



An analysis of Ge'ez language heritage potential: traditional church schools and the practices of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Churches

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Abstract

Traditional church schools and churches hold an irreplaceable share in the development of Ge'ez language heritage. The objective of the research was to analyze the potential and challenges of Ge'ez language heritage for the development of tourism in the traditional church schools, and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Churches of South Gondar Administrative Zone. To achieve this objective, the mixed research design was chosen. The respondents of the Questionnaire were 292. These were traditional church school students, calligraphers, and church servants. For the qualitative part, twenty persons (traditional church school teachers, faithful, and church and government bodies) were interviewed. Furthermore, documents were analyzed. Based on the result of the research, 86.55% of the respondents have confirmed that traditional church schools have high quality in human and physical resources and thus good Ge'ez language heritage potential. Moreover, 89.6% of the respondents have ascertained that some practices (mahlet service, the mass ceremony, prayers, preaching services) have very important potential as well. The respondents also confirmed that traditional church schools (relying on number and ability of students, books and basic need problem, modern education and globalization etc...) face very high challenges. Respondents have also witnessed that aspects including the number of church servants, and books that are read in other languages rather than Ge'ez are a challenge.. Consequently, the study recommends that all the challenges should be met, and solutions promoted and managed with the cooperation of all the stakeholders for the development of Ge'ez language heritage.

Keywords: Ge'ez language heritage, traditional church schools, practices, tourism development

Introduction

Religion plays a crucial role in everyday life for most Ethiopians and the Christian Orthodox church is the largest religion in the country, with nearly half of Ethiopia's population practising the Orthodox faith. The Ge'ez language is one of the crucial languages in the promotion of the faith based on the fact that many texts are in this language. Language is the cornerstone of culture (Berwald & Fraser, 2005). Without it, people would not be able to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and knowledge (Iftiha et al., 2001). Relying on such a basic truth, the languages of Ethiopia have contributed abundantly in the community's day to day communication. Their core focus has been in studying, recording, keeping and announcing their history, culture, and heritage. Ethiopia has numerous language heritage resources including the Ge'ez language. Ge'ez, which is also known as Ethiopic, is one of the oldest Semitic languages (Bahru, 2002) and its alphabets is among the oldest alphabets still in use in the world of today (Mara, 1972). Furthermore, the Ge'ez language is among the four different languages (Sabaean, Greek, and Arabic) which have been and continue to be used for ancient inscriptional arts (Sergew, 1972).

A number of investigators have researched a range of issues related to the Ge'ez language. For instance, Aselefech (2014) and Desalegn (2012) conducted research on "The Role of the



Ethiopian Orthodox Church for the Development of Adult Education in a case study of *Ye'abinet Timhirt Bet* and the "Language and Religion: the case of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church" respectively. Aselefech addressed *Ye'abinet Timhirt* in relation to adult education. On the other hand, Desalegn focus predominantly on examining the language usage of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church and the attitudes of the faithful towards the current language of the church. These research works are considered to be inefficient in addressing the practices of traditional church schools and activities which are performed in the Ge'ez language inter-alia the *mahlet* services, preaching, praying and mass ceremony as possible tourism development drawcards.

Generally, while Ethiopia stands 'out in front' when it comes to such resources in the South Gondar Administrative Zone (SGAZ) which constitutes its main share, or is viewed as the chief feeder for the other parts of Ethiopia, the above-stated gaps in the research pose a number of wide-ranging problems when it comes to the potential usage of the language as a tourism attractor. Due to the fact that number of able traditional church students and teachers are deceased the Ge'ez language is not being properly used. On the other hand, the activities which are performed in the Ge'ez language (like preaching and praying) are now practiced in languages other than Ge'ez. Furthermore, the needed involvement of the stakeholders on the issue is very limited. Moreover, little is known about the traditional church schools, the churches and the monasteries regarding Ge'ez language usage and its heritage since the potential of its use and associated challenges have not yet been adequately assessed. Thus, it is hoped that by conducting some research on the potential and challenges of the Ge'ez language, considering some aspects relating to selected traditional church schools and the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahido* churches of SGAZ, the researcher may be able to pave an avenue for the development of tourism in SGAZ.

Review of Related Literature

Culture

Etymologically, the word culture is coined from Latin "cultura", which means cultivate. It represents the blueprints of human activity and the representational structures that give such activities significance and importance (Reisinger, 2009). Likewise, relying on UNESCO (2002), culture is operationally viewed as "the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group". It explicitly comprises of the "lifestyles formed by beliefs, languages, nutrition, habits, dressing of people, architectural buildings, handworks and relaxed atmosphere" (WTO, 2005). Moreover, a country's culture takes on a distinctive stamp such as its way of life, the way people dress and look, all of its institutions, its street scenes, its markets and businesses, and its rhythms and patterns, the whole character and appearance of its cities and its countryside, and everything about it (its fundamental character and ethos) (Doswell, 1997).

Ge'ez is the foremost language used in the liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church, the Ethiopian Catholic Church, the Eritrean Catholic Church, and the Beta Israel Jewish community. Nonetheless, in Ethiopia, Amharic is the main language (Bulakh & Kogan, 2010).

Language in theological education augments socio-cultural interactions. It is unifying aspect that serves to facilitate understanding and provides a sense of harmony. The study of languages like Ge'ez for the Bible underpins the understanding of the textual studies and helps exegesis. Opportunities must be available for the space of the acquisition of the Ge'ez language as a way of delving deeply into biblical texts.



On the basis of some work by other researchers, culture is also reflected in both objects and ideas that are both material and nonmaterial. The Material culture includes “the things that people make such as food, clothing, architecture, arts, crafts, and technology”. Likewise, the non-material culture embraces religion, language, spiritual belief, patterns of behavior, and the education system (Berwald & Fraser, 2005). Moreover, culture represents a system of tangible and intangible components. A tangible constituent of culture represents a material culture. It comprises of productive forces and physical elements necessary to support human life, such as clothing, tools, food, buildings, paintings, and many other cultural objects and artifacts. Likewise, intangible elements of culture represent a non-material culture. It refers to values, beliefs, attitudes, morality, ethics, spirituality, traditions, and customs (Reisinger, 2009).

