

Evaluating Diversity Management Practices in Multicultural Education: Evidence from Secondary Schools in East Wollega, Ethiopia

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Keywords: Practice, Diversity Management, Multiculturalism, Content Integration and Secondary School

Abstract: This study assessed diversity management in multicultural education in secondary schools in East Wollega Zone, Ethiopia using a descriptive mixed-methods approach. Five principals, five-unit leaders, five heads of Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTSA), 85 teachers, and 290 students were sampled from their respective populations using various sampling techniques. Data collection was carried out using questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations analysed using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Findings showed low awareness of diversity dimensions (ethnicity, language, gender, culture, religion) and ineffective diversity management strategies. Multicultural content integration and instructional accommodation were also not present. The study recommends collaboration with education authorities to enhance diversity awareness and diversity management practices.

1. Introduction

Ethiopia, which is one of the oldest nations globally, has over 80 ethnocultural and linguistic communities with their own diverse cultural traditions [1] To ensure equal and equitable access to education, multicultural education (MCE) has become imperative. Although 21st-century education extends beyond discipline-based knowledge to ensure inclusiveness and diversity [2], Ethiopia has had a history of countering cultural diversity. Previous governments had the inclination to favor assimilationist ideologies, sidelining the cultural identities of various ethnic groups, a strategy that the researchers universally denigrated.

The 1960s and 1970s ethnic revitalization movements marked a turning point since formerly marginalized racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups began asserting their right to preserve their cultural identities and engage in national life [3,4] This led to calls for schools to integrate multiple cultural experiences into their curricula and highlight the struggles, aspirations, and achievements of these groups [3,5] Scholars have given prominence to culturally responsive pedagogic practices,

claiming that knowledge regarding the culture of students is crucial in successful education [6,7].

Since the downfall of the Derg regime in 1991, Ethiopia has adopted a federal system of ethnically based states. The 1995 constitution institutionalized cultural diversity, explicitly promoting cultural growth in concordance with human dignity and democratic values (Article 91) [8]. Education is also guaranteed free from religious, political, or cultural bias (Article 90). Democratic values, toleration, and the settlement of disputes by peaceful means are promoted by the 1994 Education and Training Policy as well, aligning with these constitutional principles [8].

However, regardless of these models, the applicability of multicultural education in practice in Ethiopia is tested. Diversity management has been defined by Rosado [9] as the recognition and development of the talents of different groups. Scholars theorize that gaps in cultural awareness among teachers reduce their ability to respond to diverse needs of the students [10 -15]. Gay [10] highlights that culturally unaware teachers do not respond to the needs of the students. A review of existing research revealed limited studies on this topic within the study area. While research by Maddah [16] focuses on issues such as racism, bilingualism, and disabilities at the university level. The study by Aslan [17] examines teachers' awareness of multicultural education at the primary school level, no comprehensive study has addressed diversity management practices in secondary schools. This study, therefore, aims to assess the degree of diversity management in multicultural education within Oromia Regional State, East College Zone secondary schools, against the backdrop of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism, which are some of the most pressing issues facing education [18][21].

1.1 Objective of the study

This study seeks to explore diversity management practices employed in secondary school classrooms to create inclusiveness, examine the practical application of diversity management in multicultural settings, and establish how school leaders successfully address diversity from multicultural perspectives.

2. Research Design and Methodology

This study adopts a pragmatist paradigm with a mixed-methods approach by combining qualitative and quantitative methods [20], in investigating diversity management in multicultural secondary schools within East Wollega Zone, Ethiopia. Descriptive survey design was used to find trends, attitudes, and opinions from questionnaires (Likert scale for 302 students, 62 teachers, and five principals), semi-structured focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews (40 participants), classroom observations (capturing cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, and ethnic interactions), and documentary analysis of teaching practices and diversity policies. They entailed purposive sampling of unit leaders and principals, random sampling of teachers and students, and convenient sampling of Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTSA) members for a robust analysis. The Likert scale was utilized to measure respondents' attitudes towards the implementation of diversity management in multicultural education [21], and the interviews defined following Seale and Silverman approach [22]. Moreover, in this study, a semi-structured observation checklist was developed alongside the interview guide [23]. The researchers visited each school to conduct classroom observations while teaching and learning were in progress. Key aspects examined included students' natural interactions concerning cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, and ethnic diversity dimensions.

