

CAMPUS CLIMATE FOR DIVERSITY AND STUDENTS' SENSE OF BELONGING IN ETHIOPIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Ethiopia is known as a 'museum of people' with over 80 ethnic groups and a variety of religions. In such a diverse country, the need for diversity management is critical and ongoing. This convergent parallel mixed method study explored diversity management on public university campuses, by examining a representative student sample from eight Ethiopian public universities. A stratified random sample of universities was chosen, and 458 students participated in a modified version of the Diverse Learning Environment survey, and 24 individuals were chosen through purposeful sampling for interviews. In addition, documents were analyzed at both the country and institutional levels. The findings indicate public universities in Ethiopia are generally ethnically and religiously diversified, and students generally have a positive attitude towards ethnic and religious diversity, low levels of negative diversity related experiences, and moderate levels of diversity related satisfaction. Results showed a moderate yet statistically significant positive relationship between diversity related satisfaction and students' sense of belonging at their universities. These findings indicate that the climate for diversity on campuses is moderately positive. Recommendations to increase diversity and the students' attitudes toward diversity include policy and planning implications, as well as continued research to increase knowledge and understanding.

OVERVIEW

The enrollment of diverse students in institutions of higher education is considered a major success in the efforts to embrace and even celebrate diversity (Pillay, 2010). University leadership has the obligation to manage diversity by creating a safe, welcoming, and conflict free environment in which each member of this diversified student body has the capacity to succeed and feel a sense of belonging (Onsman, 2012). Fostering a positive campus climate for diversity enhances the development of much-needed multicultural competencies. On campuses with a negative climate, students are less likely to adjust academically or develop a sense of belonging (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013; Locks et al., 2008).

Campus climate for diversity refers to real or perceived observations of the universities' environments as they relate to interpersonal, academic, and professional interactions or attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations around aspects of diversity (Hurtado et al., 1999; Hurtado et al., 2008). Campus climates are either supportive of diverse students with the structures, beliefs, and behaviors that produce positive effects on learning for all students or they are not (Hurtado et al., 1999). The assessment and subsequent management of the campus climate for diversity takes into consideration two contexts: external and institutional. While the external context refers to government/policy and socio-historical dimensions, the institutional context is comprised of both institutional level and individual level dimensions. Specific to the institutional level are the institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion; the compositional diversity of students, faculty, and staff; and organizational

structures – institutional policies, curriculum, and processes (Milem et al., 2005). The individual level includes the psychological perceptions of individuals, their attitudes towards the campus for diversity, and the behavioral dimensions that encompass individual actions and intergroup contact experiences (Milem et al., 2005).

In campus climate assessments, students' experiences with different dimensions of diversity, including race/ethnicity, linguistics, religion, gender, and class background (Hurtado et al., 2008) should be considered, as these dimensions affect the relationships students establish with their peers and educators (Dawson, 2007). Though it is necessary to consider many variables when making an assessment of campus climate for diversity, the focus of this study is on two critical variables in the Ethiopian public university context: ethnicity and religion.

Ethiopian Higher Education

Ethiopia contains a multiplicity of ethnic, linguistic, religious, and diversity markers (Ambissa, 2010; Berhane, 2009; Teshome, 2001) making diversity management one of the central educational and civic missions of higher education institutions (HEIs) (Hurtado, 2007). Over the past few decades, Ethiopian higher education has expanded rapidly, increasing access to a more diversified population. Given this organically diversified growth and the current admission and placement policy in the country, campuses are diversified and are often more representative of the diverse country than the cities or regions in which they reside (Abebaw, 2014).

In support of ensuring positive learning outcomes for all students, the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation (FDRE, 2019) stipulates that HEIs are expected to develop and disseminate the culture of respect, tolerance, and living together by rendering their services free from any form of discrimination on grounds of race, religion, sex, politics, etc. In principle, this implies that HEIs are expected to have diversity related institutional policies, rules, regulations, and management strategies to ensure peaceful co-existence of students. Current indications are that even though several university leaders throughout the country have taken measures to manage diversity, not all of these plans have been effective (Adamu, 2014; Adamu & Bejital, 2007; Hailemariam, 2016). Ethiopian public universities continue to experience challenges in relation to ethnic and religious related conflicts, which result in interruptions of academic activities, injuries, and even the deaths (Abeba, 2019; Adamu, 2020).

Researchers claim that causes of ethnic conflict are generally related to ethnic polarization, political rivalry, and historic relationships among ethnic groups (Adamu, 2013a, 2013b). However, clashing also occurs between religious groups and can be started by things as simple as one group playing religious songs and holding religious practices (prayers) which create discomfort for students from other religious groups (Arega & Mulugeta, 2017). Therefore, this study is intended to investigate the critical and current issues surrounding these two aspects of diversity in the Ethiopian higher education system and the impact of campus climate for diversity on students' sense of belonging. This study will add to the understanding of how Ethiopian public university students perceive and understand the concepts and advantages and disadvantages of diversity. The findings can inform public university leaders on the status of campus diversity climates and policy makers on the challenges of diversity being experienced. For researchers, the findings can be used to inform and suggest other areas of exploration around the topic of diversity.

