

Ph.D. Thesis Evaluation Report

on the doctoral dissertation

“Exploring Language Policy and Practices in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions towards Multilingualism – A case study of Mattu University”

written and submitted by **Keresa Kumera Chali**

The thesis provides an in-depth look at the social context that justifies or refutes legal practices that target multilingualism. All the laws that have been made to promote multilingualism will only be useful if they are applied in practice. Such good practices are presented in the first chapter of the candidate's dissertation. Proving what he claims in the first parts of the chapter: multilingualism can only be an advantage for both the individual and society. Laws and practices that provide for multilingualism have a direct positive impact on an individual's career and, through it, on the labour market. It highlights the goals that UNICEF has set for this in particular, which are in line with globalisation processes - in a period of labour migration, a multilingual workforce is needed, not a monolingual one. Ethiopia has experienced many difficulties as a colonised territory, and the author illustrates this through an analysis of public education and its language use. The emergence of French, then Italian, and finally English, along these historical processes, does not in fact appear in the region as a world language, but as the language of the colonising countries. In parallel, English is valorised as a world language, but as we can see, the language is initially taught in the 5th and 7th grades.

The dissertation provides a thorough background of the sociolinguistic context in which the issue of multilingualism in Ethiopia is situated: more than eighty-five indigenous languages are spoken in households, and the country's historical development has been marked by changing language policy situations. The context of the acceptance of multilingualism is crucial and it is indeed difficult to single out any language in such a diverse environment. In his analysis, the author refers to the fact that in many African countries, people often speak three languages fluently.

The thesis analyses the chosen topic pragmatically and covers all important details. In the introductory chapters, the author mentions the most important contributions to the literature and then presents best practices from the global and African continents. It can be seen that the topic chosen by the candidate is a niche analysis because analyses have been carried out in other areas, but not in Ethiopia. He has done the same about the theoretical framework, presenting the main guidelines in the international literature, where the importance of adequate acquisition of the mother tongue before second language teaching is stressed. In particular, he highlights Ethiopia's position in this context, i.e. what are the insights in multilingual Ethiopia (Wolff 2011) that can be of real benefit to society and language users.

Another advantage of the paper is that the author recognises that limiting the study to a specific case is a deficit of work and analysis. But as he emphasises this and carries his analysis through with this in mind, we can see that interpreting a narrow context (the example of Mattu University) sometimes means much more than work done with greater immersion. In this case, the delimitation has benefited the dissertation by exploring a chosen research topic through a different academic research method. The chosen topic provides the research method and in this case it was indeed justified to combine both methods (quantitative and qualitative). Stratified random sampling was used to achieve randomness, which contributed to the generalizability of the data. Chapter 3.2 has been enriched with a lot of pieces of new information for the dissertation submitted for the mock exam, in which the author highlights the important role that Mattu University plays in Ethiopia: "the high education in the country represents the small Ethiopia". Typos and errors have been corrected by the author.

There were suggestions that were included in the revised dissertation and some that were not. But the quality of the thesis did not suffer from that. Keresá Kumera Chali has produced a well structured work. The dissertation is unique in its kind and fills an academic gap, many similar pieces of research would be needed to map such multilingual environments.

Based on the above considerations, I can conclude that this dissertation presents an original piece of research on an important topic, therefore, I think that it meets the requirements of a PhD degree and I support that the author be awarded the title.

Questions to the candidate:

Do you plan to continue your research? Because I hope that this rich and thorough theoretical background and research experience will continue to benefit from the organization of another research, and that new information based on scientific methods can come to light about the language use in Ethiopia today.

Beregszász, 25th June 2024

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