Multilingual education in Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article was to examine the perceived views of professors on challenges of multilingual education in the current political landscape of Ethiopia. The study was qualitative and it used interview and focus group discussion. The findings of the study revealed that the rise of ethnocentric mentality has brought enormous complexities in the process of giving recognition for the minority language groups. The most visible challenges of multilingual education in Ethiopia are the state of being monolingual in a multilingual society, the wrongly-held perception of ethnocentric elites on the lingua franca language of the nation and the language-based boundaries.

Keywords: *multilingual, Ethiopia, ethnic politics, lingua franca, monolingual*

Introdaction

Citing the US Census Bureau, Odugu (2011) indicated that the world's population of approximately 6.9 billion belongs to only 194 or so sovereign states but share about 6,909 languages. From 6909 languages, 445 of them exist in India, 521 in Nigeria and 36 different ethnic groups with more or less different languages in Bolivia (Odugu, 2011). In relation to this, Europe and the North America comprise only 7% of the total number of the world's identified languages whereas Asia and Africa which are the most linguistically and culturally enriched continents account for about 64% of the world's languages (Jong, 2011). Africa is the most linguistically diversified continent with over 2,086 languages (Chumbow, 2013). This indicates that most nations in Africa are multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual as a result of which multilingualism has become a reality in the vast continent.

Since the mid twenty century, multilingual societies that had never publicly recognized their multilingualism started to acknowledge their diversity (Garcia, 2007). That is, during the 1960s ethnic identity became a concern of many groups throughout the world (Fishman, 1981). This greater interest in ethnicity was fueled in part by the independence of many African nations, the increased vitality of indigenous groups all over Europe, Asia, and the Americas, the growth of civil rights, especially in the United States, and the dynamic movement of immigrants and refugees throughout the world (Garcia, 2007). In the changed national, regional and global contexts, indigenous knowledge system, linguistic and cultural heritages have got priority in education practices of nation-states all across the globe

(Singh et al., 2012).

Multilingualism, apart from opening doors for quicker and easy communication, has a number of importance. Nelde (2007) underlined that multilingualism, as well as second and third language acquisition, may be of use to peace and cooperation between nations. For Garcia (2007) bilingualism and multilingualism are important for both language majorities and minorities for cognitive, social, and psychological reasons. In a similar manner, Okal (2014) and Chumbow (2013) stated that multilingualism practices enhance intellectual flexibility and creativity. Recent studies have indicated that children who grow up in a supportive environment speaking more than one language from an early age are more perceptive and intellectually flexible than those who speak one language. For Hamel (2005) cited in Singh et al. (2012) noted that multilingualism is not only requisite for ecological sustainability, but it is also individual and collective asset; it is being seen as a source of wealth and strength. In addition to cognitive advantages, bilingualism and biliteracy can bring about greater understanding among groups and increased knowledge of each other (Garcia, 2007). Instruction in a language familiar to pupils improves immeasurably the quality of interaction between teacher and pupil. It also narrows the psychological gulf between home and school, integrates the school better into the local community and gives recognition to the language and culture the child brings to school with positive effects on the self-esteem of individuals and local communities (Ferguson, 2006). Furthermore, it is worthwhile to note that UNESCO declaration of 1953 proposed that "education is best carried on through the mother tongue of a pupil" (p. 6) by stating that the mother tongue plays a huge role in the defining of culture, identity, and learning new knowledge (Singh et al., 2012). Moreover, from the pedagogical point of view, the use of the child's first language in education has been shown to enhance the academic, linguistic, and cognitive achievement of learners. Ferguson (2013) indicated that a substantial body of academic opinion asserts the view that primary education, particularly early primary education and early literacy, is most effectively conducted in a language familiar to the pupil. This is because the potential for the child's cognitive development is strengthened during the early years of children. In a multilingual society, a platform of international declarations and conventions support the learning of at least two languages in education: a mother tongue and a language of the larger community, as well as access to international languages (Ball, 2011).