Campus Climate for Diversity

Campus climate for diversity is a framework to examine campus climates through assessing how diverse students are supported and whether the structures, beliefs, and behaviors that produce a positive effect on diversity are being promoted for all students (Hurtado et al., 1999). Embedded in the external contexts, the institutional context of the framework is comprised of institutional level and individual level dimensions. The institutional level factors include the compositional and organizational dimensions.

The compositional dimension, also known as structural diversity, refers to the numerical representation of individuals from diverse social identities among students, faculty, staff, and administrators (Hurtado et al., 1999). The balanced representation of a diverse set of individuals within a college or university can lead to greater opportunities for interactions outside of one's ethnic and religious groups (Thompson & Sekaquaptewa, 2002) and is also positively related to satisfaction with the college experience in terms of diversity as well as ethnic identity development (Hurtado et al., 2012). Regardless of the actual structural diversity, the perception of diversity is seen differently by various populations on campus, therefore should be understood through assessing how diverse the campus *feels* to the students.

The organizational dimension of the campus climate identifies structures and processes that embed group-based privilege and oppression or confer resources such as curriculum and other institutional practices and policies (Milem et al., 2005). One consistent empirical finding is that diversity in the curriculum has the transformative capacity to enlighten and change the perspectives of individuals, especially in reducing prejudice (Denson, 2009; Engberg, 2007). Institutional policies and processes also influence the campus climate and can be seen in policies, programs and services and have the potential to create more equitable conditions and outcomes for diverse students (Hurtado et al., 2012). Institutional commitment to diversity, or lack thereof, is also identified as an aspect of the organizational dimension. Such a commitment is articulated in an institutional mission (Pepper et al., 2010).

The individual level factors include the behavioral dimensions, the psychological dimensions, and attitudes toward diversity. The behavioral dimension refers to the context, frequency, and quality of cross group interactions (Hurtado et al., 2008). Categorizing interactions into formal and informal helps educators to understand interactions they may have control over, as opposed to chance encounters. According to Hurtado (2005), formal interactions are often referred to as campus-facilitated interactions that occur in the classroom or cocurricular settings and are the result of intentional educational practice. The informal interactions occur in the everyday interactions between individuals outside of campus-designed educational activities. Interaction with faculty is another aspect that is associated with student interactions and impacts student perceptions of the campus climate and subsequent outcomes (Cress, 2008).

Another component of the individual level, the psychological dimension, involves individuals' perceptions of the environment, views of intergroup relations, and perceptions of discrimination or racial/ethnic conflict within the institutional context (Hurtado et al., 1999; Nora & Cabrera, 1996) or perceived institutional support/commitment related to diversity (Hurtado et al., 2008). Climate research based on the psychological dimension remains vital to understanding the experiences of multiple social identity groups in order to improve the conditions as a hostile campus has many negative impacts.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following basic questions:

- What is the student composition at Ethiopian public universities?
- How do public university students perceive their campus climate for ethnic and religious diversity?
- Is campus climate for diversity in Ethiopian public universities related to students' sense of belonging?

METHODOLOGY

This convergent parallel mixed method study explored the current state of Ethiopian university campus climates as well as the feelings of belonging of students. Two reasons dominate the use of this design, the simultaneous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data provide a more nuanced picture (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013) and the convenience of the simultaneous collection of both types of data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). In this study the benefits of knowledge gained from both types of data were critical to establish an accurate picture of the current state. In addition, the simultaneous collection reduced unnecessary travel to the sample universities since they are located in all regions of the country.

Participants and Settings

Primary data for this study was collected from students, teachers, and deans of students. A combination of probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used. For the quantitative data, a multistage representative sample was collected (N = 458). First, eight universities were selected using stratified sampling based on the generational classifications of the public universities. Ethiopian university generational classifications are based on the year institutions were established: first generations were established before 2007, second generation in 2007, third generation in 2011, and fourth generation in 2016. Two universities represented each of the four generations. The selected universities, Haramaya University and Hawassa University; Jigjiga University and Dire Dawa University; Debre Tabor University and Woldia University; and Salale University and Raya Universities were selected from the first, second, third, and fourth generations, respectively. Next, four colleges were selected from within each university and then simple random sampling was employed to identify the final student participants within each college. For the qualitative data, purposive, snowball, and availability sampling techniques were used to select eight students, eight teachers, and eight deans of students for interviews to supply the in-depth qualitative data. Therefore, the total number of qualitative participants was twenty-four.

Regarding the background characteristics of the quantitative respondents, 196 (42.8%) of the 458 students were female and 262 (57.2%) were male. Ethnically, 324 (70.7%) students were from Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups, with the remaining (29.3%) coming from no less than 17 other ethnic groups. This appears to be representative of the diversity of Ethiopia since Amhara and Oromo are the two dominant ethnic groups. In reference to religion, 27.9% were Muslims and 52.2% were Orthodox Christians. The rest were from Catholic, Protestant, and Wakefeta religions.

Regarding the background characteristics of the qualitative students, they represented a wide variety of fields of study and years on university campuses as well as a diverse representation of ethnicities and religions. See Table 1.

