

## Book review:

**Language Ideologies and Challenges of Multilingual Education in Ethiopia: The Case of Harari Region**, 2010, Addis Abeba. Publisher: Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA). Author: Moges Yigezu (PhD).

By Lemlem Telila

Since the sixth century Ethiopia had maintained a highly structured and well organized system of education from primary to higher education (Teshome, Wagaw, 1979). The focus of the education was around religious principles. During Emperor Menelik and Emperor Haile Selassie I governments, the educational system was modernized by mobilizing foreign scholars, as well as by sending students abroad. However, by the 1935 Italy invasion the emerging educational system was seriously disrupted and after expelling Italians, again the government mobilized foreign scholars and those foreign scholars influenced the educational system by pressuring the government. As a result, since then the medium of primary education instruction became different from the medium of higher education instruction. This study examines the impacts of the use of medium of instruction and its implementation in the educational system.

It appears, until now information for the Ethiopian educational system, focusing on language implementation has not been compiled systematically. This book by Dr. Moges Yigezu (2010) comes as great contribution to this very important issue. The research is a case study, based on the medium of instruction used in Harari region. It focuses on the use of multilingual languages as medium of instruction.

The research has been undertaken from primary school medium of instruction, its implementation, the relevance of the curriculum, the availability of teachers in specific language, and the appropriateness of teachers pedagogical training in specific language they use to teach and how the preparation is carried out and the availability of adequate teaching materials in each language. This research can be seen as providing ample evidence that sheds useful light on the way the medium of instruction used in the general education system, as well as its impacts in Ethiopia's education system. The author reports its findings and data with extensive quantitative assessment based on interviews of all stakeholders on the use of the medium of instruction in educational system.

The book is divided into nine chapters. The first Chapter deals with the general principles of the educational system since 1991. It focuses on the background and the ideologies that influence the educational system. Chapter two discusses about the issues of implementing multilingualism in education and the ideologies behind it and the possible impacts of its influences on the general education system. Along with this, a brief account of both negative and positive features between the alphabet/scripts and the direction they are written be given to indicate the unique characteristic of the

Harrari region educational system and the challenges of multilingualism in the Ethiopian education system.

Chapter three is the core of the book it contains the history of Ethiopia's educational language policies in different periods. This chapter organizes the historical facts section by section in detail. The first is from (1890-1935) the book labeled this period as 'permissive period' in which the use of different languages in formal education was allowed, where the author stated as 'linguistic diversity was tolerated'. This section discusses that the focus of this period was modernizing and building a strong nation and the language of medium of instruction in formal education was not a problem and linguistic diversity was not considered as an issue. It provides that different schools have adopted different languages such as: French, English, Amharic, Italian and Oromo, until the Italian occupation (1936-1941) segregation period, the book describes it how schools were divided between Ethiopians and Italians and it discusses that there was a total disruption of the pattern of language use in education and how the invader policy was implemented in which Ethiopians were provided with only elementary education. This part also discusses about how the Italians divided the country as:

*“Italian East African Empire' into six administrative regions, with languages of education: Tigrinya in Eritrea; Amahric in Amhara; Amharic and Oromo in Addis Abeba; Harari and Arabic in Harar; Oromo and Kefinoonoo in Oromia; Somali in Somalia” where the Italian policy was practised from 1937-1941”* (P. 31). This section, confirms to its readers that how the five years occupation has marked a significant departure from the emerging education system, and how the Italian policy has seriously disrupted the multilingual education.

The flow of the history is well organized and it encourages the reader to follow the flow. For instance, after expelling the Italian, the book discusses as in 1940s the French language was replaced by English language, as the medium of instruction for education. The author describes it as:

*“this was not only due to the British help in the liberation from the Italian invasion or the significance international use of the English language but also due to Britain's colonial ambition to exert political dominance over the country..... after the liberation the important advisers of the ministry of education were British and schools in Addis Abeba were monopolized by the British and the text books were brought mainly from Britain and its East African colonies”* (Girma, 1963, 338, as cited in Moges Yigezu, 2010, p.. 32).