As a result, monolingual education was openly blamed for the exclusion of language minorities from society; thus, throughout the early 1960s, the use of the mother tongue, along with the majority language, especially in the initial years of schooling, became much sought (Garcia, 2007). But before the mid twenty century, the history of nation-building has traditionally involved the promotion of the official language and the repression of others, even liberal states and governments have explicitly or

implicitly assumed that the linguistic minorities should accommodate to the majority language (Archibugi, 2005). Since that time, there has been a myth that "national cohesion" is possible only through a single common language (Spolsky & Shohamy, 2000). This view is widespread in both Western and Eastern Europe (Michael,2007; Jong: 2011) and it was an idea shared by the former Ethiopian governments.

Owing to this, the then national language Amharic served as a platform for social solidarity and the revised constitution of Ethiopia declared Amharic as the only national official language of the whole empire (Constitution, 1955, Article 125).The primary objective of having one national or official language was to secure the national unity of the country. In this regard, Cohen (2005) noted that the assumption of the Imperial regime's language policy was to produce national unity; it was necessary to have one language, an assumption that was widely shared at the time. Moreover, the country could make it impossible to try to develop all languages at equal footing due to lack of resources although there was no lack of political willingness on the part of the Imperial regime. In the pursuit of having a common language for all its citizens, the linguistic rights of others were threatened and the Imperial regimes failed to appreciate the immense potentials of indigenous languages.

Despite the fact that multilingualism has a number of benefits, the implementation of the multilingual language policy in Ethiopia has shown a number of problems. For the existence of such problems, Daniel and Abebayehu (2006) noted that the current instructional language policy in Ethiopia is dictated by the ruling party in line with its political ideology rather than being based in genuine attention to student learning and, ultimately, in national economic advancement. Moreover, in Africa, some people view indigenous languages in education as problems to successful education (Herbert & Bailey, 2002 cited in Mose & Kaschula, 2019). This article tries to investigate challenges of multilingual education in Ethiopia.

Research Setting

With the overthrow of Haile Selassie and the advent of the Marxist regime, the language policy was radically changed. Along with UNESCO declaration and international changes, the reinforcement of Ethiopian indigenous language use in school is more of a necessity rather than an option. Since the mid twenty century, preserving cultural identity through indigenous language education has not been a bone of contention. Taking this issue into account, the *Dergue* regime gave the necessary recognition to the various indigenous knowledge systems, cultural heritages and the century's old linguistic diversities. For the preservation of distinct cultures, endangered languages and identities, the *Dergue* established an Institute called the 'Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities' (ISEN). The policy

was to recognize the linguistic, cultural and social rights of all nationalities. Article 5 of the 1974 National Democratic Revolution programme of Socialist Ethiopia States: each nationality has the right to determine its political, economic, and social life, and use its own language (Victoria, 2010).

After the downfall of the *Dergue* regime, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) established a federal structure in Ethiopia. During the regime of EPRDF, the country is divided into linguistic zones. The 'EPRDF's constitution'(1995) Article 47 (1) classifies the member states of the ''Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia'' into nine regional states. According to Article 47, member States of the Federal Democratic Republic are: 1) The State of Tigray, 2) The State of Afar, 3) The State of Amhara, 4) The State of Oromia, 5) The State of Somalia, 6) The State of Benshangul/Gumuz, 7) The State of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, 8) The State of the Gambela Peoples and 9) The State of the Harari People. Ethiopia is a multilingual country and various languages are spoken. In relation to language, Article 5(3) of the constitution states: Members of the Federation may by law determine their respective working languages. Of all the indigenous languages, Amharic, and Afan Oromo are widely spoken. Again for a substantial proportion of Ethiopians, Amharic is used as lingua franca. Furthermore, in the school setting, Amharic is given as a subject in primary education.

For a considerable number of Ethiopians, Amharic is used as lingua franca. But it has been observed that students (non-Amharic speakers) have hardly used Amharic as a communication tool while they reached higher learning institutions. Due to a highly decentralization policy of the country, students have never been abundantly exposed to the language of the wider communication while they were in primary and secondary schools. Owing to this, some scholars claimed that the existing multiethnic and multilingual situation is a challenge to the education system of Ethiopia (Seidel & Moritz, 2009). In a similar manner, Cohen (2010) questioned the level of equity shown in the process of introducing different languages. Daniel and Abebayehu (2011) stated that the introduction of other languages for instructional purposes in the name of multilingual education had been conceived as courting national disintegration. That is, the introduction of multilingual education in the country may not take into account the social, cultural and political background of the country. Few research works have been done in the area of language policy. Daniel and Abebayehu (2006) discussed language planning and changing whereas Küspert-Rakotondrainy (2014) analyzed language policy and social identity in the light of socio-political changes in Ethiopia. None of these studies made empirical analysis on challenges of multilingualism education in Ethiopia. In light of the above, this study has tried to fill in this gap and examine the views of scholars on issue in relation to challenges of

multilingual education.   In this regard, this study tries to answer the major challenges of multilingual education in Ethiopia.

