The Roles of Social Identity on Students' Interpersonal Interaction Among Dire Dawa University Students in Eastern Ethiopia: Social Psychological Perspectives

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the roles of social identity on students' interpersonal interaction among Dire Dawa University Students in Eastern Ethiopia. The participants of the study were 337 undergraduate students selected from five colleges and one institute. The sample of this study was taken through systematic sampling and simple random sampling technique. To collect data, questionnaires were used. The findings of this study revealed that there is a positive and significant relationship between gender identity and interpersonal interaction with correlation value of (r =.473). There is a positive and significant relationship between ethnic identity and interpersonal interaction with a correlation value of (r= .599). There is also a positive significant correlation exist between religiosity and interpersonal interaction among students with a value of (r= .440) was significant at P<0.05 level of significance. The result also revealed that the three independent variables had the combined effect on interpersonal interaction of students accounted for 50.8% of the variance. Regarding the contribution of each independent variable on the variation of the dependent variable step-wise regression analysis was conducted and the result showed that, gender identity independently contributed R^2 of 9.5%, ethnicity contributed R^2 of 35.8%, and religious identity accounted for 5.1 % of the variance on interpersonal interaction.

Keywords: Social Identity; Interpersonal Interaction; University Students; Eastern Ethiopia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings exist in a context of social ties with one another. It is true that all over the world people identify themselves and belong to others based on various social categories. Social identities not only emanated from small groups of social categories like student clubs, counsel, gender club, dormitory members and the like but also from large categories such as nations or church, which provide members with a social identity (Hogg and Vaughan, 2005). Regarding the formation of social identity, Baron and Byrne (1997) also stated the assumption that society is hierarchically structured in to different social groups that stand in power and status relation in to one another. From this assumption it follows that as a core premise of the social identity approach, social categories produces social identity. Such classification leads peoples to develop some values, beliefs, feelings, and behavior toward individuals or community who have similar or different social categories from them. Higher education institutions are expected to be a place where students engaged in various scientific and enlighten ideas regardless of their differences. Institutions of higher education are in a unique position to address the teaching and learning of diversity by creating an environment that will allow positive interaction among students from different identities and backgrounds. Scholars conducted different researches on the area of social identity, for example, (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) develop social identity theory to understand the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination, social categorization, intergroup relations, social comparison, prejudice, and stereotyping. In any society, educational systems are closely related to societal needs because of the symbiotic relationship that exists between them. Educational systems cannot ignore the political, economic and cultural-ideological spheres that make up their environments.

According to common ground theory, the discovery or establishment of common ground between individuals is a fundamental component for enduring interpersonal relationships other than familial relationship. And loss of common ground, which may happen over time, may tend to end interpersonal relationships. Moreover, Hogg and Vaughan (2005) pointed out that people can be liked or disliked, depending on whether they are associated with positive or negative feelings. From the above views, it is possible to say that individuals connect to each other perhaps based on their common things they shared together. So, social identity is one of the common bonds that bind us and it is not difficult to imagine our social identity or being member of some groups can influence the situation of relationship we have with others.

This study focused on the roles of social identity on students' interpersonal interaction among Dire Dawa University students by measuring the contribution of different social categories such as ethnicity, religiosity and gender forms of social identities roles on their interpersonal interaction. Since university students are come from all corners of the country, there is no doubt that this university is a place where diversified cultures of Ethiopian societies were observed. Relaying on this fact, it is possible to say that university is a place where students' identities are established from different grounds as well as different forms of interpersonal relationship which could exist in diversified social, cultural, and historical norms and values. If we contempt even our smaller

similarity it is often the smaller differences among many similarities or shared ties that are more likely to be recognized as "making a difference" explicit contradict the principle of the present day Ethiopian government , there is emphasis on unity in diversity. Meanwhile, less attention is paid for conflicts that may emanate from the attributed differences and studies in the country did not focus on social identity as the country constitute diversified societies of multiethnic, language, religion, local, cultural, socio-economic status, and other values. Ethiopian Universities also constitute a miniature representation of these diversities, since their students came from all corners of the country having their own unique identities.

