

## The Primary Curriculum and Language Issue in Ethiopia\*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is a land of diversity. It is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multilingual society. (In this essay the term ethnic stands for the constitutional expression of "nations, nationalities and peoples" of the country). A. Tiruneh (1993) draws the geo-linguistic map of the country as follows:

The region now called Ethiopia has been the home of diverse linguistic groups since the pre-historic times. These were the Semitic languages of the northern and central highlands, notably Amharic and Tigriyna, the Cushitic languages of the lowlands and of the south-western, central and south-eastern highlands, notably Oromo, Afar and Somali; the Sidama languages of the central and southern highlands; and the Nilotic languages of the periphery areas along the Sudanese frontier (1993:1).

It is with these diversities in mind that the essay intends to survey the links between the primary curriculum and the language issue in Ethiopia.

How does education respond to these diversities? Should the school curriculum ignore them all for the sake of 'indivisible oneness' or should it attempt to embrace as many diversities as possible for cohesive unity? What educational role is any language supposed to play, in shaping citizenship at its foundation for nation-building? What are the policy implications of the political decisions either for or against diversity of languages in education? Such, then, are the complex issues involved here in examining the process of planning the curriculum at primary level within the context of multilingual society as Ethiopia.

The essay begins by outlining the purposes of education in the country, seeking primarily the explicit and implicit aims for language both as medium of

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instruction and as taught subject area. The motives (pedagogical, political and national/international) that underpin those aims and learner profiles are examined against desirable cognitive development, personality formation and qualities of citizenship of young Ethiopians.

The political positions and pedagogical imperatives that influence the relationships between language and education are critically examined in order to arrive at alternative suggestions within the thinking and practice of the current education and training policy (formulated and enacted by the historical Transitional Government of Ethiopia, TGE, 1994). Finally, it concludes by a call for revising present thinking and practice, the need to formulate and progressively implement a comprehensive and cohesive language policy at a national level (Corson, 1990; and Watson, 1992), and redefining the place and role of the Amharic language nation-wide in non-utilitarian way.

## 2. Purposes of Education in Ethiopia

The purposes of education in any country may not be readily accessible. Particularly where education is frequently influenced by 'extraordinary' speeches of rulers or by recurrent resolutions of a governing party, the efforts to see what purposes education is serving becomes very difficult. The resulting swift and unabated changes also further complicate the quest (Brumfit, 1995).

Mismatch between *what is officially professed* and *what is actually observed* is another persistent difficulty in identifying the operational purposes of the system of education (Taylor & Ricahrds, 1985; and Kelly, 1989). Without unveiling those purposes one cannot arrive at a meaningful grip of the place and role of languages in education.

The Ethiopian education system has passed through these set-backs particularly during the eighties. Massive research projects like "Education Sector Review", of the seventies, or ERGESE (Evaluative Research of the General Education System of Ethiopia, mid-eighties), carried out at the national level, could not cure the maladies the system exhibited. The former ended by unwittingly assisting the inherent social contradictions to flare up into social upheavals of the 1974

Revolution that brought the *ancient regime* out of living history (Halliday, et al, 1981). The latter was dumped without nationally significant trace (Negash, 1990: for further discussion on both projects).

What are the origins for these recurrent problems of the education system? The answers are partly to be sought in how the aims of education are formulated to address societal and individual needs. It is with this background that planning of the primary curriculum and the language issue ought to be examined.

One of the basic and ill addressed problems is the language issue (Coombs, 1985). As the history of the experience of constitution in Ethiopia shows, until recently, diversity of languages and cultures has, if ever, been given scant attention. Amidst the over eighty languages spoken in Ethiopia only one, namely, Amharic was favoured, and thus, dominated the language development opportunities until very recently (Honig, 1996). Amharic alone was allowed to enjoy the privileges of being taught as a subject throughout the school years and of being the medium of instruction at the primary level all over the nation.

Whether we consider it from the academic or political point of view-historically, in Ethiopia, this has been associated with denial of rights, hence oppression (Baker, 1992). A glance at the programmes of the various Liberation Fronts (TPLF, EPLF, EPRDF, etc.) shows that part of their struggles have been for the attainment of the freedom to *use one's own language freely*.

