*Full Length Research*

# Sailing Tranquil in the Ocean of Turbulence: Lesson to Learn Other University from Samara University

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## Abstract

*This study was focused on peacebuilding, and methodologically, the researcher employed a qualitative approach using a case study. However, data sources relied on both primary and secondary data. Moreover, data collection tools and techniques included semi-structured, in-depth interviews, FGD, personal observation, and document analysis. Purposive sampling techniques were used. Collected data were analysed through thematic analysis. The findings of this research revealed that external and internal factors contribute to the peaceful operation of the university and a stable campus environment, but inter-ethnic conflict and outside political factors in the academic life of students in other universities disrupt peaceful teaching and learning. But Samara University is the safest and most peaceful in Ethiopia, according to the Ministry of Education, which named it a peace ambassador. This is because university leaders follow inclusive approaches to peace and other universities, such as Samara University.*

## 1.      INTRODUCTION

Historically, Ethiopian university students have been central actors in shaping the socio-political landscape of the country. In the 1960s, they played a decisive role in the political movements that ultimately led to regime change and broader radical transformations in Ethiopian society. Their activism was driven by an idealistic commitment to justice and reform, which established universities as centres of intellectual debate and resistance. However, this legacy has been undermined in recent decades. Rather than serving as a unified force for addressing national challenges, university students have increasingly become entangled in the deepening ethnic polarisation that characterises Ethiopian politics today. This trend reflects the broader fragmentation of Ethiopian society, where identity politics and ethno-nationalist

sentiments overshadow civic discourse, thereby destabilising students' role as progressive change agents.

Ethiopian universities, often described as microcosms of the country, bring together students from nearly all ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. While this diversity has the potential to cultivate intercultural dialogue and national cohesion, it has instead become a point of division. Often, students are vulnerable to manipulation by political actors who exploit ethnic differences for partisan gain (Abebaw, 2019). As a result, universities that should ideally promote democratic culture, critical thinking, and peaceful coexistence are transformed into battlegrounds for ethnic rivalries. The rise of student involvement in ethnically motivated conflicts disrupts academic life and results in tragic loss of lives, thereby eroding trust among

diverse groups within the campus environment.

The recurring outbreak of violent ethnic clashes across several Ethiopian universities illustrates how these institutions have become epicentres of national crises rather than havens for learning. In this context, Samara University presents a peculiar case. Unlike many public universities in the country, it has avoided large-scale ethnic violence. This exception provokes a critical inquiry into the institutional and contextual factors that have shielded Samara University from the turbulence experienced elsewhere. The absence of ethnic violence at Samara raises fundamental questions about governance, leadership, community engagement, and conflict management strategies, which demand scholarly exploration.

Existing research provides some insights into these dynamics but remains limited in scope and depth. Miressa Yadessa (2018), for instance, explored ethnic tensions among students and highlighted the roles of university leaders in shaping student relations. Similarly, Yonas Ashine (2019) examined universities as contested terrains, framing violent student conflicts as symptoms of deeper structural flaws within Ethiopia's ethnic-based federalism. Both scholars made significant contributions by situating campus conflicts within a wider political context, but their approaches were largely centred on document analysis and broad commentary. Consequently, the nuances of why some universities, like Samara, were spared from these violent crises remain underexplored.

Another limitation of the existing literature is its tendency to generalise the experiences of Ethiopian universities without paying sufficient attention to institutional variations. While both Yadessa (2018) and Ashine (2019) emphasise the detrimental effects of ethnic politicisation in higher education, neither engages deeply with the role of leadership in preventing or mitigating conflicts at the institutional level. This gap in the literature demonstrates the importance of more context-specific studies that examine the agency of university administrators, faculty, and student leaders in navigating ethnic diversity. By focusing narrowly on structural explanations, earlier studies risk overlooking the proactive measures taken within certain universities to maintain stability and harmony.

Against this backdrop, Samara University's case provides a valuable opportunity to investigate how leadership, governance, and institutional culture can counteract the pervasive ethnicization of Ethiopian higher education. Understanding why Samara University has remained relatively peaceful, despite the broader national trend, could yield lessons not only for Ethiopia but also for other multi-ethnic societies grappling with similar challenges in higher education. This line of inquiry is especially urgent in light of the continuing ethnic tensions that threaten Ethiopia's national unity, as it emphasises the role of universities not merely as educational spaces but as critical arenas for either reproducing or resisting societal divisions. By addressing this gap, the study positions itself to contribute to both academic discourse and practical policy interventions aimed at sustaining peace in higher education.

**Objectives of the Study:**

I. To explore internal and external factors that enable the university to be a guardian of peace.

ii. To scrutinise the role of university leaders to preserve peace and security of the university

iii. To explicate the contribution of the region for the peace and security of the university.

vi. To explore lessons to learn from other universities from Samara University.

**Overview of Peace Profile Matrix**

A Peace Profile Matrix is a valuable analytical tool designed to map out and evaluate the peace-related dynamics within a given context. It provides a structured framework that enables researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of peacebuilding initiatives. The method is based on the recognition that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but a continuous process that requires sustained effort, institutional support, and active engagement from multiple actors. By focusing on specific elements, the Peace Profile Matrix allows for a comprehensive assessment of how different peace efforts are organised, coordinated, and sustained over time (2016:76–77).

