

The Support Rendered from Teacher Education Policies to Prospective Teachers' Multicultural Competence Development in Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study was designed to examine the support rendered from teacher education policies to prospective teachers' multicultural competence development in Ethiopia. The major sources of data were basic policy documents (i.e., National Constitution, Higher Education Proclamation, Education and Training Policy, and Strategic Plan Documents) related to the pre-service teacher education program. Policy documents were selected using purposive sampling technique. And, data for these policy documents were collected through document analysis technique. This technique is supported by a coding sheet prepared using multicultural attributes and how they are manifested in the four preceding policy documents. Document analysis data were reported in words following themes made vis-à-vis the research questions of this study. The findings of the study confirmed that basic policy documents reviewed seem to have given adequate contextual support to prospective teachers' multicultural development, as policies guide the actual practice at schools.

Background of the Study

There is an agreement among educators (e.g., Fagerlind & Saha, 1989) that education is a critical weapon of bringing social, economic, and political advancement in a given society. That is why investment in education has been justified by optimistic assumptions like for example, an educated population contributes to the socio-economic development of a given society as a whole; it further contributes to the well-being of individuals within the society, and a swiftly changing technologies and the changing face of the world economic and political systems require a new flexibility and adaptability by societies and individuals for which education is increasingly being seen as an essential component for an adaptable and flexible population (Schultz, 1980 cited in Fagerlind & Saha, 1989).

In spite of this agreement among scholars, however, there are two major theories regarding the role of education in society. Some consider that education functions as a means of both cultural production (e.g., Giroux, 2006) as well as cultural reproduction (e.g., Lawton, 1983; McLaren, 1994). As McLaren agrees, education works to maintain the status quo through the reproduction of the mainstream culture and discourse that maintain the

normality of oppressive behavior in the respective society (1994). Some theorists see this process as a political and a means of reproducing dominant ideologies and practices in the respective society. In this line, McLaren (1994) further contends that curriculum is “never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge...[But rather] part of a selective tradition, someone’s selection, some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge” (p. 191). Thus, what counts as knowledge, how it is organized, who is empowered to teach it, how students demonstrate mastery of it, and even who is allowed to ask questions are all parts of the politics of official knowledge and the way dominance and subordination are reproduced in a given society (Apple, 1993). The implication behind this assertion is that educational institutions legitimize the mainstream culture through the arrangement of bodies of knowledge in the “hegemonic curriculum” and by privileging the students whose cultural capital match with those of the culture that gets reinforced in schools (Giroux, 2006).

In contrast to this, there is also a room that education could equally produce possibilities for equitable relations in society (Friere, 1979). This kind of educational influence enables one to bring a society with little social, economic, and political problems (McNiel, 1996). That is why education is considered as a priority area in the move to combat the social ills of cultural diversity related to partiality, discrimination and prejudice.

The preceding discussion implies that institutions where education is being implemented are contradictory places where the dynamics of production and reproduction are simultaneously at work. At this point, therefore, the matter that comes to the minds of progressive educators is how to encourage and nurture the possibility of educational institutions to become sites of struggle over biased relations between and among the culturally diverse people in a given society.

That is why educators (e.g., Banks, 2008) consider multicultural education as a potential means of correcting the preceding distortions and inequalities. It is a process of school reform that challenges and rejects different forms of discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin, gender, and personal differences in school and society, and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, linguistic, religious, and gender among others) that students, teachers and other school personnel reflect (Jay, 2003).

Since an educational institution represents society in its small scale (Lawton, 1983), it must significantly reflect the diversity prevailing in that society. Besides, it is equally sensed by many multicultural educators (e.g., Banks, 2008; Sleeter, 2001) that educational institutions can make a significant difference for respecting diversity among its beneficiaries. The key factor, therefore, is to help students construct understanding and respecting diversities, and at the same time, overcoming ethnic barriers of realizing equitable treatment in a pluralistic society. From this, one can deduce that education cannot be divorced from its connection to emerging multicultural dynamics that shapes the context of society in general and educational institutions in particular. Contextual factors among learners such as culture, ethnicity, religion, gender and learning style give further rise to dilemmas that must be considered in any educational attempt.