Perhaps the unrivalled dominance and imposition of the Amharic language may be considered on the part of the elite rulers, sincerely, as a vision of one solid nation. In examining the multilingual situation in many countries similar to that of Ethiopia, Ofelia Garcia makes the following observation:

The decision to restrict the language rights of linguistically diversified population in all the cases discussed above can be seen as instances of state language planning. It has been felt that the spreading of a particular language will result in "nation building," that is, the development of an awareness of belonging to one nation. Coupled to this is the feeling that development and modernisation, that is the rapid spread of new technologies and ideas through schooling, will be better met by imposing one common language of education... But this "nation building" has occurred at the expense of "person-demolishing", that is,

the destruction and tearing down of the self that is the result of taking away a language from its people (1992:6).

In Ethiopia the case was not only far worse than that of loss of personality. But also, it partly led to the violent and bloody civil wars that were concluded with the collapse of the Dergue (the military dictatorship that ruled the country until the end of 1991), and with Eritrea becoming an independent State, at the same time logically and historically proving that there was neither sincerity nor naiveté behind the 'vision' or, in H. Charlotte's words, "the pervasiveness of the political philosophies that promote the one-nation-one-language ideal." (1991:2)

Unique to the historical status of languages in the nation, new time has now ushered signalling the "movement from **nation-building as person-demolishing** to a new sensitivity in which **nation-building must include person-building**" (Garcia, 1992: 6). A time to take proper measures on the grounds of lessons from history, from research outcomes and from other countries' experiences. Do the purposes of Ethiopian education, as outlined in the policy, manifest the lessons of history, research outcomes and other countries' experiences? This question can only be partly addressed here for obvious reasons of purpose and space.

Let us examine, with the help of related literature on the issue, the basic documents that explicitly or implicitly exhibit the aims or purposes of education. Some of the documents that are of help are the Constitutions of different periods; the Education and Training Policy (formulated and enacted by the historical Transitional Government of Ethiopia, TGE, 1994); the implementation strategies adopted by the Institute for Curriculum Development and Research (ICDR); and the experience of the writer as member of the ICDR- the Federal curriculum institution of the country.

Following the guiding principles of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (CFDRE), the Ethiopian education system, through its policy, is supposed to manifest Federalism, Secularism and De-ideologisation in the curriculum (CFDRE, 1994). The Policy (TGE, 1994) is structured in four parts. Each part indicates definite directions to be followed by educational, training and other related institutions. One can summarise these as follows:

**Introduction;** review of the evolution of modern education with the intent of highlighting the major problems facing the system.

**Objectives of Education and Training;** divided into General & Specific: formulation of the purposes and aims of education.

**Overall Strategy;** outline of the ensuing activities from planning the curriculum through to implementation.

**Area of ...Priority;** sequencing of change by order of priority. The second and third are the most relevant parts to our discussion in this paper. In the objectives or, the section that outlines the purposes and aims of education, the emphasis given to languages as either medium of instruction or subjects to be taught is neither direct nor sufficient for guiding language planning in the curriculum. Nor yet clear enough for implementing the curriculum. The "General Objectives" which are formulated in a manner to govern the overall set-up of the education and training enterprises do not directly state the language issue, as can be observed in the following:

Develop the physical and mental potential and the problem-solving capacities of individuals...;

Bring up citizens who respect human rights, stand for the well-being of peoples, as well as for equality, justice and peace, endowed with democratic culture and discipline...;

Bring up citizens who differentiate harmful practices from useful ones, who seek and stand for truth, appreciate aesthetics ...;

Cultivate the cognitive, creative, ...potentials...(TGE, 1994: 7-8).

In all the above instances languages, both as mediums of instruction and as subjects to be taught, have good deal of potential roles to play in education. However, viewed from the angle of a multilingual society, the policy at this crucially appropriate stage does not address the issue. *Which language ought to play what educational role*, amidst a country speaking more than eighty languages, *and why* must be one of the starting points for statement of educational aims or "general objectives". In addressing the education system at a national level, as this policy does, language issues should not be reserved for *strategic* purposes. Some forms of aim statement for the inclusion of languages in the primary curriculum ought to have been offered at this stage. Ferguson, Houghton & Wells (1977) provide ten aims for bilingual education, out of which the following might be of relevance to the curriculum developed along the above directions of the policy:

To unify a multilingual society; to bring unity to a multi-ethnic, multi-tribal, or multi-national linguistically diverse state. To preserve ethnic and religious identity. To reconcile and mediate between different linguistic and political communities. To give equal status in law to languages of unequal status in daily life. To deepen understanding of language and culture (in Baker, 1993: 154).