Research Design

The current researcher has used qualitative approach, interview and focus group discussion. Six renowned professors teaching in various universities in Ethiopia were interviewed. The professors were drawn from Addis Ababa University, Kotebe University of Education, Addis Ababa Science and Technology University and Wollo University. In addition to this, focus group discussion was carried out. The number of professors taking part in the FGD was eight.

With regard to the reliability and validity of instruments, the researcher used various strategies. In order to maintain the reliability of the data, the researcher used inter-coder agreement. In doing so, I achieved a higher percentage of agreement upon codes. Concerning validity, Creswell (2007) forwarded eight validation strategies and recommended qualitative researchers engage in at least two of them in any given study. To this end, I used two most important validation strategies, triangulation and peer debriefings. In triangulation, I used corroborating evidences from different sources. That is, I looked for recurring patterns from the findings. For example, a finding obtained through interview was corroborated with the results obtained from FGD. Throughout the analysis, I did not discuss any finding which came out through one method alone. Peer debriefing is the second validation strategy used; the preliminary analysis of the study was given to two peers and they were asked to review the findings and the interpretations of the study. Both peers were experts in the area and they have had ample experience in teaching and research. Furthermore, various findings or theories were used to provide corroborating evidence.

With regard to ethical issues, all the participants were willing in taking part in the study. Another important issue in qualitative research has been protecting participants and maintaining the security of their views. Participants were given an assurance that everything discussed would be confidential. They were also told that I would mask their names from the analysis and from the data by assigning pseudo names. The qualitative data was transcribed and the verbatim accounts were thematically analyzed and throughout the analysis, eye-catching short quotations were used.

Both the FGD and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using digital audio-recorder. Before the discussion, members were informed that they were being recorded. Participants were also informed about the purpose of the recording so that the discussion could be referred in the time of report writing. For both the FGD and the interview, I used interview and FGD protocols, pre designed

forms having few open-ended questions and ample space among the questions. The spaces allowed me to record some responses of the participants. In order to minimize losing eye-contact with the discussants, I was able to memorize the questions.

Research Results and Discussions

A large proportion of professors' responses have had similar themes; professors often raised the same matter. Thus, some selected excerpts have been presented to exemplify the issue. With regard to the challenges of multilingualism, the most noticeable challenges of multilingualism in Ethiopia are the rise of ethnocentric mentality, state of being monolingual in a multilingual society, and the language-based boundaries. The following representative excerpts demonstrate the case.

The rise of ethnocentric mentality

The participants of the study noted that the rise of ethnocentric mentality is a challenge for multilingual education. The responses of Azeb, Sara and Mulatu are representative sample from the data collected. In this regard, Azeb forwarded the following:

> *People think that "If they speak others' language, they feel that they give the language speakers the chance to be superior; they do not think speaking their language helps them in different ways (FGD, 1).*

Sara has also the following to say

> *The Amharic language has been regarded as a language of the former colonizer; thus, students did not learn and speak Amharic while they were in elementary and secondary schools (Int.3)*

In a similar manner, Mulatu has the following to say:

> *Multilingualism is an opportunity for everybody but in Ethiopia, multilingualism is practiced at the expense of killing a language [Amharic] that has already developed. Political elites in the Oromia regional states have tried to diminish the role of Amharic by deterring the youths not to learn Amharic. In the official OPDO's report, the Oromo political elites stated that they have managed to make the Oromo people unable to speak Amharic. According to this report, forty percent of the Oromo youth are unable to speak Amharic. This was a success story for them; that was the plane; their plan has nothing to do with multilingualism. All the positive ideas that come from multilingualism are not practiced. The whole propose is to separate people along ethnic lines and disintegrate the society (Int.2).*

As it can be seen from the excerpts above, the lingua franca language, Amharic, was not met positively by some. The constitution states, in Article 5, that Amharic shall be the working language

of the Federal Government. Despite this assertion, the regional states focus on their own vernacular languages without considering the importance of the language of the wider communication. As per the responses of Azeb, ethnocentric people might develop a fallacious assumption that by speaking the language of others, they might make other language superior. As a matter of fact, mastering Amharic language that serves as a bridge should not be considered as surrendering the language of one's own ethnic group.