The Peace Profile Matrix differentiates four central components: ongoing peace efforts, existing peace structures and processes, peacebuilding gaps, and peacebuilding synergies. "Ongoing peace efforts" refers to the immediate initiatives and interventions implemented to address conflicts and promote harmony, such as dialogue platforms, reconciliation programs, and student-community engagement activities. Existing peace structures and processes highlight the formal and informal infrastructures—such as administrative policies, leadership mechanisms, or traditional conflict-resolution practices—that provide long-term support for peace. Peacebuilding gaps, on the other hand, refer to unaddressed challenges, blind spots, or systemic weaknesses that hinder the sustainability of peace. Finally, peacebuilding synergies emphasise how different interventions and structures interact with one another to create stronger, interconnected outcomes, thereby making the overall system more resilient (2016: 76–77).

As emphasised in the theoretical and conceptual framework, the Peace Profile Matrix is particularly useful

when applied to academic institutions, such as Samara University. Universities are not only educational spaces but also microcosms of the wider society, reflecting its diversity, challenges, and aspirations. Employing this tool in such a setting provides a systematic way to analyse how peacebuilding is conceptualised, implemented, and sustained in the university environment. It also allows researchers to go beyond anecdotal observations by placing peacebuilding efforts within a structured and comparative framework, which strengthens the validity of findings and offers insights that can inform policy and practice.

Two main reasons justify the use of the Peace Profile Matrix in this study. First, the tool's design closely aligns with the core research questions, making it instrumental in addressing the objectives of the inquiry. Since the study seeks to understand both the mechanisms of peacebuilding and the challenges encountered, the matrix ensures that these dimensions are analysed systematically. Secondly, the tool enables a deeper understanding of peacebuilding dynamics by revealing not only what is being done but also what remains neglected. This dual perspective enhances the capacity of the research to identify practical recommendations for strengthening peace at the university level (Adonis, unpublished, 2020: 26).

In the case of Samara University, the Peace Profile Matrix is particularly relevant given the institution's unique profile in comparison to other Ethiopian universities. While many universities have struggled with ethnic-based violence, Samara has managed to avoid such large-scale turbulence. Analysing the institution through the matrix framework provides an opportunity to uncover how current peace structures and efforts are functioning, what specific gaps might exist, and whether synergies among different initiatives contribute to the stability of the institution. By doing so, the study not only highlights the success factors at Samara but also provides lessons that could be replicated elsewhere.

Ultimately, the Peace Profile Matrix serves as both a diagnostic and prescriptive tool. It diagnoses the current state of peacebuilding by assessing ongoing efforts and structural frameworks while also prescribing areas for improvement through the identification of gaps and synergies. This comprehensive perspective is crucial for contexts like Ethiopia, where the sustainability of peace in universities has broader implications for national stability and cohesion. Thus, the application of the Peace Profile Matrix at Samara University not only contributes to academic research but also holds practical significance in informing strategies for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in higher education institutions more broadly.

**Approaching Peace in Higher Educational Institution**

Approaching peace within higher educational institutions requires a deliberate, interdisciplinary, and student-centered methodology. The central premise is that peace education can transform attitudes and behaviours, particularly among students raised in environments where nationalist or exclusionary ideologies prevail. By embedding peace education within university curricula, institutions are positioned to help students reframe their understanding of identity, citizenship, and coexistence. In Ethiopia, where ethnic divisions have historically fuelled conflict, such an approach is particularly crucial. Peace education, when properly structured, does not merely transmit knowledge but actively nurtures empathy, dialogue, and intercultural competence, thereby equipping students with the mindset necessary to sustain peace both within and beyond the academic environment.

The arguments supporting the integration of peace education into university life are compelling. Peace education provides the tools through which students begin to see peace not as an abstract concept but as a shared responsibility and lived practice. Through curricular innovation, extracurricular initiatives, and participatory pedagogies, universities can encourage students to critically reflect on societal divisions while simultaneously fostering inclusive forms of citizenship. This resonates with the transformative approach to peacebuilding, which seeks to alter the underlying structures and attitudes that perpetuate conflict, and the participatory approach to development, which emphasises the value of engaging communities in shaping their futures. Together, these perspectives reinforce the idea that peace education is an essential platform for sustainable change in higher education.

Escrigas (2008) stresses that modern universities must move beyond the narrow, individualistic, and competitive paradigms that have long characterised academic institutions. Instead, they should embrace a collective and holistic paradigm that integrates peacebuilding into both the formal and informal aspects of university life. This shift requires not only rethinking curricula but also reconfiguring the institutional culture so that values of cooperation, mutual respect, and non-violence are embedded into the fabric of student experiences. Such a paradigmatic shift would ensure that the scope of education extends beyond disciplinary knowledge to include the moral and practical application of learning in ways that directly contribute to building peace and fostering community resilience.

In practice, peace education in universities can manifest in several ways, such as by including courses

focused on conflict resolution, dialogue-based seminars that bring together diverse groups of students, and leadership programmes that emphasise service, inclusivity, and reconciliation. These efforts serve as mechanisms to "change attitudes" by gradually reducing

prejudice and mistrust among students of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Moreover, by providing opportunities for students to engage with peace-related issues experientially, universities can encourage learners to internalise peace as part of their personal and collective identities.

At Samara University, these approaches take on added significance because of the institution's reputation as a relatively peaceful environment compared to other Ethiopian universities. The university's efforts to incorporate peace education and leadership initiatives have not only promoted harmony among its diverse student body but also positioned it as a model for other institutions. The recognition of these efforts is reflected in the involvement of clan elders who contributed significantly to the accreditation of Ambassadors of Peace at the university. Their participation emphasises the value of integrating local wisdom and community leadership into formal peace education, thereby creating a bridge between traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and modern academic structures.