3. Results and Discussions

This research explored diversity management in multicultural high schools in East Wollega Zone, Oromia, Ethiopia, based on data from 404 participants (23% of the target population of 1,762), five principals, five unit leaders, five heads of PTSA, 87 teachers (42% of 207), and 302 students (20% of 1,510) at grades 10 - 12, who were selected using purposive, available, and simple random sampling. A mixed-methods approach, complemented by thematic analysis of qualitative data from interviews, focus group discussions, and open-ended questionnaires with descriptive statistics for quantitative data, pointed to significant demographic trends, as seen in subsection 3.1. The findings reveal a heterogeneous but uneven distribution among gender, ethnicity, and religion, and reflect the challenges of inclusivity within the education system.

Table 1 also indicates severe gender disparities in leadership positions with all the principals, unit leaders, and heads of PTSA being male (100%), and with teachers being a majority male (70.59%) to 29.41% female, evidencing women's under-representation among professional ranks. Students, however, had a narrower gender divide (55% male, 45% female), which suggests progress towards greater access to education. Ethnically, the Oromo majority dominated (72.05% in aggregate), with 100% of principal and PTSA heads, 71.76% of teachers, 80% of unit leaders, and 71.03% students, whereas the Amhara (13.07%) and minority groups like Tigre (3.85%), Gurage (9.49%), Silte (0.77%), and Wolaita (0.77%) had smaller representations. Religious domination was Orthodox Christian (39.74%), followed by Protestants (34.10%), Muslims (21.03%), and Wakefeta (5.13%), depicting a plural but balanced religious variety. These results indicate a multi-religious and multi-ethnic school environment with persistent leadership and teaching imbalances, necessitating specific diversity management measures to enhance inclusiveness [20]

Table 1: Demographics of respondents by gender, ethnicity, and religion.

No.	Var.	Category	Type of respondents					Total (%)
			Principal (%)	Teachers (%)	Unit Leaders (%)	Students (%)	PTSA (%)	
1	Gender	Male	100	70.59	100	55	100	60.27
		Female	-	29.41	-	45	-	39.73
		Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
2	Ethnic groups	Oromo	100	71.76	80	71	100	72.05
		Amhara	-	17.6	20	12.0	-	13.07
		Tigre	-	-	-	5.0	-	3.85
		Gurage	-	5.88	-	11	-	9.49
		Silte	-	1.18	-	0.7	-	0.77
		Wolaita	-	3.53	-	-	-	0.77
		Total						
3	Religion	Orthodox	36	42.35	60	38.28	60	39.74
		Protestant	29	34.12	20	34.14	20	34.10
		Muslim	15	17.65	20	22.41	20	21.03
		Wakefeta	5	5.88	-	5.17	-	5.13
Total								100

3.1 Teachers and students practice diversity in the multicultural classroom

This study quantified the practice of diversity in multicultural classrooms in secondary schools on cultural sensitivity, discipline, integration of content, prejudice reduction, and instructional adaptation, as shown in Table 2. Results from 60 Teachers (T) and 290 students (S) showed moderate engagement in diversity practice, where A (ethnicity, language, gender, culture, and religion) had a mean value of 3.00 (T: M=3.01, SD=1.03; S: M=2.99, SD=1.01), reflecting efforts toward inclusiveness but which could be improved. Discipline (B) among students heavily influenced diversity management, rated by teachers (M=3.90, SD=0.84) as high but moderately by

students ($M=3.32$, $SD=1.09$) with a mean average of 3.61, reflecting its necessity in generating an even situation. Qualitative data from focus group discussions and interviews showed ethnocentrism, language choice, and devaluation of cultures as significant areas of conflict while gender equality schemes, such as the selection of female class monitors, showed an improvement.