It is, however, disclosed that implementing a multicultural program that considers the issue of diversity into account at Teacher Education Institutes (hereafter TEIs) is becoming a great challenge in Ethiopia. For example, studies made in Ethiopia show that though prospective teachers are knowledgeable within their content areas (MoE, 2003), they often lack the knowledge of cultural diversity, skill of interacting and creating smooth communication with diversities, and attitudes needed to successfully teach diverse students (Alemayehu, 2008; Genene, 2008; Abebaw, 2007). This might happen so due to the fear, uncertainty, or discomfort observed among prospective teachers and teacher educators alike that may have resulted from limited multicultural exposures for decades in the Ethiopian education system.

In spite of the preceding context of the educational system of Ethiopia, nowadays, student cultural diversity at schools and TEIs is growing more immensely than ever before due to the favorable condition created for wider educational access in Ethiopia (MoE, 2003). In Afar region (one of the Ethiopian regions where minority groups are residing), for example, more and more Afar ethnic group learners are getting an opportunity to schooling than ever before. This is also true for learners of other ethnic groups residing in Ethiopia. Moreover, Ethiopian people are more conscious of the benefits of educating females and as a result they send their daughters to schools more than ever before. That is, opportunities of different ethnic group learners, males and females, and different religion followers being housed in one educational institute becomes wider and wider nowadays. Due to this increasing number of culturally diverse student population, teachers at placement schools must exhibit multicultural competence more than ever before.

To this end, the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (hereafter FDRE, 1995) declares that the Government shall have the duty to support on the basis of equality, the growth, and enrichment of cultures and traditions that are compatible with fundamental rights, human dignity, democratic norms and ideals (Article 91/1). In line with the Ethiopian constitution, one important policy document was issued among other things so as to implement the basics of the constitution. This is the Education and Training Policy (hereafter ETP, 1994) of Ethiopia. The document implied the fact that cultural diversity should be an integral part of the Ethiopian education system. Following the issuance of the current ETP of the nation (1994), the major reforms in the Ethiopian education sector were changes in the school curriculum, the decentralization of education, the use of regional languages for instruction at primary schools (as opposed to the former consecutive regimes use of the national language, Amharic), and emphasis upon democratic values, and multiple perspectives in addressing diversity issues in education, and basing educational philosophy on constructive learning theory which goes in line with democratic ideals guiding Ethiopia as a nation. All these changes constitute a significant turning point in the history of education of this country (Teklehaimanot, 1999).

Moreover, the current ETP was introduced into the education system of the country in such a way that it provides legal ground for all nations, nationalities and peoples of enjoying equal rights in the country's education system. To this end, the contents of the

curriculum were developed to reflect the realities of the respective communities (Tekeste, 1996). Moreover, the assessment technique has been decided to be on a continuous basis, which also valued authentic assessment strategies such as performance, product, portfolio evaluations that go beyond traditional “paper-and-pencil” tests. Great emphasis was also given to the philosophy of bidirectional knowledge construction process, i.e., teachers and textbooks are considered as no more the only sources of knowledge instead an attempt has been made to empower students in the knowledge construction process and enable them to see things from different angles and sources. As a result, considering a student as meaning maker has been given due emphasis in the entire present day education system of the nation.

Towards effective implementation of the current education and training policy, therefore, Ethiopian government has charted out democratic and decentralized governance of the sector in such a way that equal participation of nations, nationalities, and peoples could be proved. According to Ethiopian Ministry of Education (2002, p. 32), the current curriculum has been developed in order to: produce citizens who stand for equality, justice and democracy; harmonize theory and practice (praxis); integrate national and regional realities; maintain the level of international education standards, and reflect the principles of equality of nations, nationalities and gender.

Generally, it is on the basis of the preceding conceptual, theoretical, and empirical backgrounds that the researcher made an investigation into the support rendered from teacher education policies to prospective teachers’ multicultural competence development in Ethiopia.

Statement of the Problem

Educational policy considerations of the consecutive regimes of Ethiopia before the current government came to power follows assimilationist nation building approach. Having recognized the pitfalls of such nation building policy imperatives on national integrity, the current government has charted out a new multicultural democratic nation building approach that obviously has an implication to the Teacher Education Programs (hereafter TEPs, Alemseged, 2004). However, the researcher felt that the earlier consecutive nation building policy remnants may have obstructed practitioners from implementing the current nation building policy imperatives utmost. This paper, therefore, tried to unfold the possible support rendered from the latest policy imperatives to prospective teachers’ multicultural competence development.

