

African Journal of Education and Practice (AJEP)

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Article History

Received 7th February 2025

Received in Revised Form 12th March 2025

Accepted 10th April 2025



How to cite in APA format:

Ayana, D. K., Sercu, L., & Mengistu, D. (2025). Intercultural Citizenship Education in Post-Conflict Contexts: The Case of Ethiopia. *African Journal of Education and Practice*, 11(2), 17–35. <https://doi.org/10.47604/ajep.3287>

Abstract

Purpose: In recent years, citizenship education has been the subject of much international attention, also in higher education. It is often called global citizenship, which includes a national and international dimension. By contrast, in some countries, especially those where high tensions between ethnic groups exist, citizenship education focuses primarily on preserving the country's unity and the successful coexistence of multiple cultural, ethnic, and linguistic groups.

Methodology: The study reported here considers the situation in Ethiopia, a super diverse country with 80 different ethnic groups and 109 languages spoken. Ethiopia is viewed as a post-conflict context, where the society has recently experienced a violent ethnic conflict that affected the daily lives of many citizens. The paper reports an interview study investigating how Ethiopian university administrators from two universities view citizenship education in higher education. Their views concern the need to promote intercultural competence as an important aspect of citizenship and ways to promote this competence as part of intercultural citizenship via curricular and extracurricular activities.

Findings: The results show that universities avoid controversial issues or the highlighting of ethnicity, yet attempt to promote intercultural competence in their graduates via diverse approaches to intercultural citizenship education.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: We propose that the review and development of intercultural policies and practices are particularly timely because of the political and ethnocultural tensions still present in Ethiopian society.

Keywords: *Citizenship Education, Intercultural Competence, University, Post-Conflict Country, Administrator Views*

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INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, civic and citizenship education (CCE) in secondary education has played a crucial role in preparing students to become informed, responsible, and active citizens (Arthur et al., 2008). This educational domain encompasses the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for students to engage effectively in local and national civic life and contribute actively to the democratic process (Isac, 2015). Nowadays, the primary aim of CCE is to foster a sense of civic responsibility and community engagement among students, in the first place the national community. It helps young people understand their rights and duties as citizens, the functioning of political and legal systems, and the importance of participation in democratic processes. By promoting critical thinking, conflict resolution, and social cohesion, CCE contributes to the development of versatile individuals who can navigate and influence societal structures (Cherono, 2024). In secondary education, CCE is often integrated into various subjects such as history, social studies, and ethics. This cross-curricular approach ensures that civic concepts are reinforced through multiple lenses, providing a comprehensive understanding of civic life. Some educational systems also offer dedicated courses on civics and citizenship, focusing explicitly on topics like human rights, governance, and civic duties. At the tertiary educational level, universities and colleges provide students with opportunities for growth of citizenship, yet often do not make these activities compulsory. Rather, they offer the water, and it is up to the student to drink. Pedagogically, CCE employs interactive and participatory teaching methods. These include debates, role-plays, community projects, and service learning, which engage students actively and make learning relevant to real-world contexts. Such methods enhance students' understanding and also empower them to apply their knowledge in practical situations (Musonda et al., 2020).

At the level of university education, citizenship education still encourages students to critically engage with societal issues, understand their rights and responsibilities, and participate actively in democratic processes (Gregersen-Hermans, 2017). Yet, given the global context in which we live, it also fosters more emphatically than in secondary education a sense of global citizenship, emphasizing the interconnectedness of local and global communities and the importance of addressing global challenges such as climate change, inequality, and human rights (Baker & Fang, 2021). As part of global competence, intercultural competence is also fostered (Budiharso et al., 2024). Intercultural citizenship education combines elements of (global) citizenship education with intercultural education. Via curricular and extracurricular activities, it focuses on developing learners' abilities to interact effectively and respectfully with people from different cultural backgrounds.

This is the situation in peaceful democratic societies that invest in sustainable international relationships. By contrast, the situation may be different in so-called post-conflict societies (Quaynor, 2012; Rubin, 2016). Post-conflict societies have experienced violent conflict in the past that made large parts of their population suffer, and have now entered a more stable phase, yet some unrest and instability may still afflict the country. Societies that have experienced large-scale violent conflict are often deeply divided and more prone to future conflicts. Post-conflict situations offer distinct challenges to instilling both democratic norms and a sense of social cohesion to ensure unity, democracy and social justice in the future. As regards citizenship education, such societies frequently emphasize the need for respect for different cultural and ethnic groups as well as the need for national unity and law abidance.

In Ethiopia, a country characterized by significant ethnic diversity and a history of ethnic conflict, there is a critical need to understand how citizenship education in higher education can

effectively promote intercultural competence. Despite the importance of fostering unity and coexistence among diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic groups, Ethiopian universities face challenges in addressing controversial issues and ethnic identities within their curricula. This paper studies university administrators' views regarding citizenship education in two Ethiopian universities. While Ethiopia has made strides toward peace following the end of the Tigray War in 2022, the country cannot yet be fully considered a post-conflict society due to ongoing internal conflicts and the challenges of disinformation and political instability in some regions. Continued efforts in peacebuilding, social healing, and addressing the root causes of conflict are essential for Ethiopia to transition fully into a post-conflict phase.

The paper aims to describe the current situation in two Ethiopian universities as far as civic education and education for intercultural competence are concerned. It also investigates to what extent the findings corroborate earlier findings regarding citizenship education in post-conflict societies. These findings include the avoidance of controversial issues, a lack of focus on ethnicity, a lack of trust in political parties, and authoritarianism (Quaynor, 2012).

