multiculturalism, ethnocentric attitude and behaviour and interethnic conflict issues of the university students.

#### Methods of data analyses

After the responses on the questionnaires have been collected, SPSS version 21.0 was used to enter, clean, and

analyze the collected data. The data were organized, tabulated and analyzed by using frequency, percentage and chi-square comparisons.

# **Results and Discussions**

In order to attain the objective of the study a scenario which has demonstrated a story of five Ethiopian public university students formulated and forwarded to the respondents to see their reaction to the narrations. The students represented in the scenario were from the major ethnic groups (regions) in Ethiopia. Subsequently, 10 questions have been presented based on the scenario. The scenario and questions are designated to assess the multicultural and ethnocentric attitude and behaviour of the participants. The respondents have been instructed to carefully read the story and then to reflect their first impression to the story as follows:

Students named Gemachu, Azimeraw, Ledebo, Hagos and Abdinasir were selected from Oromia, Amhara, SNNP, Tigray and Somali Regional States respectively. They were assigned and attended their undergraduate study in Addis Ababa University, Department of Psychology. All of them were second year students and shared the same dormitory.

# Table 1: Participants Response to Questions Presented Based on the Scenario

No	1: Participants Response to Questions Presented Ba Statements/questions	Responses	Freq.	%	df	<sub>y</sub> 2
	Do you believe that all the five students should be	Yes	613	79.5	2	741.02*
1	assigned to the same university regardless of their	No	66	8.6		,
	ethnic differences?	I don't Know	92	11.9		
		Total	771	100		
	Do you think that all the five students to be assigned	Yes	613	79.5	2	741.45*
2	in the same dormitory regardless of their ethnic	No	94	12.2		
	differences?	I don't Know	64	8.3		
		Total	771	100		
	Do you believe that the above mentioned students	Yes	405	52.5	2	131.96*
3	have common interest to do their group work if they	No	160	20.8		
	are assigned in the same group owing to their ethnic	I don't Know	206	26.7		
	differences?	Total	771	100		
	Do you believe in the likelihood of conflicts among	Yes	213	27.6	2	42.19*
4	these students owing to their living in the same	No	216	28.0		
	dormitory in the expense of their ethnic differences?	I don't Know	342	44.4		
		Total	771	100		
	Do you think that these students can watch different	Yes	340	44.1	2	93.18*
5	TV programs which would be transmitted in different	No	298	38.7		
	local languages without any conflict?	I don't Know	133	17.3		
		Total	771	100		
	Do you believe that these students may possibly	Yes	383	49.7	2	164.38*
6	discuss issues concerning their ethnicity, culture and	No	290	37.6		
	locality issues without any hesitation and	I don't Know	98	12.7		
	discomfort?	Total	771	100		
	Do you think that these students would intend to	Yes	534	69.3	2	$447.88^{*}$
7	make romantic relationship with other ethnic group	No	116	15.0		
	which differs from them?	I don't Know	121	15.7		
		Total	771	100		
8	Do you imagine that these students mentioned in the	Yes	461	59.8	2	251.37*
	story can live in harmony without any suspicion	No	188	24.4		
	compromising their ethnic differences?	I don't Know	122	15.8		
		Total	771	100		
9	Do you declare that all the five students should have	Yes	100	13.0	2	214.84*
	the same religion?	No	431	55.9		
		I don't Know	240	31.1		
		Total	771	100		
	Do you believe that these students have similar stand	Yes	411	53.3	2	159.46*
10	and thought concerning their country's social and	No	232	30.1		
	political circumstances regardless of their ethnic	I don't Know	128	16.6		
	differences?	Total	771	100		

*Note:* \**P*<0.05

As shown in the above table, the participants of the study have forwarded their reaction to the story. As the results revealed in Table 1, items numbered 1 and 2, the majority of the participants 613 (79.5%) support the assignment and sharing of the same university and dormitory by the five university students designated in the story regardless of their ethnic differences. Only 66 (8.6%) and 94 (12.2%) of students have expressed their dissatisfaction with the assignment and living together of different ethnic background students from different regions of Ethiopia in the same university and dormitory respectively. Small numbers of the respondents (11.9% & 8.3%) were not in a position of deciding on the matters. (N.B. Chi-square tests showed significant differences between who said "Yes", "No" and "I don't know" for almost all of the questions). This implies that the majority of the participants of the study have accepted and believed in the mixture of students in universities and dormitory from different Regional States and ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, they have a space for accommodating ethnic diversity (multiculturalism) and have positive sense to other ethnic groups.

