

OLLAA Education Department Progress and Prospectives on Afaan Oromoo, Gadaa System and Advocacy training

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Language Education

Central to the efforts of OLLAA in drawing attention to the Afaan Oromoo, Gadaa System, and related Advocacy training is the promotion and use of culture-based education. We recognize the impact of spoken language on one's self-identity, cultural awareness, and in building a more cosmopolitan world-view through education. In the diaspora of the Oromo people there are many who have been deprived of this chance at understanding their historical roots - linguistically, culturally, and historically. In the present, many Oromo living abroad are rediscovering this important element of education as a central part to their self-identity, as well as the need for identity in their Oromummaa, or "being Oromo". Many Oromo face challenges similar to other immigrants across the world: feeling ostracized or alone, forgetting or never learning the language of their parents, and struggling with leading a double life abroad. These migrants will often find themselves constantly questioning their identity, experience discrimination in their host countries, and face even further acts of hostility born from ignorance to the Oromo and its people. We believe and recognize that language can play a role in alleviating this loss of identity. Education in language will reconnect the individual with their roots or educate those who do not know so about what it means to be an Oromo. In doing so we might not only allow broader education about the Oromo by furthering understanding. We can directly better the lives of those struggling to find direction either internally or living externally in scattered regions across the globe.

Afaan Oromoo - What is it?

'Afaan Oromoo' is a language from the Cushitic Branch of the Afro-Asiatic Language Tree, a wider grouping of languages from Africa and it is the fourth most widely spoken language of Africa (after Arabic, Hausa, and Swahili). Afaan Oromoo is spoken predominantly by the Oromo people and neighboring ethnic groups living within the Horn of Africa. About 85% of Oromo speakers live in Ethiopia, mainly, in the Oromia region. Afaan Oromo is the most widely spoken language in Ethiopia boasting over 40 million speakers in the country and more than half a million speakers in other countries including: South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, the United States, and Tanzania. Alongside the numerous Oromo people is a significant number of other ethnicities, who, regularly living alongside the Oromo speak Afaan Oromoo as a second language. For instance, the Omotic-speaking Bambassi and the Nilo-Saharan-speaking Kwama in northwestern Oromia possess many individuals who use Oromo in their daily lives. Afaan Oromoo serves as the official working language of the regional states of Oromia, Harar and Dire Dawa, in addition to the Oromia Zone in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia. Afaan Oromo is widely taught in an educational setting within Ethiopia being used as a language of primary education throughout: Oromia, Harar, Dire Dawa, Benishangul-Gumuz and Addis Ababa and of the Oromia Zone in the Amhara region.

The Purpose of Learning Afaan Oromoo - Why is it important?

- To share Oromo culture and promote intercultural knowledge.
- To help students discover their self-identity by learning about differing perspectives.
- To promote education and fluency in Afaan Oromoo as well as open communication with the large diaspora of Oromo people with other languages and cultures.

Language binds people of a shared culture and history. Language is a means for those not familiar with their culture to reconnect with their origins. Learning the Oromo language will broaden a person's knowledge allowing them to: read, write, and most importantly understand conversation and literature otherwise inaccessible due to language restrictions. For Oromos living abroad in the diaspora, providing Afaan Oromoo classes are necessary to allow them to reconnect with their culture and facilitate communication with their family members in Oromia. There is great interest throughout the large diaspora of Oromos to learn their native language. This desire for language education has already been demonstrated by the participation of many in the Afaan Oromoo classes run by OLLAA.

Activities

OLLAA offers a variety of activities to serve the needs of students from all backgrounds seeking to learn Afaan Oromo:

- Afaan Oromoo Classes for Kids (class 1: 5-7 years old, class 1: 8-10 years old, and class 2: 11-14 years old)
 - Both levels 1 and 2
- Afaan Oromoo Classes for Adults (14+ years old)
 - Both levels 1 and 2
- Gadaa System Classes
- Oromo History Workshops
- Oromo Culture Workshops
- Oromo Art Workshops

Target: To serve the socio-cultural needs of Oromo people around the world and in Ethiopia. This is done through equipping and supporting Oromo youth and the wider community with resources and lingual tools they need to excel, either in business or daily life.

Objective: To develop well-rounded, confident, and responsible Oromo leaders who aspire to achieve their full potential. We do this by facilitating a creative and supportive learning environment, through which each individual is empowered. In terms of advocacy, it is hoped to inspire students to research and bring attention to the many injustices in Oromia and Worldwide.