The ETP envisages overcoming the apparent regional disparity in terms of educational access via equitable deployment of teachers in underserved and remote regions (ETP, 1994). As the researcher’s experience of the placement practice of secondary school teachers in Ethiopian educational system and other researchers (e.g., Tesfaye, 2014; Ayalew, 2009) have confirmed, however, the Ministry of Education allots the number of teachers by subject area for each region and the newly graduate teachers are mainly assigned by drawing lots. Preference of teachers is not taken into account except

in cases where the graduate teachers have rendered some years of service before enrolling as a degree student (Ayalew, 2009). Others have to follow the lots and they could end up being assigned in a region where they are not familiar with at all (Ayalew, 2009).

Therefore, investigating the multicultural support of the current teacher education policies to PTs' multicultural competence development seems in order.

Purpose of the Study

This research was done to check whether or not related policy documents such as the National Constitution, Higher Education Proclamation (hereafter HEP), ETP, and Strategic Plan documents) support prospective teachers' multicultural competence development.

Research Question of the Study

To achieve the preceding purpose of this study, the researcher raised the following research question: to what extent do related policy issues render support to prospective teachers' multicultural competence development in Ethiopia?

Significance of the Study

There is a growing recognition that education is a critical weapon for bringing about sustainable development of any nation. This commitment was expressed through the allocation of significant resources as well as through the development of policies and strategies for the expansion of education. One of the policy issues that is given due regard in the educational discourse is multicultural education and its strategies charted out in relation to the implementation of the issue of multiculturalism at TEIs and placement schools. Therefore, studying the extent to which the policy matters provide the required support of properly guiding the grassroots practice is of help for both policy makers and practitioners alike. That is why the paper tries to highlight the very significance of studying the support rendered from teacher education policies to prospective teachers' multicultural competence development in Ethiopia.

Generally, a better understanding of the support rendered from teacher education policies to prospective teachers' multicultural competence development may help teacher educators provide quality courses and placement school experiences that deepen understandings of cultural responsiveness and begin to foster the development of diversity responsive prospective teachers. It is also believed that this understanding will help policy makers to revisit the possible policy documents between the lines and make revisions, if any.

Scope of the Study

The study is delimited to the investigation of the support rendered from teacher education policies to PTs' multicultural competence development. Multicultural competence in this study refers to teacher educators and prospective teachers' multicultural knowledge, attitude, and skill of managing diversities across ethnicity,

gender, learning style, language, physical impairment and religion. Here, the study considered the presence of rules and regulations that promote multicultural education in the national and institutional level documents such as the three Universities' Strategic Plan documents, the National Constitution, the National Educational Policy, and Higher Education Proclamation.

Research Design

The design used in this study is a qualitative research design with thick descriptions of the National Constitution, ETP, HEP, and Strategic Plan Documents of the three Universities. As issues in the social sciences are soft in nature, they are usually better disclosed using qualitative approach than the quantitative approach. Specifically put, the support rendered from policy documents to PTs' multicultural competence development requires soliciting data using document analysis using a qualitative approach.

Data Sources of the Study

As policy issues are the bases for curriculum design and its implementation, documents like the National Constitution, current Education and Training Policy, Higher Education Proclamation and the respective University's Strategic Plan Documents were reviewed to check as to how these policy documents see multicultural issues (i.e., ethnicity, language, physical impairment, religion, learning style, gender, economic level) at educational institutions in Ethiopia.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The National Constitution, Education and Training Policy, Higher Education Proclamation, the Strategic Plan documents of the sample Universities were consulted using purposive sampling technique. Words, phrases, sentences, and articles of the documents were used as units of analysis. The way multicultural attributes such as ethnicity, language, physical impairment, religion, learning style, gender, and economic level are disclosed in those policy documents were used as codes of the content analysis. In addition, the latent meanings of the multicultural attributes as used in context were the basic consideration in this analysis. All the contents were selected for analysis using comprehensive sampling technique.