Ultimately, approaching peace in higher education must be viewed as both a theoretical framework and a practical commitment. By aligning interdisciplinary methodologies, student-centred approaches, and leadership roles with the strategic goal of embedding peace in the university experience, institutions can foster environments where students learn not only for personal advancement but also for collective well-being. This process contributes to the creation of a culture of peace that transcends the boundaries of the campus, influencing broader societal change in Ethiopia and beyond. Peace education thus becomes both an academic pursuit and a civic duty, ensuring that universities serve as nurseries of peace rather than arenas of conflict.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the purposes of this research article, qualitative research methods were employed, and this research focuses more on testing of existing theories of generalisations related to peace and security in science and higher educational institutions of Ethiopia, particularly Samara University. And the researcher employed a non-probability sampling technique with purposeful sampling techniques. Moreover, the researchers employed both primary and secondary data collection methods. Key informants' interviews and focus group discussions were used as primary data collection methods, and different published and unpublished documents, journals, and the

international, regional and national documents on peace and security were utilised. Finally, document analyses were employed; the researchers were given a heavy weight for primary data. Moreover, in this study, the researchers had a key informant interview with the president of Samara University, with vice presidents, the Student Dean Director, the campus security head, the leaders of the student union, the Afar Regional State president, and the Afar National Regional State Peace and Security Head. Moreover, the researchers interviewed members of the Forum of Peace of Samara University. 6 FGDs were held for about an hour; finally, the researcher used a qualitative way of data analysis. The researchers employed thematic analysis methods.

### Field Experience and Observation

The researchers developed an interview guideline, and the interview and FGD guides were prepared in the English language. Then, it was translated into Amharic and Afar. Then after, a co-researcher commented and corrected the guiding questions. Interview However, during the first phase of data collection, researchers captured photographic images of the Samara University campus environment using a flash camera. Fieldworkers used field assistance and started interviews with key informants, and interviews were held within the Administration Vice President's Office and the Academic Vice President's Office regarding the roles of leaders to sustain the existing peace in Samara University. The second phase of data collection was conducted to gate saturated data until the searcher secured enough data from the participant. For the purposes of this research, observations across the entire campus have been conducted successfully within three weeks. June, 2024. The researcherrecorded everyday phenomena on the university campus. Finally, during the observation, what the researcher observed on the Samara University campus was investigated.

## 3. RESULTS AND DATA PRESENTATION

### External factors that enable the university to be a guardian of peace

According to Asnake Kefeale (2001), what rather exists in Ethiopia is a centralised form of federal rule where policy decisions come from the centre and the sub-units are responsible for their implementation. In other words, there is a visible dependency of regions on the centre. Further, as to the author, various regions of the country witness and experience many levels of local and regional conflicts, and even this conflict looks like it has an international dimension. The federal composition of the country in its current shape and ethnic identity being the number one principle of this version of federalism also

generate, or at least transform, various local, regional or trans-border conflicts along identity lines. According to Asnake, the most significant examples are the Silte-Gurage identity dispute. In addition to these identity conflicts, the author distinguishes between intra-federal boundary conflicts, intra-regional conflicts in multi-ethnic regions and conflicts between titular and non-titular groups which were happening in the Benishangul-Gumuz, Somali and Afar regional states. According to the author, a significant level of interstate conflicts mostly derive from the fact that the boundaries are ill-defined and do not respect local realities. In the case of the Somali regional state, major conflicts obviously take place along the Somali and Afar borders, having historical roots going back to the imperial times. (Abebaw Yirga, 2019:3&4) When we go back to the case of conflict in university students, according to Tesfaye Kebede, 2009, historically Ethiopian higher education institutions have been affected by ethnic conflict for both the ruling and opposition parties. Since the early 1960s, the time when most of the university was affected by instability and different students came from different parts of the country affected by intensified conflict, at this time their agenda was not limited to ethnic identity; rather, it was mainly a national agenda. In addition to this, another headacheagenda following that is ethnic-based conflicts and tension in almost all universities, and these days it has become common news to hear that a student of one ethnic group is being attacked by the other. Tesfaye Kebede, 2009, Based on the above scholars, the key informant said that it is hard to find a university that finishes its academic year without such horrendous incidences and special interruptions. When critically observed, sometimes, but not always, university students demonstrate the carbon copy of the societies' practices. If there is conflict between two ethnic groups within the society, the same thing also happens among the students in the university from the same ethnic group societies. For more than fifteen years these practices were there in the universities. (KII-01, April 2024).

The majority of the participants in the focus group discussion said that political splits are a threat to peace in the university. According to the interviewee, another thing that threatens peace is that some students come from different parts of the country and villages and receive hidden political missions from conflict entrepreneurs, and this threatenspeace and full co-existence between students in the university. So, if one thinks that they are going against a campus student, then they can start up a fight. This perception seemed to be mirrored in several of the interviewees who were reluctant to talk about the current political situation in the country. It is due to almost all students coming from all corners of the country to the university with some spoilt information that they may get from primary education/history or come with local politics ideology. Based on this, the key informant explains his idea in the following manner:-

*"If once conflict happens in one university, its possibility to expand with other universities is also high, but these conflicts do not happen in Samara University because of leaders and Afar society contribution. (Interviewee, held within key informant)'.*

In fact, once ethnic tensions happen, they will not be eased or resolved until the country's political system becomesstable. Based on the above FGDs, a key informant said that a lack of strong security, psychological fear of students, theweakening of the traditional system of conflict management, and the deliberate arming of certain communities without due regard to the security of others are some important external factors that indicatetensions in many public universities. But contrary to Samara University, all the above-mentioned problems did not happen when we compared it with other universities (FGDP-01, April 2024).