Table 1
Student Qualitative Research Participant Background Characteristics

Participant's Code	Sex	Ethnicity	Religion	Year of Study	Field of Study
Student 1	Male	Oromo	Protestant	III	Civics
Student 2	Female	Amhara	Orthodox	IV	Civil Engineering
Student 3	Male	Wolita	Protestant	III	Sociology
Student 4	Male	Tigraway	Orthodox	II	Mathematics
Student 5	Female	Amhara	Muslim	III	Psychology
Student 6	Male	Amhara	Muslim	III	Economics
Student 7	Male	Oromo	Orthodox	II	EdPM
Student 8	Male	Sidama	Protestant	IV	Computer Engineering

The teachers and deans of students represented a variety of professional levels, from lecturer to associate professor. The teachers also ranged in years of experience from five to 15 years. The area of gender was less diversified, however remained representative of the population of higher education faculty throughout the country. See Table 2.

Table 2
Teacher Qualitative Research Participants Background Characteristics

Items	Category	Count	%
Sex	Male	14	87.5
	Female	2	12.5
Educational Background	MA/MSC	13	81.3
	PhD	3	18.7
Academic Rank	Lecturer	11	68.8
	Ass Prof	5	31.2
Professional Experience	0-5 years	-	-
	5-10 years	10	62.5
	10-15 Years	6	37.5
Experience as Dean of Students	1-3 Years	7	87.5
	3-6 Years	1	12.5

Data Gathering

The quantitative survey instrument, a student questionnaire, was developed based on the Diverse Learning Environment Instrument used by Hurtado et al. (2012). The questionnaire, apart from its introduction, had five parts which measured the campus climate for diversity and sense of belonging, with a total item number of 50. The developed questionnaire was piloted, and the validity and reliability measures were calculated for the whole instrument and for each dimension. The analysis of the pilot study data indicated that the dimensions of the questionnaire had good internal

consistency with Cronbach's alphas between 0.73 to 0.91 and the overall was 0.95. Also, based on the comments of pilot study participants, difficult wording was adapted to increase clarity and content validity and two repetitive items were deleted.

After the validity and reliability of the instrument were established, 718 questionnaires were distributed. More specifically, 231, 197, 181, and 109 questionnaires each were distributed for the first, second, third, and fourth generation universities, respectively. Out of the distributed questionnaires, 469 (65.3%) were completed and returned. Out of the 469 questionnaires returned, 11 questionnaires were void as many dimensions as possible of the questions were not properly completed, leaving the final viable questionnaire responses at 458.

In-depth interviews and consultation of documents constituted the qualitative data gathering tools. In-depth interview guides were used to stimulate discussions and understand participants' views on items on the questionnaire that needed detailed explanation and to explore the challenges Ethiopian public universities have in managing their diversity. Relevant documents such as students' higher education placement guideline, universities senate legislations, universities' students' discipline policy and the new education development road map were also consulted to add depth to the analysis. To this end, availability, contents, and applicability of documents related to strategic plans, senate legislations, and students code of conduct were reviewed.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected through questionnaires were coded and entered into SPSS 23 for analysis. Measures of frequency, percentages, means, and standard deviations were produced. Correlation analysis was performed to examine predictive relationships between dimensions of campus climate for diversity and students' sense of belongingness.

The qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic approach. In doing so, the qualitative data was systematically transcribed and translated (for the interviews made in Amharic), categorized, reduced, and organized depending on the identified major themes related to each dimension of campus climate for diversity. The qualitative data were used to expand the breadth and depth of the quantitative data.

RESULTS

The first question this study addressed was, *What is the student composition at Ethiopian public universities?* Document review on students' placement revealed that the student bodies of Ethiopian public universities are indeed diversified, as almost all of the sampled universities had students from different ethnic and religious groups. Abebaw (2014) argued that this diversification of the student bodies in Ethiopian public universities is not a deliberate action by the government to maximize the benefit of diversity, but rather seems to be the result of the diversification of the country in general. Also, despite the diversification, as the interviews revealed, there is a dominance of some ethnic and religious groups on some campuses based on location. Interviewees noted that there is a tendency to place students in a university located close to their place of residence, mostly in regions where they completed high school, and this has created dominance of students from local areas. One student stated,

I can definitely say that students from this region where the university is located are many in number. (Student #2, November 2019)

Two reasons were mentioned for the dominance of local ethnic groups in Ethiopian public universities. The first one was the preference of students to enroll in institutions near their families or at least in their home region. Due to a string of conflicts between students, which have resulted in injuries, property damage, and even deaths, parents prefer not to send their children far away. Parents appear to advise their children to select a university near them or in the region they are living. The placement criteria favor them to do so as long as the students have the required grades and test scores. For example, the placement policy of MoE states,

Students who scored an entrance point that makes them eligible for higher education will chose a university of their choice in order and will be placed by Ministry of Education accordingly. (2002, p.13)

The Ministry's recent assessment (MoE, 2018) of the current pattern of student placement was, however, critical of the present trend, arguing that it does not promote unity and diversity.