Similarly, 405 (52.5%) of the respondents have said that even though the students mentioned in the scenario are from different regions, cultures and ethnic groups, they are deemed to have interest in engaging in the same group in their group work regardless of their ethnic differences. One hundred sixty (20.8%) of them have speculated supposing that those students mentioned in the story might not be interested to do their group work in the same group. Thus, from these figures, it is possible to articulate that university students who took part in this study may have interest in working together their group works regardless of their ethnic and regional background differences.

As indicated in Table 1, question numbered 4, 216 (28%) of the respondents have suggested that conflicts might not emerge among the five university students owing to their ethnic and regional differences and more importantly living in the same dorm. And 213 (27.6%) of them didn't believed in that, students portrayed in the story can live together in the same dorm with tolerance and harmony without conflict. Others, 342 (44.4%) of the respondents were not sure what would happen owing to students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds living together in the same dorm. The chi-square test shown in Table 1, reveals significant difference between who said "Yes", "No" and "I don't know" ( $\chi 2 = 42.19$ , p < 0.05), while pairwise ad hoc analyses uncovered non-significant difference between who said "Yes" and "No" ( $\chi 2 = .021$ , p > 0.05). In general these results imply that the majority of the respondents were not sure what would happen due to students living in the same dorm from different ethnic and regional backgrounds.

Likewise, with concerns to a question whether students can watch different TV programs transmitted in different local languages with tolerance or not, the majority, 340 (44.1%) of the respondents have affirmed that the students in the story can watch different TV programs with no quarrel regardless of their ethnic differences compromising their diversity. Similarly, large number of participants or 298 (38.7%) of the respondents have said students their story designated in the story can't watch different TV programs together due to their ethnic and language differences. Even if the chi-square test indicated in Table 1, exhibit significant difference between who said "Yes", "No" and "I don't know" ( $\chi 2 = 93.18$ , p < 0.05), pairwise ad hoc analyses showed non-significant difference between who said "Yes" and "No" ( $\chi 2 = 2.76$ , p > 0.05). This may imply that respondents have mixed feelings on whether the students pointed out in the story can watch different TV programs without conflict regardless of their ethnic and language differences.

The response depicted in Table 1, for item number 6 suggests that 383 (49.7%) of the participants have claimed that students uncovered in the story can freely discuss issues concerning their ethnicity, culture and local affaires without any hesitation and discomfort regardless of their differences. Two hundred ninety (37.6%) of them have reacted that they could not discuss on the matters. Pairwise ad hoc analyses revealed significant difference between who said "Yes" and "No" ( $\chi 2 = 12.85$ , p < 0.05). This indicates that the majority of the participants of the study believed in discussions and dialogues among dissimilar groups.

Furthermore, as it is shown in Table 1, for item number 7, 534 (69.3%) of the respondents confirm that individuals represented in the story could make romantic relationship with other ethnic group students which may differ from them. Only 116 (15%) of them have contradicted the romantic relationship would occur and almost the same number of the respondents, 121 (15.5%) of them have said that they are not sure what would happen.

Similarly, as indicated in Table 1, for number 8, 461 (59.8%) of the respondents have accepted that those students mentioned in the story could live together without any suspicion and doubt by compromising their ethnic differences. One hundred eighty eight (24.4%) of them have rejected the episode; the tolerance among the individuals from different ethnic and regional backgrounds. In general, these figures by implication reveal that university students involved in the study have accepted their ethnic, cultural and psychological dissimilarity.