Cultural Heritage

UNESCO (1972), with its convention concerning the protection of world cultural and natural heritage, has started to define cultural and natural heritage. On the basis of this convention, various countries have stated their own proclamations regarding their heritage. For instance, Ethiopia has provided explanations in its proclamation (No. 209/ 2000), which is named as a “proclamation to provide for research and conservation of cultural heritage”. Based on this proclamation, cultural heritage is “anything tangible and intangible which is the product of creativity and labor of man in the prehistoric and historic times”. Relying on this proclamation, cultural aspects should describe and witness the evolution of nature. Moreover, it possesses a major value in its scientific, historical, cultural, artistic, and handicrafts content”. Thus cultural heritage is either tangible or intangible. In line with the above proclamation, tangible cultural heritage is a cultural heritage that can be seen and felt. It includes immovable and movable historical, man-made cultural heritage. On the other hand, intangible cultural heritage is any cultural heritage that cannot be felt by hands even if it can be seen or heard. Typically, intangible cultural heritages are the summation of various elements: “different kinds of performances and show, folklore, religion, belief, wedding and mourning ceremonies, music, drama, literature and other similar cultural values, traditions, and customs of a nation, nationalities, and peoples” (No. 209/2000).

Additionally, in accordance with UNESCO (2003), which is confirmed by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation No. 484/ 2006, in the name of “convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage ratification proclamation”, intangible cultural heritage has its own elements. These are oral traditions and expressions, language as a means of expressing intangible cultural heritage, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events. It also comprises of “the knowledge and the practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship”.

Culture and Tourism

Culture and tourism have a jointly favorable affiliation. This relationship can assure the attractiveness and competitiveness of countries in the case of the tourism industry. Culture is ever more an important element of the tourism product. It also creates distinctiveness in a crowded global market place. Simultaneously, tourism offers an important means of enhancing culture including language (OECD, 2009). Likewise, tourism has a very important role in the development of destinations in the world. In most conditions, culture is a most important asset for tourism development and one of the major beneficiaries of this development. Correspondingly, culture is a chief aspect to the attractiveness of most destinations, not only in terms of tourism but also in attracting residents and inward investment (OECD, 2009).



The EOTC Traditional Church Schools and Ge'ez Language Development

Ge'ez literature is dominated by the Bible and it comprises the Deutero-canonical books. There are also many medieval and early modern original texts in this language. The majority of the important works are correspondingly the literature of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church. These works include Christian Orthodox liturgy (service books, prayers, hymns), hagiographies, and a range of Patristic literature. About 200 texts were written about home-grown Ethiopian saints from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century.

The religious alignment of Ge'ez literature was due to traditional education being the obligation of priests and monks. Thus the Tewahido Orthodox Church is the custodian of the nation's culture to a very large extent. Pankhurst asserts that

Traditional education was largely biblical. It began with the learning of the alphabet, or more properly, syllabary... The student's second grade comprised the memorization of the first chapter of the first Epistle General of St. John in Geez. The study of writing would probably also begin at this time, and particularly in more modern times some arithmetic might be added. In the third stage the Acts of the Apostles were studied, while certain prayers were also learnt, and writing and arithmetic continued. ... The fourth stage began with the study of the Psalms of David and was considered an important landmark in a child's education, being celebrated by the parents with a feast to which the teacher, father confessor, relatives and neighbours were invited. A boy who had reached this stage would moreover usually be able to write, and might act as a letter writer.

The fact is clear that language is an important conveyor of cultural symbols and meanings of groups and so plays a decisive role in constructing the social identities of Ethiopian Orthodox youth. There must be greater collaboration by the Church with the schools and the community. For example, some churches (e.g., the Ethiopian Orthodox Church) can rent or provide space and teachers to offer Ge'ez heritage language classes for their parishioners and students

Since the advent of modern education in the recent times, the EOTC traditional schools have spent much time in teaching about the three thousand years of the history of Ethiopia. The schools have three major classifications. These are the elementary school, the medium school, and the high school. The elementary school (beginners' stage or first stage) consists of reading and writing as well as oral lesson curricula. Likewise, the medium school (second stage) possesses Zema bet, Keddassie bet, Aquaquam bet, and Qine Bet. In addition, the higher school also use exegetical works for the study of the Old and New Testament Books, the Books of Menekosat and Likaunt (Mezmur, 2011; Ertiban, 2012; Aselefech, 2014; Ertiban, 2018). The schools are bases for the promotion of literature, architecture, governance, medicine and other knowledge and diverse 'pearls of wisdom' (Mezmur, 2011).

There are very many Africa languages and dialects and most of them relate to ancient text languages to some point (Bonk, 1984). Some of them like Ge'ez transmit grammar and vocabulary that expresses the biblical concepts better than other languages. Thus, a language and dialects like Ge'ez can assist in enunciating beliefs and devotion. The hidden meanings fixed in the ancient languages helps to illustrate religious mysteries. Crisp & Sanders (2014:100) state that:

Doctrinal formulae enable articulation of what is revealed in rational terms, and they enable a certain clarity about and defence of what is revealed; but this does not mean that the divine mystery is a fog to be cleared, and the



same formulae may also shape our ever deeper entry into that as it is revealed through the text of Scripture.

