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## Education and Diversity: Pupils' Perceptions of 'Others' and Curricular Responses at Selected Sites in Ethiopia

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**Abstract:** Schools play a central role in inculcating positive identity, which is founded on an accurate and constructive understanding of oneself and others. The present study, by taking the multicultural and social reconstructionist stances on the purpose and functions of schooling, attempted to appraise children's awareness and perceptions towards out-groups as well as curricular responses to educate on diversity in Alternative Basic Education (ABE) centers found in five selected sites. Data were collected from 150 children (aged 10 – 14 years), 30 ABE facilitators, 10 experts in Woreda Bureaus of Education (WBE) and 15 Centre Management Committee (CMC) members. The result indicated that the children were not well aware of the diversity of their social environment in terms of the two markers of diversity (ethno-linguistic and religious diversity). The perceptions the children hold towards out-groups were also not as desirable as expected. Irrational hatred, fear of the different and ethnocentric attitudes were noted. Not any curricular intervention meant to educate the children on diversity was also observed. The implications this situation has for educational policy and practice has been discussed.

**Key words:** out-groups, diversity, perception on diversity, schools, school curriculum

### Introduction

Diversity along ethnic, linguistic, religious and many other markers is the reality of Ethiopian societies. The question in such a social situation is whether schools have to educate children on diversity or ignore it altogether. Many who accept that schools have to educate children on diversity also question whether it is developmentally appropriate to introduce issues of

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diversity right from early years of schooling. Even though some may think to the contrary, many recent studies indicated that children's awareness and attitudes towards out-groups form early in life. For instance, according to Gomez (1991) children's attitudes towards their race, ethnic groups and other cultural groups begin to form even earlier in the pre-school years. Derman-Spark and her associates (1999) reviewed research outputs and noted that between ages 3 and 5 children become aware of gender, ethnicity and disability. At about the same age children become sensitive to both positive attitudes and negative biases attached to these key aspects of diversity by their family and by society in general. Studies by Katz and Parillo (both cited in Hendrick, 1988), regarding the perception of differences in skin color show that children as young as three years of age respond to skin color of African and Mexican Americans. McCandy and Hoyt (cited in Hendrick, 1988) studied White and Asian children in an elementary school in Hawaii and discovered that the children of both ethnic groups sought their play companions from the same sex and ethnic background. Another research by Bakley (cited in Seefeldt, 2001) suggested that by the age of seven children's attitudes and values - their confidence in themselves and others - are fully formed. Similarly, Biles (1994) notes that an early primary year's child (ages 7 and 8) understands: i) that skin color will not wash off/change; ii) that it is possible to be a member of multiple groups - family, class, culture, race, and etc. at the same time; and iii) prejudice against the group to which s/he belongs. Therefore, these studies indicate that by the time they join primary school, children are aware of differences around them.

Children are influenced by the culture, opinions, and attitudes of their caregivers (Gomez, 1991). For instance, caregivers' perceptions of ethnic groups can affect the child's attitudes toward these groups. And what children experience in this early years of their life greatly influences whether they will grow up to value, accept and comfortably interact with diverse people or whether they will succumb to the biases that result in, or help to justify unjust treatment of an individual because of her/his identity (Manning and Baruth, 1996). Thus, the primary school years are the right period of development to introduce issues of diversity in a way that is developmentally

appropriate. If Ethiopian children are to value differences and work towards the common goods that are free from inherited biases, prejudice and ethnocentrism they have to be exposed to the reality of the diversity of the population. The common adage in the field of multicultural education - ignorance breeds prejudice- needs to inform our approaches to childhood schooling.

### **The Problem**

Many local studies (e.g. Abebaw, 2007; Tilahun, 2007; Girma, 2008) seem to have indicated inadequate inter-group (inter-cultural) relations among different communities in Ethiopia. For instance, Abebaw (2007) investigated the intercultural relations between the Awramba and the surrounding community in South Gondar. The result indicated that there was no good relationship between the two communities. Similarly, Girma (2008) studied the intercultural relations among ethnic and religious groups in Kemise and reported that there have been times of intense conflicts due to intolerance emerged from ethnic and religious differences. A study by Tilahun (2007) regarding the 2004/05 campus conflict at Bahir Dar University revealed that the tension between ethnic particularist and assimilationist views underlied such conflicts. In connection with the diversity-sensitiveness of the curriculum and pedagogy, studies were conducted by Ambissa (2005) and Genene (2008) on primary schools in Addis Ababa. Dejene (2008) also conducted a study on Bonga College of Teacher Education. These researchers indicated (in various ways) that both the curriculum and pedagogy are not sensitive to the diversity of the Ethiopian population.

One may ask what roles schools are expected to play so that the espoused policy direction of building a strong national unity through recognition of the diversity of the population becomes a reality. In relation to this, a positive multicultural trend, which can be disastrous if wrongly handled, is the regionalization of curriculum. Curriculum regionalization, according to the 1994 Education and Training Policy (TGE, 1994), has been intended to maintain the local relevance of the curriculum including increased inclusion

of local cultures and utilization of the regional languages for education. If enough care is not given by way of exposing the children to the diversity of their social environment, such multiculturally positive trend may be a disservice to inter-group understanding. The present study was intended to appraise this by assessing the perceptions pupils hold about out-groups and the curricular responses in selected sites of Ethiopia. More specifically, the study was intended to:

- assess pupils' awareness of the diversity of populations in their respective environment;
- examine the perceptions the students hold about those who are different from them (i.e., the out-groups), and
- appraise if there is any intentional curricular response to educate the children on diversity.