Data Gathering Instruments

To gather reliable and valid data from the sample policy documents (i.e., National Constitution, Education and Training Policy, Higher Education Proclamation and the respective University's Strategic Plan Documents) of this study, the researcher used document analysis techniques. The document analysis was supported with coding sheet prepared using multicultural attributes (i.e., ethnicity, language, physical impairment, religion, learning style, gender, economic level) and how they are described as possible categories of analysis.

Document Analysis

Using this instrument, policy matters that support quality multicultural provisions in TEPs were analyzed by referring to the National Constitution, the Strategic Plan Documents of the respective Universities where the sample TEIs reside, the Education and Training Policy (1994) of Ethiopia, and HEP (2009). Thick description of multicultural attributes such as ethnicity, language, physical impairment, religion, learning style, gender, and economic level were made. The researcher also used to explain the latent meanings of descriptions of multicultural attributes as narrated in the policy documents.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data secured using document analysis was reported qualitatively in words following the basic themes made vis-à-vis the research question of this study. To this end, words, phrases, sentences and articles of policy documents were coded. Three coders were given training and made to code the descriptions of the multicultural attributes such as ethnicity, language, physical impairment, religion, learning style, gender, and economic level on separate coding sheets. Inter rater reliability was checked throughout the coding process. When the researcher came across with an intolerable inter coder difference in coding, it was made to stop the coding process for a while and provided orientations for the coders until the consistency level among the raters reaches the acceptable level of agreement.

Content Analysis of the Multicultural Aspects of the Ethiopian Constitution

The policy intent of the current government to promote multicultural education is assessed by analyzing its Constitution. To this end, words, phrases, sentences and articles were used as units of analysis. On the bases of the five items guiding the document analysis, words, phrases, sentences and articles of policy documents were coded. The results obtained from the analysis of the Constitution identified the following focal points that are presumed to promote multiculturalism and multicultural education: “We, the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia firmly be convinced that the fulfillment of the objectives of the constitution requires full respect of individual and people’s fundamental freedoms and the rights to live together on the basis of equality and without any sexual, religious or cultural discrimination” (CFDRE, 1995, p.75); “All of Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state recognition” (CFDRE, 1995, p.78); “The law shall guarantee all persons equal and effective protection without discrimination on grounds of race, nations, nationalities, social origin, color, sex, languages, religion, political and other opinions” (CFDRE, 1995, p.87), and “Every Ethiopian national has the right to equal access to publicly funded social services including education” (CFDRE, 1995, p.99). Generally, these articles confirm the fact that the Ethiopian constitution gives sheer emphasis to the issue of multiculturalism seen in nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia.

Content Analysis of the Multicultural Aspects of the Education and Training Policy (1994) Document of Ethiopia

As mentioned before, another document analyzed was the ETP of Ethiopia. To this end, words, phrases, and sentences were used as units of analysis. The ETP document of Ethiopia which was drafted in 1994 began by criticizing and suggesting better courses of actions of the previous consecutive governments' drawbacks in the area of education. At its introduction part, the Policy document has clearly indicated the earlier consecutive governments' draw backs. It is reported that there had been a problem of accessibility and equity in education in the previous consecutive regimes. The Policy document further pointed out that there was high disparity in educational provisions among regions. Opportunities for high school education and vocational training were limited to big towns, HLIs were also found only in very few regions. The infrastructure allocated to the rural population to provide relevant quality education was at an insignificant level of development. These all can be evidences that obstruct the current government's effort to exercise the issue of multiculturalism for the citizens regardless of their background. That is why the current government began its journey by finding better courses of actions to the bottle necks of the previous regimes.

This intention of the government is reflected in one of the policy's specific objectives, "To recognize the rights of nations/nationalities to learn in their mother language at the same time providing one language for national and another language for international level communication" (ETP, 1994, pp. 10-11). As an overall strategy, several areas that include curriculum, structure of education, teachers, language and education, and finance have been identified.

The attempt of the government to entertain the issue of multiculturalism is also reflected in the specific strategies. For example, one of the specific strategies in the curriculum section states that the curriculum and the textbooks prepared both at national and regional levels should give due attention to concrete local conditions and gender issues. Moreover, the emphasis on gender representation on the teaching profession has been well articulated as "Special attention will be given to the participation of women in the recruitment, training and assignment of teachers" (ETP, 1994, pp. 10 -11). The other area where the policy addresses equity in education is finance. In the policy document, it is stated as "Special assistance will be given to those who have been historically deprived of educational opportunities and steps will be taken to raise the educational participation of deprived regions" (ETP, 1994, p. 6).