Below, we first describe the current political situation in Ethiopia. Next, we delve into tendencies in citizenship education in post-conflict societies. Third, we present the study's methodology and findings regarding the two case studies' approaches to citizenship education. We round off the paper with a discussion and conclusion.

Ethiopia: A Post-Conflict Nation

Ethiopia's status as a post-conflict society is intricate and multifaceted. Although the formal conclusion of the Tigray War in November 2022 marked a significant step towards peace, the country continues to grapple with internal conflicts and challenges that complicate its post-conflict status. Despite the cessation of hostilities in Tigray, Ethiopia remains embroiled in violent internal conflicts, particularly in the Amhara and Oromia regions. These conflicts, involving various militia groups, have resulted in ongoing violence and instability. The central government's efforts to consolidate military control and address ethnic violence have encountered resistance, further complicating the peace process (Tronvoll, 2022; Labzaé, 2023).

Nevertheless, Ethiopia is undertaking several post-conflict initiatives, including rehabilitation, reconstruction, and peacebuilding efforts. These activities aim to address the damage caused by the Tigray War and other conflicts, promote social healing, and foster long-term stability. However, the presence of ongoing violence and political tensions poses significant challenges to these efforts.

Disinformation remains a significant obstacle in Ethiopia's post-conflict phase. Competing narratives and false information about the Tigray War and other conflicts have hindered efforts to achieve transitional justice and reconciliation. This disinformation has deepened divisions among ethnic groups and made it difficult to establish a unified national narrative or seek justice for past atrocities.

While Ethiopia has made strides towards peace following the end of the Tigray War, the country cannot yet be fully considered a post-conflict society due to ongoing internal conflicts and the challenges of disinformation and political instability. Continued efforts in peacebuilding, social healing, and addressing the root causes of conflict are essential for Ethiopia to transition fully into a post-conflict phase.

Citizenship Education in Post-Conflict Countries, such as Ethiopia

In a comprehensive literature review of studies on citizenship education in post-conflict countries, Quaynor (2012)) identifies several prevailing tendencies in civic and citizenship education. Firstly, the discussion of controversial issues is notably absent in civic education classrooms within these regions. Additionally, both students and teachers in many societies express a desire to avoid interactions with individuals from previously antagonistic groups, coupled with a pervasive distrust in political parties. Furthermore, there is a marked presence of authoritarian tendencies and skepticism towards democracy among teachers and students in these countries. Nevertheless, it is important to note the variations between countries (Quaynor, 2012). For instance, studies conducted in Northern Ireland, Lebanon, and South Africa reveal that students exhibit more democratic inclinations compared to those in other post-conflict nations, such as Bosnia-Herzegovina (Hromadzic, 2008) or Croatia, Kosovo (Weinstein et al., 2007).

The recurring themes identified are deeply intertwined with the dynamics of power in post-conflict societies (Ghosn-Chelala, 2020). The types of power, including corruption, exercised by political parties foster distrust among both teachers and students. Power relations and customs within the classroom significantly influence the implementation of citizenship education. Engaging in open discussions on controversial issues requires teachers to relinquish intellectual control of the classroom and students to engage in dialogue across differences. Consequently, curricula developed by intergovernmental organizations or local agencies that emphasize active citizenship education may face challenges in classrooms that uphold authoritarian values. In post-conflict countries, both teachers and students tend to score high on measures of valuing authoritarianism and are highly critical of democracy. Even if teachers value human rights and democracy in general, they often believe that the school should be an authoritarian space.

In post-conflict countries, textbooks are important instruments to re-build national citizenships. Yet, they may play different roles. They may stress the need to be loyal to one's own ethnic group and avoid others perhaps out of fear. By contrast, they may avoid the mention of ethnicity altogether, in fact prohibiting from considering the genocide as an inter-ethnic conflict (Weinstein et al., 2007). Interestingly, textbooks in Mozambique and South Africa, both multi-ethnic states, encouraged nationalism and the country's independence and right to self-determination over individual rights or ethnic identities (Cabecinhas & Mapera, 2020).

In Ethiopia, the education system is now considered to have a societal responsibility to produce good and responsible citizens, who understand and respect the constitution, share democratic values, and respect individual human rights and those of different ethnocultural and linguistic groups (Ethio.all.com, s.d.). Civic and Ethical Education as a statutory educational subject in compulsory education is to develop a sense of citizenship to participate in and contribute to the development of the multicultural and multilingual community and country.

For many years, the federal Ethiopian government has incorporated civics and ethical education into all levels of education in order to produce good citizens with civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Yet, some studies in Ethiopia's civic and ethical education argue that the curriculum is "... education *about*-rather than through or for citizenship; the reproduction-rather than transformation-of social order, an emphasis on conformity or compliance over action and civic engagement by citizens; a content-led rather than process-led approach (Ghberu & Lloyd, 2020). Interestingly, recent reforms have led to new textbooks for civic and citizenship education with the textbook for 10th grade students for example dealing with education for

peaceful cohabitation of different ethnic groups, democratization or global competence (ethioall.com, s.d.).