Concerning, religion 431 (55.9%) of the respondents have not declared that the students indicated in the story should have the same religion. Only 100 (13%) of them have expected the same religion from the individuals. This implies that participants of the study have a place for compromising and accepting religious differences.

As shown in Table 1, number 10 pertaining to the social and political concern of their country, 411 (53.3%) of the respondents have deemed to accept that the students articulated in the story could have similar stand and thought and 232 (30.1%) of the respondents have assumed that the students could not have similar stand and

thought about their country's social and political circumstances. And only 128 (16.6%) of them were not sure what would be their stand on the country's affairs. From these figures it is possible to articulate that students involved in the study deemed have similar stand and thought concerning to the social and political issues of their country.

Overall, from the above descriptions of figures based on the story concerning the five university students nominated from different regions and ethnic groups, it is possible to say that the respondents in the present study have accepted and believed in the mixture of students from different Regional States and ethnic backgrounds to be assigned in the same university and dormitory. Imperative number of respondents has reported that university students would have interest to work together in their group work regardless of their ethnic differences. The result has also provided that the respondents have mixed feelings on whether conflicts might emerge due to sharing the same dormitory and watching different TV programs among the students could freely discuss issues concerning their ethnicity, culture and local affairs and even would make romantic relationship breaking their ethnic and regional impediment. Furthermore, the results have revealed that the majority of the students have accepted diversity and living together compromising their ethnic and cultural differences.

Thus, from the above findings it can be said that university students who participated in the study are sensitive to other students from diverse background, accepting diversity, less ethnocentric and conscious about interethnic conflicts. Consistent to this study, an earlier local study on students in the former Be-ede Mariam School and Hailesellasie I University (Ziegler, 1972) has found that students during that time had not been ethnocentric. This is may be attributable to the then aspiration of unity among students had been strong. Habtamu, Hallahmi & Abbink (2001) also investigated that good and positive relationship has been exhibited among various ethnic groups' young adult college and high school students in Ethiopia.

The above findings were incongruent with the reports (Abera Hailemariam, 2010; Abera Teferi, 2010; Asefa, 2009, Demewoz, 2001; 1997) that university students in Ethiopia exhibited more negative intergroup attitude, misunderstanding among ethnic groups, greater desire to avoid interethnic interactions, suspicious to each others and more ethnocentric. Actually, the above mentioned studies are conducted on few segments of "the dominant ethnic groups" in the country such as Amhara, Oromo, Tigre and Guragie.

#### Conclusions

In line with the worldwide ideological and pragmatic changes on matters of multiculturalism and owing to the issues that are highly popularized and promulgated in today's Ethiopia, it is essential to make an investigation concerning issues of multiculturalism and related issues. Normally, colleges and universities are places where young people come from different ethnic backgrounds, social classes, religious and political affiliation. Exposure to this diversity is likely to bring tendency of ethnocentrism, intergroup conflict and ethnic prejudice.

Thus, this study has attempted to assess the state of multiculturalism among undergraduate university students in Ethiopia. To achieve the purpose of the study this study was organized around a cross-sectional survey research design.

Based on the data obtained from the scenario presented and the story narrating the university life of five students nominated from different regions and ethnic groups, the reaction of the respondents indicates that there is a healthy relationship and tolerance, acceptance of diversity and intercultural sensitivity among the target group university students. This provides some insight about the presence of improved intercultural sensitivity and multiculturalism and nonexistence of serious ethnocentric attitude and interethnic conflicts among university students in Ethiopia.

#### The way forward

The finding of the study provides healthier feelings, attitudes and lesser interethnic conflict and ethnocentric attitude among university students in Ethiopia. Thus, university administrators, counseling psychologists and others should exert in their efforts to promote the development of a strong multicultural attitude and practices among university students.

As the findings presented based on the scenario provides that several respondents have mixed feelings on the concern of whether the students can watch different TV programs without conflict regardless of their ethnic and language differences. Many respondents presuppose that TV programs transmitted in different local languages in TV rooms may cause for interethnic conflicts. Thus, university management should consider language diversities and students interest and arrange (set) TVs in different angles of the campus halls or dormitories to satisfy the need of students.

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