Furthermore, even in our context, Demewoze (1997) on his study pointed out that students revealed own ethnic favoritism bias and peer preferences of own ethnic member. As a result, the students seek to establish friendship, peer, and/or other relationships based on similarity of their social categories i.e. centering on ethnicity, religion, language, field of study, locality, socioeconomic status, educational background, and so on as the saying goes '*Birds of the same feather flock together'*. On the other hand, students portrayed negative feelings or hatred to out-groups as can be detected from graffiti sprayed on walls of class rooms, toilet, and public gathering places. This is true as we simply observe the daily activities of students. Overall, the above research findings and observations have clearly shown being part or not a member of some groups influences the relationship we develop and have by creating a tendency of favoritism of own group and discrimination of others. As a result of such interaction, conflicts will arise. It is also true that at present, a large number of students join universities with their diverse social identities. The occurrence of conflicts among students of such diversified social identities may disturb the academic atmosphere by damaging properties and affecting students' contacts and relationships in classroom, dormitories, group works, and other academic areas. If the situation has got worse, it could be transferred to the society unless different stakeholders like higher education policy makers, university administrators, academicians, Politicians, and others give emphasis to solve the problem. Therefore, the occurrences of frequent conflicts in different Universities of the country has clearly shown us the importance of creating and managing this issue through establishing healthy or smooth social environment.

Researches in our country were also focused on ethnicity and its effect on interpersonal relationships by neglecting other social identity categories, Even though it is observed that interpersonal relationship and conflicts have come about or attributed to other social identity elements. Therefore, based on the above facts studying the topic is timely and the researcher wants to see the influence of other social identity categories like gender and religion on interpersonal interaction besides ethnicity. Moreover, the research generates some findings to be utilized by different concerned stakeholders to alleviate the problem. Here, in line with the felt problem and purpose set above, the study answers the following research questions.
1. Is there any relationship between social identity and students' interpersonal interaction among Dire Dawa University Students?
2. How far we can predict the interpersonal interaction of students on the basis of their gender, ethnic, and religious identities?

1.1 Objective of the study
1.1.1 General Objective
 The main objective of this study is to investigate the roles of social identity on students' interpersonal interaction among Dire Dawa University Students.
1.1.2. Specific Objectives of the study are:
✓ To examine the relationship between social identity and interpersonal interaction among Dire Dawa University Students.
✓ To see whether religion, gender, and ethnic identities can predict and shape students' interpersonal interaction among Dire Dawa University Students.

2. Review of Related Literatures
2.1 Concepts and Definition of Social Identity
The notion of identity, one's idea as to who one is and how one defines oneself is the most important in guiding the individual through all of life's choices that have some bearing upon what one is like. In addition, once constructed identity has a meaning of its own because it establishes one's social role and personal nature, it guides future choices and makes possible future engagements with society and with other individuals. So an identity is more than just a static label, it is a dynamic force in one's life. Since any person in understanding his/her world is continually involved in the activity of interpretation. Tajfel (1981) defines social identity "as part of individuals self concept which derives from knowledge of their membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership." In the social identity theory, a person has not one, "personal self", but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group membership. Different social contexts may trigger an individual to think, feel and act on basis of his personal, family or national "level of self" (Tajfel, 1986). Apart from the "level of self", an individual has multiple "social identities". Social identity is the

individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups (Hogg and Vaughan, 2005). In other words, it is an individual-based perception of what defines the "us" associated with any internalized group membership. This can be distinguished from the notion of personal identity which refers to self-knowledge that derives from the individual's unique attributes. Social identity theory asserts that group membership creates in-group/ self-categorization and enhancement in ways that favor the in-group at the expense of the out-group. As such, this study tries to assess the roles of social identities particularly such as gender, ethnicity and religious identity can shape students' interpersonal interaction in their respective identity.

3. Research Methodology
3.1 Design of the Study
A descriptive research design was used for this study, since the study is intended to assess the roles of social identity on students' interpersonal interaction among Dire Dawa University Students. The dependent variable is interpersonal interaction and the independent variables are the components of social identity as gender, ethnicity, and religiosity.