It is only in the "specific objectives" section that we find an attempt at directly stating some purpose to languages in education:

To recognise the rights of nations/nationalities to learn in their language, while at the same time providing one language for national and another for international communication (TGE, 1994: 10-11).

The point, however, is that while it is essentially correct not only to recognise but also to accept this right; it is incorrect and even misleading to assume that the policy's aims shall be nationally fulfilled by "providing " one language (and at that not specifically indicated) "for national... communication". The problems related to statement of educational aims and purposes are not reducible to communication skills: they are issues of qualities of citizenship as the result of schooling. Again the above mentioned specific objective either limits the extent nationalities are to learn up to primary education only, as they (by this same policy) are supposed to use their languages up to this level (TGE, 1994: 23); or the educational ideals envisioned by the "general objectives" can be considered as *mere communication skills*. With the exception of this vague, but directly stated "objective"; the policy addresses issues related to the place and role of languages in education under its *strategy*.

What goals are, then, deduced from these aims for the primary curriculum? This is very important, because implementing such changes as envisioned in the policy begins by transforming them into *curricular goals at the appropriate levels*. As has recently been the case in Ethiopia, before any attempt was made at changing the old primary curriculum, goals had to be set, profiles framed and rationale substantiated for determining the content of the new curriculum. While the provisions for languages in education under the strategy part of the policy and the curricular learner profiles with their attendant rationale will be discussed in the following sections; it is here appropriate to conclude by making an overview of the goals of the primary curriculum. Since goals cannot be seen

apart from the levels of the education system for which they are meant, it is also essential to mention at this point the structure of the curriculum. As stated in the policy:

Primary education will be of eight years of duration, offering basic and general primary education to prepare students for further general education and training (TGE, 1994: 14).

The first four years (grades 1-4) cover basic education, while the next four years (grades 5-8) are spaced for general type of education. For our immediate interest at this stage of the essay we can focus on the first cycle of primary curriculum. The goals of this cycle (1-4) are:

to provide basic education which is appropriate to the age-level, physical and mental development of the learner; provide basic education to develop the potential of the learners; acquaint the learners with production and service giving activities within their environment; and lay the foundation for further education and training by equipping them with problem-solving skills and attitudes (ICDR, 1994: 2-3).

It is true that the language component in primary education can develop "the potential of the learners"; it can also partly lay the foundation for "further education and training". Languages, either as subjects to be studied or as mediums of instruction have, as well, to be "appropriate to the age-level of the learners" (Baker, 1993). If these are worth mentioning (and indeed they are) in the goals that help plan the primary curriculum; *even more worthwhile does it become to address the issues and dilemmas in identifying what languages to teach and for what purpose.* In all the goals mentioned above both the learners and education itself seem to have been considered from an utilitarian point of view: economic and productive aspects are more pronounced than the desirable qualities of citizenship in the multilingual society of Ethiopia. Not surprisingly, congruent with the aims or "general objectives" in the policy, the goals of primary curriculum (ICDR, 1994) fail to address the issue in determining the place and role of languages in primary education. On the contrary, what the policy has reserved to its strategic aspect (TGE, 1994: 23-4) ought to have been clearly manifested as curricular goals of primary education. In planning the primary curriculum, should language issues be seen simply as questions of strategy? Should not the goals be made to reflect the political solutions to these

This fusion is rather *an educational aim to be achieved and sustained through generations*, than a "skilful planning" or "part of a plan...to achieve a specific purpose" (OUP, 1995: 1159). Thus, the above quoted first provision must be made part of the aims or general objectives of the Ethiopian education, and by logical extension, one of the leading goals for languages in the primary curriculum.