Given the limitations of time, in this study diversity refers only to ethno-linguistic and religious differences.

### **Operational Definition of Terms**

**Diversity:** the reality of the presence of various social groups (ethnic, religious, gender, dis/ability groups) in a geographic space.

**Ethnic group:** represents what is designated as 'nations, nationalities and people in the 1995 Ethiopian Constitution.

**Ethnocentrism:** is a belief that one's own attributes are not only valid and superior to those of others but they are also universally applicable in evaluating and judging others attributes/behaviors.

**Out-groups:** those who do not belong to one's own group. They are the 'others' in terms of such attributes (markers) as ethnicity, religion, dis/ability.

**Perception of out-groups:** the view or opinions that members of a social group hold regarding those who are out-groups or presumptions made regarding the 'others'.

## Theoretical Underpinnings

Many writers believe that when a difference of any kind arises, a hierarchical mode of conceptualizing and responding to differences typically emerges. For instance, citing Lorde (1984), Gardner, Dean, and McLaig (1989. P. 64) argued that

...all people learn to respond to differences out of what may be called a patriarchal consciousness. This mode of thinking is dualistic and hierarchical. Specifically, it 'conditions us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior.'

According to these writers, this mode of thinking makes people fear or mistrust differences and, at times, deny their existence. Hence, ignoring difference can by no means bring social cohesion. This has been demonstrated by Harber (1994) in his work entitled *Democratic Education and Ethnic Tolerance in Africa*. In Harber's opinion, a large effort has been put into enhancing national awareness through messages about the need for national unity in school textbooks and the use of national symbols such as flying the national flag, singing the national anthem and saying the national pledge. Nigeria is a good example in this regard. To Harber, these and other opportunities which focus on inculcating unity without appreciating differences within the citizens were not successful in creating national identity among the minorities. Hence, the writer contends that if schools are to be successful in bringing about the desired national identity and social cohesion, they have to first appreciate the differences among students and reorganize their programs.

The present study, therefore, theoretically leans towards the social reconstruction perspectives wherein schools are believed to serve as agents of social change. It recognizes the influence of discourse in society as competing curriculum to school curricula. It also recognizes the power of the

formal curricula and teachers to counter the out-of-school (societal) influences and the ultimate role of schools to build the future society in a different way. As Postman (1995) argued, the purpose of public education should not be to serve a public but to create a public. Thus, school's role is not only to respond to what exists or to transmit the current values but it is also to move the society into the future and help them learn new values. In due course, schools are expected to play immense role in constructing positive identity. Tatum (2001) argues that the development of positive identity is a lifelong process that often requires unlearning the misinformation and stereotypes we have internalized not only about others, but also about ourselves. When schools start to serve this purpose (a social reconstructionist purpose) they help students develop a rational capacity to question the taken-for-granted and the so called "normal". In the present study, it is assumed that Ethiopian children pick up unexamined assumptions about out-groups from their respective communities as "normal" and it is the role of the school to help the children learn to question such assumptions. Targeted curricular intervention is an essential tool to be employed in such efforts.

### **Method of the Study**

**The study sites:** The study has been based on data collected from five selected sites in Ethiopia, namely, Azezo, Debresina, Dimtu, Malge and **Waliso**. The researcher used to frequently visit these places when he was working as education consultant for an International Non-governmental Organization. These sites are from three different regional states in Ethiopia: Oromia, SNNPR and Amhara Regions. Thus, it was possible to get the opinions of children from various ethnic and religious groups that represent diverse cultures. Azezo community is situated in the Western outskirts of Gondar town. The community is predominantly Amhara, the ethnic group that speaks Amharic which is the official language of the country. Most members of the community are Orthodox Christians. In fact, there may be some differences between the two groups in terms of such cultural elements as dress, dance, etc. The two are also different in terms of the interaction

they have with people from other cultures. For example, the Debresina community is geographically bordered with such people as the Argoba and the Afar; whereas Tigrigna speaking people are the Azezo community it is the most observable neighbors of the Azezo community. The Dimtu community (situated in Jimma Zone) is predominantly Oromo and most members of the community follow Islamic religion. The Yem is an ethnic group located in the neighborhood of the Dimtu community. The Waliso community consists of the Oromo people who are largely followers of Christianity and Islam. They largely interact with the Gurage ethnic group though there are other people such as the Kambata in the neighborhood. The Malge Woreda community (situated in Sidama Zone) is predominantly Christian though there are followers of other religions. They are bordered by many ethno-linguistic groups one of which is the Oromo who are largely Muslim. Thus, each rite has one dominant ethno-linguistic and religious group and other minority groups. Hence, it is hoped that the data obtained from such areas would represent the diversity of the country and provide valid information.