The book provides ample evidence on different attempts to adopt education to the aspirations, problems, conditions and needs of Ethiopia. This part makes readers to ask several questions and satisfies the readers by providing the historical facts. For instance it stated as due to another foreign country influence, namely the American “Point four Scheme”, for the first time Ethiopians are encouraged to adopt education, in local language. The book stresses as, at that time there were enough qualified Ethiopians to replace foreign scholars and by 1950s the Ethiopians took over the foreign positions at schools and in government offices, as teachers and advisers. As the country needs to adopt education to the aspirations of the nation, it indicated that after many years of struggle, in 1963 the Ministry of education has decided that Amharic to replace English as medium of instruction, for primary education in all government schools. It further summarizes it as:

*“It was a result of continued national pressure for using indigenous language and Amharic for reasons of sentimental attachment, authenticity and efficiency. Amharic as the official language was enshrined in the 1930 as well as in the 1955 constitution”* (P. 32).

By providing historical facts readers know how and when the use of local language as medium of instruction has started and the author also discusses how the development of the Amharic language without including other major languages has created dissatisfaction during the Emperor Haile Selassie I government. It states as after the liberation, the focus of the policy was characterized by unification, modernization and “*nationalism by a quest for building strong nation in the face of European colonial powers*” (P41). At the same section, it also describes that in 1974, the government had included reform and proposals recognizing other Ethiopian languages for the first time, however the author concluded that since the government was replaced by the military, the proposal has remained on the paper.

According to the author, during the Military regime, (1974 – 1991) the educational policy has marginalized traditional culture and religious institutions and education was controlled to promote the socialism ideology. The historical flow of the book is well organized and this section also provides readers how the military policy recognized to develop languages other than Amharic in the area of literacy. It provides evidence to compare different policies, at different period and their results. For instance, when the military came to power, the illiteracy rate was 93 percent but it shows how it has changed since 1979, where Oromo, Wolayita, Somale, Amaharic and Tigrigna were introduced in the first literacy campaign; again in 1981, Hadiya, Tigre, Kunama, Gedeo and Kambatta were introduced. In 1982, Sidamo, Afar, Silte, Saho and Kefa-Mocha were also introduced. During the military regime literacy was taught in 15 languages and after 1974 the policy towards modernizing other Ethiopian languages for basic education and mass media was done by replacing the National Amharic Academy with the National Academy of Ethiopian Languages.

The book discusses the current language policy (1991- Present) in lengths. It also provides what the current Constitution, Article 5 has and describes as:

*“Several vernaculars were introduced in formal primary education and other official purposes as part of a wider reorganization of geopolitical and administrative structures in Ethiopia that has placed language at the center of the process of social redefinition.... all of Ethiopia's constituent languages, of which there are at least 80, may be used of a range of official purposes”* (p. 37).

By comparing the constitution with what is practiced on the ground, the author provides a good picture on the current education system. It also discusses that the 1994 education policy states as Amharic will be taught as a language of country wide communication and English as a medium of instruction for secondary and higher education. And students can choose and learn at least one nationality language and one foreign language, English will be taught as a subject starting from grade one. But in the same section it describes as:

*“In most regions in Ethiopia, in addition to the vernacular, which is used as the medium of instruction at the primary level, Amharic, the official language of the country and English are taught as subjects within the primary school system. English is introduced as of grade one in parallel with the vernacular, whereas Amharic is given as a subject starting from grade three. The introduction of the English, which is a foreign language, before the introduction of the country's official language projects an ideological stance towards the status of the two languages “* (p. 38).

It seems the book has tried to answer ambiguous questions. For instance, it states that it has been a decade since the education policy was implemented, but it provides readers that no

full evaluation of the policy has been done to date. It discusses how research has shown positive results whereas others show their concerns on the use of different languages in the primary education. It also discusses that serious problems have been identified in teachers' availability, curriculum development, teaching materials, language standardization and orthographic development. In addition, it also included author like (Cohen 2000) who said: *"The policy has been regarded as potentiality politically divisive since it allegedly shows the government's intention to divide the country along ethnic lines, thereby contributing to its hidden agenda of 'erosion of the existing bases of national unity' "* (Cohen, 2000, as cited in Moges Yigezu, p. 39).