Internationally, scholars have described different perspectives, theories, and models of civic education that have implications to formulate the goals of civic education. For example, Cohen (2010) proposed liberal, diversity, critical, and republican conceptions of civic education. The *liberal* conception of civic education sees society as a gathering of individuals, and the role of civic education is to develop an autonomous person who has the capabilities of self-government. The *diversity* conception of civic education sees society as a gathering of social groups, and the role of civic education is to develop active and informed citizens who are tolerant of diversity and stand for social justice and equality of different groups in society. The *critical* conception of civic education sees society as a gathering of individuals, and the role of civic education is to promote individuals who have critical thinking skills and understand and react to unjust reality in a society. The *republican* conception of civic education sees a person as a social creature, and the role of civic education is to install citizens with societies' shared values, common goods, norms, and laws to ensure the stability and solidarity of a state.

From the above, it would appear that the Ethiopian approach to civic and ethical education combines several of Cohen's typologies. The approach emphasizes the transmission of knowledge about the Ethiopian state (*liberal conception*), and currently only minimal attention is given to the promotion of independent critical thinking in political and societal matters (*critical conception*). As Ghebru and Lloyd (2020) argue, recent research on civic and citizenship education in Ethiopia has revealed a need for improvement in a number of areas with regard to curricula and textbooks. The materials are currently oriented to a conservative form of civic education rather than a more progressive citizenship education, or towards the development of intercultural behaviors and values, and active critical citizenship (*diversity conception*). (p. 1).

In conclusion, it can be said that the Civic and citizenship education curriculum in Ethiopia aims to foster a sense of national unity and respect for diversity among students. However, it has been noted (Gebbru & Lloyd, 2020) that the curriculum often emphasizes sovereignty, patriotism, and responsibility more than intercultural citizenship. While there are elements that promote understanding and tolerance among different ethnic groups, the focus on intercultural citizenship could be strengthened to better reflect Ethiopia's diverse cultural landscape and contribute more convincingly to rebuilding social fabric and trust in political institutions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

Given the results of other studies looking into citizenship education in post-conflict countries, it is expected that Ethiopian citizenship education will emanate a certain distrust of political parties. Also, it can be expected to show a favorable tendency toward authoritarianism and avoid touching upon controversial issues, such as the country's ethnic wars. The study reported here aimed to investigate whether these expectations hold. The specific group under study were university administrators, responsible for outlining the university's citizenship education policy.

The research questions guiding the study were:

- How do participants describe the current situation at their university concerning promoting intercultural citizenship in students?

- What recommendations do administrators formulate to improve the situation?

Sample

The study took the format of a double case study. Seven informants from Jimma University and an equal number from Hawassa University were selected for a semi-structured interview. Administrators were purposefully selected as they had to be involved in educational policy making.

Table 1 provides more information on each informant. It highlights each participant's gender, age, place of birth, language mastery, role at the university, university, degree obtained, years of experience, and frequency of intercultural contacts.

Table 1: Participants and Their Demographic Information

Cases	Gender	Age	Demographic Variables of the Interviewee					
			Language Mastered	Roles at university	University	Educ. Status	Experience	Frequency of interaction
IP-1	M	43	Multilingual	Director	JU	3 rd	13	Very Often (Almost Daily)
IP-2	M	38	Multilingual	Student Dean	HU	3 rd	16	Always (Daily)
IP-3	M	45	Multilingual	Student Dean	JU	3 rd	19	Always (Daily)
IP-4	M	50	Multilingual	Lecturer	HU	3 rd	14	Very Often (Almost Daily)
IP-5	M	42	Multilingual	Director	JU	3 rd	15	Very Often (Almost Daily)
IP-6	M	56	Multilingual	Admin V/President	JU	3 rd	10	Always (Daily)
IP-7	M	42	Multilingual	Department Head	JU	3 rd	18	Always (Daily)
IP-8	M	33	Multilingual	Department Head	HU	2 nd	4	Always (Daily)
IP-9	M	45	Multilingual	Lecturer	HU	2 nd	5	Very Often (Almost Daily)
IP-10	M	50	Multilingual	Lecturer	HU	2 nd	6	Very Often (Almost Daily)
IP-11	M	47	Multilingual	Lecturer	HU	2 nd	20	Very Often (Almost Daily)
IP-12	M	31	Multilingual	Department Head	JU	2 nd	3	Always (Daily)
IP-13	M	58	Multilingual	Lecturer	JU	2 nd	36	Very Often (Almost Daily)
IP-14	F	30	Multilingual	Department Head	HU	2 nd	2	Always (Daily)

IP = interview participant; JU = Jimma University, HU = Hawassa University; 2nd = Master's degree; 3rd = Ph.D.

As can be seen from Table 1, 13 informants are men, and only one is a woman. This reflects the general situation in Ethiopia where the number of women in positions of power is extremely limited. Seven informants were older than 45, and 7 were younger. Half of the respondents are located at Jimma University and half at Hawassa University. Over half of them hold a Ph.D. degree. As concerns the participants' working experience, it appears that 5 respondents or about one-third, have over 15 years of experience, whereas 4, 3, and 2 respondents have respectively 1–5 years, 11–15 years, and 6–10 years of working experience at Hawassa or Jimma University.

Regarding their current roles and responsibilities at the university, one was an administrative vice president, two were student deans, two directors, four department heads, and five lecturers. Due to their administrative positions in universities, these groups of administrators were considered interesting informants because they are (co)responsible for university policy determination, or they have policy-making power regarding educational matters. Moreover, these groups have direct contact with both staff and students. Hence, it can be said that these groups of respondents have adequate exposure, experiences, and insights about the issue under investigation. Finally, in terms of the variable 'frequency of face-to-face interactions with culturally diverse populations at the university', Table 1 reveals that the first half of the interview participants make face-to-face interactions with culturally diverse populations very often (almost daily) or on a daily basis.