**Data sources:** The principal data sources for the study were children learning at Alternative Basic Education (ABE) Centres (Aged 10 – 14 years); facilitators at the ABE centres, education experts at the respective Woreda Bureaus of Education and Centre Management Committee members. Two ABE centres were taken from each of the five sites. Accessibility to transportation was considered in the selection of the centre. The 10 centres make up about 22% of the NGO-operated ABE centres at the sites. From each of the 10 ABE centres 15 students in Level III were taken for interview. These children belong to the predominant ethno-linguistic group in each area. Children who could give adequate information were selected with the help of the facilitators. This was done without disregarding gender representation. Accordingly, a total of 150 children were taken for interview. From each of the centres, three facilitators (total 30) were also selected based on availability at the time of the fieldwork. Two experts (a supervisor and an expert of in-formal education program) from the respective Woreda Bureau of Education were included as sources of data. At least three

persons were selected from among the 5 to 7 Centre Management Committee (CMC) members from each of the centres. The selection was based on availability. Information from the CMC members was used to learn about the ethno-linguistic and religious diversity of the study sites. The information helped in judging the children's awareness of the diversity of their localities.

**Data collection tools:** multiple tools of data collection were used to allow space for triangulation of sources and tools. Structured interview was used with the ABE children. This was found appropriate because i) the literacy level of the children was not well developed to adequately respond to questionnaire; ii) it was conducive to study how the children feel when they were asked to talk about various ethno-linguistic and religious groups; iii) it was convenient to rephrase the questions in the way that does not embarrass or disappoint the children and; iv) it allowed to ask the children to justify their responses whenever necessary. The structured interview included items that were designed to assess the children's awareness of the ethno-linguistic and religious diversity in their environment and their perceptions about out-groups.

Unstructured interview was used to get the opinion of facilitators and the education experts'. Similarly, unstructured interview was used to learn about the ethno-linguistic and religious diversity of the locality from the Centre Management Committee members. A pre-set evaluation guide was used to help the facilitators assess the inclusiveness of the curriculum, the pedagogy and the general school setting. Visits to the ABE centres and observations were used to learn more about the co-curricular elements (mini-media and cultural clubs). Other representations such as bulletin board displays and wall drawings at the centers were also used as sources of data. All the interview items and the evaluation guide were after used after they were commented on by the researcher's colleagues.



**Data collection procedure:** The data collection process was preceded with giving adequate orientation to the respondents. This took place after obtaining the respondents' consent to take part in the study. The interviews were facilitated by the researcher and two assistants at each site. Responses to the structured interviews were recorded on the interview sheet itself, but the responses to the unstructured interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the interviewees. This was later transcribed for thematic analysis. Orientation was given to the teachers (facilitators) to help them accurately assess the inclusiveness of the curriculum, the teaching-learning process (the pedagogy) and the overall culture of the school (i.e., ABE centres) using the pre-set evaluation guide.

**Methods of data analysis:** Four categories of thick data emerged from the interview and the observation data. These include: description of diversity, children's awareness of the diversity of their social environment, the perceptions the children hold about out-groups and curricular responses to diversity. Responses to the structured interview were summarized using frequency counts and percentages and those from unstructured interview and observation were described based on the thematic categories that evolved from reviewing the raw data.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Pupils' Awareness of the Diversity of Population in their Environment**

Citizens' awareness of the social group diversity of their environment is one of the essential conditions in taking care of the differences and ensuring peaceful co-habitation. Mutual respect cannot be expected in a situation where citizens do not know who are in their environment, how those who differ from them are different, and what they share in common with those others. Knowledge of the common elements helps bind citizens together while awareness of differences help take care of the social group boundaries in the attempt to maintain mutual respect. This premise has guided the survey of the respondents' awareness of the diversity of their social

environment. This has been preceded by a detailed study of the situation of the locality in terms of the ethno-linguistic and religious groups visible in the locality. This served as the basis to determine the respondents' awareness of the ethno-linguistic and religious diversity of their locality.

**Table 1: Children's Responses to Items Related to Awareness of Ethno-linguistic Diversity (n=150)**

Indicators	Yes, fully	Yes, partly	Not at all
1. The pupil could name the ethno-linguistic groups in his/her locality	61 (40.7)	76 (50.7)	13 (8.7)
2. The pupil could note the differences the ethnic groups in his/her locality have from his/her own in terms of cultural clothes, hair style and/or food habits	26 (17.3)	96 (64)	28 (18.7)
3. The pupil could note the similarity the ethnic groups in his/her locality have with his/her own	15 (10)	83 (55.3)	52 (34.7)
4. When a language which s/he can't speak is spoken the pupil can identify which of the languages in their locality is being spoken	33 (22)	69 (46)	48 (32)
<b>Total</b>	<b>135 (22.5)</b>	<b>324 (54)</b>	<b>141 (23.5)</b>

*NB: Numbers in parenthesis are percentages.*

The above table depicts that the children's knowledge of the ethnic groups in their locality is partial, as a marginal majority of them (54% on the average) could partly indicate the attributes of the ethnic groups in their respective localities. This was measured using the four indicators. About 23.5% of the children could not even display their knowledge of the ethno-linguistic attributes apart from that of their own. The situation was worse when the children's awareness of religious diversity was examined.