However, integrating multicultural (C) content into instruction was not widespread, as teachers rated it moderate ($M=2.88$, $SD=1.08$) and students rated it low ($M=2.25$, $SD=0.90$), averaging 2.57. Classroom observations of courses like Civic and Ethical Education, History, Afan Oromo, Amharic, and Biology revealed that only Civic and language teachers incorporated diversity-sensitive content regularly, reflecting the absence of teacher training and sensitization to multicultural education. Prejudice-reducing initiatives (D) were also moderate (average mean=2.89; teachers: $M=2.75$, $SD=1.14$; students: $M=3.02$, $SD=1.03$), indicative of intermittent use of prejudice-reducing activities. Similarly, adaptive instructional techniques (E) in changing instruction strategies for equity pedagogy received low to moderate ratings (average mean=2.78; teachers: $M=3.07$, $SD=1.01$; students: $M=2.49$, $SD=0.89$), opposing adaptive teaching recommendations to support varied learners. The study conveyed moderate diversity practice in multicultural classrooms, with discipline being a very important aspect in diversity management but adaptive instruction approaches, and integration of multicultural content limited. Despite taking some steps forward, issues such as ethnocentrism and inadequate teacher training were obstacles towards inclusiveness.

Table 2: Teachers and students practice diversity in the multicultural classroom

Items	Respondent	Respondents' level of agreement										Mean	SD	Avg.
		SD		DA		UND		AG		SA				
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			
A	T			30	50			29	48.3	1	1.7	3.01	1.03	3.00
	S	5	1.7	129	44.5	23	7.9	129	44.5	4	1.4	2.99	1.01	
B	T			8	13.3			42	70	10	16.7	3.90	0.84	3.61
	S			107	36.9	17	5.9	132	45.5	34	11.7	3.32	1.09	
C	T			35	58.3			22	36.7	3	5.0	2.88	1.08	2.57
	S	36	12.4	200	69			54	18.6			2.25	0.90	
	S	29	10.0	158	54.5	100	35	3	1.0			2.27	0.65	
D	T	7	11.7	27	45			26	43.3			2.75	1.14	2.89
	S			144	49.7			141	48.6	5	1.7	3.02	1.03	
E	T			28	46.7			32	53.3			3.07	1.01	2.78
	S	4	1.4	213	73.4			73	25.2			2.49	0.89	

3.2 The extent to which diversity management strategies are used in diverse classrooms

According to findings compiled in Table 3, the extent to which diversity management strategies were implemented through five specific dimensions was measured. Effective communication (F) with diversified groups was seen to be moderate by teachers ($M=3.00$, $SD=0.86$) and low by students ($M=2.24$, $SD=0.64$), with a mean of 2.62, indicating sporadic use and lack of student engagement in understanding diverse perspectives. Equitability of treatment (G) by gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, and language was ranked moderately by teachers ($M=3.47$, $SD=0.62$) but low by students ($M=2.40$, $SD=0.75$), with an overall mean of 2.94, which aligns with Banks [27] who advocate for equal opportunities but suggest students' lower commitment. The findings show that while teachers try moderately, classroom practice does not necessarily foster inclusive communication and equality to the same extent.

Sensitivity and awareness (H) to diverse groups were moderately shown by teachers ($M=3.05$, $SD=0.83$) but low by students ($M=2.36$, $SD=0.91$), with $M=2.71$, indicating a lack of consistency in establishing the same degree of sensitivity to every group. Cultural learning and knowledge sharing (I) were also limited, with teachers at a moderate level ($M=2.50$, $SD=0.70$) and students low

(M=2.26, SD=0.64), with an average mean of 2.38, which showed that cultural exchange was not practiced in classrooms. Celebration of differences and compassion (J) was the lowest (average mean=2.11), and this was corroborated by interview findings that special events like Nations and Peoples' Day were not celebrated, showing few efforts towards unity building through official celebrations. These results identify salient concerns infrequent communication, limited student inclusivity, and lack of cultural appreciation activities attracting more teacher training and structured diversity programs to promote multicultural education practice.

Table 3: The extent to which diversity management strategies are used in diverse classrooms.