3.2. Study Area
The area of this study is found in the Eastern part of Ethiopia which consists of the major local regional states namely, Dire Dawa City Administration. These regional states are purposely selected for this study because it is the region where the Eastern public higher education institution Dire Dawa University was found. This University was selected to get a deep and closer observation to investigate the issue critically and to get adequate information from diversified socio-cultural groups with heterogeneous characteristics, which enhance the findings to be generalized.

3.3 Study Population
The study was undertaken in Dire Dawa University on students from five different colleges and one institute (College of Health and Medical Sciences, College of Natural and Computational Sciences, College of Social Science and Humanities, College of Law, College of Business and Economics and Dire Dawa Institute of Technology).

3.4 Samples and Sampling Techniques
The study sample was taken from 6288 regular students of the university enrolled in undergraduate program in 2016/17 academic year. Specifically, under graduate students from college of health and medical sciences, college of natural and computational sciences and technology institute who were at academic level of 2nd year and above. Each department was treated as a stratum and therefore stratified random sampling was employed. The sample size formula is adopted from C.R.Cothari (2004)

$$n = \frac{z^2 . p . q . N}{e^2 (N-1) + z^2 . p . q}$$

Where:
n = sample size required
N = number of people in the population
P = estimated variance in population, as a decimal:
e = Precision desired, expressed as a decimal
Z = based on confidence level: 1.96 for 95% confidence,

$$n = \frac{(.95)^2 * 0.5 * 0.5 * 6288}{(.05)^2 (6288-1) + (.95)^2 * 0.5 * 0.5} = 337$$

The final samples of the students were selected proportionally from the five colleges and one institute found in the university as follow:

Institute/ College	Department	Year II	Year III	Year IV	Year V	Total
CBE	Management	7	5			12
	Economics	6	6			12
	Accounting	10	7			17
	Banking	3	3			6
	Marketing	2	2			4
	LSCM	3	2			5
	PADM	2	3			5
	LRPV	3				3
						64
CNCS	Statistics	4	3			7
	Physics	2	3			5
	Maths	2	3			5
	Chemistry	6	5			11
	Biology	6	5			11
	Sport	4	3			7
						46
CSSH	Amharic	1	1			2
	English	1	1			2
	PSIR	1	2			3
	History	1	3			4
	Psychology	1	2			3
	Geography	2	3			5
	Afan Oromo	3				3
	Aaf Somali	2				2
						24
CMHS	Medicine	2	2	2	3	9
	Anesteshia	1	1	2		4
	Midwifery	3	4	3		10
						23
CoL	Law	5	4	4	3	16
						16
DDIT	Architecture	3	3	3	3	12
	Chemical	5	8	5	3	21
	Civil	6	9	8	7	30
	Computer	3	3	3		9
	COTM	7	11	14	13	5
	Eletrical	6	9	7	8	30
	Industrial	4	3	4	3	14
	Mechanical	4	3	3	3	13
	Surveying	4	5	5	3	17
	Textile	3	4	3	3	13
						164

Total Sample=CBE+CNCS+CSSH+CMHS+CoL+DDIT=64+46+24+23+16+164=   *337*

3.4 Instruments

After the researcher decided to use questionnaires as a data collection tool, it was important to look upon about its reliability, validity, and other related issues. Keeping in mind these criteria, the researcher had developed and administered questionnaires having two parts for measuring social identity and interpersonal relationship of respondents using self-report scale.

3.4.1 Social Identity Measurement Scale

Social identity items are adapted from Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IV) which is designed to measure individual's social and personal identity (Cheek, 2002). It is a self report type which consists of 35 items. Then after a thorough study of the measures followed by modifications, reductions, and additions of items were made, the researcher had adapted 26 items measuring three areas of Social identity (gender, ethnic, and religion identities).

The response format for the questionnaire has a five –point Likert type scale with response ranging from 1[Never important to my sense of whom am I] to 5 [Extremely important for the sense of whom am I].