Before the coming of the present government, Amharic had served as an ideologically neutral unifying force for the multilingual societies of Ethiopia. But the EPRDF and the current Prosperity Party, for their political advantage, preached that Amharic has been the language of the former rulers as it was witnessed by the response of Sara. This finding was corroborated by the findings of Záhořík & Wondwosen. Záhořík and Wondwosen (2009) noted that the language issue became a central point of political debates and Amharic was presented as an imperial language. In addition, the findings of Küspert-Rakotondrainy (2014) also indicate that there is a huge political drive behind the language policy as well as an increased sense of ethnic and cultural identity.

There is a strong political will to promote Afan Oromo instead of Amharic language. This was confirmed by the response of Mulatu. The reply of Mulatu showed that the government tried to slim down the pragmatic value of Amharic language and replace it with Afan Oromo. This effort of the government could not gain momentum since the overwhelming majority of the population, more than eighty percent, has spoken Amharic as a first or second language. Despite the efforts of the ruling government to promote Afan Oromo, people do not want to learn the language by force. For example, parents in Addis Ababa objected to the use of Afan Oromo language in school by arguing that language should not be imposed. This is because Amharic as a second language (next to mother tongue for non Amharic speakers) has become an accepted norm for many non-Amharic mother tongue speakers in Ethiopia (Cohen,2005).

The language hegemony of Amharic was not welcomed by the EPRDF government as well as the Prosperity Party because the language was assumed to exemplify the exercise of power as well as economic and political domination. In connection to this, in criticizing the previous regimes, the government stated that Amharic was deliberately imposed throughout the country as the official medium of instruction in all primary schools as a tool to deepen and broaden the pattern of ethnic domination (MoE, 2002). The over politicization of ethnic federalism has been the reason for the inability of the youths not to speak Amharic language as a language of wider communication because they develop negative attitude towards the language. With regard to attitude, Michael (2007) noted that community attitudes may enforce, support, accept, tolerate, or reject multilingualism or give

special status to one or more than one languages. Moreover, Pinker (2000) cited in Mohd and Sultan(2013) believes that community attitudes toward the language being learned can also have a profound impact on SLA (Second Language Acquisition). Furthermore, Adegbija(1994) cited in Matsinhe (2013) noted that language attitudes are one of the main challenges facing the development, promotion and use of African languages, particularly in education. Where the community has a broadly negative view of the target language and its speakers, or a negative view of its relation to them, learning is typically much more difficult. On the other hand, if the community has a positive view of that language, the learning process will be much easier (Bialystock, 2001 cited in Azmi, 2013).

It was noted that Ethiopian language education policy falls broadly within the parameters of "best policy" in terms of multilingual developing countries (Berhanu, 2009). This was said because the architects of the political landscape in Ethiopia are quite known in accepting international declaration and mixing it with their own political agenda. By making minority languages the language of instruction without having a lingua franca, the country becomes in a state of disintegration. While the actors in favor of the policy of multilingualism were gripped with the promotion of multilingual cultures, ethnic rights and equality, the actors against the policy process emphasized its negative implications on the national integrity (Daniel & Abebayehu, 2006).

Ethnocentric elites who have had soft hearts for the current federal government have accused the imperial government of Ethiopia for using Amharic as the only official language of the country. But using one language policy that unified the country was being practiced in other parts of the world. In this regard, Batibo (2005) noted that English, French and Spanish were adopted monolingual policy in their respective countries at the expense of minority languages like Alsatian, Basque, Breton, Catalan, Cornish, Irish Gaelic, Lorrainian, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh and others. Even liberal states and governments have explicitly or implicitly assumed that the linguistic minorities should accommodate to the majority language (Archibugi, 2005). Since that time, there has been a myth that "national cohesion" is possible only through a single common language (Spolsky&Shohamy, 2000). This view is widespread in both Western and Eastern Europe (Michael, 2007; Jong, 2011) and it was an idea shared by the former Ethiopian governments. Owing to this, the then national language Amharic served as a platform for social solidarity and the revised constitution of Ethiopia declared Amharic as the only national official language of the whole empire (Constitution, 1955,Article 125). The primary objective of having one national or official language was to secure the national unity of the country. In this regard, Cohen (2006) noted that the assumption of the Imperial regime's language policy was to produce national unity; it was necessary to have one language, an assumption that was widely shared at the time. Moreover, the country could not make it possible to try to develop all languages at equal

footing due to lack of resources although there was no lack of political willingness on the part of the Imperial regime.