1. Inauguration of the first Afaan Oromoo Class (General Enrollment)

The inaugural Afaan Oromoo class run by OLLAA began in October of 2020. The inaugural class began after a need to educate Oromos living globally about the Oromo language was identified. This first class was taught by Yosef Hamba Tola and was attended by a stunning number of more than 85 students from different countries. Although the majority of the participants were from the US there were many students from: Asia, Australia, Europe and North America. The inaugural class was an introductory class aimed at providing a basic Afaan

Oromoo introduction for beginners. The curriculum consisted of qubee (alphabet), conversational phrases, greetings, pronouns, vocabulary, conjugations, sentence building, and more. It laid the foundation for the following classes that the education department aims to build upon.

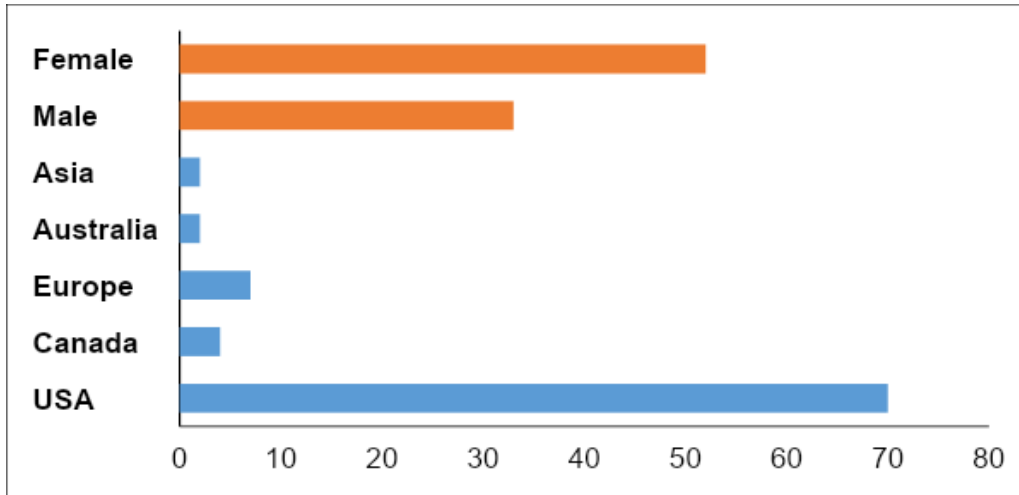


Figure 1: this graph shows the number of students from the first round of Afaan Oromoo class between October – November 2020, their national origins, and ratio of female to male students.

2. *Afaan Oromoo Classes for Kids Level 1 (5 – 14 years old)*

With the growing need to educate the diaspora in the Oromo language it is critical for children to begin their education early. The Afaan Oromoo Childrens Class first ran from June to August of 2021 and educated approximately 43 children ranging in age from five to fourteen years old. The youngsters were divided into age groups of 5-7 years old, 8-10 years old, and 11-14 years old to accommodate the varying instructional approaches required for each age group. The Afaan Oromoo Children’s Class met for a total of eight weeks and covered the alphabet, long/short vowels, consonants, and word formation.

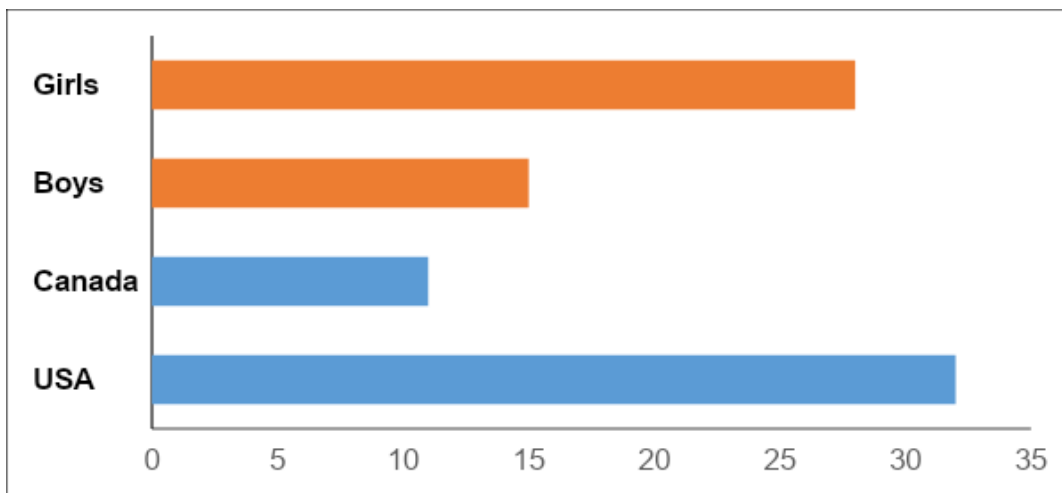


Figure 2: This graph shows the number of students ranging in age from 5 – 14 year’s old who attended the first Afaan Oromoo Classes for Kids in 2021. The background of students spans across different continents/countries. Accompanying this geographic diaspora is the ratio of girls to boys students as presented in the first two columns at the top of the graph.