3.4.2 Interpersonal Interaction Measurement Scale

The same procedures as mentioned above have been applied here too. The researcher adapted from the intergroup interaction self report scale which was previously developed and used by (Plant, Butz and Taratakovsky, 2009). The adapted questionnaire consisted 26 items and tried to measure different dimensions of interactions which prevailed among students in their academic and social life in the university.

3.4.3 Reliability Test

A Pilot test was also conducted to measure the reliability of the items. Before the pilot study had been conducted to avoid difficulty in English language, translations of items were made by two post graduate students from the department of foreign languages. One of them translated the items from English to Amharic while the other translated the items from the Amharic back to English. The minor differences that appeared in the forward and backward translations were smoothened out by the researcher and translators jointly. Then the final Amharic versions of the items were prepared for Administration. Finally, the Amharic version of the instrument was pilot tested on 50 (17 females and 33 males) randomly selected students from Raft Valley University College. The researcher had selected the setting owing to the homogeneity of the population under study and to avoid forewarning effect due to communication. Accordingly, a scale analysis on SPSS 21.0 has revealed 26 items for social identity and 26 items for interpersonal interaction were reliable and the remaining was excluded (i.e. values less than 0.7). The reliability estimate for each variable scale i.e. gender, ethnicity, religiosity, and interpersonal interaction had a reliability estimate of r = (.821), (.831), (.873) and (.812) respectively using Chronbach Alpha method to see the internal consistence of the items to be measured. The results showed there is high internal consistence.

3.5 Data collection Procedure

The researcher together with his research assistants administered the questionnaire after getting the consent of the instructors and students. In all cases, the participants were provided with a brief explanation about the study and asked to fill out the questionnaire individually. They were also assured that their responses would be kept in strict confidentiality, and would never be revealed to any third party. Besides, respondents had been informed that participation is voluntary. Finally, the questionnaire was administered to 337 participants.

3.6 Methods of Data Analysis

The responses obtained from the respondents were analyzed using a Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 21.0. Pearson Correlation analysis was employed since the researcher is interested to examine the association between different dimension of social identity variables like gender, ethnicity, and religiosity students with their interpersonal interaction. In addition, Multiple Regression analysis using step-wise method was employed in order to explain the degree to which interpersonal interaction of students can be predicted by their social identity and to determine the proportion of variance on the dependent variable accounted for by each of the independent variables considered in the study. Test of significance for all cases were performed at the alpha level of .05.

4. Results and Discussion

After the data on the present research problem were collected, they were subjected to different statistical treatment as mentioned in the previous chapter. Then, the results have been summarized under the following sub headings: results obtained using simple descriptive statistical values (means, Standard Deviations, t-values of the scores), results of Correlation analysis, Results of multiple regression analysis, and Results of step-wise regression analysis.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table-1 Demographic characteristics of the Respondents

Variable		N	Percent
Age	15-20	46	13.6
	21-26	268	79.5
	>27	24	6.8
Total		337	100
Gender	Male	199	59.1
	Female	138	40.9
Total		337	100
Religion			
	Muslim	146	43.4
	Christian	191	56.6
Total		337	100
Ethnicity			
	Amhara	102	30.3
	Oromo	115	34.2
	Somali	26	7.7
	Tigre	38	11.2
	Others	56	16.6
Total		337	100

As depicted in table-1 above, the age category of the respondents mainly falls into the age range between 21-26 (79.5%) whereas, the rest found in the age range of 15-20 (13.6%) and above the 26 age range accounts only 6.8%. Regarding the gender difference, 199(59.1%) of them were male and 138(40.9%) of them were female. The respondents religious background indicate that 191(56.6%) of them were belong to Christian whereas, 146(43.4%) of them were belongs to Muslim religion. Regarding ethnic background of the students, the majority of them 115(34.2%) were belong to Oromo ethnic group, 102(`30.3%) were belong to Amhara ethnic group, 38(11.2%) were belong to Tigre ethnic group, 26(7.7%) were belong to Somali ethnic group and others account as 56(16.6%).