The policy document further implies something about knowledge construction culture in the overall education system as "the aims of education is to strengthen the individuals and society's problem solving capacity, ability and culture starting from basic education and at all levels" (ETP, 1994, p. 1). Moreover, the policy emphasizes the development of problem solving capacity and culture in the content of education, curriculum structure and approach, focusing on the acquisition of scientific knowledge and real experiences of the students (ETP, 1994, p. 4). This is further stressed in one of

the general objectives of the policy: "Develop the physical and mental potential and the problem solving capacity of individuals by expanding education and in particular by providing basic education for all" (ETP, 1994, p. 7). One of the specific objectives of the policy emphasized the same point: "to develop and enrich students' inquisitive ability and raise their creativity and aesthetic interest" (ETP, 1994, pp. 8 -9).

Emphasizing the need to consider the issue of multiculturalism, the policy document further indicated that "education plays a role in the promotion of respect for human rights and democratic values, creating the condition for equality, mutual understanding and cooperation among peoples" (ETP, 1994, pp. 1-2). This is further indicated in one of the general objectives of the policy as "bring up citizens who respect human rights, stand for the wellbeing of people, as well as for equality, justice, and peace, endowed with democratic culture" (ETP, 1994, pp. 7-8). This is made concrete in the specific objectives of the policy as: "to enable both the handicapped and the gifted learn in accordance with their potential and needs" (ETP, 1994, p. 9); "to provide education that promotes democratic culture, tolerance and peaceful resolutions of differences and that raises the sense of discharging societal responsibility" (ETP, 1994, p. 10); "to provide education that can produce citizens who stand for democratic unity, liberty, equality, dignity and justice, and who are endowed with moral values" (ETP, 1994, p. 10); "to recognize the rights of nations/nationalities to learn in their language, while at the same time providing one language for national and another one for international communication" (ETP, 1994, pp. 10-11), and "to gear education towards reorienting society's attitude and value pertaining to the role and contribution of women in development" (ETP, 1994, p. 11).

The 'Curriculum' section also emphasized the need to consider multiculturalism as "the curriculum ensures that the curriculum developed and textbooks prepared at central and regional levels, are based on sound pedagogical and psychological principles and are up to the international standard, giving due attention to concrete local conditions and gender issues" (ETP, 1994, pp. 12 -13). Under the section of 'Educational Structure', the policy indicated the fact that "special education and training will be provided for people with special needs" (ETP, 1994, p. 17). In the same section, the policy document disclosed the fact that "continuous assessment in academic and practical subjects, including aptitude tests will be conducted to ascertain the formation of all round profile of students at all levels" (ETP, 1994, p. 18). Still in the same section, the policy emphasized that "special attention will be given to the participation of women in the recruitment, training, and assignment of teachers" (ETP, 1994, p. 22). The same section further indicated that "teacher training for special education will be provided in regular teacher training programs" (ETP, 1994, p. 22).

Under the section 'Languages and Education', the relevance of medium of instruction to cultural diversity is indicated at length as "cognizant of the pedagogical advantage of the child in learning in mother tongue and the rights of nationalities to promote the use of their languages, primary education will be given in nationality languages" (ETP, 1994, p. 23). Extensions of this emphasis on the same page indicated

that “making the necessary preparation, nations and nationalities can either learn in their own language or can choose from among those selected on the basis of national and country wide distribution” and “the language of teacher training for kindergarten and primary education will be the nationality language used in the area” (ETP, 1994, p.23).

Under the part of ‘Educational Support Inputs’, it is indicated that “special attention will be given for women and for those students who did not get educational opportunities in the preparation, distribution, and use of educational support inputs” (ETP, 1994, p. 29). It is also stated that “the financing of education will be just, efficient and appropriate to promote equity and quality of education” (ETP, 1994, p. 6).

