

An Ethnomusicological Analysis of Selected Indigenous Amharic
Children's Songs in Selected Government and Non-Governmental
Primary Schools in Addis Ababa

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis, entitled “**An Ethnomusicological Analysis of Selected Indigenous Amharic Children’s Songs in Selected Government and Non-Governmental Primary Schools in Addis Ababa**”, is the result of my own original research work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university or institution.

All sources of materials used for this thesis have been duly acknowledged and referenced.

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Ethnomusicology at department of Music and Fine Art, Mekelle University.

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APPROVAL SHEET

This is to certify that the thesis entitled: **“An Ethnomusicological Analysis of Selected Indigenous Amharic Children’s Songs in Selected Government and Non-Governmental Primary Schools in Addis Ababa”**

Submitted to the Department of Music and Fine Art, College of Social Science and Languages, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Ethnomusicology, is a record of bona fide research work carried out by **FIKADU WAGAW ABEBE** under my supervision and guidance.

Therefore, I recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements.

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Abstract

This study explores the Ethnomusicological features of selected indigenous Amharic children's songs in both government and non-governmental primary schools in Addis Ababa. It aims to examine the musical, linguistic, and cultural elements embedded in these traditional songs and assess their roles in children's socialization, moral education, and identity formation. The study employs qualitative research methods, including interviews, participant observation, and audio-visual documentation. Songs were classified into categories such as play songs, lullabies, and moral instruction songs. Musical and lyrical analyses were conducted to uncover patterns, themes, and educational implications. The findings reveal that indigenous Amharic children's songs are rich in poetic devices, traditional melodies, and cultural values. These songs contribute significantly to children's cognitive, emotional, and ethical development. Moreover, variations were found in how the songs are used and perceived across government and non-governmental schools. The study concludes with recommendations for incorporating indigenous music into formal education and preserving these cultural expressions for future generations.

Keywords: Ethnomusicology, Indigenous Songs, Children's Songs, Amharic, Addis Ababa, Cultural Heritage, Primary Education

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CHAPTER ONE

2. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Music has long been recognized as a foundational component of Ethiopian cultural expression and oral heritage, deeply woven into the fabric of everyday life. It serves not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a medium through which societal values, histories, emotions, and worldviews are communicated and preserved. Among its most vital functions is its role in the lives of children. From the earliest stages of life, music—especially in the form of songs—is used to comfort, educate, entertain, and socialize young members of society. In Ethiopian communities, indigenous children's songs—particularly those composed and transmitted in Amharic, the official working language of the country—play a central role in childhood development. These songs are not simply entertaining ditties; they are embedded with social norms, cultural values, and life lessons. They are sung during playtime, community events, family gatherings, and school activities. The content and structure of these songs, which often include poetic devices such as rhyme, rhythm, repetition, and metaphor, are carefully designed to make them memorable and meaningful for children. Common categories include lullabies (which soothe and bond infants with caregivers), play songs (which accompany physical games), counting and alphabet rhymes (which build cognitive and linguistic skills), riddles and call-and-response songs (which encourage critical thinking and interaction), and moral songs (which teach values such as kindness, honesty, and respect).

Despite the cultural and educational richness of these traditional songs, contemporary Ethiopian society—especially in urban centers like Addis Ababa—is experiencing significant cultural shifts due to the influence of globalization, modern technology, and changing lifestyles. The expansion of digital media, television programming, internet access, and foreign entertainment content has significantly altered the musical environment in which children grow up. Young people are increasingly exposed to foreign musical styles, commercial pop culture, and digital forms of entertainment that often displace indigenous oral traditions. Furthermore, the formalization and standardization of education have led many schools to adopt rigid curricula focused primarily on academic subjects, with limited integration of local cultural elements such as music and oral literature. This has resulted in a gradual erosion of traditional musical knowledge, particularly among children who are no longer routinely exposed to the songs that once defined communal learning and cultural identity.