Instrument and Coding

Data was collected using a semi-structured interview. Interviews lasted between 30 and 86 minutes. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded manually with the help of NVIVO. Two researchers independently coded part of the data to ensure intercoder reliability. In cases where a lack of agreement appeared as to which code(s) to assign to which unit of analysis, this was discussed between coders till a consensus could be reached. After this initial period of training on how to code the data, the coding was continued by one of the researchers. After systematic combined deductive and inductive coding was completed, themes arising from the data could be established.

FINDINGS

RQ 1: How do participants describe the current situation at their university concerning promoting intercultural citizenship in students?

Low Intercultural Development Status

Based on their working experience in universities, the interviewees evaluated and explained their university's students' and members of staff's current intercultural development status, and concluded that this is far from optimal, which becomes clear in the classroom and on campus where students demonstrate undesirable, i.e. ego-culture-centric behaviors.

"The intercultural competence development status of our university's students and members of staff is not good; a lot must be done. Because, for example, when we assign group work, university students prefer to join their ethnic group; they have less interest in working with other students who have different cultural backgrounds. These kinds of things are observed in the classroom and on university campuses too; sometimes even students fight each other based on their cultural differences. Hence, there is a gap, and this gap should be filled. Therefore, these are the reasons why I said the intercultural competence development status of my university's students and members of staff is not good" (JUIP-1¹).

Another interviewee from Jimma University reports observing ethnocentric behaviors, also by members of staff, and calls for a clear policy direction that can promote intercultural competence among staff and students.

¹ JUIP-1 = Jimma University Interview Participant number 1.

"Of course, I am not observing a good development status for intercultural competence because, when you visit our cafeteria, you observe faculty members discussing in a group with people who have similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds. I usually observe while people search for individuals who can communicate in their first language, usually from their ethnic group. Thus, if faculty members are not interculturally competent, it is unthinkable to produce interculturally competent graduates. Hence, I think, we must have a new and clear policy direction on how we can develop intercultural competence" (JUIP-5).

Nevertheless, interviewees from Hawassa University emphasize that students and faculty members from culturally diverse urban areas have better IC development status than those from culturally homogeneous rural areas.

"Usually, I observe that because they live in diverse cultures, communities, and languages, people who come from culturally diverse urban areas have more awareness of cultural diversity, have relatively better IC, and easily adapt to new cultures and interact with culturally diverse people compared to people who come from culturally homogeneous rural areas" (HUIP-11).

Several interviewees from Hawassa University refer to a lack of intercultural exposure and regular intercultural dialogue with people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Also, students are not regularly exposed to intercultural communication difficulties or misunderstandings that could cause conflict in the university. Because of this self-determined lack of exposure to interculturality, students cannot grow and develop personally to become more interculturally competent. As a consequence, (political) conflicts arise at universities.

"Usually, in the university, we should see a little Ethiopia every day. However, because of a lack of intercultural exposure to diverse cultures these days, we have noticed that most students and members of staff at the university are generally not approachable or do not want to be approached by others; they seclude themselves and set themselves apart. As a result, we see conflicts in the university—political concepts conflicts" (HUIP-2).

Interviewee HUIP-8 also hints at the intercultural competence of current-day students as being lacking and strong unifying and multicultural policy measures as not being in place. He explains that this situation can be understood in the current political context where Ethiopia is still struggling to maintain its unity as a country while expressing also a desire to respect its different ethnocultural groups. Also, Ethiopia is evolving toward becoming a democratic state with different political parties of which some aim to emphasize the rights of particular ethnic groups, endangering the country's unity. These macrosocial factors codetermine universities' choices with respect to the promotion of intercultural citizenship.

"In universities, what has been happening these days is not good in terms of solidifying and promoting intercultural relationships or confidence among students and faculty members because of the different national and political turmoil here and there in different corners of the country" (HUIP-8).

From the above, it becomes clear that administrators from both universities see room for improvement as far as intercultural interactions between the different ethnic and cultural groups attending courses or lecturing at their universities are concerned. It appears that the goals set for civic and citizenship education by the Ethiopian government, namely to promote

understanding and cooperation between different ethnic groups to build a peaceful society, are not yet in place. The different groups present at the university do not tend to interact much, not during classes and not during their free time. As long as interethnic mingling is not common practice, intercultural competence including the willingness to interact with different cultural groups cannot develop to a sufficient extent.

RQ 2: What do administrators suggest to improve the situation?

Minding One's Language Use

The interviewees point towards several ways of sharpening students' and members of staff's intercultural competence and citizenship. One suggestion is to mind one's language and not use what one respondent calls 'culturally inflated' language that discriminates against some student groups.

"When I was working at Jimma University, I took care not to use culturally inflated language that discriminated against different students. I take care of my language, and I respect students' cultural diversity. I can say these positively influence my communication with my students, and it creates a good rapport between me and my students" (JUIP-6).

This highlights the fact that university students and faculty members should always be conscious of their speech and language use, especially when they interact with people from diverse cultures, which could cause culture shock and influence their work and teaching/learning processes negatively at the university. This conviction reminds us of Cohen's (2011) *diversity conception* of citizenship, arguing that citizens should become tolerant of diversity and stand for social justice and equality of different groups in society. It does not reflect typical tendencies in post-conflict nations as sketched by Quaynor (2012), namely that nations may emphasize national identity and refrain from recognizing the country's multiethnic identity.