Under the section ‘Educational Organization and Management’, it is indicated that “educational management will be decentralized to create the necessary condition to expand, enrich and improve the relevance, quality, accessibility and equity of education and training” (ETP, 1994, pp. 29-30). Similarly, it is indicated that “educational management will be democratic, professional, coordinated, efficient and effective, and will encourage the participation of women” (ETP, 1994, p. 30). From the foregoing discussion of the ETP (1994) document, one can conclude that the current ETP seems to have provided due emphasis to the issue of multiculturalism.

Content Analysis of the Multicultural Aspects of the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation (2009) Document

Content analysis was carried out to evaluate whether or not the HEP document promotes multicultural education. To this end, words, phrases, sentences and articles were used as units of analysis. As part of the ‘guiding values of HLIs’, institutes are required to promote and uphold democracy and multiculturalism (HEP, 2009, p. 4981). Under the section ‘Language of Instruction’, it is also reported that short term trainings and preparation of teachers for primary schools shall be given in any appropriate language (HEP, 2009, p. 4987). Education shall also be given for students with complete hearing impairments in or supplemented by appropriate sign language (HEP, 2009). It is further indicated that every academic staff member of an institution shall have the responsibility to teach, including assisting students in need of special support and render academic guidance or counseling and community services (HEP, 2009, p. 4988).

In the section ‘Quality of Teaching-Learning and Assessment of Students’, it is indicated that the teaching learning process in any institution shall be, whatever the methods of delivery employed, interactively student-centered that shall promote active learning (HEP, 2009, p. 5005). The ‘Physically Challenged Students’ section has also pointed out that: institutions shall make, to the extent possible, their facilities and programs amenable to use with relative ease by physically challenged students; institutions shall, to the extent that situations and resources permit, relocate classes, develop alternative testing procedures, and provide different educational auxiliary aids in the interest of students with physical challenges; building designs, campus physical landscape, computers and other infrastructures of institutions shall take into account the

interests of physically challenged students; and institutions shall ensure that students with physical challenges get to the extent necessary and feasible academic assistance, including tutorial sessions, exam time extensions and deadline extensions (HEP, 2009).

Generally, the content analysis results of the HEP document indicate sheer support of entertaining the issue of multiculturalism among the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia. The researcher hopes that this attempt of the government to consider the issue of multiculturalism as part of the HEP document is a step ahead towards providing equitable treatment of diverse HLI students in general and TEI students in particular.

Content Analysis of the Multicultural Aspects of the Strategic Plan Document (2004) of Bahir Dar University

The content analysis was carried out to evaluate the strategic plan document of Bahir Dar University (hereafter BDU) to see whether or not it promotes multicultural education. To this end, words, phrases, sentences and articles were used as units of analysis.

The results obtained in the analysis of the Strategic Plan document of BDU indicate that “scholarship application should provide evidence that confirms their low economic status and inability to pay for tuition fee” (BDU Strategic Plan Document, 2004, p. 16). On the same page, it is pointed out that “Females and [the] physically disabled will be given priority.” Still on the same page, it is stated that “Orphans, famine, war or other disaster-dislocated applicants will be given priority.” The document further indicated that “20% of all places shall be reserved for females in addition to their right to compete in the 80 % places.” (BDU Strategic Plan Document, 2004, p. 16)

As part of its ‘Strategic Objective’ section of the document, the University disclosed that “Gender equity has reached its highest level compared to any organization in Ethiopia” (BDU Strategic Document, 2004, p. 16). The plan further indicated that this Strategic Objective has been executed through the following strategies: “the university has established a female education center that gives support to female education in the area of assertiveness, confidence building and leadership, and encourages female students to participate in social activities.”; “the University provides tutorial classes for female students to prevent drop out and academic dismissal.”; and “has experiences at implementing affirmative action ideas in practice in areas of learning and employment” (BDU Strategic Plan Document, 2004, p. 6). The document further pointed out the knowledge construction philosophy shared by the University as “the teaching learning process will be student oriented and practical” (BDU Strategic Document, 2004, p. 11).