By examining representative schools, chapter four describes the ethnography of elementary schools in Harari region. The research supports its findings by a wealth of data for four consecutive years from 2000-2004 and the data displays enrollment number, dropouts and repeaters for both genders in (grades 1-8) for each year, in the whole region, as well as the rate of enrollment, dropout and repeaters in the first and second primary cycles in rural schools. It also compares the rate of repeaters and dropouts in both rural and urban settings. By using the Harari Regional Government Educational Bureau (2005), as a source of data, the book assures its readers that the findings can be verified. In this chapter, by highlighting the type of school and the language each school uses another data displays the use of languages in the curriculum in elementary schools. For instance: in Harrari school, Harrari language, Oromo school - Oromo language, Heritage school, Amahric language, other schools use English language and it also recorded the number of periods they use per week for different grades (1-8). In general this chapter gives a good picture in the language implementation model adopted in various schools in the Harari region.

Chapter five assesses not only the language used but also the nature of multilingualism in the region and it discusses the attitude of parents, teachers and students on the choice of medium of instruction in schools, the use of mother tongue and the use of the language of wider communication in primary education, as well as the attitude towards the capabilities of mother tongue towards the appropriateness of the scripts adopted and the use of other competing languages in the Harari region. By involving all stakeholders, the book provides the reality on the ground. For example, the interviews, gathered from both students and teachers in their choice of medium of instruction and their responses on problems related on the use of mother tongue in education, as well as student responses on problems associated with availability of teaching materials and qualified teachers makes the book more valuable. It is well documented. By doing this it indicated that the major problem is inconsistency in the use of orthography due to lack of standardization, variation in procrastination in some words and lack of proper spelling. As a result, the book confirms lack of community involvement in decision making and in the implementation, as well as lack of preparation before the implementation of the policy. The findings can be used as a model to improve the general education system, in Ethiopia.

Chapter six explores the choice of scripts by focusing on linguistic and pedagogical issues. The author discusses that adapting a particular script to a new language for the purpose of basic education brings several issues, and those issues became more complex and confusing when more than one script is involved in a multilingual education system. Such as: The Ethiopic script, (fidel), the Arabic script, The Oromo Orthography (Quebe). After examining the use of different scripts, the book suggested as:

*"From technical and psycholinguistic perspective adopting an existing orthography presupposes a good and accurate description of the phonology of the language and familiarity with its sound pattern. Moreover, in the process of designing a new orthography, especially when two or more languages*

*adopt the same script, any existing orthography already in use in the area or in the school system should be taken into consideration. When multiple scripts are in use, harmonization of the different orthographies would help in facilitating the teaching learning process” (P117).*

This part provides information on the source of the current education challenges that can help all stakeholders to work on the solution.

Chapter seven discusses on the nature of the curriculum and it is divided into several sections, which makes the book more readable and friendly. It provides readers to acquire lots of information in a single chapter. It deals on the shortage of teaching materials in general, and how students are forced to share books and how it became a problem both for students and teachers. Especially the shortage is noticeable for teaching in Amharic and Oromo and the book highlighted as the education office did not give it enough attention. However, in schools where Harari is a medium of instruction, due to the small number of students in Harari language, it generalizes as there is no shortage of teaching materials, but the problem in Harari schools is lack of teacher’s guides. Similarly, in mainstream schools there is no teaching material shortage in main subjects. Interestingly the author discusses that in schools such as SOS (referred as International school), the teaching materials come directly from USA and they are adapted to fit the local systems and there is no shortage of materials, however the problem in this school is the curriculum as a whole reflects the U. S. System. This chapter covers each part section by section including, sections that describe about the preparation, structure and content of language teaching, on the standardization and language development and about the teaching approach and teacher's training. It also discusses on the positive outcome in Harari region, where children are learning in mother tongue in early grades. By including a section about the absence of bridging between any two languages involved, it highlighted on the need for the link between the languages used. The author states those factors that affect multilingual education as:

*“The intended aim of the multilingual education in Harari region, as well as elsewhere in Ethiopia, is thus not merely linguistic but also it includes ‘semi-linguistic aims’ i.e. a multilingual approach to basic education serves political aim as well. The introduction and use of vernacular languages in basic education as well as in other domains is highly politicized. Mostly use of local languages as medium of instruction has been based on the political imperative to represent groups of people in the state. In consequence, both Oromo and Harari have been introduced for the purpose of education in the absence of the necessary stage of standardization and development. Particularly lacking are the selection of an appropriate teaching method reflected in the orthography and the teaching material’ bridging’ between the language taught in the school system in order to maximize ‘transfer’, an appropriate fact-finding survey before and after implementation, the necessary evaluation mechanism and the setting of clearer goals and strategies for the multilingual vernacular education. ... the use of vernaculars in the classroom cannot by itself guarantee the success of multilingual education. There must be a a standardized spelling for the language, and the orthography proposed should be user-friendly and based on a proper linguistic analysis of the sound system of the language. There should be pedagogical grammars and dictionaries or word lists available to guide the teachers. If teachers lack proper materials, the potential advantage of switching to the vernacular run the risk of being nullified. (Baker 1996; Garcia 1998, as cited in Yigezu, 2010, p. 133)*

Chapter eight discusses the politics of educational language planning. It covers several issues section by section. By describing the language planning models, the general social and political planning and how they are dictated by the ideology of the political system in power, it shows the requirement of fact –finding, political will of the leadership, and it also discusses about inadequate

language development, deficits of language planning and implementation processes. It supports its findings by including the data on the generic classification of languages, demographic profile of the speakers, the domains of language use, the nature of bilingualism, the attitude of speakers, level of standardization, institutional support, typology of ecological classification, and the implication for language planning.

This part describes that the Harari region has a truly multilingual vernacular education between the program with a strong component of mother tongue education. Beside this, it also highlights the two challenging factors. One is political, where there is a 'mismatch' between the educational language policy in as many as five languages in primary education and the political arrangement in the region where it doesn't recognize the same groups with in its policy and it exclusions by design. As an example it indicated as:

*“It does recognize the Amharic language as an official language and uses the language as one medium of instruction in primary education, but it ignores the Amharic speaking people (37 percent of the total population) in power sharing and excludes them from participating in police, the judiciary, etc. This marginalization of the major groups from the political platform, therefore, could create tension, result in ecological imbalance, and conceivably lead to future conflict. Conflicts that look like language conflicts on the surface are very often much more about rights, power, and political marginalization”* (P.149).

The author summarizes how the second challenging factor, the economy, with the unbalanced power can cause and be reflected in the multilingual and scripts usage in primary education.

The last chapter comes with conclusion and recommendations, they are direct, easy to understand and easy to implement. For instance, it recommends to revise the orthography, in designing the orthography the idea of linking between two languages that are in use in the region, and focusing on the similarities of alphabets. Another suggestion is the need to have a clear objective in the policy and its implementation as well as to train qualified teachers, and the last recommendation emphasizes to include a mechanism, to evaluate the current policy and its implementation.

In general this is a well- researched and well documented work. By using a scientific approach the author reveals the challenges and problems the primary education is facing in Ethiopia. The book covers several sections that have different entries which complement to each other and using tables and sections facilitate its readability and understanding. Additionally the questionnaires provide a good picture on the ground and they are helpful on major educational issues. With the wealth of data, the study is well documented and the author supports the findings by those gathered data. I would say it is a good resource for policy makers, education professionals, students and for the wider community, in general. I recommend this case study, in Harari region can be used as a general model to improve the Ethiopia's education system in the whole country. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the usefulness of the book would be further enhanced if this book is available in major Ethiopia's languages.

### **Reference:**

Wagaw, T. G. (1979). *Education in Ethiopia: Prospect and retrospect*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