Interviewees also emphasized that knowing and using the native languages of their students can ease their communication with students and promote students' learning. The provision of a (student) translator in the classroom can be a means for increased understanding of the subject matter and each other.

"Sometimes my students may not speak the languages I know (e.g., Afan Oromo, Amharic, and English). To avoid misunderstandings and intercultural communication difficulties, I usually try to look for a translator, switch from one language to the other, and in case I face a shortage of words or terminologies, I try to understand them in the context we are discussing, taking examples from the students' cultural background to help them get immersed in the teaching and learning processes at university" (JUIP-12).

Need for Governmental Top-Down Policy

One striking finding concerns the fact that 10 participants refer to the need for the government to initiate change. The finding is striking since Quaynor (2012) highlights that one tendency in citizenship education endeavors in post-conflict countries is to distrust those in political power. Yet, here we see that governmental initiatives are trusted, at least to a certain extent. As will become clear from some quotes below, there also remains a level of distrust toward nepotism or fanatic people appointed to some positions.

As becomes clear from the below quote, when the government issues legislation demanding universities promote their students' intercultural competence, university leadership will take

this seriously, and chances are that they will make efforts to implement the governmental policy. As long as the government does not impose intercultural education, universities may prioritize other issues. In other words, respondents ask for a top-down decision, even if they can see bottom-up that action may be needed to deal with intercultural issues on their campuses. Reference is also made to the curriculum which must be a reflection of real life, of Ethiopia's multilingual and multi-ethnic reality.

Yeah, based on what we have discussed, I do believe that Ethiopian higher academic institutions are forming, not only creating knowledgeable individuals, but also tolerant minded very broad-minded citizens. In this regard, my general recommendation is there is a need to have institutional commitment first. It starts from the government itself to general values, then it comes to the specific universities. (...) We need the commitment of the government and the universities to promote intercultural. (HUIP-8)

At the national level, we need a policy that promotes multiculturalism, in a way not only writing it on paper, but they have to strategize it and put it in a curriculum, and that it has to be in real life. The government must make sure that leaders of the university are multicultural themselves as the best criterion of democracy. (JUIP-2)

As becomes obvious from the following quote, criticism is voiced at politicians who divide the country more than they unite it. Reference is made to the fact that some university presidents are appointed because of their cultural background, not on the basis of their capacities, which leads to nepotism. This statement can be seen as evidence of a distrust of people in power (Quaynor, 2012). Interestingly, this statement shows that administrators think beyond national citizenship and incorporate a vision of global citizenship in their thinking about how to promote intercultural citizenship among students and staff.

From the below quote, a call for competent leadership becomes obvious. Without competent leaders, who can surmount ethnocultural divides and promote unity in diversity, Ethiopian universities may not be able to establish policies that can contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals, such as internal peace, respect for inequalities, and the promotion of equality among students.

So, policy lifting should be revised. You can revise policy; you can revise your structure, management, administration, etc. And stop assigning presidents based on cultural groups. The problem it has is you assign a president according to culture, and that person also promotes nepotism. Many bad things are seen today because of this practice. I think that should be revised and improved. It should be better on competence. (HUIP-11)

Respondent five, from Jimma University, like half of the other respondents, demands an office that could support the implementation of intercultural policies at the university. Such an office could help to implement the top-down policies released by the government, as it would take some of the workload off the shoulders of local administrators and lecturers. Change in education is a slow and difficult process, all the more so when it concerns such delicate issues as cultural and linguistic identity. If you leave change to bottom-up processes only, nothing much may happen given the very delicate balances that often need to be respected in university governmental bodies.

There should be offices under the Federal Ministry of Education and in each university. There should be an office that supports and plans for these issues. Because of our past political discourse, we cannot develop this one overnight. That is why I said there should

be a body that can look after this. I suggest that there should be responsible offices. (JUIP-5)

What 'responsible' might entail is clarified in HUIP-2's below quote in which he explains that people in authority cannot be religious or ethnic fanatics, nor can they be corrupt. This kind of people is dangerous to a multicultural society. In other words, staff can be a blocker to innovation and interculturalization of the curriculum.

Interculturally competent enough in a way that they are not, not religious fanatics and corrupt. If someone is corrupt, a fanatic of ethnicity or religion, they are dangerous to a multicultural society. They are the evils of the society they have to be. At any rate, they cannot be professional, or at least they can be driven out of offices. So, they cannot lead the community to prosperity, or call it to the new language of prosperity. (HUIP-2)

Finally, Respondent 6 from Jimma University points out that a comprehensive, national approach should be taken. Intercultural competence should be accepted as a value by the nation. After that, policy needs to be designed and communicated to universities. Transparency about the whole process is needed for it to succeed. Recommendations should be given to appropriate bodies.