Challenges of Ge'ez Language Development

The Ge'ez language used in Ethiopia is classified as a South Semitic language. It progressed from a previous proto-Ethio-Semitic ancestor that was utilized to compose royal inscriptions of the kingdom of D'mt in the Epigraphic South Arabian script. The Ge'ez language is not generally thought of, as formerly supposed, to be an outgrowth of Sabaeen or the language termed as Old South Arabian (Weninger, S. n.d.). Ge'ez is the liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo, Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo, Ethiopian Catholic, and Eritrean Catholic Christians, and is also used in prayer and in scheduled public religious feast celebrations. It is also used liturgically by the Beta Israel (Falasha Jews) of Ethiopia and it's part of the liturgical rite used by the Christian churches and is called the Ethiopic Rite (Bonk, 1984). The language heritage of Ethiopia has faced a number of challenges which are witnessed by various pieces of evidence. According to Sergew (1972), the history of Ethiopia in the Middle Ages was more or less a history of war. During this period, the cultural heritage of the past suffered abundantly, and many manuscripts vanished. Ethiopian history has recorded two distinctive periods. These were the persecution of Christians and destruction of monuments of the north by Gudit (an Amazonian group of Ethiopia) in the 10th century, and the invasion of Ahmed Grag, in the 16th century, who has been characterized by European writers as 'Attila of Ethiopia'. This invasion dealt a severe blow to Ethiopian culture in general (Sergew, 1972).

Moreover, in the 16th Century, the Muslim occupation of the Christian highlands under Ahmed Grag lasted for a little more than ten years, between 1531 and 1543 CE. However, the amount of destruction brought about in these years can be estimated in terms of centuries. Ahmed Grag and his followers were dazzled at the extent of the treasures of the church, and the splendor of Ethiopian Christian culture at the time. The church as the most important storehouse of the cultural heritage of Christian Ethiopia, was a special target for the destructive furies of the Imam (Tadesse, 1972). Recruiting students to attend heritage language schools and then also retaining them as active participants in the church is a challenge that most heritage languages face. Low and decreased student enrollments is a major challenge. Students are sometimes not motivated to attend heritage language courses as they are attracted to the more modern aspects of town and city life. Recruitment and training of teachers is a major challenge that most heritage language schools face. There is very limited funding and many of the teachers do not have formal training in education. Thus, the funding for heritage language programs comes primarily from tuition and donations, it is difficult to pay the needed limited amount of teachers tolerable salaries.

It is critical to advance public awareness and backing is needed. The church and the public must understand that via community-based heritage languages such as Ge'ez, students "can maintain and develop their proficiency in the language, and, as a result, serve as local, national, and international linguistic resources" (Compton, 2001: 149).

Methodology

The study area

The study was carried out in South Gondar Administrative Zone (SGAZ), one of the eleven zones of Amhara National Regional State of Ethiopia, which is bordered by East Gojjam in the south,



North Gondar in the north, Waghimra in the northeast, North Wollo in the east and west Gojjam in the west. The zone has eleven districts. These are Debre Tabor Town, Andabet, Esate, Lay Gaynt, Tach Gaynt, Simada, Ebinat, Libo Kemkem, Fogera, Dera, and Farta. Of these, The research has addressed eight namely, i.e. Debre Tabor Town district, Farta district (located around Debre Tabor town), Lay Gaynt district (75 kms), Fogera district (42 kms), Este district (54 kms), Andabet district (90 kms), Dera district (73 kms), and Simada district (105 kms) away from Debre Tabor Town (Meron, 2007) (see the schools, monasteries and churches in table 1.1). Debre Tabor, the capital city of SGAZ, was founded in 1365CE, during the reign of Seyfe Arid, in the name of Jura (Solomon, 2011). This was before the foundation of many cities of Ethiopia including Gondar.

The study design

This research used a cross-sectional mixed methods approach. Cross-sectional, also known as 'one-shot' or 'status' studies, research perspective is unsurpassed in finding the prevalence of a phenomenon, situation, problem, attitude or issue of the selected sites, heads of areas and experts (Kumar, 2011). Since the research was focused on the discovery of the potential and the identification of challenges of Ge'ez language for tourism development in selected sites of SGAZ (seven districts), the issue was treated using a qualitative research method. This was to discover what can be learned about a phenomenon of interest, particularly social phenomena where people are the participants (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). It also gave the researcher the chance of understanding people's experiences in context.

A quantitative research method was applied to measure the level of the potential and the challenges faced. Thus, the researcher used a quantitative research approach in preparing a questionnaire and also followed a qualitative research approach (observation, photographic data, documents, texts and in-depth interviews) to conduct the research in defining, characterizing, and describing the potential and challenges of language heritage in the case of selected sites (Berg, 2001).

Data Gathering Tools

In keeping with Maykut and Morehouse (1994), and concurring with Erickson and Wilson(1982) and Wagner, (1979), the data of qualitative inquiry is most often people's words and actions. It allows the researcher to capture language and behavior. The most useful ways of gathering these forms of data are participant observation, in-depth interviews, the collection of relevant documents, and the collection of narratives (Berg, 2001; Beverley et al., 2009). Thus, the researcher used both qualitative and quantitative tools.

The researcher observed the language potential of the schools, their practices and the associated challenges they faced relating to Ge'ez. Likewise, in-depth interviews were conducted with stewards of the churches, head teachers and pupils of the traditional church schools. This was done before meetings with an expert of the Culture and Tourism Department, heads and experts of the Culture and Tourism offices, managers and expert from the diocese, heads and subject experts of district *bête kihinet*, servants of the church, and kebele administrators. This was done by preparing open-ended questions to gather information on the Ge'ez language potential and the challenges faced. Moreover, the researcher used a questionnaire containing close-ended questions, and he assessed Ge'ez language heritage potential and challenges of tourism development in SGAZ. A Likert scale was used which consisted of the elements strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree.



Sampling

The researcher used purposive and snowball sampling because, these sampling approaches gave the chance for working with participants or informants with whom contact has already been made and using their social networks. Moreover, snowball sampling furnished an opportunity to exploit hidden issues (FHI, 2005).