To promote unity in diversity, the current student placement system has to be revisited and replaced with a system that avoids the dominance of campuses by students from certain regions only. (2002, p.25)

The second factor mentioned to create dominance of certain ethnic groups at universities is the transfer of students from their original placement to another university located in their home region. The main reasons for students to ask for transfers to other universities were concerns of conflict and feelings of insecurity. Unless transferred to places of their ethnic origin, they expressed concern that they could become victims of violence due to their ethnic identity. A student stated,

Many Oromo students used to be assigned to this university. But, after staying here for a semester or two, they get a transfer to other universities mostly to their region and will leave this university. Again, due to the conflict of Amhara and Oromo students taking place this year, many Oromo students left the university; it is really very sad. (Student #3, December 2019)

In agreement with the above student's opinion, transfer of students especially in relation to students leaving campuses due to conflicts in the country and inside universities, a dean of students also said the following:

Two years before, there was a conflict between Oromo and Somali students in our university. Due to that conflict, not only Oromo students but also teachers who served this university, beginning from its establishment, left the university. After they left this university, we heard that they have been placed to universities in Oromia region, I mean including the teachers. The loss was twofold for us: it decreased the diversity of our students and loss of best minds (Dean of Students #2, November 2019).

In general, the sample universities were found to have a diversified student body, yet the feeling among students and teachers was that students from the region where a university is located or from local areas are found to be dominant.

Attitude of Students Towards Diversity

The second question guiding this study was, *How do public university students perceive their campus climate for ethnic and religious diversity?* This question is answered through investigation of students' *attitudes* towards diversity, their diversity related *experiences*, and their diversity related *satisfaction*. The first aspect assessed was the *attitudes* of students towards students of different ethnic and religious backgrounds and having a diversified student body in general. The statements for this portion of the survey are in Table 3 and the scale was from one, meaning strongly disagree, to five, meaning strongly agree.

As can be seen in Table 3, students had a good attitude for diversity with mean scores between 3.51 and 4.26. While the lowest mean score was associated with the perception about socialization of students from different religious backgrounds ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.24$) and the second lowest result was related to socialization of students from different ethnic backgrounds ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.15$), these were still above the middle score of 3 indicating agreement with the statements. The highest score was about the practice of having a friend from another ethnic background ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.01$), indicating students may embrace individuals from outside of their own group.

According to one student, dorm placement was a positive way to encourage diversity through exposing students to others that are different from them and expanding their views.

If there are other students in your dormitory or classroom who speak other language than yours, which is the reality in most cases, and if they are willing to teach you, it means you get the chance to know other language. For example, if I know many languages, which I am very eager to know, it will give me an opportunity to work anywhere in Ethiopia. That is a real advantage as job opportunities are very rare if you focus only to work in some areas. (Student #5, 2020)

Though the basis for socialization for students in most cases was with those that share the same ethnic or religious background, Table 3 shows students believe that it is good to attend universities with students from different ethnic ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.08$) and religious ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.99$) groups. Moreover, students indicated that they should have basic understandings of other ethnicities ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.96$) and religions ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.03$) and develop meaningful relationships with students of different ethnicities ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.02$) and religions ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.02$).

The qualitative results also showed many students believed it was good to have interactions between students of diverse backgrounds as it is beneficial in learning different languages and cultures. They also mentioned that when students know languages and cultures other than their own, they may be motivated to explore other languages and cultures and may even work after graduation in regions different from where they were raised. Here is an example of what a participant had to say on the issue.

Definitely, it is excellent to have diverse student body at university campus. For example, if there are students who speak a language different from yours, you get a chance to learn that language which is an excellent opportunity. Not only the language, but you could also have a good opportunity to know about another culture, dressing style, type of food, and so on. I am highly appreciative of having a diverse student in universities. (Student #1, November 2019)

Table 3
Mean Ratings of Respondents about Attitude towards Diversity

Items	Mean	SD
In this university, it is good to have students from different ethnic background	3.99	1.08
In this university, it is good to have students from different religion background	4.12	.99
As university students, I should have basic understanding of other ethnicities	4.06	.96
As university students, I should have basic understanding of other religions	4.00	1.03
I should develop meaningful relationships with students outside my ethnicity in this university	4.05	1.02
I should develop meaningful relationships with students outside my religion in this university	4.00	1.02
I accept the different way of life of other students from different ethnic background of me	4.07	.99
I accept the different way of life of other students from different religion background of me	4.02	1.04
In this University, I have friends from different Ethnic groups	4.26	1.01
In this University, I have friends from different religion groups	4.23	.98
In University, I often study with students from different ethnic backgrounds	4.08	.99
In University, I often study with students from different religious backgrounds	4.00	1.03
At this University, students from different Ethnic groups socialize with one another	3.75	1.15
At this University, students from different religion groups socialize with one another	3.51	1.24

The data from Table 3 also show that, in practice, students had friends from different ethnic groups ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.18$) and religious groups ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.05$) which gave them a very good opportunity to know about different ethnic groups and religions and also languages, cultures, and other positive values.

These results indicate that there are still a number of students not willing to go out of their ethnic and religious groups to make friends, spend time together, and know about other ethnicities and religions. However, they are not the majority. Efforts to encourage cross social group interactions are not always successful. For example, the following was stated by a dean of students in relation to encouraging the socialization of students in campuses when they may avoid experiences that cross ethnic or religious lines.