**Internal Factors that able Samara University to Maintain Peace and Stability**

There are several internal factors that contribute to peaceful operation of the university and a stable campus environment at the university and conflict in other universities, ranging from a simple personal disagreement among students of various ethnic backgrounds to larger-scale organised destruction of some infrastructure on the campus. While inter-ethnic distrust, maladministration, and outside political factors and ensuing suspicious academic life are present among students in other universities, Samara University has been reported to be the safest and most peaceful university in Ethiopia, for which the university has been accredited as an ambassador of peace by the Ethiopian Ministry of Science and Higher Education. According to Tesfaye K. 2009, the spillover effect of an outbreak of a conflict is so great that people living in nearby areas have on many occasions threatened to storm campuses in support of their ethnic groups. The surrounding people are on the verge of invading the outside students. Simply imagine yourself as a particular ethnic group student or, for that matter, any other student with a similar story who happens to be studying in another ethnic group or somewhere else but is threatened to be attacked for the death of a student hundreds of miles away, which has nothing to do with this particular student. This implies even parents sometimes knowingly or unknowingly are part of the conflict.

According to a key informant of this study, violent incidents and instabilities in conflict-prone Ethiopian universities such as Ambo and Wollo universities are attributed to the political interference of outside actors such as political parties and social media activities. These

instabilities have affected the quality of education teaching and learning in the higher education system for the past several years. (KII-02, April 2024).

Unlike the above conditions in most public universities, Samara University has been successful in maintaining a peaceful and stable campus system. And there is a peaceful teaching and learning system in our university.Besides these peace unions, one of the participants said that the university middle official focused more on political propaganda than on focusing on peace and stability of the university since peaceful teaching and learning are interpreted from a political point of view. In this regard, FGD participants said that most of the course was covered by two periods using PowerPoint; this affects the peaceful teaching and learning of the university. For these reasons, most of the lectures were finished for a given course withintwo periods in a semester; therefore, from the respondent, one can understand that the department heads do not have effective control over their respective staff, and this needs special attention to tackle the existing problem. (FGDP-02, April 2024). Finally, FGD participants support the above ideas by saying most of the higher educational institutions, especially the 3rd-generation universities in Ethiopia, have been lagging behind the global competition due to a lack of modern laboratory and ICT facilities. Based on the above, participant one, a key participant, explains the idea of going to explain the problems of the main entrance door. The participant explains the issue in the following ways:

*"If you want to enter the university campus with a laptop, you do not require having smart cards, and non-university members/workers have easy access to campus entrance doors because there is a lack of a controlling mechanism at the main campus entrance doors. This can increase crime; for instance, theft of students' valuable property like laptops can be easy." (KII-04, April 2024)'*

Therefore, from the above participant, one can conclude that, based on the notable proclivity for security guards to check bags and vehicles and refuse access to any suspicious people, it can be viewed as a fairly effective form of crime prevention. Therefore, during the field trip, no criminal activities were documented throughout the university. But it is arguable that due to a lack of a strong campus security force, it's difficult to sustain ambassadors of peace in Samara University. FGD discussions also support the above arguments, saying that now Samara University is going to remove the potential security threat by focusing on the safety of campus, which will improve. But only one participant did not agree with the above argument and said it's impossible to say student clinic workersgive full service delivery, and the participant added that fire and electrocution incidents become security risk factors, and the causes of fires, said the participant, are electrical shocks, burns, appliances and plugs. Additionally,

cooking material like boilers, stoves and pastries and (kawiya) also contributed to these fires because fire was happening in female graduate student dorms. Therefore, from respondent one, one can conclude that if electrical equipment is unsafe or in poor working condition, it can cause electrical fires and become a security risk. FGDs point out that there is a lack of emergency exits, subserviced emergency fire equipment, and visible live wires from missing electrical covers. However, despite the abundance of fire safety measures taken, fires occur since it is a large campus with a multitude of building occupants. Although notable safety mechanisms are in place, damaged and/or exposed light fixtures and electrical wiring within campus buildings undermine these safety promotion strategies.

## University Leaders as Promoters of Peace and Stability in Campus

Without the deliberate efforts of leaders, peace promotion within the wider society and in universities remains extremely difficult to achieve. Leadership is pivotal in shaping the values, attitudes, and behaviours of both institutions and communities, and the absence of committed leadership often leaves peacebuilding initiatives fragmented and ineffective. In a context such as Ethiopia, where political and ethnic tensions frequently intersect with academic life, the role of leaders becomes even more decisive. Their influence can either exacerbate existing divisions or, conversely, cultivate an environment where peace and stability are nurtured as collective aspirations.

Interviews conducted with participants highlight this reality, emphasising that leaders must be the first to take initiative in peace promotion, as their example sets the tone for broader societal conduct. One respondent noted that the rest of the population often follows the guidance of leaders, making leadership engagement an indispensable prerequisite for sustainable peace (KII-08, May 2024). This assertion underscores the symbolic and practical power leaders hold in establishing norms and expectations within a community. If leaders actively promote peace, inclusivity, and dialogue, these values are more likely to be embraced by the wider population, including students within university settings.

Key informants further argued that those in positions of authority have a unique responsibility to set the agenda for peacebuilding. Citizens, particularly in hierarchical and authority-driven societies, often place trust in leaders and align their actions with the messages and priorities communicated from the top. When leaders neglect this responsibility, they inadvertently create space for division, mistrust, and conflict to take root. Conversely, when leaders embrace peace as a guiding principle, their authority becomes a powerful tool for fostering reconciliation and social cohesion.