The Selected Traditional Church Schools, Monastery and Churches, Kebeles, and Heads and Subject Experts

The study was conducted in selected traditional church schools, the monastery and churches, kebeles, using heads and experts of the Culture and Tourism department and offices, heads and experts of the diocese and Wereda bête kihnet, scholars, and the local community. These groups were selected based on their proximity with the area in question (see the table 1. 1 below).

Additionally, the south Gondar Diocese (SGD), wereda bête kihinets (Debre Tabor Town district, Farta district, Lay Gaynt district, Este district, Andabet district, Simada district and Dera district), south Gondar Administrative zone culture and tourism department (SGAZCTD) heads and experts, and culture and tourism heads and experts of the seven districts were also selected for the study. In general, fourteen traditional church schools, one monastery, eight churches, and six kebeles were selected for the study. The traditional church schools were five Qine schools, four Digwa schools, two Aquaquam schools, one Kiddasie School and one Exegesis school. Then again, Mahdere Maryam, Debre Tabor Eyesus, Mekane Eyesus, Debre Leulan Medhane'alem, Debre Tabor Eyesus, Bekilo Filega Kidane Mihret and Mahder Maryam churches were used. Gono Gebr'al, Zebboye Micha'el, Ginib Giyorgis, Bikilo Filega Kidane Mihret, and Qiera Maryam kebeles were the main areas of the study.

The sample size was determined by using the sample size determination formula, according to Yamane (1967). This formula is expressed as follows:

$n = N / 1 + N (e^2)$, where n is sample size, N is total target population, e is level of precision. Therefore, according to the formula, the sample size determined at 5% precision and a 95% confidence level. The total target population is 1084, as shown in the table 1.1, $(575+185+35+15+113+28+133= 1084)$. Hence, $n = 1084 / 1 + 1084(0.05)^2 = 292$

Table 1.1 Summary of the selected sites

1. Qine Schools

		No. Pupils	Percent of total	Selected
1	Ascha Micka'el	75	6.91%	$20.20 = 20$
2	Sene Giba Giyorgis	40	3.69%	$10.77 = 11$
3	Tsegur Micha'el	150	13.83%	$40.40 = 40$
4	Zara Micha'el	250	23.06%	$67.34 = 67$
5	Debre Leulan Medhane'alem	60	5.53%	$16.16 = 16$
	Total	575	53.04%	<u>154</u>

2. Degwa schools

		No. Pupils	Percent of total	Selected
1	Amba Maryam	25	2.30%	$6.73 = 7$
2	Mokish Kidanemihret	35	3.22%	$9.42 = 9$



3	Debre Leulan Medihane'alem	100	9.22%	26.93 = 27
4	Wereta Giyorgis	25	2.30%	6.73 = 7
	Total	185	17.06%	49.83 = 50

3. Aquaquam Schools

		No. of pupils	Percent of total	Selected
1	Hamusit Gebr'al	10	0.92%	2.69 = 3
2	Gafat T/haymanot	25	2.30%	6.73 = 7
	Total	35	3.22%	9.42 = 10

4. Kiddasie School

		No. pupils	Percent of total	Selected
1	Amba Maryam	15	1.38%	4.04 = 4
	Total	15	1.38%	4.04 = 4

5. Churches selected for manuscript areas

S.N	Sites selected	No. of servants	Percent of total	Selected
1	Bikilo Filega Kidane Mihret	50	4.61%	13.46 = 13
2	Debre Tabor Eyesus	36	3.32%	9.69 = 10
3	Mahdere Maryam	27	2.49%	7.27 = 7
	Total	113	10.42%	30.43 = 30

6. Kebeles selected from calligraphic areas

		No. of Calligraphers	Percent of total	Selected
1	Bikilo Filega Kidane Mihret	1	Below ½ %	1
2	Ginib Giyorgis	5	Below ½ %	2
3	Gono Gebr'al	5	Below ½ %	2
4	Qiera Maryam	10	Below ½ %	2
5	Zebboye Micha'el	7	Below ½ %	2
	Total	28	Below ½ %	9 = (to get more reliable data)

7. Churches selected from Practice areas

S.N	Sites selected	No. Servants	Percent of total	Selected
1	Debre Tabor Eyesus	36	3.32%	9.69 = 10
2	Mahdere Maryam	27	2.49%	7.27 = 7
3	Bekilo Filega Kidane Mihret	20	1.84%	5.38 = 5
4	Debre Leulan Medhane'alem	50	4.61%	13.46 = 13
	Total	133	12.26%	35.82% = 35



Sample's Targets

Since this research was served by both qualitative and quantitative approaches some 20 people were interviewed qualitatively, while there were 292 respondents for the quantitative aspect. The interviewees comprised fourteen stewards of the churches, head teachers of the traditional church schools, pupils of the traditional church schools, heads and expert of the Culture and Tourism department, heads and an experts of the culture and tourism offices, expert from the diocese, servants, kebele administrators, and calligraphers, a total of 20 persons. On the other hand, the respondents for the questionnaire numbered 292 church servants (churches' teachers), priests, deacons and the faithful.

Sources of Data

The researcher used primary data from participant observation, photographic data and in-depth interviews, collected narrations, and questionnaire and also used secondary sources including documents and texts.

Analysis of Data

The qualitative data was analyzed by describing and interpreting the data collected from participant observation, in-depth interviews, document and textual analysis, and photographic data. Likewise, the quantitative part of the data was analyzed by descriptive statistics: frequency, percentage, and mean for their relationships according to the study objectives, using SPSS version 20. The rating scales in the questionnaires to respondents were analyzed by valuing (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5). Interval = range/number of scales, where range = maximum - minimum. Interval = $5 - 1 / 4 = 0.8$. Thus, the potentials and the challenges of Ge'ez language heritage for tourism development, is varied by 0.8 points each, which could be clarified for all sections: 1-1.8 = very low, strongly disagree and not at all important; 1.81-2.6 = low, disagree and not so important; 2.61-3.4 = medium, neutral; 3.41-4.2 = high, agree and important; and 4.21-5 = very high, strongly agree and very important. Moreover, the quantitative data was also triangulated by the qualitative data.