In the beginning of the academic year, we make dormitory assignment of students based on alphabets only. We also warn them not to change their dormitory unless they have critical health issues so that they can be together with a student that can help them. But, still we find students changing their dormitory when we make supervision to join their friends from the same locality, ethnic and religion group. This is a very common trend. (Dean of Students, #6, 2020)

In general, the results showed that students have a good attitude towards having a diversified student body in terms of ethnicity and religion at university campuses. Moreover, they showed a good perception towards exploring other ethnicities and religions and socializing with students of different background.

Diversity Related Experiences of Students

Another aspect of campus climate is the *experience* students have with diversity issues, for this study specifically ethnicity and religion related diversity. As can be inferred from the results displayed in Table 4, the mean ratings of respondents to items in this dimension ranged from 2.16 to 3.50 with an average overall mean score of 2.67. This indicates a relatively good experience as the items in the dimension were worded negatively with a one representing very often and a five representing never. Even though most of the responses indicated a relatively positive experience, the data show that many of the respondents have observed ethnic based conflict (M = 3.50, SD = 1.29) among students on their campuses which were difficult to control (M = 3.30, SD = 1.36). The respondents also indicated that they heard offensive jokes about some ethnic groups (M = 3.08, SD = 1.31) and personally experienced discrimination because of their ethnic background (M = 3.01, SD = 1.44).

Table 4
Mean Ratings about Diversity Related Experience of Students

Items	Mean	SD
I have experienced Ethnic discrimination at this University from Students	3.01	1.44
I have experienced Religious discrimination at this University from Students	2.60	1.44
At this university, I sometimes hear offensive jokes and stories about people from some Ethnic groups	3.08	1.31
At this University, I sometimes hear offensive jokes and stories about people from some Religion groups	2.85	1.30
I have been treated unfairly by a teacher or staff member because of my Ethnicity	2.38	1.45
I have been treated unfairly by a teacher or staff member because of my Religion	2.16	1.39
At this university, I had experienced physical assault/injury because of my ethnicity	2.32	1.43
At this university, I had experienced physical assault/injury because of my religion	2.20	1.39

At this university, I had experienced property damage because of my ethnicity	2.39	1.44
At this university, I had experienced property damage because of my religion	2.16	1.36
At this university, I have observed conflict among students because of ethnic issues	3.50	1.29
At this university, I have observed conflict among students because of religion issues	2.76	1.36
Ethnic conflicts are very difficult to control at this university	3.30	1.36
Religious conflicts are very difficult to control at this university	2.72	1.41

The qualitative data also showed that in the majority of sampled universities, there was a conflict among students for different diversity related issues, however the dominant aspect that elicits conflict was ethnicity. A dean of students recalls,

On 2 August 2019 at 11:30 PM, one student was thrown from a building and was severely injured. After he was taken to hospital, he died of the severity of the injury that he experienced. Immediately, a conflict started between two ethnic groups of students, Amhara and Oromo. Regrettably, in that conflict, two Amhara students died, five students from both groups severely injured. Due to this conflict, still there are eight students in prison at the zonal correction center. (Dean of Students #1, November 2019)

A story was narrated by a student about conflicts that took place between Oromo and Amhara students.

Though I am not quite sure about the real cause of the conflict, there was a conflict between Amhara and Oromo students in our university. Due to last year incident, many students from both sides were injured. Again, this year, after the Woldia University incident, there was a series of conflicts between the same groups of students which resulted in many injuries. Most significantly, the class was interrupted for long and only resumed a week earlier. This is really very sad. (Student #7, February 2020)

The incident mentioned by this student occurred during the 2019/2020 academic year resulting in a conflict between Amhara and Oromo students causing the deaths of two students from Oromo ethnicity. After this incident, there were clashes between these two groups of students in many public universities around the country which resulted in further deaths of students, property damage, and students leaving their campuses. The problem predominantly affected universities located in the Amhara and Oromia regional states. Though many of the 2019/2020 conflicts between these two groups was mainly thought to have resulted from the Woldia University incident, most of the respondents take the case further and attribute the cause to the general political scenario of the country and provocation of outside forces. Authors such as Dawson (2007) also stated that political realities could impact attitudes of students and the relationships they make with peers outside of their ethnicity. Arguing that the root cause of the conflict among students is more political than ethnic, a dean of students of one university had this to say,

I definitely think that the current political condition and outside factors are mainly causing conflicts between students. For example, a simple conflict between two students from two ethnic groups can easily grow to group conflict which you cannot control easily. Then after the conflict, when some of the students involved in the conflict try to leave the campus, other who were not involved in the conflict also follow suit. ... when you make a discussion to solve the conflict after incidents, the discussion agenda will be immediately changed to other issues which are directly related to politics, mainly issues that are being circulated by activists. This definitely tells you that the cause for the conflicts are deeply rooted to the political scenario of the country and even some agendas are being thrown for the students by external forces or activists. (Dean of Student #2, November 2019)