3. Afaan Oromoo Class Level 2 for Adults (14+ year’s old)

In September 2021 (class from September 25 – December 12, 2021 = 12 weeks), the Afaan Oromoo Class Level 2 for Adults was launched in an effort to advance language instruction for Oromos living across the diaspora. Mr. Samuel Komicha taught 41 pupils. Students gained knowledge of grammatical plurality, the basics of letter writing, sentence patterns, paragraph writing, in addition to many other essentials. Through this course students gained a general proficiency in Afaan Oromoo with an emphasis on writing and discussion as part of a developing skillset. The classes met twice weekly and provided an opportunity for learners to converse in Afaan Oromoo, as well as engage in practice exercises to utilize what was learnt in class with the added opportunity to ask questions.

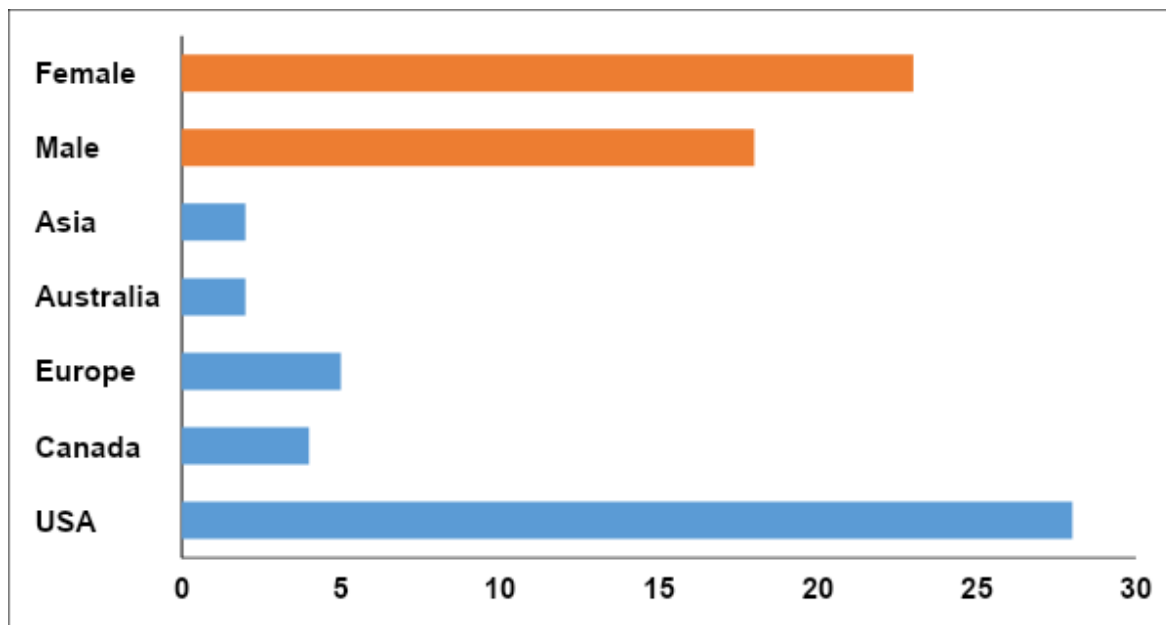


Figure 3: this graph shows the number of adult students (14+ year’s old) who attended Afaan Oromoo Class Level 2 for Adults from September – December 2021 for 12 weeks across many different continents/countries in addition to the ratio of female to male students.

Gadaa, Culture & History Education

OLLAA provides information about the Gadaa, Oromo Culture, and History of the Oromo people. This education includes the Gadaa system, an indigenously fostered democratic socio-political system. There are no schools which teach the Gadaa philosophy as a guiding ideology in the present. As elders within the Oromoo community pass away and the rate

indigenous intellectuals declines it is critical that we endeavor to preserve this incredibly rich cultural and endemically Ethiopian national history. Fortunately, interest in the Gadaa system and ideology is increasing which means that our contribution is timely to prevent the loss of a rich and cherished heritage. Additionally, UNESCO has designated the Gadaa System as an Intangible World Heritage signifying the importance of this ideological system to the collective sum of mankind's knowledge and philosophy.