**Table 2: Children's Responses to Items Related to Awareness of Religious Diversity (n = 150)**

Indicators	Yes, fully	Yes, partly	Not at all
1. The pupil could name the religions followed/ practiced by the population in has/have from his/her locality	26 (17.3)	119 (79.3)	5 (3.3)
2. The pupil could note the differences the religion (s) in his/her locality have from his/her own	27 (18)	88 (58.7)	35 (23.3)
3. The pupil could note the similarity the religion (s) in his/her locality has/have with his/her own	4 (2.7)	100 (66.7)	46 (30.7)
<b>Total</b>	<b>57 (12.67)</b>	<b>307 (68.22)</b>	<b>86 (19.11)</b>

Here too, the majority (about 68%) of the children were only partially aware of the religions practiced in their environment. And about 19% were not aware of (or were not able to indicate) the presence of any other religion in their environment. The studies cited earlier (e.g., Biles, 1994; Gomez, 1991; Derman-Spark and her associates, 1999) indicate that children become aware of the diverse groups in their locality earlier than entry to grade one (roughly before the age of seven). Even if cultural differences could be there, the fact that children in the present study (age 10 – 14 years) could not fully recognize the social groups (ethno-linguistic and religious groups) in their environment is something that attracts attention.

The discussions with the children at the various sites revealed that there is a tendency to see only the 'predominantly' observable ones. For example, in Azezo the children took for granted the presence of Amhara and Tigre as the only ethnic groups and the Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and Muslims as the sole religious groups in their locality. Children in Dimtu happened to take for granted Oromo and Yem as the only known ethnic groups and Muslims and Christians as the sole religious groups in their locality (*note that the order reflects the dominance of the group at the study site as learnt from the children*). Therefore, there is dominance or mainstream orientation and the

presence of the ‘others’ or the ‘minorities’ seemed to be not well recognized or may be ignored. This may imply that the children were not helped to read their social environment or they might have inherited ignoring the ‘different’ from their communities, a situation analogous to what is often referred to as the colorblind perspective. According to Banks (2001), a colorblind perspective is a situation where difference is intentionally ignored in order to promote similarity. This has been noted when a child who was asked from Azezo about the Protestant Christians (locally called *pente*) responded “I know that there are *Pentes* around, but that is not an Ethiopian religion.”

The children’s awareness of the ethno-linguistic and religious diversity of their locality has been examined across the study sites as presented in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Cross-site Observation of Children’s Awareness of Ethno-Linguistic and Religious Diversity in their Locality**

Children aware of:		Azezo	Debresina	Dimtu	Malge	Waliso
Ethno-linguistic diversity*	Fully	5 (4.17)	18 (15)	5 (4.17)	50 (41.67)	60 (50)
	Partially	70 (58.33)	62 (51.67)	74 (61.67)	65 (55.83)	50 (41.67)
	Not at all	45 (37.5)	40 (33.33)	41 (34.17)	5 (4.17)	10 (8.33)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>
Religious diversity*	Fully	3 (3.33)	3 (3.33)	5 (5.56)	3 (3.33)	43 (47.78)
	Partially	67 (74.47)	63 (70)	65 (72.22)	69 (76.67)	43 (47.78)
	Not at all	20 (22.22)	24 (26.67)	20 (22.22)	18 (20)	4 (4.44)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>

\* see Tables 1 & 2 above for ‘n’

As displayed in Table 3, the children were only partially aware of the ethno-linguistic and religious diversity in their environment. In fact, Waliso children, followed by Malge children seemed to be more aware of the ethno-linguistic and religious diversity of their environment than all the other groups. Nearly half of the respondent children could fully mention the ethno-linguistic and religious diversity of their surrounding. This may be due to the fact that the two localities (Waliso and Malge) have more observable number of other ethnic and religious groups compared to the other three sites.

In general, regardless of variations among the cites, it can be said that the children are not well aware of the ethno-linguistic and religious diversity in their locality.

### The children's Perceptions of Out-groups

Inter-group attitude is an essential factor in the effort made to maintain healthy diversity. It is an undeniable human nature that members belonging to a certain group based on some kind of attributes prefer their likes to those who belong to other groups along those particular attributes. Therefore, in-group preference over out-group can be taken as normal. The problem is when the matter involves stereotypic view, ethnocentrism, prejudice and discrimination. The simplest way to study children's perception of an attribute is through directly asking them whether or not they like the attributes. Thus, an attempt has been made to make the respondent children identify attributes of diverse groups which they like most and those they do not like at all. During the discussion the word 'dislike' has been rephrased as 'not happy with' to reduce the tone. Table 4 has been used to present the result.