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretations

The research had two sections. These are the demographic data and the data analysis and interpretation of Ge'ez language heritage potential and challenges.

Demographic Data

The demographic data of the research deals with aspects including gender, religion, age, marital status, educational status, and occupation of respondents. These data are presented below.

Gender and Religion of the Respondents

Rooted in the data acquired from the questionnaire, the gender and the religion of the respondents was only male (100%) and only Orthodox in faith (100%) respectively. This shows that currently the only participants in Ge'ez language heritage development (traditional church schools, *mahlet*, *Kiddasie*, preaching and books reading in the church) are males and all of these are Orthodox Christians. In the study area, the females and the persons who are not followers of the Orthodox religion do not form part of Ge'ez language heritage development.



Issue	Data (n= 292)	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	292	100.0
Religion	Orthodox	292	100.0

Table 1.2 Gender and Religion of the respondents

Age of the respondents

The age of respondents in the research questionnaire had five categories in various ranges of years. The respondents in the ages of 19 – 30 took the greatest share (54.5%). Moreover, the rest of the ages are described as 12 – 18 (28.4%), 31 – 50 (14.7%), 51 – 60 (2. 1%), and more than 60 years (0.3%). The data provides substantiation that almost of the participants in Ge’ez language heritage development are in the age group of 19 -30. The younger generation, within the age group of 12 -18 (28.4%), is half in number when it is compared with the participants within the age group of 19 -30 (54.5%). This shows that Ge’ez language heritage is becoming scarce for participants because the number of participants (new generation) is decreasing from 54.5% to 28.4%.

Issue	Data (n= 292)	Frequency	Percent
Age of respondent	12 -18	83	28.4
	19 -30	159	54.5
	31 -50	43	14.7
	51 -60	6	2.1
	above 60	1	.3

Table 1.3 Age of the respondents

Marital and Educational Status of the respondents

Most of the respondents (81.5%) are single. This proves that single students are more participative in orientation than the rest of the males. The others 16.10%, 1.0%, and 1.4% are either married, divorced and/or widowed. On the other side, pertinent to their educational status, most of the respondents were uneducated (63.4%). The rest of respondents that belonged to the groups at 18.5%, 8.6 %, 1.4%, 4.8%, and 3.4% had a primary education, secondary education, diploma, bachelor degree, and master degree respectively.

The data show that the respondents who have 90.5% (63.4% + 18.5% + 8.6 %) of the respondents are directly participating in Ge’ez language development. From these respondents, 63.4% have only traditional church school education. The others 27.1% (18.5%+ 8.6 %) are now participating in Ge’ez language heritage development. However, they were (are) students of primary education and secondary education. Those who have diplomas (1.4%) are the former students of traditional church schools. The research also took information from 10 persons (3.4%) who have closer connection in Ge’ez language heritage development.



Issue	Data (n= 292)	Frequency	Percent
Marital status	Single	238	81.5
	Married	47	16.1
	Divorced	3	1.0
	Widowed	4	1.4
Educational status	Uneducated	185	63.4
	primary education	54	18.5
	secondary education	25	8.6
	Diploma	4	1.4
	Bachelor	14	4.8
	Master	10	3.4

Table 1.4. Marital and educational status of the respondents

Current Occupation of the Respondents

Most of the respondents (68.8%) have no work and are the students of traditional church schools. Their life relies on the scholarships offered by the local community. The rest of the respondents are engaged in agriculture (12.3%), public service (6.5%), private business (6.2%), and some are NGO employees (6.2%).

Issue	Data	Frequency	Percent
Current occupation	private business	18	6.2
	Agriculture	36	12.3
	government employee	19	6.5
	NGO employee	18	6.2
	no business	201	68.8
	Total	292	100.0

Table 1.5 marital and educational statuses of the respondents

Ge'ez Language Heritage Potentials

This subunit affirms the Ge'ez language heritage potential of traditional church schools, and practices (*mahlet* service, mass ceremony, prayers and preaching service). These are presented as follows:

Ge'ez Language Heritage Potentials of Traditional Church Schools

This section addresses the issues relating to the subject of the quality of teachers and students, and the books used by them, the content of textbooks books, and other contributions of the schools in heritage tourism development.

On the bases of the answers of the respondents, most of them (68.5%) strongly agreed that the current teachers of traditional church schools have high Ge'ez language potential. The others fell in with the idea of agree (30.1%), undecided (1%) and disagree (0.3%). Only 1% of the respondents were not in a position to decide if teachers of traditional church schools have high Ge'ez language potential or not. However, 0.3% of the respondents disagreed. Generally, this shows that the current teachers of traditional church schools have very high worth when it comes



to Ge'ez language heritage potentials (mean 4.67) when they are compared with the former teachers of the traditional church schools.

More than one-third (37.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the students of traditional church schools have high Ge'ez language potential if opportunities are provided for them. The rest of the respondents either agree (49.3%), are undecided (7.2%) or disagree (6.2%). On the bases of this data, the highest level of agreement of the respondents went to agree (49.3%). The respondents confirmed that traditional church school students have high (mean of 4.19) Ge'ez language heritage potential that is associated with their level of educational exposure or social status.

On the other hand, the level of Ge'ez language heritage possession of books used in traditional church schools is expressed as strongly agree (72.9%), agree (18.2%), undecided (6.8%), and disagree (2.1%). These books have a very high (mean 4.61) Ge'ez language potential. Most of the books used in the traditional church schools are monolingual, and only in the Ge'ez language. These are books used for oral learning such as *Praise of Mary* and *Malkāmalk* (A poem about Mary and a poem about Jesus).