Gadaa System

Gadaa is a traditional style of government practiced by the Oromo people of Ethiopia that was created through decades of communal experience. The Gadaa System regulates the community's political, economic, social, and religious activities, addressing issues like conflict resolution, reparation, and women's rights protection. It acts as a check on moral behavior, promotes social cohesion, and expresses aspects of community culture. Gadaa is divided into five classes with one serving as the ruling class. This class is composed of an elected chairman, officials, and an assembly of the people.

Each class in Gadaa advances through a succession of grades before reaching a position of authority with leadership changing every eight years. Men whose fathers are already members of the Gadaa System are eligible for enrollment, whereas women are consulted on decisions regarding women's rights and security. Oral historians provide classes on history, laws, rituals, timekeeping, cosmology, mythology, standards of conduct, and the function of the Gadaa system as an administrative system. Meetings and ceremonies are held beneath a sycamore tree (considered the Gadaa symbol), and major clans have erected Gadaa Centers and Ceremonial Areas in their own territories.

Introduction to Gadaa System

Brief Description of Gadaa System Class Attendees

According to the data in Figure 4 below, the bulk of Gadaa System class attendees (more than 50%) between October and November 2020 were male, with around 25% being female. In addition, the analysis indicates that approximately 55% of participants originated from the United States, 8% in Canada, 7% in Europe, and only 2% in native Ethiopia. Additionally, Americans, particularly men, enrolled in lessons at a higher rate than Ethiopians or people from Asia (approximately 2-3%). It is worth noting that the Gadaa System Classes are intended to educate members of the Oromo diaspora. Additionally, Ethiopians may easily get these types of classes through public schooling which is the primary reason for the relatively low number of Ethiopian participants in face-to-face classes.

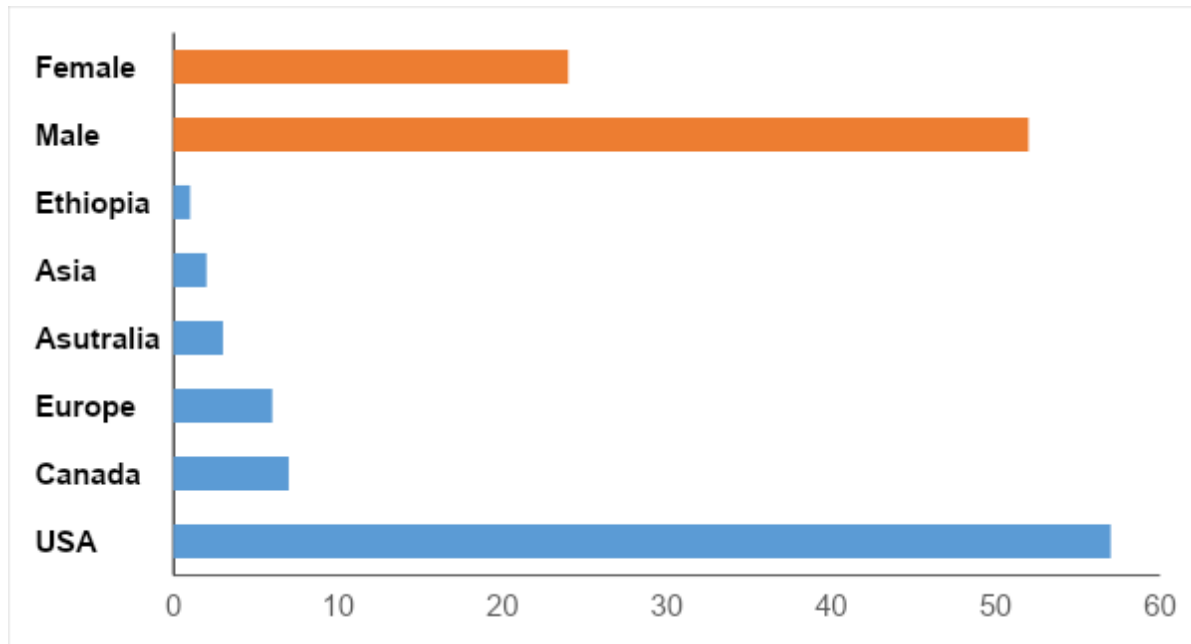


Figure 4: Gadaa System class attendance from October – November 2020. Note the participation rates across different continents/countries and the ratio of female to male students.