4.2 Results Obtained Using Descriptive Statistical Method

Table- 2 Descriptive Statistics of Variables in the study

Variables	Levels	Mean of Interpersonal interaction	Standard Deviation	N	T
Gender identity	High	26.3293	9.05366	246	50.600
	Low	18.4455	4.39881	101	
Ethnic identity	High	37.5561	10.82585	205	53.863
	Low	25.2985	7.02523	134	
Religious Identity	High	26.6071	9.14926	280	49.706
	Low	17.3000	4.99593	64	

The analysis included mean, standard deviation and the minimum and maximum observations for each independent variables and the dependent variable. The data presented in Table-2 above indicate the difference in interpersonal interaction between respondents with high and low level of gender identity is statistically significant. The mean interpersonal interaction of students with high level of gender identity (Mean = 26.32 & St.=9.05) is significantly higher than the mean interpersonal interaction (Mean = 18.44 & St.=4.39) of respondents possessing low level of gender identity. Similarly, respondents with high level of ethnic identity have mean interpersonal interaction of (Mean = 37.55& St.=10.82) which is significantly greater than the mean academic achievement of respondents with low level of ethnic identity (Mean = 25.29& St.=7.02). As can be seen in the table above, the mean interpersonal interaction difference between respondents of high and low religious identity was also found to be statistically significant. The respondents with high level of religious identity have mean interpersonal interaction of (Mean = 26.60 & St.= 9.14).

4.3 Results of Correlation Analysis

Cohen and Manion (1989) have suggested three approaches in interpreting the magnitude of relationship between dependent and independent variables. These are, examining the strength of the relationship, statistical significance of the relationship, and the square of correlation coefficient. Usually, when an attempt is made to explain the nature of the degree of relationship between independent and dependent variables, these techniques are employed. As far as this study is concerned, the data are interpreted using these techniques. Hence, the major objective of this research is also to assess the relationship between social identity i.e. gender, ethnicity, and religiosity as independent variables and interpersonal interaction as a dependent variable. Table-3 shows inter correlation matrix. This matrix is mainly used to evaluate the magnitude and the strength of relationship between independent

variables (Gender, Ethnic, and Religious identities) and Dependent variable Interpersonal interaction.

Table-3 Results of Inter Correlation Matrix

Variables	X_1	X_2	X_3	Y
Gender (X_1)	1.00			
Ethnicity (X_2)	.300**			
Religiosity(X_3)	.266**	.283**		
Interpersonal interaction (Y)	.473**	.599**	.440**	1.00

** Significant at 0.01 level

Table-3 indicated that positively significant correlation were obtained for all different sub-components of social identity and interpersonal interaction that is *(r= 0.473), p<.01)* between gender identity and gender based interpersonal interaction, *(r = .599), p<.01)* between ethnicity and ethnic based interpersonal interaction, and *(r = .440), p<.01)* between religious identity and religious based interpersonal interaction. In this study, the researcher found a positive and significant relationship between gender identity and interpersonal interaction. It implies that students' gender identity or the feeling he/she has for maleness or femaleness has a direct connection in determining the relationship they have with others. The result of this study is also consistent with the findings of Lockheed (2004). These researchers found out in their different studies that students' feel comfortable when they interact with similar sex groups than their opposite sex groups. And as a result most of the time they prefer to interact with same-sex classmates. Therefore, it can be learnt that the perception, feelings, and beliefs that the students have toward their maleness or femaleness have a direct relationship by predicting the types of their interaction with same-sex or opposite-sex.