**Table 4: Pupils' Responses to Items Related to Attributes they Like/or that they are Unhappy about, if any (n = 150)**

Indicators	Mentioned their own	Mentioned none	Mentioned that of others
1. Language s/he likes most	72 (48)	72 (48)	6 (4)
2. Personal name s/he likes most	128 (85.3)	15 (10)	7 (4.7)
3. Cultural dance s/he like most	129 (86)	18 (12)	3 (2)
4. Religion s/he likes most	134 (89.3)	8 (5.3)	8 (5.3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>463 (77.17)</b>	<b>113 (18.83)</b>	<b>24 (4)</b>
5. Language s/he is unhappy with, if any	0	39 (26)	111 (74)
6. Personal name s/he is unhappy with, if any	10 (6.7)	20 (13.3)	120 (80)
7. Cultural dance s/he is unhappy with, if any	0	27 (18)	123 (82)
8. Religion s/he is unhappy with, if any	0	37 (24.7)	113 (75.3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>10 (1.67)</b>	<b>123(20.5)</b>	<b>467 (77.83)</b>

*NB: Numbers in parenthesis are percentages.*

As reported here, most of the children (about 77% on the average) identified that they like or are happy with their own attributes– like personal names and dances from their own culture and the religions they practice. Even if it may be difficult to expect the children to prefer others’ attributes to their own, in the present study the expectation was that most of the children would mention none as there could be no reason to prefer one to the other. The exception here is language, an attribute for which an in-group preference is marginally below average. As discovered during the interview, many children were concerned about the practical value of learning languages. Children whose first language is Amharic seemed to have been concerned about learning English. Many of the children for whom Amharic is not the first language seemed to have been concerned about learning both Amharic and English. This relates to what Obanya (1999) notes as the paradox over the need to learn language in Africa – the socio-cultural advantage of preferring to learn (in) one’s own language and the practical values (e.g. for getting a job) of wanting to learn ‘mainstream’ languages.

The result reported in Table 4 also depicts, that most of the children (over 77% on the average) characterized attributes of out-groups as something they dislike or are not happy with. Only about 20% of the children did not want to mention any attribute as something they were not happy with. An attempt has been made to examine the children’s responses across the study sites.

**Table 5: Across-sites Observation of Children’s Opinions on Diversity-related Attributes they are Happy with and/or are Unhappy with**

Attributes they are		Azezo	Debresina	Dimtu	Malge	Waliso
Happy with or like*	Theirs	90 (75)	87 (72.5)	97 (80.83)	80 (66.67)	99 (82.5)
	No one’s	27 (22.5)	28 (23.33)	19 (15.83)	32 (26.67)	17 (14.17)
	Others	3 (2.5)	5 (4.17)	4 (3.33)	8 (6.67)	4 (3.33)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>120</b>
Unhappy with or Dislike*	Theirs	0	1(.83)	2(1.67)	3(2.5)	4(3.33)
	No one’s	15 (12.5)	16(13.33)	18(15)	38(31.67)	36(30)
	Others	105 (87.5)	103(85.83)	100(83.33)	79(65.83)	80 (66.67)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>

\* see Table 4 above for ‘n’

It is possible to observe from the table a clear trend towards in-group preference and distaste for out-groups' attributes at the study sites. The majority of the children (66.67% – 82.5%) reported that they are mostly happy with the attributes that represent their own social groups. As noted earlier in this report this situation is normal so long as it is not associated with hatred of those who are different. In this connection, an attempt has been made to examine which attributes (in-groups' or out-groups') the students were most unhappy with. At three sites (Azezo, Debresina and Dimtu), over 80% of the children identified attributes of out-groups as something they do not like or are not happy with. At the remaining two sites (Malge and Waliso), while the majority (65% and 66% respectively) identified out-groups' attributes as something they are not happy with, the percentage is lower than that of the other three sites. This could be related to the better situation of awareness about the out-groups noted earlier.

The children were asked to explain why they were unhappy with those attributes of out-groups. Here are some representative responses. A child at one of the sites said, *"I do not know why, but I hate the cultural dances of...."* In fact, such expressions have been used by many of the children. Similarly, a child from another site said, *"I dislike when the ... [name of an ethnic group] speak their language around me because I feel that they might be insulting me."* A boy from another site said, *"I do not like ... [name of a religion] religion because the way they pray is not good."* The reasons the children gave were stereotypical and irrational (e.g., some said they just hate attributes of others).

The children were also asked to indicate if there are humans they consider harmful. At one of the centres a child indicated, *"I fear the people I saw on television who are dark-skinned and who do not wear clothes."* Another one noted, *"I feel that people who wear **shirit** (apron) and carry **sanja** (bayonet) are harmful. Thus, I fear them."* An interesting, but stereotypical response was heard from a child in one of the sites. He said, *"The ... (name of members of an ethnic group) cut males' genital organs and use it as **finya** (balloon) to play with. Thus, I fear them."* Imagine how the child related the

faulty construction about out-groups prevailing in the society to his own experience as a child.

In these sample responses it is possible to see blind hatred, fear of the different and ethnocentrism or judging others' attributes based on one's own cultural frame work. It is not difficult to imagine the role of adults behind the constructions these children hold about the out-groups. As already discussed, such dislike for the different and related ethnocentrism could be sourced or copied from the care givers or they could be picked up from the society (Gomez, 1991; Manning and Baruth, 1996). This may indicate that schools (ABECs) could not help the children develop desirable intercultural competence.

Children's perception of out-groups was assessed in terms of the relations they had/have/or wish to have with the out-groups. The data obtained in this regard is presented as follows.