In the university context, leadership assumes a particularly strategic role. University leaders are not only administrators but also custodians of diversity, as campuses bring together students from multiple ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. It is therefore their duty to establish institutional mechanisms that promote dialogue, tolerance, and mutual understanding. This can be achieved through the creation of dialogue centres and tolerance centres that serve as platforms where students can engage in constructive conversations, resolve misunderstandings peacefully, and build relationships across divides. Such initiatives institutionalise peace practices and prevent campuses from becoming fertile grounds for ethnic or political manipulation.

The establishment of dialogue centres in universities also has pedagogical significance. These centres complement classroom learning by providing practical spaces where theories of peace, conflict resolution, and civic responsibility are put into practice. They offer students the opportunity to engage in peer mediation, intercultural dialogue, and community service projects that reinforce the principles of coexistence. By embedding these values in both formal and informal learning spaces, universities can ensure that students graduate not only with academic knowledge but also with the skills and dispositions required to contribute positively to society.

Ultimately, leaders at all levels must be committed to promoting peace in higher education and in Ethiopia. Leaders who prioritise dialogue, inclusivity, and unity create institutional and cultural conditions that make peacebuilding possible. In the absence of such leadership, peace remains a fragile and elusive goal. The experiences shared by participants reaffirm the indispensable role of leaders in setting the agenda for peace, both within universities and in society at large, making their actions central to the realisation of unity and diversity.

**University Teachers as Promoters of Peace and Stability**

The impressive academician, intellectual and the role of teacher in peace building implementation will be determined by two important criteria teacher quality and strategy. Teacher in university/society has bearing on their potential roles and in peace building are the points of departure for the discussion is that peace can be promoted from teachers. The role of teachers play in the peace building process was important like giving training on peace building, preparing seminar on peace building possess qualities that are seen as essential in this process. (KII-06, April 2024) University teachers occupy a central role in the promotion of peace and stability, both within academic settings and the wider society. Their influence is shaped by two critical factors: the quality of

the teacher and the strategies they adopt in their practice. Teachers are not only carriers of knowledge but also role models whose attitudes, behaviours, and pedagogical approaches deeply influence students. By embodying values such as fairness, inclusivity, and respect for diversity, they can set the tone for peaceful coexistence within classrooms and campus life. In societies marked by ethnic and political fragmentation, such as Ethiopia, the contribution of teachers to peacebuilding becomes even more significant, as their credibility and intellectual standing position them as trusted guides in shaping student attitudes.

The potential of teachers to promote peace extends beyond routine teaching. As highlighted by a key informant, teachers can actively participate in peacebuilding by organising training sessions and seminars on conflict resolution, tolerance, and intercultural dialogue (KII-06, April 2024). These initiatives create spaces where students can engage with the principles of peace not only as theoretical constructs but also as practical skills applicable to their daily interactions. Such engagements foster critical reflection on issues of diversity and difference, thereby equipping students with the tools to resist ethnic extremism and contribute to unity. When integrated into the academic culture, these activities amplify the teacher's role as both an educator and a peacebuilder.

Moreover, the effectiveness of teachers in peace promotion depends on the strategies they employ to integrate peace education into formal and informal learning processes. Teachers who adopt participatory pedagogies, encourage dialogue-based learning, and facilitate collaborative problem-solving contribute to a culture of inclusivity and shared responsibility. Their ability to nurture empathy, mutual respect, and critical thinking in students strengthens the foundation for sustainable peace within the university community. In this way, university teachers are not only academic leaders but also key actors in fostering social cohesion, preparing students to become advocates for peace both during their time in higher education and beyond.

**The Roles of Afar Clan Leader in Peace Building Processes**

Clan leaders in Samara town are practitioners in reconciliation, springing their authority from being delegates of their communities and making actions accountable to them. Shekh Daresa Musa, one of the key informants, explains the role they play in maintaining peace as follows:

*"We elders kept our indigenous conflict management mechanisms to sustain peace, and indigenous values and norms contribute a lot to peace, and we have ultimate*

*power to reconcile our people, and this has shown our efforts for long-lasting peace for our university as well as the region by confronting the challenges we have faced for a decade." (KII-09, June 2024).'*

Therefore, Afar clan leaders contribute significant roles to preserve peace between individuals and groups. For example, when an individual violates the rule of Afarre of social and economic organisations, the wrongdoer is ordered to stand in front of the group. (KII-10, July 2024).

The contribution of the Afar region to preserving peace and stability in Samara University was the main theme of this research. However, the existence of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms totally illuminates security risks in Samara University. Data obtained from FGDs also shows that using different traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in the study area increases peace and stability. Therefore, clan leaders play an important role in harmonising peace and stability in Samara University. (Interview held with key informant, June 2024)

## How Can Samara University Accredit Ambassador of Peace

When we come to the case of Samara University, ethnic conflict did not happen because leaders were focused on peacebuilding, and these were the backbones for the accreditation of Samara University as an ambassador of peace in the Afar National Regional State. Based on the above argument, one key informant explores his idea regarding peace as follows:-

*"Peace is the most sensitive issue that everybody should care about, and it is not enough to talk about peace without peacebuilding. One must believe in it. And it is not enough to believe in it. One must work at it." (Interview held with key informant, June 2024)'*

What is the actual state of the universities being selected as Ambassadors of Peace when other universities are rocked by ethnic conflict? In order to find the answer to this question, we have to evaluate social capital as a key performance indicator of Samara universities being selected as a place or comfortable place for a peaceful teaching and learning environment for education. (MoSH 2013) Based on the above argument, one of the key informants explains the reason in the following way:

*"Respecting values, norms, and diversity in terms of religion and ethnicity is one of the reasons why Samara University was selected as a place for peaceful teaching and learning even though the environmental conditions of the region are hot; most of the students selected Samara University." (Interview held with key informant)'*

Therefore, assuring a vision of sailing tranquilly in the ocean of turbulence, where every concerned body in the university and work heart-to-heart to seek to ensure an inclusive approach to peacebuilding, were secrets of Samara University, accredited Ambassadors of Peace.