Generally, the strategic plan document of BDU considers the issue of multiculturalism. However, the researcher’s experience of the setting at BDU as an instructor confirmed the doubtfulness of its practices as an integral part of the different programs. For example, the physical land escape and classroom facilities at BDU give little consideration to special need students. A single instance could be my personal experience as an invigilator of an examination in one of the courses. As I have been concerned about entertaining special needs more than ever before due to my engagement

into multicultural issues in my dissertation, I was roaming around the exam hall to find out a chair that suits to one of the left handed examinee I had. But, I failed to get one out of hundreds of chairs found in the exam hall. But, in terms of maintaining a reasonable gender balance among its academic staffs, however, the University can be considered as a role model for other Ethiopian HLIs.

Content Analysis of the Multicultural Aspects of the Strategic Plan Document (2003) of Mekelle University

The content analysis was carried out to evaluate the Strategic Plan Document (2003) of Mekelle University (hereafter MU) to see whether or not it promotes multicultural education. To this end, words, phrases, sentences and articles were used as units of analysis.

In the Strategic Plan Document of MU, the general strategy states: “Improve equity and access to education that addresses the participation of women and those from disadvantaged regions” (MU, 2003, p. 26). This general strategy is broken down into specific strategies. The following are the specific strategies listed to implement the general strategy: “develop programs that help to produce a proper mix of students across gender and regional divides”; “develop a working document that ensures equity and access to education and addresses the participation of women and people from the disadvantaged regions”; “establish a center for training female drop outs”; “raise awareness within the University community about the value of educating females”; “identify factors that impede females’ persistence and participation in the University and at schools and develop strategies”; “promote enrollment of female students”; “provide extra-curricular experience on subjects that may help in career development for female students”; “design systems to accommodate the needs of female students, including preparing diagnostic studies or need assessment, and then provide remedial help”; “Promote the recruitment of female instructors”; and “avoid gender bias in educational materials”.

Even though the document has raised the need of considering diverse students from disadvantaged regions’ (such as Gambella, Somalle, Benshanguli Gumuz, and Afar) participation in the HLIs, little strategy has been designed to achieve the goal. Especially, no attention is given in the document about the recruitment of both the administrative and academic staffs from the minority regions. This is practically seen in the TEI’s academic staff composition. For example, there was only one female instructor in the TEI. In this specific instance, one can imply that female PTs have little role model in the TEI.

The evaluation of the strategic plan document of MU, however, gives emphasis only to females; which of course, is at a planning level. But, the issue of multiculturalism is more than this. Even the physical land escape and classroom facilities give little emphasis to the attempts of entertaining special needs students. Moreover, most instructors in the TEI are Tigrians where the University is led by federal policies and strategies – though interview data from PTs confirmed that the TEs who had been working there had little bias towards PTs of culturally diverse groups.

Content Analysis of the Multicultural Aspects of the Strategic Plan Document (2003) of Hawassa University

The content analysis was carried out to evaluate the Strategic Plan Document of Hawassa University (hereafter HU) to see whether or not it promotes multicultural issues. To this end, words, phrases, sentences and articles were used as units of analysis.

In the Strategic Plan Document of HU, female participation is given emphasis as: "... enhance females' participation in the HU system" (HU, 2003, p. v). Student-centeredness is also emphasized under the mission statement of the document that is stated as "responsible and democratic attitude of students can be realized through student-centered, practical oriented teaching" (HU, 2003, p. 9).

Under the section 'Core Values', the following points are included: "commitment to democratic principles and upholds that democratic culture is cultivated and practiced in all aspects of the University Affairs"; "equity to promote evenhandedness and affirmative action to ensure gender and other social balances in its provision of opportunities and services"; "gender sensitivity and treasures offering special support to female students and staff through affirmative action, to ensure their sound representation in the university community with respect to every activity carried out in the HU system"; and "diversification and strives to strengthen the diversification of the University community, ideas, experiences, educational programs, etc." (HU, 2003, pp. 9-10)

Objective 10 of the document highlights female participation as: "Increase female participation to 40%, in the HU system, by the end of 2013/14" (HU, 2003, p. 30). On the same page, strategies to realize the objective are given as follows: "strategy 10.1: Formulate and popularize an institutional gender policy"; "strategy 10.2: Support female students by strengthening the existing Female Student Affairs Office and establish new ones"; "strategy 10.3: Support/promote increased enrollment of female students"; "strategy 10.4: Introduce courses that provide self-employment opportunities and help in career development of female students"; "strategy 10.5: Introduce mechanisms to offer special scholarship opportunities to female students"; and "strategy 10.6: Devise affirmative action that will encourage employment and increase the number of female academics and administrators" (HU, 2003, p. 30).