Secondly, there are books used for developing reading skills such as the Epistle of John, the Gospel of John, the Acts of the Apostles, the Homily of St. Michael, and David's psalms. Likewise, in the schools, there are books for conducting hymnary education. These are *Mə'rāf*, *šoma dəgwa*, *ziq*, *Zəmmāre* and *Mawāsit*, and *dəgwa*. Finally, there are books for exegesis, for instance, the books of old and new testaments, and a range of writings of various scholars, and monks. However, some of the books (dictionaries used in Qəne schools, and homilies (and even synaxarium of the Saints) are bilingual and written in both Ge'ez and Amharic. These are the books of grammar and dictionary, written by scholars (Yared Shiferaw, Mezgebu Sibhat, and Burukie). This provides a huge opportunity for the students and the teachers of traditional schools, to develop their language heritage skills if they are inclined to do so.

The wide areas covered by the content of the books in terms of Ge'ez language potential is considered to be good since, under the category of strongly agree there were (49.3%), agree (27.4%), undecided (13.4%), disagree (7.2%), and strongly disagree (2.7%). These books have high (mean 4.13) nature of language aspects, computational skills, philosophical parts, law, ethics, history, astronomy, theology, liturgy, and even an hymnary (Hayle Eyesus and kifle Maryam interviewed on 15/09/2017; Biruh and Haregewein interviewed on 26/03/2017 and 10/12/2016 respectively). For instance, the books used in the common schools, cover the issue of law. These are the Ten Commandments and the six rules of the gospel, which are recorded in the books of Exodus and the Gospel of Matthew respectively. Additionally, the book of the law of the kings states many issues regarding spiritual and secular laws that need to be adhered to by believers.

Respondents have expressed their level of agreement on the teachers' issue of being a graduate of at least two schools and they strongly agree (50.0%), agree (29.1%), undecided (12.3%), disagree (7.5%), and strongly disagree (1.0%). Half of the teachers of the traditional church schools are graduates (mean of 4.19). This implies that, to be confident in their profession, teachers require a range of experiences from various schools. Finally, the respondents have expressed as strongly agree (42.5%), agree (41.1%), undecided (8.6%), disagree (6.8%), and strongly disagree (1.0%), that the schools make a meaningful contribution to tourism development. Since they have a unique culture (food and clothing habits, educational delivery system, prayers, hosting guests and other aspects), traditional church schools possess a great deal of (mean 4.17) Ge'ez language potential which favours elements of tourism development,

including the buildings of the schools (fig 1. 1) which could become touristic offerings for those from other continents desiring unique cultural experiences.

Figure1.1 buildings of traditional church schools



S.N	Item	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		strongly agree		Mean	Scale
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	Teachers have high ge'ez language potential.			1	.3	3	1.0	88	30.1	200	68.5	4.6678	strongly agree
2	Students have high Ge'ez language potential.			18	6.2	21	7.2	144	49.3	109	37.3	4.1781	Agree
3	Books have high Ge'ez language potential.			6	2.1	20	6.8	53	18.2	213	72.9	4.6199	strongly agree
4	Books possess wider contents of issues.	8	2.7	21	7.2	39	13.4	80	27.4	144	49.3	4.1336	Agree
5	Teachers are graduates of at least two schools.	3	1.0	22	7.5	36	12.3	85	29.1	146	50.0	4.1952	Agree
6	Schools possess great contributions for tourism development.	3	1.0	20	6.8	25	8.6	120	41.1	124	42.5	4.1712	Agree

Table 1.6. Ge'ez language heritage potentials of traditional church schools

Ge'ez Language Heritage Potentials of Practices (Mahlet Service, Mass Ceremony, Prayers and Preaching Service)

As in the above cases, the level of agreement on Ge'ez language heritage practices is expressed in the following manner. The *Mahlet* service has great potential for Ge'ez language development and respondents strongly agree (82.9%), agree (15.4%), are undecided (0.7%), or disagree (1.0%). The Mass (Liturgy) ceremony also holds great potential for Ge'ez language development and in this case the respondents strongly agree (65.4%), agree (25.4%), are undecided (2.4%), or disagree (6.8%). Likewise, the books read in churches have great potential for Ge'ez language development and respondents strongly agree (59.6%), agree (34.2%), are undecided (0.7%), or disagree (5.5%); and the Preaching service encompasses the great potentials for Ge'ez language



development and in this aspect respondents strongly agree (46.6%), agree (34.9%), are undecided (5.5%), disagree (12.0%) or strongly disagree (1.0%). Bearing in mind these facts, except for the preaching service being considered as important (mean 4.14), each of the three practices (*mahlet* service, mass ceremony, and books reading in the church) are all very important (mean of 4.8, 4.49, and 4.48 respectively) as Ge'ez language development potential.

S. N	Item	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		strongly agree		Mean	Scale
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	Mahlet service has great potentials for geez language development.			3	1.0	2	.7	45	15.4	242	82.9	4.8014	strongly agree
2	Mass ceremony has great potentials for geez language development.			20	6.8	7	2.4	74	25.3	191	65.4	4.4932	strongly agree
3	Books reading in the church have great potentials for Ge'ez language development.			16	5.5	2	.7	100	34.2	174	59.6	4.4795	strongly agree
4	Preaching service has great potentials for Ge'ez language development.	3	1.0	35	12.0	16	5.5	102	34.9	136	46.6	4.1404	Agree

Table 1.7. Ge'ez language heritage potential of practices (mahlet service etc.)

Ge'ez Language Heritage Challenges

This associated issue deals with the challenges of language heritage. It encompasses both the ongoing of traditional church schools and the practices of the churches.