Secondly, all the remaining being series of decisions, seem to be wanting some form of higher conceptions for their intelligibility. For example, does it follow from making the diverse mother tongues the media of instruction to conclude and decide that Amharic "be taught as a language of country wide communication"? (TGE, 1994: 24) Where is, then, the national interest in the linkages between languages and education? What pictures of an Ethiopian national or citizen do these provisions provide to the citizenship dimensions of primary education? What commonly shared national Ethiopian belongingness do they lend to the primary curriculum- understood here as the foundation for adult life? Taken in its broader sense the issue is: *how come all these provisions, under the strategy part of the policy, without a single educational aim to justify them?*

The possible answers to this question may be sought partly in the history of the place and role of Ethiopian languages in the modern formal education and partly in the circumstances under which the policy was formulated and enacted.

With the exception of Tigringa in Eritrea (until the Federation was dissolved in 1962), Amharic alone made its place secured in the formal curriculum, first as a subject and then as the medium of instruction in the primary education. In view of the dominance of the ideology of "One Indivisible Country" (IAG, 1993:) in the governmental politics of Ethiopia up to the end of the eighties, none of the other Ethiopian languages could find any space in the formal schooling. The denial to learn through one's own language coupled with being forced to learn through imposed second language resulted in resentment and bitterness. With the coming into force of the Transitional Period Charter in 1991(IGA, 1993) *the right to use one's own language freely* became the new political thinking towards democratisation.

The present policy was also formulated and enacted during this transitional period. With nationality languages flooding in into the primary education and



with the century old resentment and bitterness open in the air Amharic was associated with, and taken for the enemy. In other words, the association of the Amharic language with the preponderant elite Amharic speakers who ruled the country and with its role as an instrument of domination and assimilation led to what Honig expressed as the "purge" of "the Amharic language from the teaching curriculum" (1996: 1), to be more precise, from its long standing historical role as the medium of primary education, in areas where it is not a mother tongue. However, it continued and is still continuing to be taught as a subject in schools. To provide this language just for the sake of communication and as a national language symbolising unity are quite different tasks. It is essential here to underline the sociolinguistic distinction between a national language and a working or official language:

A national language is the language of a political, cultural and social unit. It is generally developed and used as a symbol of national unity. Its functions are to identify the nation and unite the people of the nation. An official language, by contrast, is simply a language which may be used for governmental business. Its function is primarily utilitarian rather than symbolic. It is possible, of course, for one language to serve both functions (Holmes, 1994: 105).

Thus one can imagine how difficult the situation could be for addressing a call for a national language, and more so for demanding to raise Amharic into the level of a national language, though by no means impossible, under politically heated conditions, and in a country where "unity within a nation" has until recently been heavily and mistakenly held "as synonymous with uniformity and similarity" (Baker, 1993: 248).

With stability assured now under a constitutionally founded governance, however, rationality in political thinking and objectivity in the academic performance are highly expected. Furthermore, it must be underlined that the desire to maintain a stable multi-lingual and culturally diverse Ethiopian nation-state can be complemented and facilitated with the determination in planning for a national language education at the primary level. It is a matter of converting into educational practice what is politically and implicitly stated in the constitution. In its Preamble, the Ethiopian constitution addresses as follows:

issue in a manner suitable to education? Are not language issues directly related to questions of citizenship: one of the major concerns of education in all ages? Is it not possible to expect from the goals of primary curriculum the possibility for its unifying role through the diversity of languages in education?

Within this multicultural world in transition, within this ocean of waves, linguistic diversity allows the expression of the complexity of differences, at the same time it preserves the harmony and unity of our beautifully different world (Garcia, 1992: 2 emphasis added).

### 3. Language And Education

The relationships between languages and education in the curriculum are not immutable; they are relative to the major shifts and changes in the society in which education operates. These relations, therefore, are not solely confined either to the teachers and the school or to the curriculum developers. Outside the academic milieu there are political positions to be rationally considered; and again, outside the political spheres, there are pedagogical imperatives to be weighed objectively. While the former primarily aims at some form of vision about the larger society, the latter is mainly concerned on how students progress in learning. These tendencies might not be obvious and clear. On both sides the opinions vary, as summarised by C. Baker :

...that there are three basic orientations or perspectives about language around which people and groups vary: language as problem, language as right and language as a resource. These three different dispositions towards language planning are not necessary at the conscious level. They may be embedded in the unconscious assumptions of planners and politicians. Such orientations are regarded as fundamental and related to a basic philosophy or ideology held by an individual (1993: 247-8).