Efforts are made to encourage diversified student interactions. One such attempt is to assign students to dorms based on the alphabetical order of their names as opposed to student choice or group status. Responses garnered from interviews revealed that this is the case in almost all universities, creating a high probability that students from diverse backgrounds are placed in the same dormitory. However, in cases where students from one ethnic group are dominant at department level, a student may be assigned with other students of the same ethnic group. One student mentioned this as a probable reason for discriminations or experiencing offensive jokes about ethnicity. In the words of a student,

When you are assigned to a dormitory, if the other dorm mates are from an ethnic group different from yours and you cannot understand their language, they are likely to discriminate you by not talking to you and study with you. They may sometimes try to say something uncomfortable about your language or ethnicity. For this reason, after the initial dormitory assignment, if students feel discriminated by their dorm mates, they try to change dormitories complaining to the proctors. If they fail to change, they spend most of their time with their friends outside their dormitory and go to their room only to sleep. (Student #5, December 2019)

A dean of student from one sample university gives a comparable account of placement of students in dormitories.

... dormitory placements are made before students arrive to the university using alphabetical orders taking their departments as a base. In less than a month following the completion of students' placement, my table becomes flooded with request of students to change their dormitories. When I ask some of the students their reasons to change, most mention language and culture difference. Though rarely, some others state religion difference as a reason for wanting to change. But as a rule, unless a student has a very serious medical case which needs a close assistance from a friend, we do not change their placements. Though that is the case, most of the time, when we make some unnoticed checkups, we find students who come from the same area, ethnic group and sometimes religion in the same dormitory. (Dean of Students #8, February 2020)

The data indicate that students did not perceive religious issues to be as challenging as ethnic issues. Participants indicated relative minimal unfair treatment by a teacher or staff member because of their religion ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.39$), little damage of personal property due to their religion ($M =$

2.16, SD = 1.36), and an absence of physical assault or injury due to their religion (M = 2.20, SD = 1.39). The qualitative data obtained from both students and deans of students were confirmatory. A student participant said,

I do not observe religion to be a factor for division or conflict between students at this university. As the main issue at the country level is ethnicity, every student is more alert about it. If there are issues about religion, mostly it is about dissatisfaction by the university cafeteria service provision during fasting periods. Those issues also, most of the time, will be solved easily and will be forgotten immediately. (Student #8, March 2020)

In summary, the results showed that students have a better experience with religious diversity experiences than with ethnic diversity experience, that students value cross group experiences and yet many still tend to remain within their ethnic groups when possible. The responses also point to political reasons for the ethnic conflict that is experienced on university campuses.

Diversity Related Satisfaction of Students

The next aspect of campus climate for diversity refers to *satisfaction* of students towards their campuses. For these responses a score of one represented *very dissatisfied* and a score of five represented *very satisfied*. As can be seen from the data in Table 5, students indicated a moderate satisfaction in many diversity related issues and dissatisfaction in others with the overall average mean rating of 3.13, the lowest being (M = 2.88, SD = 1.30) and the highest being (M = 3.46, SD = 1.20). While the highest mean rating was related to satisfaction with the religious diversity of students on their campuses, the lowest was related to administrative responses for ethnic discrimination/conflict.

In addition to dissatisfaction of administrative responses to ethnic conflicts/discrimination, the results from these data showed students were dissatisfied with fasting cafeteria services (M = 2.90, SD = 1.39). This is a food service provided during fasting periods for Orthodox Christian and Muslim students. Students also indicated dissatisfaction with administrative responses for incidents of religion related conflicts (M = 2.96, SD = 1.29). However, this was not as high as that for ethnic related conflict.

Even though the student interviewees tended to support the quantitative findings on the issues of dissatisfaction on fasting cafeteria service, deans of students did not always share the claims of the students. For example, one of the deans of students stated:

When a fasting period approaches, for both Christians and Muslims, we announce for fasting students to get registered to make arrangement for the cafeteria service. Then based on the number of students we get, we try to serve them accordingly. Of course, sometimes students go too far and ask for the cafeteria time to be adjusted like the cafeteria to be opened at 3PM in the afternoon, for Christians, or early at 4AM, in the case of the Muslims. Even though this is directly in contradiction with the secularism principle universities are supposed to advance, we open the cafeteria as per their need and tell them to serve themselves as we cannot afford to make cafeteria workers serve them as it has many implications in terms of time and finance. Also, in both Christians and Muslims holy days, we prepare a special meal and serve it with soft drinks and fruits. Especially, since the area our

university is located is very famous for its cheese and since there is a good supply of it, on holy days students are served at lunch and dinner times (Dean of Students #1, November 2019).

Table 5
Mean Ratings of Respondents about Diversity Related Satisfaction

Items	Mean	SD
Ethnic diversity of students' body	3.02	1.21
Religious diversity of students' body	3.46	1.20
Ethnic diversity of teachers	3.37	1.18
Religious diversity of teachers	3.39	1.17
Ethnic diversity of support staff	3.19	1.21
Religious diversity of support staff	3.15	1.20
Interactions among different ethnic background students	3.04	1.23
Interactions among different religion background student	3.32	1.20
Atmosphere for ethnic differences	3.02	1.18
Atmosphere for religious differences	3.04	1.15
Administrative response for incidents of ethnic discrimination/conflict	2.88	1.30
Administrative response for incidents of religious discrimination/conflict	2.96	1.29
Fasting Cafeteria services	2.90	1.39

The same dean of students related the points of dissatisfaction of the students with the cafeteria service to another case.