Another interview says when we compare Afar society with other societies, the way Afar society receives students and shows their concern is somehow different from other societies because Afar people are peace lovers; they are not comfortable with the mission of the enemy. FGDs pointed out that university leaders were taking the lion's share in peacebuilding, not only university leaders but also medium- and low-level administration, including university leaders, college deans, directors, coordinators, department heads, etc. (FGDP-05, May 2024).

Key informants said that there are some interesting lessons other public universities should learn from Samara University in the sense that different strategies were planned and orientated to sustain peacebuilding, for example, promoting a culture of peace and social interaction based on principles of freedom, justice and democracy, respecting diversity, tolerance and solidarity, which should be taken as lessons. (KI-06, May 2024). By doing so, Samara University is sailing tranquilly in the ocean of turbulence. Therefore, this brings more opportunity that initiates students better to choose Samara University for teaching and learning life. From the participant one can understand that to sustain the existing Peace University communities were focusing on positive peace, which means absence of violence and qualities such as freedom and justice, democratic participation, and social justice.

One of the key informants explains his idea regarding the issues of peace as follows:

*"Everyone must be committed to the matter of peace and should do everything that they can … And peace is the language we must speak." (Interview held with key informant)'*

Samara University was engaged in creative debates with a peace-sensitised academic community, introducing into the public realm issues which were relevant for peacebuilding efforts, such as gender equality, minority issues, sustainable development, etc. The findings of this research show that opportunity creates conducive conditions for peacebuilding, like transitional justice, the axiology of peace, the culture of peace, the ethics of peace, and peaceful development.Moreover, one of the key informants said that there are activists that release misinformation on different social media, which increases tension between students. The interviewee explores his idea in the following manner:-

*"In Ethiopian higher educational institutions there are various issues that are raised in social media in an*

*incorrect manner, and the students should care about true information because they are more sensitive to the issues, and some of the activists who use social media in irresponsible ways want to motivate students to do the wrong thing in the university." (KII-11, July 2024).'*

Therefore, from the participant, one can understand whether information is proofed or not and whether this is based on false information, and this clearly shows that

proofing relevant information is significant to distinguish false information from the real one. Focus group discussions (FGDs) indicate that university leaders, including the academic and administrative vice presidents, act as agents to maintain peace and security on campus, dedicating their efforts to peacebuilding through various methods and techniques. Samara University becomes Ambassadors of peace what other University should learn from Samara University        .
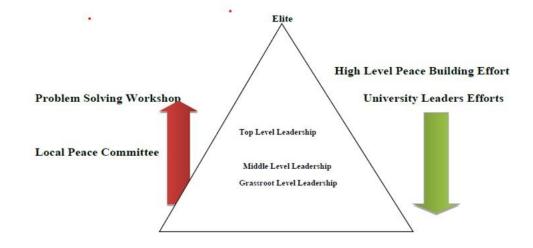


Renowned peace researcher Paul Lederach, in his book Building Peace: Lederach, argues that actors at all levels of social and political structures should engage in peacebuilding processes. Peacebuilding activities should be undertaken at all the levels, because peace activism and peace-related dynamics are needed across all those levels. Lederach designed a pyramidal model of peacebuilding in which the role and position of academics in peacebuilding efforts is clearly indicated. Lederach asserts that peacebuilding should be undertaken at three different levels, namely, top-level level 1, middle-range level 2 and grassroots level 3. Each of those levels plays an important role in the peacebuilding process (Paul

Lederach 2006). Many peacebuilding actors consider that the middle-range actors were equipped with considerable intellectual, creative, didactic, and anagogical capacities and values. This allows them to create the infrastructure to achieve impact both at the high level and at the grassroots. The leadership at the grassroots level should attend seminars, conferences, round tables, and targeted training programmes aimed at creating peace-related skills they need in order to address the key challenges faced by their respective communities, such as healing of memories, reducing prejudice, working with post-traumatic syndrome sufferers, etc. (Rettberg, 2003: 85).



**Actors and Approach to peace building.          University Community**
Source: Adopted from Leaderch Model 1997 as Cited Ramsbotham et, al 2005, 24

The elements of the model are represented graphically above show the roles of University leader's effort to bring grass root level of university community participation in peace building.

## What Lessons Could Other Universities Learn from Samara University?

Peacebuilding, as Boutros-Ghali (1992, p. 5) rightly observed, encompasses "actions that give support to structures that solidify peace and prevent relapse into conflict." It is not a singular activity but a process involving multiple phases of transformation, conflict prevention, and conflict management. According to key informants, Samara University's approach to peacebuilding illustrates how preventive and palliative actions can be effectively harnessed within higher education institutions to foster stability, social cohesion, and resilience. These mechanisms—when appropriately adopted—provide a blueprint from which other universities can learn.