The struggles for ethnic dominance deter Ethiopians not to have a common linguistic basis which is indispensable for national unity. Having a common language does not mean that students learn a lingua-franca at the cost of the mother tongue. Rather students can develop two or more languages without distracting the unity of the country which is one of Ethiopia's most valuable historical legacies. But due to the political indoctrination, students develop prejudice to the language of others and it was found out that politicians manipulated languages as tools for their political advantages.

Monolinguals in a multilingual society

Despite the fact that Ethiopia is a multilingual country, citizens have recently become monolinguals due to the politicization of ethnic identity by egocentric elites. The following excerpts show the case clearly. Tseganesh added the points below:

We only promote multilingualism at national level. We are not learning other languages after the government claims to implement multilingualism in the education system. At national level, the country is multilingual but people are monolinguals; we do not speak other's languages due to political indoctrination. For example, are we teaching Afan Oromo to Amhara children? Are we teaching Amharic to Oromo children? We do not (FGD).

Mulatu forwarded the following:

The political orientation has been negatively influencing the people not to use different languages and we are unable to communicate each other. We are becoming monolingual (Int.2).

Tesfaye added the issue below:

If you go to the Oromia Regional State, children are indoctrinated to develop profound hatred to Amharic language, the lingua franca. The political orientation has to be revised (FGD).

As it can be seen from the responses of Tseganesh, Mulatu, and Tesfaye, there has been a politically-motivated intent along with the implementation of the policy of multilingualism. This finding was corroborated by the findings of Daniel and Abebayehu. That is, the measure taken by the government in recognizing the languages of minority is dictated by the political ideology of the ruling party; it does not take into account the interest of the country and the population. In view of the ethno-centric ideology of the government along with its indoctrination, people do not like to learn other's languages. The response of Tseganesh has been a good testament. People are not learning other languages after the government claims to implement multilingualism in the education system. Owing

to this, people do not want to learn each other's languages because the lingua franca language, Amharic, has been considered the language of the former colonizers. By so doing, each state promotes a monolingual education where the national official language (Amharic) is abandoned by the overwhelming majority of the new ethnic based states (Daniel & Abebayehu, 2011). The indivisibility of the Ethiopian nation which has been the result of thousands of years of interaction has been eroded and the stable ethnic composition has been disrupted by the introduction of ethnic federalism, so that Ethiopians are now at odds along ethnic lines (Bekalu, 2017). This indicated that multilingualism in Ethiopia is highly politicized and citizens are becoming monolinguals while the country remains to be a multilingual state.

Due to the wrong mix between multilingual policy and ethnic federalism, most youths in Oromia regional states do not speak the language of the wider communication. In this regard, Solomon has the following to say

> By the time, I was a department head, I received twenty seven students coming from Eastern Oromia. None of them could speak other language other than Afan Oromo. You know, the class instruction has to go in English, but the students did not listen English. Amharic is the federal language of the country but these students cannot speak and listen Amharic. So, by the end of the semester, many of the students scored below point seven. By the end of the second semester, most of them were dismissed for good (FGD)

In a similar manner, Yalew added the following points:

> I was born in the Oromia regional state. I had a friend who had Oromo parents and he spoke both Afan Oromo and Amharic fluently while we were children. When I met him after twenty years, he did not want to use Amharic language. When I talked to him in Amharic, he gave me a response in Afan Oromo. I was really shocked. It is the political pressure that changed his thoughts (Int.3)

Sharing his experiences at Wollo Unversity, Bezabih noted the points below

> While I was teaching at Wollo University, some of my students coming from Oromia Regional State did not speak Amharic and English. They only know one language, Afan Oromo. They were unable to communicate with the people around. This makes students live only in one particular place. Thus, the misuse of multilingualism has brought a number of problems (Int.1).