Almost all of the local peoples around our university are orthodox Christians. This has an implication in the religion composition of our cafeteria workers. Almost all are orthodox Christians as we hire administrative staffs from the local area. For this reason, I had been approached by some Muslim students who expressed their dissatisfaction with cafeteria workers and type of meat served for them. But as this university has an obligation to create a job opportunity for the local people. I told them we would not entertain their request. I think the dissatisfaction is mainly related with this issue (Dean of Students #1, November 2019).

A similar argument was made by dean of students of a university located in a Muslim dominated area. There, the dissatisfaction was expressed by Christian students. In relation to the university administrative responses to conflicts, both ethnic and religion related, one student said the following:

The university leaders do not meet and share the different concerns of the students unless there is a serious conflict. Even when there is a conflict, their response is not quick especially if the incident takes place at night. Again, I am not satisfied

with the way they take disciplinary measure. For example, after conflicts we still see the main actors in conflicts being free and measures taken against many innocent students who were in the conflict area by chance. For this reason, most of the time conflicts recur again very shortly (Student #5, February 2020).

On the other hand, as can be observed from Table 5, religious diversity of students' body ($M=3.46$, $SD=1.20$) and teachers ($M=3.39$, $SD=1.17$), ethnic diversity of teachers ($M=3.37$, $SD=1.18$), and interactions among different religion group of students ($M=3.32$, $SD=1.20$) were identified as moderate areas of satisfaction. During interviews, one of the student participants said the following in relation to interactions among students of different ethnic and religion groups.

Most of the students want to socialize with students who came from their locality, region, or ethnic group. But as different religion followers can be found in the same ethnic group, you can see that different religion backgrounds socializing at campus level (Student #8, March 2020).

Many of the deans of students agreed that students often gravitate to those from the same ethnic group irrespective of religion. In support of this, a teacher said the following:

I think the order of the day is to be with your ethnic group. Inside the class you see students who come from the same locality sticking together. I think that they feel very comfortable talking to a student who talks their language they can easily understand. But when we see it in relation to the current situation of the country in general and the politics in particular, I feel that they deliberately stick with a student of their ethnic group. (Teacher #2, November 2019)

In general, the results showed that students have a good attitude towards having a diversified student body in terms of ethnicity and religion at university campuses. They also showed a good perception towards exploring other ethnicities and religions and socializing with students of different background. Therefore, taken together, the campus climate for diversity in Ethiopian public universities can be considered as moderately positive constituted by conflicts among students for diversity related issues mainly ethnic issues.

Relationship between Campus Climate for Diversity and Students' Sense of Belonging

The third guiding question for this study was, *is campus climate for diversity in Ethiopian public universities related to students' sense of belonging?* As can be seen from the results displayed in Table 6, there was a weak yet statistically significant positive relationship between students' attitudes towards diversity and their sense of belonging at their university ($r = .143$, $p < 0.05$). The $R^2 = 0.020$, indicated that attitude towards diversity explained 2.0% of variance in students' sense of belonging at their university.

The relationship between diversity related satisfaction and sense of belonging indicated a moderate, statistically significant positive relationship ($r = .468$, $p < 0.05$) and the $R^2 = 0.219$ indicated diversity related satisfaction explained 21.9% of variance in students' sense of belonging towards their university. The data did not indicate a statistically significant relationship between students' diversity related experience and a sense of belonging at their university ($r = -.075$, $p > 0.05$).

Table 6***Correlations between Dimensions of Campus Climate for Diversity and Students' Sense of Belonging***

Variables	1	2	3	4
1 Sense of Belonging	1			
2 Attitude towards Diversity <i>Sig. Level</i>	.143** .002	1		
3 Diversity Related Satisfaction <i>Sig. Level</i>	.468** .000	.221** .000	1	
4 Diversity related Experience <i>Sig. Level</i>	-.075 .111	-.079 .090	-.052 .270	1

** Pearson Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Pearson Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PLANNING AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the findings of this study, the following policy, practice, and further research implications can be made. Policy implications include examining and adapting policies at the university and national levels, particularly in reference to written diversity policies and establishing and maintaining diversified student bodies. Planning implications include establishing and maintaining a diversified student body on each campus, increasing faculty diversity, and planning for ways to encourage cross group interactions. Future research could include examining other aspects of diversity, such as gender and political views, and further examining why ethnicity is more challenging to handle than religion. Many of these implications would not be linear and do not clearly fall into one category, but would be highly interactive and possibly circular, as policy will affect planning, and research could provide more information to assist with policies and planning.