Yet considered at the conscious level, from the political perspective the relationships between language and education, in the curriculum may be seen as means to achieve the envisioned 'reality'; for the pedagogical view, however, these may be considered in terms of their value for the autonomy of the academic performance- what facilitates learning. Thus, one can detect the potential

tensions between the political positions and the pedagogical imperatives in handling languages and education in the primary curriculum. This needs to be handled by striking the right balance. It becomes even more complicated in multilingual societies. This seems to be the case in Ethiopia when the policy renders the relations, *strategically*, as follows:

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... Amharic shall be taught as a language of countrywide communication... English will be the medium of instruction for secondary and higher education...

Students can choose one nationality language and one foreign language for cultural and international relations...

English will be taught as a subject starting from grade one...(TGE, 1994: 23-4).

A number of observations could be made from the above elements of the "overall strategy" of the policy. First, primary education is supposed to satisfy the political dimension of the rights to use one's own language in, at least, the primary level; and at the same time to help facilitate the learning capacity of the child by making mother tongue the medium of instruction. Both the academic/pedagogical imperatives of learning through the mother tongue and the political decision on the rights of nationalities to freely use their languages have become complementary: resolved to the extent that they become one and the same purpose. *Making the child, in the primary level, free to learn in his/her mother tongue.* As far back as in 1953, UNESCO had made the call for the possibility of mother tongue to be the medium of instruction bearing in mind its pedagogical advantages, among others, for the learner :

It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that in his mind works automatically for expression. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he belongs. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium. But... it is not always possible to use the mother tongue in school and, even when possible, some factors may impede or condition its use (UNESCO, 1953: 12).

We the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia:  
Strongly Committed... to building a political community founded on  
the rule of law...  
Further Convinced that by continuing to live with our rich and proud  
cultural legacies in territories we have long inhabited, have, through  
continuos interaction on various levels and forms of life, built up  
common interests and have also contributed to the emergence of a  
common outlook; ...  
Convinced that to live as one economic community is necessary in  
order to create sustainable and mutually supportive conditions for  
ensuring respect of our rights and freedoms;  
Determined to consolidate, as a lasting legacy, the peace and the  
prospect of a democratic order...  
Have, therefore, ratified, on 8 December 1994 this  
Constitution...(CFDRE,1994: Preamble).

If this extremely valued vision of Ethiopia as a politically and economically unified nation with a common outlook is to be educationally met, both the policy and the primary curriculum should respond by consciously paving the way for the Amharic language to actualise its potential as a national language and exemplifying unity through equality of diverse languages and national symbolism. For how else could Ethiopia be conceived to be unified without a national language? Equality of languages in this context does not necessarily mean arresting a relatively advanced language. When both the constitution and the policy recognise and accept the rightful role of ethnic languages in education, and when particularly the policy asserts the need to maintain the use of the English language in the school curriculum, there could be no intention of arresting the development of that language; thus, no intention of arresting the progress of Amharic as well. The country having paid sacrifices to do away with some persistent political ills, ways should not be paved for others to replace them. In other words, we must be certain to avoid the impediments that are described by K. Watson:

In multiethnic, multilingual societies language can become a barrier to integration if different ethnic or racial groups insist on maintaining their own languages as a means of transmitting cultural and social values and if, as a result, they resist the concept of a national language ( Watson, 1990: 101 emphasis added).

One basic fact needs to be cleared at this point, the fact that the decision of the Federal Government to use Amharic as its working language (CFDRE, 1994: Article 5) has been confused with the inclusion of that language in the curriculum for its utilitarian value than the national interest. If we consider the preferences of the Government to be identical with the purposes and content of the curriculum, then the main focus is shifted from the learner to the demands of the bureaucracy, thus; education remains to be liberated. However, there is a great deal of freedom for, at least, the curriculum development at the centre to be freely decided by the professionals on the basis of the policy. Furthermore, the constitution has granted the academic freedom by making it unequivocally clear that education "...public or private, shall be provided in a manner that is free from any political partisanship, religious influence or cultural prejudice." (CFDRE, 1994: Article 90). Incidentally, this is also a call for de-ideologising the school curriculum which has been inherited with its excessive dose of ideology and inflated propaganda.