Ge'ez Language Heritage Challenges of Traditional Church Schools

On the bases of the respondents, most of them (71.6%) are strongly agreed as to the number of students joining the schools which shows a decrease from time to time. The others are expressed as agree (24.3%), undecided (0.3%), disagree (2.1%), and strongly disagree (1.7%). Less than 4% of the respondents agreed that the number of students joining the traditional church schools is not decreasing from time to time. This shows that the number of students joining the traditional church schools decreases from time to time and at a high rate very (mean 4.62). Similarly, more than one third (43.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the current students' abilities are far less than the former students' when it comes to Ge'ez usage. The rest of the respondents have given their responses as either agreed (22.9%), undecided (9.9%), disagree (14.0%), and strongly disagree (9.9%). On the basis of this data, the ability of current students is considered to be higher than (mean 3.75) the that of former students.

On the bases of informants, the current students are able to learn and study rapidly since they use published materials. Likewise, they are equally quick to forget. However, the reverse is true for the former students. They learn and study slowly, and most have learned and studied without the help of books. In earlier times there was an absence of printing machines. Students had a responsibility to study from oral transmission techniques which took a long time. This also made the former students have an enhanced memory (Betsiha, Solomon, and Negatibeb interviewed on 20/05/2017; Haregewein interviewed on 10/12/2016; Walle interviewed on 22/02/2017; Meseret interviewed on 11/11/2017).



On the other hand, the level of agreement on students facing reference book problems was expressed as strongly agree (68.5%), agree (24.3%), undecided (2.1%), disagree (2.7%), and strongly disagree (2.4%). Respondents assured the researcher that most of the traditional church school students are suffering from the problem of a lack of reference books (mean 4.54). Students of Qene lacked even the most basic books, for instance, the books on grammar and dictionaries of Kidane weld kifle, metsihet, and other books written by foreign authors. These books are nonetheless accessible in bookstores but they are very expensive and often cannot be purchased at all. Books such as a book of Degwa, cost more than 800 birr which is very expensive for poor students (Betsiha, Solomon, and Negatibe interviewed on 20/05/2017; Haregewein interviewed on 10/12/2016; Walle interviewed on 22/02/2017; Meseret interviewed on 11/11/2017).

Furthermore, the Quality of teachers has decreases over time. This poses as a challenge in language heritage development and was stated by respondents as strongly agree (49.7%), agree (15.1%), undecided (11.6%), disagree (16.4%), and strongly disagree (7.2%). It is a huge (mean 3.84) challenge for traditional church schools. The main reasons for this are, on the basis of informants comments (Betsiha, Solomon, and Negatibeb interviewed on 20/05/2017; Haregewein interviewed on 10/12/2016; Walle interviewed on 22/02/2017; Meseret interviewed on 11/11/2017; Mekonnen and Semre interviewed on 10/12/2017), most of them were inclined to say that money generating business allows them to lead better lives and fulfil their basic needs. Furthermore the respect that was given to the teachers in the past times is no longer visible. The respondents expressed their level of agreement on the issue that students are facing basic need problems as strongly agree (78.4%), agree (15.8%), undecided (0.3%), disagree (1.4%), and strongly disagree (4.1%). This is a very crucial problem (mean of 4.63) for the pupils of traditional church school students, since more than 94% of them are suffering from a severe lack of basic needs.

Even though the above challenges occur in the schools, the stakeholders are not involved in it. Church bodies lack the necessary due attention that traditional church students need, and the respondents strongly agree (71.9%), agree (20.2%), undecided (2.4%), disagree (3.1%), and strongly disagree (2.4%) that the church role is diminishing. Most of the respondents also felt that, government bodies have not given due attention to Ge'ez language development, and they responded as follows: strongly agree (76%), agree (17.1%), undecided (2.7%), disagree (2.4%), and strongly disagree (1.7%). It is obvious that stakeholders, both church and government bodies, have been very negligent (mean 4.56 and 4.80 respectively) in paying attention to traditional church schools. These bodies have no plan for the development of the schools. Likewise, the low involvement of the local community is expressed as strongly agree (50%), agree (32.5%), undecided (4.5%), disagree (12.3%), and strongly disagree (0.7%). This is also a risk for the schools. In the past, local communities had given sponsorship to the students. However, now local communities are not involved and considered to be negligent (mean 4.18) concerning schools offerings.

On issue that teachers have no meaningful salary, the respondents strongly agree (26%), agree (34.9%), are undecided (18.2%), disagree (15.4%), or strongly disagree (1.7%). Moreover, it was accepted that teachers have faced basic need problems for years now and on this respondents, strongly agree (3.8%), agree (62.7%), undecided (29.8%), disagree (3.8%), and strongly disagree (3.8%).

Depending on the final issues, the level of agreement on the question that modern education has negative effects on the schools, and globalization has negative effects on the schools is responded to as strongly agree (49.3%), agree (32.5%), undecided (8.2%), disagree (7.2%), and strongly disagree (2.7%); and strongly agree (49.3%), agree (35.3%), undecided (7.9%), disagree



(5.5%), and strongly disagree (2.1%) correspondingly. As it is seen from the data, modern education is a serious challenge (mean of 4.18), and globalization is fundamentally imposing a very high (mean of 4.24) negative impact on traditional church schools. Former students were attached to a traditional lifestyle. However, most of the current students desire a more modern life. At the current time, modern schools are expanding their offerings in most sites. Additionally, the government bodies are also enforcing the notion that local children be provided with a more modern education. This has an indirect effect on the students to not joining traditional church schools. Students are also attracted to life in towns. The desired modern life is not accessible at their current schools (Betsiha, Solomon, and Neqatibeb interviewed on 20/05/2017; Haregewein interviewed on 10/12/2016; Walle interviewed on 22/02/2017; Meseret interviewed on 11/11/2017; Mekonnen and Semre interviewed on 10/12/2017).