**Table 6: Pupils' Opinion on Interactions/Relations with Out-groups (n = 150)**

Indicators	Yes	Indifferent	No
1. The pupil wishes to learn languages spoken in his/her locality (other than his/her own)	49 (32.7)	33 (22)	68 (45.3)
2. The pupil had/has/wish to have a friend from individuals belonging to other ethno-linguistic group (s)	41 (27.3)	80 (53.3)	29 (19.3)
3. The pupil had/has/wish to have a friend from among followers of other religions	51 (34)	62 (41.3)	37 (24.7)
4. The pupil likes to share the same desk in class with someone who belongs to other ethno-linguistic group	25 (16.7)	118 (78.7)	7 (4.7)
5. The pupil likes to share the same desk in class with someone who practices a different religion	14 (9.3)	105 (70)	31 (20.7)
6. The pupil shares meals with someone who practices other religion	11 (7.3)	92 (61.3)	47 (31.3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>191 (21.22)</b>	<b>490 (54.44)</b>	<b>219 (24.33)</b>

*NB: Numbers in parenthesis are percentages.*



The children's responses (reported in Table 6) regarding the measures of positive inter-group relation is not as such encouraging. On all measures the proportion of children who positively responded is very small (average 21.22%) and in two extreme cases the figure is below 10%. They prefer to be either indifferent (which attracted the majority) or they do not want to engage in those activities of positive inter-group relation. Apparently, these responses seem to lack a clear trend (with the majority being *indifferent*), but they do not contradict the result reported above. This has been learnt from the way the children expressed their opinions during the interview despite, apart from the ambiguity associated with the word *indifference*. For instance, a child was asked why he wished to learn the language of the ethnic groups in his locality. He responded, "*Because I want to hear what they say so that they do not insult me.*" This indicates that it is the instrumental value of protecting oneself from the 'harmful' others that is behind the interactions/relations the children like to have. This means that the need to know others' languages is not out of genuine acceptance of others or the attributes of those others.

An attempt has been made to examine the opinions across the sites. The result is reported in Table 7 below.

**Table 7: Across-sites Examination of Pupils' Opinion on Interactions/Relations with Out-groups (n = 150\* x 6\*\*)**

Study site	Positive (Yes)	Indifferent	Negative (No)	Total
Azezo-Gondar	27 (15)	94 (52.22)	59 (32.78)	180
Debresina	27 (15)	114 (63.33)	39 (21.67)	180
Dimtu	27 (15)	88 (48.89)	65 (36.11)	180
Malge	58 (32.22)	93 (51.67)	29 (16.11)	180
Waliso	52 (28.89)	101 (56.11)	27 (15)	180

\*Actual number of respondents; \*\*number of indicators (Table 7 above)

With the exception of Dimtu, at all the other study sites a fair majority of the children indicated that they are indifferent towards forming/having good interaction or relations with out-groups. At Dimtu this proportion is marginally

below average (48.89%) and the proportion that holds negative view of forming relations with out-group is bigger at this particular site.

In general, notwithstanding variations from site to site, the results presented here seem to indicate that the perception the children hold about out-groups is not adequately positive.

### **Curricular Response to Diversity in the ABE Centers**

In his discussion of where to focus on in the effort to multiculturalize schools, James Banks (2001) identified five dimensions, namely: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture. The first two (content integration and knowledge construction) mainly refer to the diversity-sensitiveness of the process and substance of curriculum construction. The next two (prejudice reduction and equity pedagogy) largely refer to the inclusiveness of the pedagogy; whereas the last one (empowering school culture) focuses more on the diversity-friendliness of school rules and regulations, community resources and social interactions within the school. Therefore, curricular response has been measured in the present study in terms of these three attributes: inclusive curriculum, inclusive pedagogy and empowering school culture. The need to appraise the responsiveness of the curriculum based on these three elements is due to the fact that the curriculum is situated in the school culture and implemented through pedagogy, both of which are essential determinants of the operative curriculum.

*a) Inclusiveness of the curriculum:* Based on James Banks' conception cited above, curriculum is inclusive when, i) contents about different groups are fairly integrated into the curriculum, for instance, by taking examples from different cultures and gender groups; and ii) the implicit cultural assumptions, frame of references, and perspectives within a discipline are carefully considered to make sure that every group is included (not excluded and/or not wrongly imaged). Thus, it may be noted that, inclusive curriculum embraces cultural awareness, sensitivity to differences and skills for

questioning unexamined assumptions about out-groups. This is displayed through the official curriculum, i.e., the textbook, the co-curricular activities such as clubs and other voluntary activities, the unofficial curriculum such as wall-drawings, bulletin-board displays and music heard in the school compound.