Here we are sensing the need for further substantiating policy issues related to languages in education, which cannot continue being squeezed into an already-exhaustively elaborated educational policy. Added to the multiplicity of languages in the country and with few of them being only recently transformed into the written form, there is a language development task ahead, of which education, and particularly the primary level, could only partly contribute. Again as early as 1953, UNESCO has pointed the need for research on the language issues as follows :

A careful survey of linguistic situation of a region by linguists is essential before it is decided which languages should be used in school and which should not (UNESCO, 1953: 12).

All these point to the need for a language policy at the national level. Why do we need such a policy at the national level?

A language policy at national level tries to do many things. It identifies the nation's language needs across the range of communities and cultural groups it contains; it surveys and examines the resources available; it identifies the role of language in general and of individual languages in particular in the life of the nation; it establishes strategies necessary for managing and developing language resources; and it

relates all of these to the best interest of the nation through the operation of some suitable planning agency. A language policy at national level is as comprehensive and coherent as possible. It marries up with other national goals and must be acceptable to the nation's people in general. By setting out guidelines within which action is possible and desirable, a national policy on languages enables decision-makers to make choices about language issues in a rational and balanced way ( Corson, 1990: 141).

#### 4. Languages in the Primary Curriculum

The style of constructing the school curriculum in Ethiopia mainly follows what is known as the *Objectives-Model*. Although it is not the intention of this paper to dwell in the explanation of the theoretical side of curriculum planning introductory statements on the planners' view is worth mentioning. This model, being appreciated for its demand on the clarity of purpose in organising the curriculum is either taken independently or in combination with some modifications. In changes that are aimed either at reform or, as is currently the case, at overhauling the whole curriculum, it is an established tradition for panels at the ICDR to look for the intended changes in the form of objectives. This can take different forms. Some of the most common forms are: a) goal setting; b) framing the profiles by levels; c) substantiating subject-area rationale; d) stating grade-subject specific objectives; and, e) statement of instructional objectives. Evaluation, in all its aspects, can either be simultaneous or take on where implementation begins. These are all attempts at giving teaching and learning meaning and purpose. Following this tradition, therefore, we may raise the question that: *what meaning and purposes are given to including languages in the primary curriculum? In other words, is enough consideration given to the cognitive development and self-identity of the learner commensurate with the national interest and its accompanying citizenship?*

In examining the policy in earlier sections, we hardly found a positive answer to this, except the one that we discovered being misplaced under the strategy section. In this final section of the essay we will look into the more concrete aspects of the primary curriculum; namely, beginning from the commonly approved time table through to the profiles and rationale that serve as mutually

assured substances for the curricular materials prepared at the *regional* levels. Let us begin by viewing the time table:

**Table 1;** Period distribution for languages in the curriculum (ICDR, 1994: 8-9).

English	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6
National language	-	-	6	6	4	4	5	5
Others	25	25	20	20	23	23	21	21
Weekly Total	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35

N. B. : One week is five working days and one period is forty-five minutes. The average school beginning age (grade one) is the chronological age 7 of the child.

Compared to others, the language component has taken between at the least 29%, and at the highest 43% of the total weekly curriculum time. How is this tremendous amount of emphasis given to languages to be explained? What amount of content and magnitudes of processes are incorporated in the curricula? Before we seek the answers from the profiles and rationale for the inclusion of these languages in the curriculum, a little clarification of two facts is essential to avoid further confusion to mention: the naming of 'mother tongue' and 'national language' in the above time table. It must be understood that not all mother tongue languages have made their way into the primary curriculum. However, for those that are eventually able the place is *reserved*. The policy has clearly outlined the conditions :

Making the necessary preparation, nations and nationalities can either learn in their own languages or can choose from among those selected on the basis of national and country wide distribution( TGE, 1994: 23).

Again the phrase 'national language' as applied in this time table is misleading for two reasons. First, it disguises the actual subject, namely, Amharic. That place and curricular time is what is actually applied for the Amharic language as a subject to be taught in the primary education all over the nation. Secondly, it misrepresents the way this language is understood in the policy, by specifically confusing the '... language of country wide communication' (TGE, 1994: 10-11) with a national language. The proof to these arguments can be extracted from the profiles and rationale to which we will presently focus.