Intercultural competence should be accepted value for the nation. Then how to include IC in the curriculum, in the education system, and in the higher education system, then policy should be designed and communicated to universities. (...) When it becomes clear, our own level strategies should be designed. The document should be communicated, kept in libraries, and open for information for the community, for students, for the staff as well. (JUIP-6)

Need for Development of University Leadership and Staff

No less than eight respondents underline the importance of leadership as being interculturally competent. This emphasis follows from the observation by other respondents that not all leaders are interculturally competent and do not set the right kind of example. Leadership should understand the very reality of cultural diversity, and educational leaders should be interculturally competent and cultivate intercultural citizenship in students. When this is the case, they can understand the importance of educating students towards becoming intercultural citizens, and make it a policy priority. When the leadership is not interculturally competent, the message from the hidden curriculum imparted to students may be that there is no need to interact in meaningful ways with students from diverse backgrounds, and that one can continue to dwell within one's own cultural group, maintaining one's monocultural mindset.

Everything starts from the leadership. Leadership understands the very reality of cultural diversity. I mean leaders should be interculturally competent first. That should start with understanding; they have to understand the very reality that people, be it staff or student that they lead who are from diverse backgrounds so they themselves have to be competent. They have to be conscious. That is the base; that is, it is only when they know that they start paying attention to it. In fact, they have to make it one of their major agenda. (JUIP-3)

Quite a number of respondents (six) also highlight the importance of staff training and staff quality when intercultural matters are concerned. Staff should be interculturally competent, and not refrain from getting involved in diverse multicultural groups, for otherwise, their views on things may remain monoperspectival, or 'myopic' as respondent JUIP-12 says in the below

quote. There is a need to familiarize oneself with students' different cultural backgrounds, for example through reading about their cultures, and to share examples with students that relate to these different backgrounds.

My point is how I can help my students to be interculturally competent where the fact that I myself refrain from involving in intercultural communities. If I am not interested to be part of diversified groups, different groups, friends, or individuals speaking or analyzing things in a different way than mine, if I refrain, and isolate myself from other perspectives, then most likely I will only have my own perspective which will be myopic. Therefore, I will be less helpful for my students on their way to becoming interculturally competent. (...) Yes, we have to help ourselves to be interculturally competent because when we read diversified materials from different cultures, not only our own culture, then we will have a lot of experience as exposure so that we share what we understand. What you read will be in you and you share it. If you read about the Borana, the Gedio, the Gurage, and others, all these readings will be in you, and you will take it out and share it as an example to your students. Your diversified reading accumulated in you can be shared with your students. You can give different examples taken from ethnographic publications, for example. (JUIP-12)

Promotion of Intercultural Competence via Co-Curricular Activities

A third theme arising from the analysis of the interview data, concerns the respondents' views on how the informal curriculum might contribute to interculturalizing students' mindsets. Interestingly, even if the respondents believe the students should educate themselves, for example, through participating in multicultural student life, the university itself should provide possible learning opportunities for students too.

Students should have their own motivation, awareness, positive attitude towards difference- diversity. It is up to the students to drink but the water should be availed by the university. (JUIP-12)

To think interculturally appropriately in the university and to respond to the current social differences and tolerance among students and members of staff, Ethiopian universities should plan consciously and work on IC. This is to mean that Ethiopian universities must allow space for members of staff and students to become interculturally competent by giving them the necessary induction training (e.g., workshops, seminars) on IC and facilitating opportunities for social events (e.g., dialogues, sport festivals, and theatrical arts) that can help to foster interculturalization among students and faculty members who have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. (JUIP-1).

Nine respondents refer to co-curricular activities, or to the informal curriculum (Leask, 2015) as a means for enhancing students' intercultural competence. Co-curricular activities are places where students share their cultures and learn from one another. Ethiopian universities should take advantage of students' and staff's multilingualism and multiculturalism to promote intercultural competence during leisure-time activities. As will appear from our discussion below, administrators and lecturers expect more salvation from activities at the informal than at the formal curricular level. This suggests that lecturers may feel their discipline cannot easily be interculturalized and/or university teaching should be devoted to the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge and skills, not the softer skills, such as intercultural competence. One

additional reason lecturers mention is that all students can benefit from such events, not only students studying specific disciplines or subjects.

In the university, the students should have opportunities to be involved in these events. The students' council, as we have discussed, should work on intercultural competence issues. The council should arrange different forums debate performances. If such kind of things are done students will have exposure to different cultural issues; they widen their cultural horizons when they graduate, they will have healthy intercultural communication skills and competence. They can adjust themselves to different cultures. They work properly and they will not face any problem because they know what intercultural communication means, what intercultural competence includes and the like. Then they apply this concept to their daily life. That is what I think. (JUIP-1)

I think, to promote healthy intercultural communication among university students and university members universities should continuously organizing different cultural events like sport events, cultural events, music events, cultural nights and the like which expose staff and students to learn from one another. They should emphasize co-curricular activities because a lot of students are involved in it. When you involve students in co-curricular activities, you call for membership, you have to make sure students with diverse backgrounds join the club, and they can do a lot of things in such a way that they can influence one another. They can teach one another about their cultures, their customs, their values which will eventually help one to be culturally and interculturally competent. (JUIP-3)

The Peace and Sustainable Development Forum is mentioned five times as an activity that is of particular importance in terms of preparing students for living and working in tomorrow's multicultural society. The forum raises students' awareness of the sustainable development goals formulated by the United Nations and their responsibilities in contributing to the realization of these goals. In this sense, the Peace Forum contributes to interculturalization of the universities in its broadest sense.