The textbooks in use at the ABE centers, as the key outlets of the official curriculum, were prepared in Amharic, Afan Oromo and Sidamigna languages based on the guidelines adapted by the respective Regional Education Bureaus of the three regional states (Amhara, Oromia and SNNPR). They were basically designed based on the national curriculum guideline for the first cycle (Grades 1-4). Because of this, they have major similarities. In the present study, the teachers/facilitators were asked to assess the inclusiveness of the curriculum. This was done after carefully orienting them on how to use the pre-specified criteria. The results are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8: Inclusiveness of the Curriculum - facilitators' Assessment**

Indicator	Yes, adequately	Yes, but inadequate	Not at all
1. The textbooks give chance to the pupils to study about the ethno-linguistic groups in their environment	4(2.6)	134(88.7)	12 (7.9)
2. The textbooks give chance to the pupils to study about the religious groups in their environment	1(.7)	140(92.7)	9 (6)
3. Illustrations in textbooks represent various ethno-linguistic groups	1(.7)	114(75.5)	33 (21.9)
4. Wall-drawings and bulletin-board displays reflect the various ethno-linguistic groups in their locality	-	113(74.8)	37(24.5)
5. The music heard during break time is in various languages of the school locale	-	126(83.4)	24(15.9)
6. There are school-wide activities (such as clubs) which are intended to educate children on diversity of their locality.	-	142(94)	8(5.3)

*\*n is more than 30 because of multiple measures used*

As presented in the table, the majority (74.8% to 94%) of the facilitators rated the inclusiveness of the curriculum as inadequate on all the indicators. Discussions made with the school supervisors at their respective Woreda Bureau of Education and with the facilitators indicated no any intentional effort made to make students learn about ethno-linguistic and religious groups in their environment. These supplements the data obtained from the facilitators. Here are sample responses regarding this:

Gemeda from Waliso Woreda Bureau of Education (WBE) said,

*It is good for children to know about other peoples in their environment. Yet, apart from what the children learn as part of the common curriculum, we do not have a separate agenda for that.*

Ayalew from Gondar Zuria WBE had this opinion

*I feel that children do know about who is who in their environment even before coming to the ABE centers. They can learn about their neighbors further as they live in the society.*

Gonsamo from Malge WBE argues that,

*There is no any intentional effort. Sidama children sometimes hear Amharic music during break. Yet, that is not intentionally meant to teach the children about Amhara culture. It is just what happens by accident.*

Yeshiwork (facilitator, Azezo) said,

*There are wall-drawings and various posters or displays posted on bulletin boards. I think no one thought about the messages they transmit regarding the representation of the various social groups in the locality.*

All these ideas indicate that there is no intentional activity in the Woredas to educate the children on issues of diversity. The respondents' idea that the children can learn about others as they live in the communities may also confirm that the respondents lack awareness about the purpose of educating issues of diversity. On the one hand, diversity is the reality of the study sites. On the other hand, educating children on their environment is one of the

major purposes of the First-Cycle Primary School (TGE, 1994). Education on diversity therefore needs to become part of the school curriculum.

*b) Inclusiveness of the pedagogy:* The teaching-learning process is said to be inclusive when it is designed and executed from the perspective of the various groups in the community and in the classroom. From James Banks' perspectives, cited above, an inclusive pedagogy focuses on, i) lessons and activities teachers use to help students develop positive attitudes towards different social groups, and ii) a teaching situation in which teachers modify their teaching in ways that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse social groups. In the present study, the facilitators were asked to assess the pedagogy applied in the ABE centers using the following six criteria statements.

**Table 9: Inclusiveness of the Pedagogy - Facilitators' Assessment**

Indicator	Yes, adequately	Yes, but inadequate	Not at all
1. Use classroom examples fairly taken from the various ethno-linguistic groups in the locality	-	105(69.5)	45(29.8)
2. Use classroom examples fairly taken from the various religions in the locality	-	68(45)	82(54.3)
3. Use different activities/homework that help pupils experience ethno-linguistic diversity of their surrounding	-	114(75.5)	36(23.8)
4. Use activities/homework/projects that help pupils experience the religious diversity of their surrounding	5(3.3)	126(84)	19(12.7)
5. Bring to classroom posters, drawings, pictures, etc that show different ethno-linguistic groups in the locality;	-	103(68.7)	47(31.3)
6. Read stories on the different ethno-linguistic groups in the locality to the class	-	111(74)	39(26)

*\*n is more than 30 because of multiple measures used*

The majority (68.7% to 84%) of the facilitators indicated that the pedagogy is partially inclusive of all measures except one indicator (using examples fairly taken from various religions). In the case of using classroom examples fairly taken from various religious groups, a marginal majority (54.3%) reported that there is no such an effort. The remaining others indicated that the examples available are inadequate. Discussion held with the selected facilitators revealed that there are some pedagogical activities which are helpful for the children to learning about their social environment. The absence of intentional effort to educate the children on diversity has also been pointed out during the discussion. Here are some sample responses:

Kamal (facilitator, Dimtu) noted,

*I ask my students to tell me the names of the ethnic groups in the vicinity of our centre when I teach the topic 'peoples of Ethiopia'. Yet, I do not go to the detail to teach about each and every ethnic group in the locality.*

Birke (facilitator, Debresina) said,

*I normally teach what is there in the textbooks. In fact, I try to relate the curriculum to the children by taking different local examples. When it comes to the various cultural groups in the locality, I never think about which example from which social group. I just take what comes to my mind at the time as far as it is relevant to the lesson topic.*

Petros (facilitator, Malge) reported,

*I teach the portion on peoples of Ethiopia. Yet I have never bothered about which culture or ethnic groups are in the locality.*

Kebede (facilitator, Waliso) said,

*The lessons are in Afan Oromo. I think we have to teach about Oromo culture and related things. We should not bother about others apart from what is stated in the textbook.*

From these responses, it was possible to learn that the teachers paid no attention to educate children on issues of diversity. This seems consistent with the words of the experts interviewed from Woreda Bureaus of Education (WBE). A tendency to exclusively depend on the expressed contents of the textbooks was observed. The responses also seemed to indirectly indicate that not much attention has been given to issues of diversity in the textbooks. This information is consistent with what is presented in Table 8 earlier.