The only language-related statement of profile available in the document is the one that deals with the first cycle of primary level and reads as follows :

they will be able to write in standardized calligraphy, read properly and compute correctly with the four basic operations in numeracy (ICDR, 1994: 4) (emphasis added).

Are these the only ideals to be shared equally by the three languages included in the primary curriculum? There are a number of profiles formed for the completes of both cycles at different ages and with varying degrees of expected achievements. It is also true that languages can enrich the learning situation by contributing knowledge, skills and attitudes but, then, where is the planning aspect of the curriculum, i.e., the intentionally designed change?

In all the profiles one hardly finds a direct statement of an Ethiopian national's picture, which would have been stretched to apply to the languages' curriculum package. There is also *nothing at all* that can be ascribed for having to learn the Amharic language to the effect of national interests in terms of national unity. Therefore, unless a critical review and remedial measures are undertaken these statements create not only *the false image of a country that has no nationally bound citizenry; which is in all respects contrary to the constitution, but also indicate the absence of the national role of a language in uniting Ethiopians as a cohesive nation.*

In the rationale part, there are basic conceptions on the need and importance of using the mother tongue in education both to the learner and to the community or ethnicity. Since they are in agreement with the policy, there seems to be no reason to repeat them here. However, the inclusion of the mother tongue as a subject is explained correctly in terms of its immediacy: as it "will be immediately used as a medium of instruction...." (ICDR, 1994: 12). In addition to the importance of making it the medium of instruction, it is also mentioned that "if students learn in their mother tongue, they can develop self-reliance and psychological motivation, and retain social cultural and values." (ICDR, 1994: 13) Further, it is underlined that 'nations and nationalities' would also benefit in retaining their 'self-identity'. This also applies to the individual learner.

The question, however, is should self-identity be only limited to the ethnic level or should it, being freely and firmly rooted in it, be elevated to the national and progressively to the universal level? Neither to 'gain experience' nor to



'exchange views, ideas, cultural and social values across different cultures...', nor yet the conception of the Amharic language 'as a lingua franca' could satisfy the educational demands of citizenship and national unity - *a unity essentially to be tied by a national language*. In view of the elaboration so far undertaken there seems to be a ghost-like shadow of an imaginary gulf between the multiplicity of mother tongue languages and a national language.

There is clearly a need for elaborating the healthy and complementary relationships between the diversity of mother tongue languages and a national language to be chosen from among them. Not forgetting that Amharic is as well a mother tongue among many. This gross inconsistency and imbalance in the perception and treatment of the relations between ethnic languages and national language needs an urgent educational solution. The solution is to be sought in critically reviewing the policy through public discussion on the need for, and identification of, a national language in view of language planning; and the subsequent curricular decisions taken so far. A reasoned and objective assessment of the possibility of addressing the need for a national language, and elevating Amharic to serve that national need is an educationally inescapable task. Consequently the need for a comprehensive and coherent language policy at the national level to deal with these issues seems to be timely.

## 5. Conclusion

In examining the purposes of education in Ethiopia, we have seen that there are no clearly and comprehensively stated aims for languages in the primary level. The analysis of the links between language and education has enabled us to conclude that the available related conceptions in the policy are taken for their strategic values, which themselves are in need of clarity of purpose. In this connection, we have also observed that the national visions or purposes enshrined in the new constitution of Ethiopia may not be educationally met by an educational policy that estranges the potential for national language by overemphasising ethnic languages and at the same time silencing the need for a national language. Our scrutiny of the reasons why the Amharic language is taught in the primary level has forced us to doubt whether the nationally relevant

ideals in the policy could be realised through a language 'designed' for utilitarian means and 'resisted' of its potential role of nation-building.

These all led us to the appreciation of the need to address these issues on the basis of, and in line with, the diversity of languages accompanied and complemented by a national language in a comprehensive and cohesive language policy at a national level. There is also a need to clearly and convincingly substantiate the possibility of a purposefully changed *national* role of the Amharic language and its potential capacity to be raised and planned to a national language. Consequently, the purpose of teaching Amharic as a language in primary education needs to be transformed from its utilitarian role, and enhanced to manifest the role of language education for nation-building and citizenship formation.

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