**Preventive actions** at Samara University have been instrumental in reducing tensions before they escalate into open conflict. These actions take the form of seminars, forums, and public lectures, creating spaces for dialogue, reflection, and the exchange of perspectives on peace, human rights, and mutual coexistence. Such activities enable students and staff to anticipate potential conflict, while offering institutional mechanisms for early intervention. According to participants, Samara University's sustained commitment to preventive strategies demonstrates the value of embedding peacebuilding initiatives into the academic framework, thereby safeguarding structural peace. This commitment presents a clear lesson for other universities: investment in preventive peace education and dialogue platforms is critical to pre-empting violence and nurturing long-term stability.

**Palliative actions**, by contrast, are directed towards conflict management once disputes arise. At Samara University, leadership has demonstrated responsiveness through inclusive consultations and proactive conflict resolution processes designed to sustain existing peace. Unlike several public universities in Ethiopia where inter-ethnic tensions have forced the suspension of teaching and learning, Samara University has been relatively insulated from such disruptions. A key informant (interview, July 2024) observed that this resilience is attributable to the institution's leadership focus on peacebuilding and its capacity to transform potential flashpoints into opportunities for dialogue. Other universities can therefore learn that conflict management requires not only reactive measures but also a culture of trust, consultation, and strong leadership commitment.

From participants' testimonies, it is evident that Samara University has nurtured values of care, fairness,

and generosity, thereby reinforcing the collective stability of its community. Peacebuilding is not simply a leadership responsibility but a shared ethos that enriches the daily interactions of students and staff. This experience underscores a vital lesson: embedding peace values into university culture is as important as developing formal mechanisms of conflict prevention and management.

## CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

Ethiopian higher education institutions have often been sites of inter-ethnic conflict, fuelled by political polarisation, maladministration, and mistrust among students. Reports of ethnic-based clashes in universities have become disturbingly common, with students of one ethnic background targeted by others. In contrast, Samara University has distinguished itself as one of the safest and most peaceful universities in the country. This reputation has been formally recognised by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, which has accredited it as an "Ambassador of Peace." The findings of this study suggest that leadership at Samara University has played a decisive role in fostering this environment. Through its emphasis on both preventive and palliative peacebuilding strategies, the institution has established itself as a model from which other universities can learn.

However, observations also revealed practical challenges that could undermine these achievements. For instance, while the university is undergoing infrastructure renovations, gaps in security such as the absence of smart card access systems create vulnerabilities to theft and other crimes. Addressing such concerns is essential to ensuring that physical security supports, rather than undermines, the broader culture of peace. Policymakers and university administrators must therefore prioritise modernised security measures alongside peacebuilding initiatives.

### Policy Recommendations and the Way Forward

To consolidate and expand its achievements, Samara University—and indeed other higher education institutions—should consider the following recommendations:

- Establish diverse platforms for scholarly dialogue to address historic grievances, promote mutual understanding, and build inter-ethnic friendships.
- Introduce first-year orientation programmes that emphasise students' rights, duties, and responsibilities, alongside life skills training for peaceful coexistence.
- Create a dedicated Dialogue Centre for Tolerance to enhance peace and security across campus.
- Engage clan leaders and traditional authorities in peacebuilding processes, leveraging indigenous mechanisms for reconciliation and cooperation.
- Prioritise modern infrastructure, up-to-date

educational equipment, and robust campus security systems, including smart card access.

- Strengthen collaboration with civil society organisations to sustain Samara University's role as an Ambassador of Peace.
- Institutionalise volunteer and family support projects, while reinforcing the cultural practices of the Afar society that contribute to peacebuilding.
- Expand academic branches in agricultural, industrial, and health sciences to ensure students' practicum needs are met in regions such as Gawane, Aysaita, and Dubti.

## Availability of Data and Future Research

The study relied on qualitative data drawn from open-ended interviews and focus group discussions, which were manually organised and thematically analysed. While the raw data remain in non-digitalised form, selected interpretations have been included in the analysis. Future research should address unresolved questions, such as the impact of irresponsible social media use by activists in fuelling conflict within higher education institutions. Additionally, further investigation is needed into the role of peace education in sustaining long-term stability and inclusivity in Ethiopian universities.

## Acknowledgements and Declarations

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**Appendix 1: List of key Informant Interview**