According to the excerpts above, youths coming from the Oromia regional state are becoming monolingual and they did not speak the lingua franca language. In a study conducted at Kotebe University of Education, Bekalu(2019) found out that students coming from Oromia regional state

were unable to use Amharic for communication purpose. In a similar manner, Tesfaye (2012) noted that instructors are facing difficulties of giving group work or projects since in some cases, significant number of the students from the same class have a very limited command over the Amharic Language.

Promoting the idea of ling-centric, political elites in the Oromia regional state established linguistic distinctiveness in the region. This is the result of Afan Oromo- only policy which alienates the youth from their fellow Ethiopians. The current political orientation and increase ethnocentric thought reduce the possibility of integration among the various ethnic/linguistic groups which is the major challenges for the implementation of multilingual education. Each regional state has only used its own vernacular and the absence of a common language brings challenges especially among the student population.

Students become vulnerable by the ideology of ethnocentric political elites and they are left uncared in the classroom. The response of Solomon indicated that most students were dismissed due to the fact that they became monolinguals that made them prevented from forming close ties with their fellow Ethiopians. Due to language barrier, students at higher learning institutions form friendship based on their own ethnic groups; there have been less forms of inter-ethnic interaction among student population. Without a language of wider communication, students could not build new relationship with classmates and teachers and this may threaten their academic performance because learning happens through interaction which is fostered by a climate of cooperative and social interaction. The absence of pleasant learning environment caused by language barrier could not yield equal opportunities among student populations. Therefore, in practice, using local languages for primary education in Ethiopia is unlikely to produce an equal quality of education for students (Cohen, 2006). This happened due to the fact that political decision was not made with professionals through conscious planning and consultation; moreover, there was no survey made to check whether the concerned people wanted the languages to be the medium of instructions (Getachew & Derib, 2006).

Despite the wrong political narration prevailing in the country, there was no any ethnic group who was excluded from the education and government administration in the history of Ethiopia. Respecting other ethnic groups' rights including language use is a homegrown practice in Ethiopia. As a matter of fact, multilingual administration was the norm in the ancient empires of the Persians, Ptolemies, and Carthaginians, the Roman Empire and the Imperial regimes in Ethiopia or the old Abyssinia; for example, the religious freedom given to the Muslim population when they were persecuted from the Arab world was a testament to that (May, 2017). However, the ethnic federal architects viewed themselves as savior of the minority groups and they propagate multilingual education as if the minority groups were oppressed. EPRDF had the desire to re-write the false narration about ethnic oppression in history from hearsay, rumor and gossip. These disinformation campaigns have been

bombarded daily by the mainstream media for the last three decades. The regional state media has taken the lion's share in spreading the disinformation and they are hardliners. Most youths in some regional states have taken the misinformation of the government at face value and they have developed profound hatred towards the language of the wider communication. As a result, they become monolingual and the potential positive impact of strengthening one national language for communication has not been recognized (Cohen, 2005). The struggles for ethnic dominance deter Ethiopians not to have a common linguistic basis which is indispensable for national unity.

Although education in mother tongue has been the order of the day and was also proposed by International organization like UNESCO, UNESCO has also recommended the use of national and official languages of wider communication, along with some global languages (UNESCO, 2003; Singh et al., 2012). In a similar manner, Fishman (1971) cited in Batibo (2013) calls the three national aspirations, namely identity, unity and modernity. That is, local language is used for identity whereas national language is for unity and foreign language for modernity. Similarly, Okal (2014) stated that multilingualism practice in education should embrace the indigenous, national/official and foreign languages as equal partners in the language policy development and education. But this is not the case in the Ethiopia; the federal language of the country, Amharic language, which could play the role of official or national language, has not been given the required status due to lack of political will.