Items	Respondent	Respondents level of frequency rate										Mean	SD	Avg.
		N		R		ST		MT		AL				
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			
F	T			22	36.7	16	26.7	22	36.7			3.00	0.86	2.62
	S	31	11	160	55.2	97	33.4	2	7			2.24	0.64	
G	T			4	6.7	24	40	32	53.3			3.47	0.62	2.94
	S	25	8.6	145	50	98	33.8	22	7.6			2.40	0.75	
	S	59	20	104	35.9	83	28.6	44	15.2			2.39	0.98	
H				18	30	22	36.7	19	31.7	1	1.7	3.05	0.83	2.71
	S	54	19	108	37.2	97	33.4	31	10.7			2.36	0.91	
I	T	5	8.3	24	40.0	29	48.3					2.50	0.70	2.38
	S	29	10	159	54.9	99	34.1	3	1.0			2.26	0.64	
J	T			32	53.3	14	23.3	14	23.3			2.70	0.83	2.11

3.3 Analysis of School Leaders' Diversity Management in Multicultural Contexts

Based on the feedback of 60 teachers and 290 students (Table 4), consideration by school leaders of ethnicity, language, gender, culture, and religion (K) was moderate (T: M=3.25, SD=1.10; S: M=3.07, SD=1.00; average mean=3.16), reflecting half-hearted efforts but not sufficient inclusivity, since trust is key to diversity [27] Reframing school culture for equity (L) scored moderate (T: M=3.08, SD=0.94; S: M=2.97, SD=0.88; average mean=3.02), with no in-depth curriculum modifications [27] Promoting cultural pluralism (M) was moderate among teachers (M=3.37, SD=0.93) but low among students (M=2.23, SD=0.62; average mean=2.63), while coexistence training (N) was significantly low (T: M=2.10, SD=0.84; S: M=1.41, SD=0.50; average mean=1.76). Diversity issue management (O) was low to moderate (T: M=3.03, SD=1.06; S: M=2.23, SD=0.62; average mean=2.63). Interviews revealed government effort in vernacular language inclusion but politicized ethnic conflicts as obstacles, with students avoiding universities outside their respective regions. These findings highlight the need for effective leadership training to cross ethnic lines and enhance multicultural education [27, 28]

Table 4: School leader's implementation of diversity management in multicultural perspectives

Items	Respondent	Respondents' level of agreement										Mean	SD	Av. mean
		SD		DA		UND		AG		SA				
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			
K	T			25	41.7			30	50	5	8.3	3.25	1.1	3.16
	S			132	45.5	9	3.1	145	50	4	1.4	3.07	1.0	
L	T			21	35	16	26.7	20	33.3	3	5.0	3.08	0.94	3.02
	S	2	0.7	106	36.6	83	28.6	95	32.8	4	1.4	2.97	0.88	
	S	31	10.7	208	71.7			51	17.6			2.24	0.87	
M	T			19	31.7			41	68.3			3.37	0.93	3.42
	S			82	28.6			199	68.6	9	3.1	3.46	0.94	
N	T	1	1.7	28	46.7			30	50	1	1.7	3.03	1.06	2.63
	S	29	10	165	56.9	95	32.8	1	0.3			2.23	0.62	
O	T	10	16.7	42	70			8	13.3			2.10	0.84	1.76
	S	171	59	119	41							1.41	0.50	

4. Conclusion

The study reveals that diversity management is moderately implemented in secondary schools of the East Wollega Zone. Though there exist some goodwill and enterprise on the part of school leaders and educators, these efforts neither coalesce nor converge into one fully functioning inclusive and culturally responsive environment. Major impediments to achieving an ideal environment include weak policies, little teacher training, and limited student engagement. There is some degree of awareness that has not been transformed into tangible application within the curriculum and in everyday activities. In this regard, some of the key interventions proposed by the study are:

- Strengthening policy frameworks to institutionalize diversity management practices in schools.
- Enhancing teacher training programs to equip educators with the skills necessary for fostering inclusivity.
- Encouraging active participation from students, parents, and community stakeholders in promoting cultural awareness and integration.
- Establishing monitoring mechanisms to assess and improve diversity management strategies continuously.

Overall, while some progress has been made, a more structured and committed approach is required to create a school environment that truly embraces multiculturalism and ensures equal opportunities for all students. Future research could further explore the long-term impacts of improved diversity management strategies and their effectiveness in fostering inclusive educational settings.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge Wollega University, Ethiopia, for its support.

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