| No | Code | Sex | Age | Position in the community | Place, Month and Years of interview | Mobile Telephone Numbers of Interviewer/Participants |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | KII 1 | M | 57 | Samara University President | Samara University May, 2024 | +251911662072 |
| 2 | KII 2 | M | 46 | Samara University Administration V/President | Samara May, 2024 | +251928917171 |
| 3 | KII 3 | M | 46 | Samara University Academic V/President | Samara May, 2024 | +251928956909 |
| 4 | KIII 4 | M | 36 | Peace expert | Samara May, 2024 | +251912069613 |
| 5 | KII 5 | M | 28 | Peace Expert | Samara May, 2024 | +251912069613 |
| 6 | KII6 | M | 42 | Campus Security Head | Samara May, 2024 | +251917571790 |
| 7 | KII 7 | M | 40 | Clan  leader | Samara May, 2024 | +251910373584 |
| 8 | KII 8 | M | 34 | Clan Leader | Samara May, 2024 | +251910373584 |
| 9 | KIII 9 | M | 30 | Religious Leader | Samara May, 2024 | +251904226369 |
| 10 | KII 10 | M | 53 | Peace committee | Dubti May, 2024 | +251913136225 |
| 11 | KII 11 | M | 56 | Peace committee | Samara May, 2024 | +251913136225 |
| 12 | KII 12 | M | 60 | Student Union | Samara May, 2024 | +251931761185 |
| 13 | KII 13 | M | 54 | Student Union | Samara May, 2024 | +251931761185 |
| 14 | KII 14 | M | 30 | Clan Leader | Samara May, 2024 | +251910373584 |
| 15 | KII 18 | M | 67 | Clan Leader | Dubti May, 2024 | +251910373584 |
| 16 | KII 19 | M | 74 | Clan Leader | Dubti May, 2024 | +251910373584 |
| 17 | KII 20 | M | 42 | Student Union | Samara May,2024 | +251931761185 |
| 18 | KII 1 | M | 56 | Resident | Samara May,2024 | +251911711930 |
| 19 | KI 2 | M | 74 | Religious Leader | Aysaita May, 2024 | +251904226369 |
| 20 | KII 3 | M | 56 | Religious  Leader | Samara May, 2024 | +251912138923 |
| 21 | KII 4 | M | 46 | Clan Leader | Aysaita May ,2024 | +251910373584 |
| 22 | KII 5 | M | 48 | Clan Leader | Aysaita May 2024 | +251967778520 |
| 23 | KII 6 | M | 69 | Peace Committee | Samara May, 2024 | +251911918851 |
| 24 | KII 9 | M | 71 | Peace Committee | Samara  April ,2024 | +251911918851 |
| 25 | KII 10 | M |  | Resident | Samara  April ,2024 | +251911287070 |
| 26 | KII 19 | M | 74 | Clan Leader | Dubti May,2024 | +251912069613 |
| 27 | KII 20 | M | 42 | Student Union | Samara May,2024 | +251912069613 |
| 28 | KII 1 | M | 56 | Resident | Samara May,2024 | +251917571790 |
| 29 | KI 2 | M | 74 | Religious Leader | Aysaita May ,2024 | +251910373584 |
| 30 | KII 3 | M | 56 | Religious  Leader | Samara May,2024 | +251910373584 |
| 31 | KII 4 | M | 46 | Clan Leader | Aysaita May, 2024 | +251904226369 |
| 32 | KII 5 | M | 48 | Clan Leader | Aysaita May ,2024 | +251913136225 |
| 33 | KII 6 | M | 69 | Peace Committee | Samara May,2024 | +251913136225 |
| 34 | KII 9 | M | 71 | Peace Committee | Samara  April ,2024 | +251912069613 |
| 35 | KII 10 | M | 60 | Resident | Samara  April 2022 | +251912069613 |

Key: KII:  Key informant, FGDs: Focus Group Discussion, ICL Interview held Clan Leader

**Appendix 2: List of Focus Group Discussion Participant B**

| Number of FGD | Code | Sex | Age | Position | Place, Months and Years of FGD | Mobile Telephone numbers of FGD Participant |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Group one** | | | | | | |
| 1 | FGD 1 | M | 46 | Religious elder | At Samara June, 2024 | +251920700114 |
| 2 | FGD2 | M | 35 | Peace expert | At Samara June, 2024 | +251911858717 |
| 3 | FGD3 | M | 48 | Police officer | At Samara June, 2024 | +251942040453 |
| 4 | FGD4 | F | 39 | resident | At Samara June, 2024 | +251965290003 |
| 5 | FGD5 | M | 68 | Clan Leader | At Samara June, 2024 | +251910093351 |
| 6 | FGD6 | M | 71 | Peace committee | At Samara June, 2024 | +251910552085 |
| 7 | FGD7 | M | 47 | Clan Leader | At Samara June, 2024 | +251914619414 |
| **Group two** | | | | | | |
| 9 | FGD1 | M | 76 | Peace committee | Dubti woreda July, 2024 | +251910552085 |
| 10 | FGD2 | M | 68 | Clan Leader | Dubti woreda July, 2024 | +251914676128 |
| 11 | FGD3 | M | 71 | Clan Leader | Dubti woreda July, 2024 | +251910914931 |
| 12 | FGD4 | M | 67 | Clan Leader | Dubti woreda July, 2024 | +251910914931 |
| 13 | FGD5 | M | 53 | Clan Leader | Dubti woreda July, 2024 | +251910914931 |
| 14 | FGD6 | M | 58 | Resident | Dubti woreda July, 2024 | +251929937908 |
| **Group three** | | | | | | |
| 16 | FGD1 | M | 38 | Religious elder | Aysaita woreda July, 2024 | +251942815053 |
| 17 | FGD2 | M | 42 | Religious elder | Aysaita woreda July, 2024 | +251942815053 |
| 18 | FGD3 | M | 49 | Police officer | Aysaita woreda July, 2024 | +251913011888 |
| 19 | FGD4 | M | 65 | Resident | Aysaita woreda July, 2024 | +251940414171 |
| 20 | FGD5 | M | 55 | Peace committee | Aysaita woreda July, 2024 | +251967778520 |
| 21 | FGD6 | M | 54 | Clan Leader | Aysaita woreda July, 2024 | +251983693760 |
| 22 | FGD7 | M | 62 | Resident | Aysaita woreda July, 2024 | +251911971709 |
| **Group four** | | | | | | |
| 24 | FGD1 | M | 65 | Clan Leader | Samara University July, 2024 | +251911662072 |
| 25 | FGD2 | M | 73 | Religious elder | Samara University July, 2024 | +251928917171 |
| 26 | FGD3 | M | 56 | Clan Leader | Samara University July, 2024 | +251928956909 |
| 27 | FGD4 | M | 68 | Clan elder | Samara University July, 2024 | +251913853408 |
| 28 | FGD5 | M | 61 | Clan Leader | Samara University July, 2024 | +251911701428 |
| 29 | FGD6 | M | 70 | Clan Leader | Samara University July, 2024 | +251910446646 |

Key: FGD: Focus Group Discussion Participant