Language-based boundaries

The responses of Abay, Mulatu and Degu noted that the language-based boundaries might be a challenge for multilingualism. The responses are representative samples. Abay, in the interview session forwarded the following:

> *Multilingualism has a lot of advantages; people should have been encouraged to learn other languages as much as possible but when you make it a policy to say this section of the country belongs to a certain language group. That is the problem (Int. 5).*

Similarly Mulatu has the following to say

> *In the name of recognizing the right of other languages, the country is effectively divided into ethnic groups allowing them to own land, even connecting it to ownership of land. Land and ethnicity is connected. The Oromo have been told that this is your land, a very large chunk of the country was allocated to them and some of them benefited, telling other people to leave their land (Int.2).*

Degu in the FGD forwarded the following insights:

> *Multilingualism is important to promote someone's culture, experience, tradition and beliefs. It*

helps to preserve the culture of the society but language-based federalism is a challenge to apply multilingualism (FGD).

As per the response of Abay and Mulatu, the present government has established mono-ethnic borders, making the societies be confined to ethnic boundaries and being monolingual which in turn weaken social cohesion. In connection to this, a similar finding was observed from Küspert-Rakotondrainy's rigorous analysis. Küspert-Rakotondrainy (2014) stated that people really identify more with their own group after the introduction of the policy, but at the same time they refuse to identify with the Amharic-speaking core ("*Habesha*"). Citing Teshome (1999) Küspert-Rakotondrainy (2014) further noted that the intention of the government is to promote increased polarization in order to prevent a unified opposition. When people are forced to be confined to certain areas and culture, they forget their common identity and when people lose their common identity, they gradually lose their national sentiment and become distinct states.

Due to the mono-ethnic borders, there is an increase ethnocentric thought that would reduce the rate of assimilation among the various ethnic/linguistic groups. Furthering the discussion, Cohen (2006) stated that the division of the country into regions defined by language is problematic because of the lack of unambiguous linguistic boundaries and the high degree of contact and mixing between the various peoples that inhabit the state.

The demarcation of regional boundaries along ethnic lines has brought major problems. There is no consensus on the boarder lines of regional states between Tigray and Amhara, Amhara and Oromo, Oromo and Somalia, Amhara and Benishangul-Gumz, Oromo and Sidama and the like. The controversy existing among regional states has led to various conflicts in the country. In this regard, Bekalu (2017) noted that the federal structure which is based on ethnicity contributes to ethnic tensions and conflicts, widening the disparities among the ethnic groups. A further point of attention is the findings obtained from Mulatu. Mulatu clearly stated that, '*a very large chunk of the country was allocated to them and some of them benefited, telling other people to leave their land.'* The demarcation of the boundaries has been unlawful and unreasonable since a large portion of the country was generously given to certain ethnic groups. Moreover, the settlement pattern is mostly mixed and it did not consider the presence of other ethnic groups in the region. In general, the implementation of the current instructional language policy is crippled partly due to its failure to accommodate the nature of settlement in the country (Daniel & Abebayehu, 2006). These entire anomaly triggers a lot of problems in Ethiopia including ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and genocide in the country. In this regard, Bekalu (2018) further noted that a key factor motivating the acts of ethnic cleansing is the ethnic federal structure introduced in the country and Amharic language speakers living as a minority group in other regional states are persecuted or endangered.

Conclusion

The aim of this article is to examine the perceived views of professors on the challenges of multilingual education in the Ethiopia. The study was qualitative and it used interview and focus group discussion.

With regard to the challenges of multilingual education, the most visible challenges of multilingual education in Ethiopia are the state of being monolingual in a multilingual society, the wrongly-held perception of ethnocentric elites on the lingua franca language of the nation and the language-based boundaries. It was learnt that the ethnic-based federalism has a profound pressure on multilingual education. Due to the political influence brought by ethnocentric elites, some youths have become monolingual and developed unpleasant attitude towards the language of wider communication, Amharic.

Amharic is the most widely used and developed language in the country but ethnocentric elites could never comprehend the country-wide use of the language and they simply pointed their fingers on the former Imperial regime for using Amharic as a language of lingua franca. In a culturally and linguistically diverse country like Ethiopia, promoting Amharic as a means for national integration and social cohesion has been mandatory. Moreover, Amharic has been the only language in the country that has been developed and used its own scripts. Despite the allegation of the architects of ethnic federalism with regard to Amharic language hegemony, the history of nation-building has traditionally involved the promotion of the official language and the repression of others.

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Gebeyehu has the following to say:

> *One challenge in multilingual nation is not to reach an agreement on the language of lingua franca (Int.4).*

All the challenges are exacerbated by the ethnic-based federalism system of the country.