Table 1.8 Ge'ez language heritage challenges of Traditional church schools

S. N	Item	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		strongly agree		Mean	Scale
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	The number of students joining decreases from time to time.	5	1.7	6	2.1	1	.3	71	24.3	209	71.6	4.6199	strongly agree
2	Current students' ability is less than the former.	29	9.9	41	14.0	29	9.9	67	22.9	126	43.2	3.7534	agree
3	Students face reference book problems.	7	2.4	8	2.7	6	2.1	71	24.3	200	68.5	4.5377	strongly agree
4	Quality of teachers decreases from time to time	21	7.2	48	16.4	34	11.6	44	15.1	145	49.7	3.8356	agree
5	Students face basic need problems.	12	4.1	4	1.4	1	.3	46	15.8	229	78.4	4.6301	strongly agree
6	Church bodies lack due attention towards students.	7	2.4	9	3.1	7	2.4	59	20.2	210	71.9	4.5616	strongly agree
7	Government bodies don't give due attention to the students.	5	1.7	7	2.4	8	2.7	50	17.1	222	76.0	4.8048	strongly agree
8	Teachers have no salary.	5	1.7	45	15.4	53	18.2	102	34.9	87	29.8	3.7568	agree
9	The local community has low involvement in the schools.	2	.7	36	12.3	13	4.5	95	32.5	146	50.0	4.1884	agree
10	Teachers have faced basic need problems.	11	3.8	11	3.8	87	29.8	183	62.7	11	3.8	4.5137	strongly agree
11	Modern education has a negative effect on the schools.	8	2.7	21	7.2	24	8.2	95	32.5	144	49.3	4.1849	agree
12	Globalization has a negative effect on the schools.	6	2.1	16	5.5	23	7.9	103	35.3	144	49.3	4.2432	strongly agree



Ge'ez Language Heritage Challenges of Practices (Mahlet Service, Mass Ceremony, Prayers and Preaching Service)

The other important issue, which is taken into consideration to deal with the challenges of language heritage, is associated with practices (mahlet service, mass ceremony, prayers and preaching service). According to respondents, the number of church servants and Ge'ez language coverage of mass ceremony is very high (mean of 4.69 and 4.51 in that order) but decrease from time to time. This is portrayed as strongly agree (75.3%), agree (22.3%), undecided (0.3%), disagree (1.0%), and strongly disagree (1.0%); and strongly agree (63.0%), agree (31.5%), undecided (3.0%), disagree (4.1%), and strongly disagree (1.0%) respectively. Additionally, respondents have stated their conformity as strongly agree (47.6%), agree (37.0%), undecided (8.6%), disagree (6.2%), and strongly disagree (0.7%) seeing that the preaching service in the churches is delivered in other than the Ge'ez language. This comprises a very high level of challenge (mean of 4.26) for the maintenance of the Ge'ez language as a heritage. Most church servants (deacons and priests) do not know the Ge'ez language (Betsiha, Solomon, and Neqatibeb interviewed on 20/05/2017; Haregewein interviewed on 10/12/2016; Walle interviewed on 22/02/2017; Meseret interviewed on 11/11/2017).

Similarly, for the question stated that the books of prayer in the churches are read in the Amharic language, and the respondents have confirmed this saying that they strongly agree (29.1%), agree (36.6%), undecided (13.4%), disagree (17.1%), and strongly disagree (3.8%). Reading books in the Amharic language in the church service imposes negative impacts (mean of 3.7) on the advancement of Ge'ez language, since reading is among the mechanisms for heritage language development. Moreover, the negative impact of modern education and globalization on the practices is expressed as, strongly agree (36.0%), agree (43.2%), undecided (9.2%), disagree (9.9%), and strongly disagree (1.7%); and strongly agree (47.9%), agree (32.9%), undecided (8.2%), disagree (8.6%), and strongly disagree (2.4%) respectively. These prove that the negativity level of modern education and globalization on the development of the practices is high (mean of 4.01 and 4.05 correspondingly).

Table 1.9. Ge'ez language heritage challenges of Practices (mahlet service, mass ceremony, prayers and preaching service)

S · N	Item	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		strongly agree		Mean	Scale
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	The number of church adherents decreases from time to time.	3	1.0	3	1.0	1	.3	65	22.3	220	75.3	4.6986	strongly agree
2	Ge'ez language coverage of the mass decreases from time to time.	3	1.0	12	4.1	1	3	92	31.5	184	63.0	4.5137	strongly agree
3	The service is delivered in other than the geez language.	2	.7	18	6.2	25	8.6	108	37.0	139	47.6	4.2466	strongly agree
4	Books are read in Amharic.	11	3.8	50	17.1	39	13.4	107	36.6	85	29.1	3.7021	agree
5	Modern education has a negative effect on traditional practices.	5	1.7	29	9.9	27	9.2	126	43.2	105	36.0	4.0171	Agree
6	Globalization has a negative effect on traditional practices.	7	2.4	25	8.6	24	8.2	96	32.9	140	47.9	4.1541	Agree



Conclusions

The selected sites (traditional church schools and churches) of SGAZ possess very significant Ge'ez language heritage potential. The potential is in two categories. These are traditional church schools and practices (mahlet service, mass ceremony, prayers and preaching services). Traditional church schools hold very significant Ge'ez language heritage potential in the cases of the ability of teachers and the use of books that contain needed study aspects. Moreover, the ability of students, the wider issues of the books, and the presence of teachers who are graduates are considered important when it comes to the high Ge'ez language heritage potential of traditional church schools. Likewise, mahlet service, the mass, and book readings during the church service have very significant Ge'ez language heritage potential as well.

Conversely, the decrease in numbers of students joining traditional church schools, lack or absence of text and reference books, the very low involvement of stakeholders (church and government bodies), modern education and globalization are some of the very serious challenges faced by traditional church schools. Practices such as the mahlet service, mass ceremony, prayer books, and preaching service, are also facing the problem of decreasing numbers of adherents and a greater percent of Amharic coverage of the mass ceremony (especially in the towns), modern education challenges and also globalization.

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