The analysis in this study disclosed that statistically significant positive relationship exists between students' ethnicity and interpersonal relationship with own groups. This finding is also in line with numerous researches conducted on the area. For example, Taylor and Jaggi (1974)   in their study subjects found out that the majority of ethnic groups have   ethnocentric attitude which makes people to share positive attitudes and stereotypes about their own ethnic group members compared to members of other ethnics. Similarly, Hassan (1978); Crooker and Schwartz (1985) identified that there is strong positive correlation between attitudes toward own ethnic group members and negative correlations toward other ethnic groups. This finding is also consistent with the study made by Najeemah (1996) that the majority of students have strong positive relationship with their own ethnic groups. Additional findings from stepwise regression analysis indicated that ethnicity predicts students' interpersonal relationship independently and positively. It accounted for the largest proportion in explaining the variance in the interpersonal relationship i.e. 38.6%. According to Habtamu (1998) in Ethiopian context, ethnicity and identity are overlapping concepts. So, when we speak of ethnicity, we are also speaking of identity. Therefore, the largest proportion of variance accounted for by ethnicity, relative to other independent variables, in predicting interpersonal interaction in this study can be explained by the above mentioned facts. The result of this study seems compatible with Taylor and Jaggi, (1974) who demonstrated the effect of similarity in religion toward own group favoritism. Conversely speaking, the above mentioned findings and ethnocentrism theories had learnt us as the tendency to prefer interact with own identity groups increase the tendency to develop negative attitude toward others also increased. In relation to this, Daniel and his colleagues (1993) and Schwarzwald and his colleagues (1992) found out positive correlation between the amount of involvement in religious beliefs and prejudice.

4.4 Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

As mentioned earlier, this study deals not only with determining the relationship of each independent variable to the dependent variable but also discerns the combined effect of all independent variables on the dependent variable. Thus, multiple regression analysis technique is considered to be appropriate in the analysis of this study. In order to evaluate the combined effect of all predictor variables for the prediction of Criterion Variable, all predictor variables are employed simultaneously.

Table-4 Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

Criterion Variable	Predictor Variable	Regression Coefficient Bi	Standard Error	T	Standard Error of the estimate	F	R	R^2
Interpersonal Interaction (y^1)	Gender (x_1)	.769	.115	6.678	16.84506	113.239	.710	.504
	Ethnicity (x_2)	.931	.086	10.821				
	Religiosity (x_3)	.890	.152	5.864				

P< .05

Constant = 1.998

Regression equation

On the basis of the data in the above table the regression equation or the prediction equation is: $Y = 1.998 + .769x_1 + .931x_2 + .890x_3$

Where $X_1 =$ Gender identity

$X_2 =$ Ethnicity

$X_3 =$ Religiosity

$Y=$ Interpersonal Interaction

The results presented in the table-4 above show that the use of respondents' gender, ethnic, and religion identity to predict interpersonal interaction yielded a multiple correlation coefficient (R) of .710 and (R^2) of .504.That is, the percentage of variance on the interpersonal interaction of students accounted for the combination of all the three independent variables (F=337, 113.239, p<.05) was 50.4%. The t values in the table indicate the strength of the independent contribution of each predictor variable in the prediction equation. The analysis of this strength indicates that gender identity (with 6.6780) is positively a significant predictor of interpersonal interaction. The same is true also for ethnic and religious identity. The analysis of the multiple regression results also showed that gender identity is a significant predictor of interpersonal interaction and it accounted for 9.5% of the variance in the interpersonal interaction of students. Statistically significant and positive relationship between religiosity and interpersonal interaction of students was obtained. The results of multiple and stepwise regression analyses also indicated that the religiosity of students added to the prediction of interpersonal interaction accounting for 5.1% of the variance. As high score on religious identity scale indicate higher religious identity, this result implies that individuals who had higher religious identity had higher intimate relationship with their own similar religious groups of students.

4.5 Results of Stepwise Multiple Regression between Independent and Dependent Variables

The table below presents the results of step wise multiple regression analysis in which the independent variables were identified in terms of their importance in explaining for variance on interpersonal interaction.