Policy

The results show that policies need to be examined and established in a couple of critical areas both at the national as well as the university levels. As mentioned earlier, at a national level, the placement criteria of students to public universities should give due attention to intentionally create diversified student bodies on public university campuses. Policies of the Ministry of Education (MoE), including placement and transfer, have not prevented the domination of some ethnic groups at universities. One of the main policies surrounding this issue is that of the transfer policy, allowing students to transfer to the university of their choice. Therefore, it is suggested that due attention be given to these policies and emphasis on their fair implementation as this contributes or hinders diversification of student bodies at Ethiopian public universities. Policy related to plans and methods to avoid the recurrent conflicts between students and university administration should be devised together with strict implementation guidelines. Also, at the national level a policy could be examined that would require universities to have a diversity statement as part of their mission and/or vision.

At the institutional level, universities should show commitment to promote the diversity of their student body in the form of a mission, vision, or diversity statement that clearly embraces students of various ethnic, religious, and other diversity groups. As this study revealed, mission statements of

many Ethiopian public universities do not consistently contain such language. Another step would be to include such statements in strategic and operational plans.

Planning

The data showed that students were dissatisfied with administrative responses for diversity related conflicts, whereas students were moderately satisfied with religious diversity and related issues. Since the creation of positive campus climate for diversity largely depends on institutional commitment and appropriate responses to diversity related issues such as tensions and conflicts on campus (Gurin, 1999; Hurtado et al., 1999), the gaps observed by the selected sample public universities deserve attention.

University administrators also could improve plans to make their campuses attractive enough to be primary choices for students by properly showing commitment in addressing students' diversity issues. For this, having a specific structure working on diversity issues is critical. Since students choose to enroll in universities close to their home or choose to transfer when possible, universities could strive to make their campuses an attractive and viable choice for incoming students, and a place where those currently attending choose to remain until completion of their programs. This may be achieved by establishing safety and security for all students as well as embracing diversity and encouraging students to interact outside of their ethnic and religious groups.

This tendency to stay within one's ethnic or religion circle may pose a problem for students' life in campuses as they may be obliged to live in the same dormitory, form discussion groups for academic purposes in classrooms, and work on assignments with students unlike themselves. For example, in relation to religion, some authors suggested that it is a key factor that determines students' relationships in educational environments (Sharabi, 2011) and can affect the teaching learning process (Dawson, 2007) and create deep divisions among students characterized by conflicts (Figueroa, 1999). Efforts by university administrators, faculty, and staff could focus on demonstrating and leading cross group interactions as a safe way to encourage these activities.

One dissatisfaction point of students about their campus climate for diversity is the lack of diversification of the academic staff, mainly the instructors. Most public university administration have autonomy to recruit their academic staff and could take advantage of this freedom with a plan to increase the diversity. A diverse staff could assist in efforts to manage students' diversity.

In addition to diversifying the academic staff, a due emphasis could be given to provide diversity sensitivity and professional ethics training for faculty, staff, and students. One such effort was initiated at Jigjiga University in January 2020 by the U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa through a series of conferences titled *Peaceful and Purposeful Education* (U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa, 2020). During this conference students received motivational as well as sensitivity training and faculty received training on working with diversity in their classrooms. Future planning could encourage increased activities and trainings on campuses.

Future Research

The issue of diversity management in the higher education settings is still widely unexplored in the Ethiopian context. Therefore, other research areas can be recommended such as examining relationships between student management with other important variables such as students' academic achievement, management of academic staff, institutional performance, etc. Research could be conducted that would bring a deeper understanding of the dynamics of a number of variables.

Comparative studies both internal to Ethiopia as well as international comparative studies could be conducted. Comparisons among Ethiopian universities of different generations or in different regions might provide an indication of different practices and experiences that have been successful and those that have not. Comparison studies could be conducted with universities in other countries that have found success in diversity related issues, especially those that have diverse ethnic populations. Since the issues with ethnicity in Ethiopia seem to loom larger and have a greater impact than those surrounding religion, more effort for policy, planning, and future research should be made to further alleviate the ethnic issues that lead to academic disruptions and possible harm to individuals.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this study include the timing of the data collection and the scope of the study. The data for this study were collected during a time of unrest on university campuses creating difficulty in data collection and also a potential effect on the data that were collected. Tensions were high and it may have been more challenging for both the students and the faculty participants to be honest about their particular experiences and challenges. Even though anonymity was emphasized, fear of being identified may have affected the information provided.

The scope of the study was also a limitation since the diversity variables of focus only included ethnicity and religion. Diversity has many additional dimensions including gender and political affiliation, etc. These dimensions could also critically affect students' diversity experience during their stay at their respective universities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn. The campus climate for diversity in Ethiopian public universities is moderate on many campuses, yet dominance of some ethnic groups does exist due to student and family preference. Students generally have positive attitudes toward the diversity in the student body both for ethnicity and religion. The students indicated positivity toward exploring other ethnicities and religions through socializing with peers unlike themselves. Overall, the students' responses showed that experiences related to religion were not as negative as those related to ethnicity. The experiences of ethnic related conflict seem to support these perceptions.

Positive diversity related experiences, including relationships with peers and teachers, is a prerequisite for students' sense of belonging. The relative absence of ethnically mixed academic staff, mainly teachers, and the presence of ethnically motivated conflicts between students made students leave their campus due to a belief that they may be in danger of an attack due to their ethnic background.

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