Generally, the content analysis of the Strategic Plan Document of HU gives due emphasis to the issue of multiculturalism. The HU has already practiced its plan in terms of entertaining some basic needs of special need students. At least the buildings are constructed in such a way that wheel chair users can access any office with little challenge. But, little is done to maintain gender balance in its academic staff. The TEI had only one female Muslim instructor. This shows that female PTs had little role models. It is also true that most instructors in the TEI were those who had been brought up in SNNP region in spite of the fact that the TEI serves PTs all over Ethiopia as well as students from abroad.

Discussion of the Findings

The Contribution of Teacher Education Policy to Prospective Teachers' Multicultural Competence Development in Ethiopia

An attempt was made to critically analyze policy documents such as, the National Constitution (1994), ETP (1994), the Strategic Plan Documents of the three sample Universities (i.e., BDU, MU, and HU), and Higher Education Proclamation (2009). To this end, words, phrases, sentences and articles were used as units of analysis while analyzing the messages of the contents of the four documents. On the bases of the five items that guide the document analysis, words, phrases, sentences and articles of policy documents related to multicultural attributes were coded. As the analyses inform, all the documents give great emphasis to the issue of multiculturalism as part of their intention and implementation strategies. The researcher assumes that such attempts to emphasize on the issue of diversity in policy documents influence the practice at TEIs and placement schools, as policies are charted out to guide practice at educational institutions.

Contrary to the current finding, some multicultural researchers recognized that educational policies assimilate some diversity issues while promoting others (Alemayehu, 2008; Artiles et al., 2006; Apple, 2004). In this regard, a number of scholars have documented the fact that education for diverse students support deficit assumptions and assimilatory agendas and, therefore, fails to provide equitable educational opportunities for these students at both placement schools and TEIs (e.g., Artiles et al., 2006). That is why multicultural researchers agree that educational policies can either create a large amount of conflict or respect between and among diverse groups of learners within educational institutes. Educational institute policies that discriminate among diverse students essentially create two or more separate groups. If students are divided into groups, they tend to favor the 'in-group' at the cost of the 'out-group' (Ambissa, 2010; Alemayehu, 2008) even if these groups have not previously experienced conflict. Such kinds of practices at educational institutes would aggravate stereotyping and discrimination between and among diverse learners. So, great care should be taken while formulating and implementing institutional policies and an effort should also be made to adopt policies that encourage diversity fair interaction among students at educational institutions of any level (Schofield, 1993). Being aware of this, a multicultural education environment is designed in such a way that it assures that all students are encouraged to respect the differences between and among diverse student populations.

Summary

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the support rendered from teacher education policy to PTs' multicultural competence development in Ethiopia. To this end, the National Constitution, Education and Training Policy, Higher Education Proclamation, and the Strategic Plan Documents of the Universities were consulted using purposive sampling technique. To gather reliable and valid data, the researcher used document

analysis techniques with three trained coders. The summaries of the major finding are given below:

The Support Rendered from Teacher Education Policies to Prospective Teachers' Multicultural Competence Development

An attempt was made to critically analyze policy documents such as, the National Constitution (1994), ETP (1994), the Strategic Plan Documents of the three sample Universities (BDU, MU, and HU) where the respective TEIs reside, and Higher Education Proclamation (2009). To this end, words, phrases, and sentences were used as units of analysis in analyzing the messages of the contents of the four documents. It was found that all the documents have given great emphasis to the issue of multiculturalism as part of their objectives and implementation strategies. Moreover, the latent messages of the multicultural descriptions in the four preceding policy documents were found positive to cultural diversities of the nations, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia.

Conclusions

As the findings indicated, all the policy documents such as the National Constitution (1994), ETP (1994), the Strategic Plan Documents of the three sample Universities (BDU, MU, and HU) where the respective TEIs reside, and Higher Education Proclamation (2009) give great emphasis to the issue of multiculturalism as part of their objectives and implementation strategies. Such attempts to emphasize on the issue of multiculturalism in policy documents influence the practice at TEIs and placement schools, as policies are formulated with the assumption that they guide our day-to-day practice as it is well proved by different educators.

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