I feel that the students' council, peace forum is the best mechanism by which Ethiopian universities can develop students' intercultural communication competence. The student union helps university students be active and search for better jobs after their graduation; Hence, its significance goes beyond developing intercultural competence. Peace and sustainable dialogue forums help students discuss and share their experiences, their cultures, their languages, and their concerns when they come to the university and how they see people from other languages and cultures. It helps them to become aware of sustainable development goals. (JUIP-3)

Four respondents suggest that the university should set aside a budget for supporting all of these activities. Supporting these activities financially can be perceived as a sign of the importance the university attaches to the promotion of intercultural competence among its students and graduates. Financial means can be an incentive for prioritizing intercultural competence education more than is currently the case.

To produce interculturally competent graduates, resources can be found from within, therefore, universities should allocate budget for these kinds of forums like cultural nights, shows, literature nights, sports events. Just you will realize them with budget, so you have to allocate resources. (JUIP-12)

Promotion of Intercultural Competence via the Curriculum

Surprisingly and as already mentioned above, not many respondents also make reference to integrating intercultural competence teaching in the mainstream curriculum. Courses are meant to impart knowledge and skills that graduates will need to function well in their profession, for example as engineers. Yet, a limited number of lecturers (four) do refer to the importance of using examples from different cultures to clarify the subject matter. In this way, the curriculum becomes interculturalized up to a certain extent.

For example, if my example is only specific to my place of residence, then in this case I am not helping my students to be intercultural competent. If I am not taking examples from different cultures, and different practices, if I am not reading diversified literatures, ethnographic publications from all cultures, then my teaching is not supportive of students. (JUIP-12)

There are many management issues, and, in the curriculum, we should make it necessary, especially, in Social Science to have at least one intercultural experience-sharing trip program for a course, or you can also organize an intercultural experience-sharing program for members of staff too. (HUIP-11)

Language learning as part of the university curriculum is seen as one way of promoting intercultural competence among students. Members of staff need to set the right example. Part of setting the right example is making it possible for students to learn additional languages during their university studies. Without multilingual competence, students may be unable to find jobs in regions outside their own cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Also, members of staff should demonstrate their mastery of different languages to their students.

As to my assumption, to make graduates competent especially intercultural, I think the universities should focus on the language. Members of staff should master multiple languages. For the students, multilingual students are very important as our country is diversified in terms of cultures and languages. At least the university should focus on one, two or three Ethiopian languages. This is because of the interaction of the students; the interaction of graduates from the universities. As you know in Ethiopia, for example, the graduates from Afan Oromo speakers cannot find jobs from any other region even from the capital city of Ethiopia (Addis Ababa) because of language problems. (HUIP-10)

Discussion

Against the framework of citizenship education in post-conflict countries, this research set out to answer the following two research questions for Ethiopia:

- How do participants describe the current situation at their university concerning promoting intercultural citizenship in students?
- What recommendations do administrators formulate to improve the situation?

In order to answer our research question, we have built on the viewpoints of administrators, from two Ethiopian universities. Generally speaking, administrators indicate that although the university population is intercultural, different ethnic groups do not tend to interact much, neither during classes nor in free time. Moreover, the approach to education does not foster intercultural competence as much as it could with curricula focusing on professional contents only, and not also on building intercultural understanding and societal cohesion. Given this situation, administrators expect much from cocurricular activities where students can get to

know each other's cultures and develop their intercultural competence. Yet, these activities are non-compulsory and may reach only a small part of the student population. Interestingly, Ethiopian administrators show a certain trust in governmental initiatives to promote intercultural competence among the university population, admitting that without a governmental incentive to interculturalize education at the tertiary level of education, universities may not be inclined to invest time and effort into the creation of unbiased curricula, cross-community initiatives, or the training of lectures to address sensitive issues related to ethnic diversities and conflicts as part of citizenship education.

Our findings partially align with existing literature on citizenship education in post-conflict countries. As Quaynor (2012) points out, in post-conflict nations, people may put their trust in an authoritarian state and distrust political parties after a period of political turmoil and conflict. Our findings suggest that university administrators await governmental initiatives before actually addressing the thorny issue of accommodating all students from all ethnic groups, putting their trust in an authoritarian state that dictates top-down the need to invest in multi-ethnic education and fostering intercultural competence. Being backed up by such a policy facilitates creating a sense of urgency among students and staff to leave the past behind and look forward to living together peacefully today and in the future, even with individuals from previously antagonistic groups. Like in other post-conflict countries, administrators testify to universities avoiding controversial issues, choosing not to bring up topics that could draw attention to ethnic conflicts and wars. Yet, administrators do see the need to promote intercultural competence, a skill that is essential for overcoming intercultural differences and difficulties.

How intercultural competence can be promoted is food for debate. It appears remarkably difficult to develop this competence in learners, in particular in post-conflict countries. Among the student and staff population, resistance to change may hamper any initiatives to interculturalize education. Some groups may reaffirm their ethnic identity and create new barriers between them and other groups. Other groups may develop a more intercultural identity and look down upon groups asserting their ethnicity. These differences in development speed may create new tensions, especially when the controversial issues underlying these tensions are not addressed explicitly in teaching.

Explicit teaching needs teachers who can defuse thorny high-tension situations and can contribute to mutual understanding and peacebuilding. Teacher abilities include the skill to mediate disputes and negotiate solutions that are acceptable to all parties, as well as de-escalation skills, i.e. the skills to calm down heated situations and prevent conflicts from escalating. As repeatedly emphasized by the respondents, educators need to be interculturally competent themselves to set an example. Pedagogically speaking, teachers should be able to use teaching methods that empower students to become active peacebuilders and advocates for social justice. As Cohen (2011) emphasized, a good citizen can think critically about any political or societal situation, forming his/her own opinion as to how to organize society and substantiating it with arguments.