Advocacy Training - Why is this class important?

Advocacy is the process of advancing a cause - whether through public opinion or legislation. Oromos are not properly represented as a people within the political and social dialogue of Ethiopia, therefore, campaigning is vital to spread the truth of the plight of the Oromoo and effect a democratic change. This workshop is designed for persons committed to eradicating the mindsets, policies, and systemic limitations that enable economic exploitation, political disenfranchisement, state-sanctioned violence, and breaches of basic human-rights. This unequal treatment is not only against Oromos, but also many people worldwide. Public advocacy will equip the Oromo and others with the tools necessary to fight these battles on a local, national, and international level, ensuring systemic change through a nonviolent and multilateral process.

Brief Overview of Advocacy Training Class Demographics

Figure 5 shows that the majority of men (about 35 %) participated in advocacy training classes from October to November 2020 while 15 % were female. The top three countries of origin for participants were the United States (37%), Canada (4%), and Europe (3%).

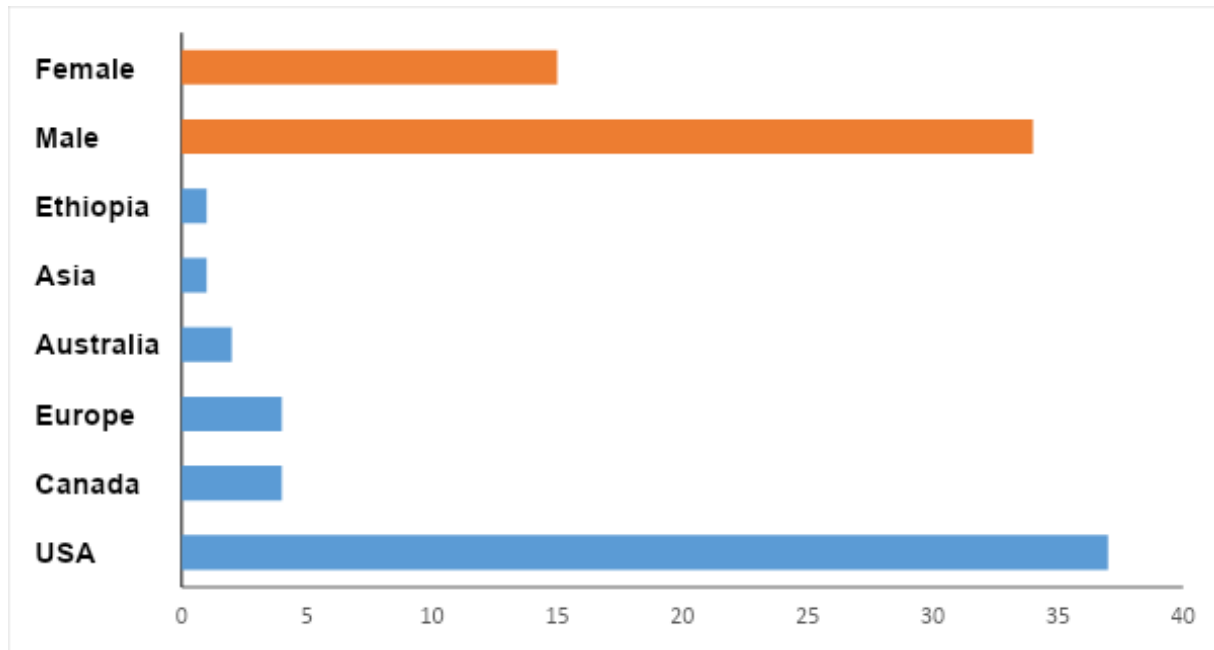


Figure 5: This chart shows Advocacy Training Class attendance from October – November 2020 across different continents/countries alongside the ratio of female to male students.

Education Department's Perspectives

The Educational Department's primary objectives are:

1. To encourage students to develop their language abilities in order to build their confidence, discover their identity, and prevent discrimination.
2. To assist students in determining their profession, develop critical skills that will enable them to obtain steady work, and achieve personal independence.
3. To familiarize students with the Gadaa ideology by educating them about the Oromo's cultural and social heritage in the contemporary world

OLLAA works to advance and increase opportunities for linguistic, professional, and cultural education. In addition to these basic tenets, OLLAA strives to educate and empower the Oromo Diaspora to embrace their identity and strengthen their Oromummaa. Additionally, the Educational Department ensures that students receive a high-quality and professional education. This education by OLLAA is offered by experienced leaders and role models from throughout society who seek to guide students at every stage and level of their education.