Table-5 Results of Step-Wise Regression Analysis

Step	Variables entered	Reg Coef.(B)	Standard error of Reg.SEB	R	R^2	A R^2	Change in R^2	F-ratio
1	Ethnic Identity	.244		.599	.358	.356	-	187.681*
2	Gender Identity	.902		.673	.453	.450	.095	138.833*
3	Religious identity			.710	.504	.500	.051	113.239*

Constant = 1.998   *p<.05

To assess the independent contribution of predictor variables in the variation of students' interpersonal interaction, step wise multiple regression analysis was conducted. The above table shows when all independent variables were entered in to the regression equation, ethnic identity appeared to be the variable that relatively accounted for the highest variation in students' interpersonal interaction. It contributed 35.8% of the total variance in the interpersonal interaction .This is statistically significant (F=337, 187.681, p< .05). Gender identity of student was the next best variables that entered in to the regression equation. Its inclusion in to the equation raised the coefficient of determination by 9.5%, which is statistically significant (F= 337, 138.833, p < .05). Religious identity was also identified to be important variable in explaining the variance in the interpersonal interaction of students. As can be seen in table four above, its contribution in the increment of change on R^2 is 5.1%. Therefore, the independent contribution of the proportion of the variance on the interpersonal interaction of respondents by each predictor was statistically significant.

To sum up, the above mentioned results revealed that variation of students in their interpersonal interaction in part was explained by the three independent variables. In other words, the results indicate that gender, ethnic, and religious identities are relatively more important than other independent variables (those are not included in the study) in predicting students interpersonal relationship. The identified variables explained 50.4 % of the variance in this study and the highest predictive power was shown by ethnic identity. On the basis of the main research questions, the results of the study were discussed in the following sequence: the relationship between gender identity and interpersonal interaction, ethnic identity and interpersonal interaction, and religious identity and interpersonal interaction. The three independent variables i.e. Gender, ethnicity, and religiosity were combined in this study to investigate their predictive power on interpersonal interaction of students. To examine the combined effect of the variance accounted by these variables together, multiple regression analysis was employed. The results indicate that changes in interpersonal interaction were accounted for by all of the variables in the regression model. Then all variables combined together and accounted for 50.4% of the explained variance in the interpersonal interaction of students. Among the three variables ethnicity had the highest contribution to the prediction of interpersonal interaction (35.8% of the explained variance) followed by gender identity (9.5%) and then Religious identity (5.1%). These results suggested that among the variables in the study considered, ethnic identity was the most important variable in explaining the variation. Although the proportion of gender and religion identities should not be overlooked for they significantly explained variability on students' interaction.

5.   Conclusion and Recommendation

Though there may be variation in magnitude, in all cases the relationship between independent variables and

dependent variable (gender, ethnicity, and religiosity with interpersonal interaction) was positive and significant. These showed that most of the time students establish interpersonal interactions based on similarity of the three studied identities that implies students have limited interaction with out-group members. Ethnicity was found to predict prominently students' interpersonal interaction as compared to the three independent variables. Thus, it implies in the university interpersonal interaction is more likely to be similarity in ethnic background which resulted in favoritism of own ethnic group and unfairness on other ethnic members. The findings of the study had shown students' preference to establish relationship with their similar identity groups. In other words, students have limited interaction with out-group members. Therefore, this tendency is likely to create social distance among learners again which may limit their interactions in group works, class participation, peer relations, and the outcome of learning. The presence of positive interaction among learners in class is likely to create favorable class room conditions. Such result may in turn help to design intervention programs in order to improve group relations and integration and the learning process and output. Therefore, it has made a message to educators to create a favorable academic environment. From the above statements, it can be implied that such intervention programs would give an opportunity to improve both the academic performance and cross identity interaction.

The results of the study showed that the interaction of students among other identity groups is limited. Thus, this tendency has its own implication in limiting the students' interaction in the form of eating together, living with out- group members which hampers their social relationship. The finding has also an implication on Psychological effect especially those who came from minority groups will be affected in peer rejection. Therefore, sociologist and psychologist should be among the concerned bodies to design different remedial solutions. The study has also revealed that students' interaction is prominently based on ethnic background in our context. And as most research findings reported, most conflicts of the world are deeply rooted in ethnicity. Meanwhile, Ethiopia is an interesting country which contains this diversity. Therefore, the study has its own implications that lead politicians to design policies and strategies that promote tolerance and unity, and accommodate such diversities. This study enhances further research in the area as there are no local studies available on such sensitive areas. Moreover, such a research will also contribute in filling the mentioned limitations of this study.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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