*c) Empowering school culture:* According to James Banks' perspectives cited earlier, empowering school culture focuses on school policies and practices that are non-discriminatory to students from diverse social groups. It also encompasses the policies and managerial practices that welcome and motivate the other students. The following six specific points were used to assess whether the situation of the ABE centers is empowering children of diverse backgrounds. This means that the six specific points assess whether a) the ABE centers have been designed to help children see the diversity of their environment in their school, and b) the 'other' students could see their attributes in the overall situation of the schools (ABE centers).

**Table 10: Inclusiveness of the School culture - facilitators' views**

Indicator	Yes, adequately	Yes, but inadequate	Not at all
1. The school encourages a fair parental participation from every ethno-linguistic group	2(1.3)	121(80.7)	27(18)
2. The school encourages a fair parental participation from every religious group	-	117(78)	33(22)
3. The school rules and regulations are framed by taking into account the diversity of the student population	2(1.3)	121(80.7)	27(18)
4. Intentional and school-wide efforts are there to encourage positive inter-group interactions among students.	-	111(74)	39(26)
5. Intentional efforts are there to encourage minority students' participation in such school-wide activities as clubs.	2(1.3)	121(80.7)	27(18)
6. The diversity of the school locale is one of the basic considerations in setting up the parents-teachers associations (PTA).	-	29(19.3)	121(80.7)

*\*n is more than 30 because of multiple measures used*

As can be seen in the table, the facilitators' rated the situation as inadequate. This seems to indicate that the school situation is not empowering enough. Basically, when the voices of the various social groups are heard or when people of different backgrounds are visible in the schools they are likely to help students that those attributes are valued. The result noted here indicates the inadequate care the schools take in dealing with children of different background. This is consistent with the account of WBE supervisors and ABE facilitator. Both data type reveal that *there is no any intentional effort made to educate the children on diversity.*



## Conclusions and Implications

The result of the study presented in the preceding section demonstrated that the children are not well aware of the ethno-linguistic and religious groups in their locality. As far as the children's perception of out-groups is concerned, it was learned that the children seemed to hold a biased opinion about the out-groups. They do not like some attributes of those which are different from their own attributes. They appreciate their in-groups and **hold low opinions about** the out-groups. They suspect the 'others' as harmful and fear them. Most of the children do not wish to have a positive interaction or relations with those who are different from them in terms of ethno-linguistic and religious attributes. Instrumental ends happen to explain any positive disposition or indifferences the children displayed in terms of, for example, learning the languages of groups in their locality. Therefore, on many counts it was possible to note that the children do not hold a genuinely positive attitude towards the out-groups. Even if some variations have been observed from one study site to the other, it was generally noted that the children from all the sites were found to be biased against out-groups; they happen to fear the different and do not wish to form genuine relations like friendship with them. Efforts made to identify if there is any curricular response to educate the children on issues of diversity have come up with discouraging finding. The Woreda Bureau of Education (WBE) and the Alternative Basic Education (ABE) centers do not make effort to address this concern in terms of the curriculum, the pedagogy and the overall organization of the schools. Education practitioners, that is, experts and facilitators lacked awareness of regarding multicultural education.

The study has limitations related to the scope and the data gathering tools. For example, the study was conducted only on five sites in three of the nine Regional States in Ethiopia. And also classroom observation and content analyzes were not as sources of the data used in the study. Despite these limitations the following policy implications can be for warded.

- 1) The Ministry of Education need to clearly articulate that multiculturalism has to guide the design and enactment of every experience primary schools (alternative basic education centers) provide for their students.
- 2) Capacity building programs for educational practitioners (teachers/facilitators, education experts and education decision makers) need to embrace multicultural competence so that these practitioners come to value 'inter-group education'.
- 3) It is advisable to consider developing school-wide policies, such as, the following to promote multicultural awareness among school children.
  - Devising cultural weeks similar to sport week during which children learn about cultural groups in their locality in a way that is appropriate to their level of development or such programs may integrate sport and intercultural programs.
  - Making sure that the school setting reflects the diversity of the locality in terms of the contents of wall drawings, music heard during break time, various displays, and exhibits of cultural artifacts.
  - Making sure that parents of diverse background are visible in the school and can contribute to school activities as community resources (like inviting persons from diverse backgrounds to talk to students at flag ceremony).
  - Arrange study visits for at least selected groups of students (like *the know your country clubs* or *cultural clubs*) so that they learn about various social groups and share whatever they learn with their school mates.
  - Providing special training and professional development opportunities for teachers and education experts through which they learn about diversity in Ethiopia and mechanisms to ensure inclusion of those diverse groups into the curriculum and pedagogy.

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