One way to promote secondary and tertiary students' intercultural competence is by investing in teacher and lecturer education. Since Ethiopian civic and citizenship education can now be characterized as in between traditional and more modern, preparing citizens for active participation in an intercultural and global society, a fundamental reconsideration of the contents and approaches to teacher education needs to be considered. First, teachers need to be educated as interculturally competent teachers themselves. Next, they need to learn how to

translate governmental educational guideline documents advocating for rebuilding social fabric into teaching approaches that foster intercultural competence. Teachers should instill this competence in learners, using adequate pedagogical approaches, such as inquiry-based learning or problem-based learning. In problem-based learning, students are presented with real-world problems that require critical thinking and creative solutions. They also have to work in groups to solve the problems which will encourage them to discuss different cultural perspectives and understandings. This approach is most feasible at the tertiary levels of education in focus in this paper. Another approach that may help to cultivate intercultural competence, is case based learning. These approaches to education help university students to analyze real-life scenarios, encouraging them to apply their knowledge and think critically about outcomes, striving for the successful coexistence of multiple cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups.

Addressing the question of whether the two universities investigated in this study can be said to have institutionalized intercultural education, it is fair to say that they have not yet reached this stage (Fullan, 2016). Institutionalization would imply that the implementation phase of a new “program” is sustained beyond the first year or two. On the basis of our findings, it is fair to say that this is not yet the case, despite the fact that administrators support the promotion of intercultural competence in and interculturalization of higher education. It is hard to think of the initiatives taken so far in terms of a systematic endeavor to promote the intercultural competence of university graduates (Abbink, 2011). Though many co-curricular activities (informal curriculum) are mentioned and advocated as good opportunities for students to meet other cultures and develop their intercultural competence, participation in these activities is voluntary, which implies that they may not reach all students. Curricular initiatives (formal curriculum) are mentioned by a few participants only. Some administrators expect salvation from lecturers’ interculturalization of their subject matter, for example by including explanatory examples originating from different Ethiopian cultures and regions. All in all, all of these initiatives can be classified as initiation and implementation (Fullan, 2016), not as institutionalization activities. This is still true some fourteen years after Abbink (2011) wrote that building a society that is more just, democratic and inclusive by means of higher education in Ethiopia has only just begun.

This study is not without its limitations. For one thing, no more than a limited number of respondents from only two universities that are located in the Southwestern and Southern parts of Ethiopia have been included in this study. Future research could enlarge the research group and include more case studies situated in more diverse regions. A second limitation concerns the fact that the study is cross-sectional and does not take on a longitudinal perspective. Currently, the political situation in Ethiopia is in a constant flux of change, and these changes may affect universities’ policies. It will be interesting to reconsider the topics considered in this study anew once a governmental policy initiative is released that concerns the implementation of intercultural competence promotion in universities next to knowledge economy-related knowledge and competencies. The study is also limited as it only addressed administrators’ views and not also those of lecturers and students. Investigating all stakeholders’ views would allow for establishing a baseline of students’ and lecturers’ current intercultural competence. This baseline would help determine what should be prioritized in programs aiming to enhance both groups’ capacities to rebuild social fabric and address ethnic and political divisions.

The implications of the study are multifaceted and hold significant potential for educational policy and practice in Ethiopia and other post-conflict contexts. Firstly, the findings could inform policymakers about the necessity of integrating intercultural competence into

citizenship education curricula. This integration could lead to the development of policies that emphasize intercultural citizenship as a means to foster national unity and peaceful coexistence. Moreover, universities may need to revise their curricula to incorporate more comprehensive approaches to intercultural competence. This revision could involve the inclusion of both curricular and extracurricular activities designed to foster understanding and respect among diverse ethnic groups. Additionally, professional development programs could be designed to equip educators with the necessary skills to effectively promote intercultural competence. Furthermore, by focusing on intercultural competence, universities can better prepare students to navigate and contribute positively to a diverse society. This preparation could enhance students' ability to engage in constructive dialogue and collaboration across cultural and ethnic lines. Promoting intercultural competence through education could also play a role in preventing future ethnic conflicts. By fostering mutual understanding and respect, education can contribute to long-term peace and stability in post-conflict societies. The study could also encourage further research into the effectiveness of different approaches to intercultural citizenship education. Continuous evaluation and adaptation of educational strategies could ensure that they meet the evolving needs of a diverse student population. Finally, the broader community could benefit from graduates who are more culturally competent and capable of contributing to social cohesion. This could have positive ripple effects on community relations and overall societal harmony.

Conclusion

Our findings have shown that the two Ethiopian universities studied in this investigation have not yet reached the institutionalization phase of educational change as far as the promotion of intercultural competence is concerned. As such they can be considered representative of Ethiopian state universities and universities in other post-conflict countries. Even if administrators refer to attempts that are in place to support the development of young adults towards embracing diversity as an enriching fact of life, till present these attempts have remained largely marginalized, written down on paper, but not yet actualized in the university environment.

We propose that the review and development of intercultural policies and practices are particularly timely because of the political and ethnocultural tensions still present in Ethiopian society. As pointed out by Fullan (2016), a dynamic interplay between universities and the government will work best to reorient civic and citizenship education at the tertiary level of education to promote intercultural competence in students, lecturers, and administrators.

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