This growing marginalization of indigenous children's songs raises important questions about the sustainability of Ethiopia's intangible cultural heritage. As oral traditions are vulnerable to disappearance if not actively practiced and passed down, there is a pressing need to understand how these songs are currently functioning within modern educational contexts. Ethnomusicology, as an interdisciplinary field that studies music within its cultural and social frameworks, provides a powerful lens through which to explore the roles, meanings, and transformations of children's songs in Ethiopian society today. It allows researchers to consider not only the musical characteristics of these songs—such as melody, rhythm, structure, and performance style—but also the socio-cultural contexts in which they are learned, performed, and valued.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the context of Ethiopia's rich and diverse cultural heritage, indigenous children's songs—particularly those expressed in Amharic—have historically played a crucial role in early childhood development, cultural education, and social cohesion. These songs, characterized by their engaging rhythms, repetitive structures, and culturally embedded themes, have served as powerful tools for transmitting values, language skills, emotional expression, and communal knowledge across generations. However, in recent decades, especially in urban centers like Addis Ababa, these traditional practices are facing serious challenges. The increasing pace of globalization, the expansion of digital technologies, and the proliferation of Western media have contributed to a growing preference for foreign music, entertainment, and educational models, often at the expense of local oral traditions. As a result, indigenous Amharic children's songs are becoming marginalized in both home and school environments, leading to a worrying decline in their usage, appreciation, and transmission among young people.

One of the most pressing issues is the apparent disconnect between Ethiopia's formal education system and its indigenous cultural heritage. Government and non-governmental primary schools in Addis Ababa, while central to shaping the minds and values of the next generation, frequently adopt rigid and standardized curricula that leave little room for culturally grounded artistic expressions such as traditional music and oral literature. In many cases, teachers lack training in the integration of local musical traditions into classroom instruction, and there are few institutional mechanisms in place to encourage or support such practices. Consequently, children may complete their early education without ever learning or performing the songs that their parents or grandparents sang during their own childhoods.

Additionally, there is a noticeable gap in scholarly inquiry concerning the current status, functions, and pedagogical potential of indigenous Amharic children's songs in school settings. While some studies have addressed the broader field of Ethiopian music or folklore, very few have specifically examined the ethnomusicological aspects of children's songs within the structured and diverse environments of modern primary schools. Even fewer have attempted a comparative analysis between government and non-governmental schools, which may differ in their openness to integrating cultural content, the backgrounds of their teaching staff, and their educational philosophies. This lack of research limits our understanding of how these songs are currently valued (or devalued), what roles they might still play in child development, and what obstacles or opportunities exist for their preservation and revitalization.

If this neglect continues unchecked, Ethiopia risks losing not only a vital part of its intangible cultural heritage but also a valuable educational resource that can support holistic child development. Indigenous children's songs are more than nostalgic remnants of the past; they are living cultural tools that can foster creativity, reinforce moral behavior, enhance language acquisition, and strengthen social identity. Therefore, this study emerges from an urgent need to explore how selected indigenous Amharic children's songs are used, transmitted, and perceived within government and non-governmental primary schools in Addis Ababa. Through a focused ethnomusicological lens, the research seeks to document these songs, analyze their musical and thematic elements, and assess the extent of their integration into educational practices. In doing so, the study aims to highlight the critical importance of culturally responsive pedagogy and to contribute to the preservation and appreciation of Ethiopia's oral musical heritage in the face of rapid socio-cultural change.

Despite the cultural and pedagogical importance of indigenous Amharic children's songs, they are increasingly underrepresented in urban Ethiopian schools. In both government and non-governmental institutions, the use of these songs in the formal and informal curriculum is declining. While some teachers still use them for classroom management, language practice, or break-time entertainment, many students are unfamiliar with even the most common traditional songs. This marginalization is concerning because these songs are carriers of indigenous knowledge, moral values, language idioms, and historical memory. Their disappearance could result in a significant loss of intangible cultural heritage, especially for urban children who may already be distanced from rural traditions. Moreover, academic research has rarely focused on this specific intersection of ethnomusicology, children's culture, and education. This research addresses that gap by documenting, analyzing, and interpreting selected songs and their sociocultural roles across different educational settings.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The overarching aim of this study is to explore and analyze the role of indigenous Amharic children's songs in selected primary schools in Addis Ababa through an ethnomusicological lens. Given the increasing marginalization of these traditional oral forms in contemporary educational and cultural settings, this research seeks to uncover the extent to which these songs are preserved, transmitted, and utilized within both government and non-governmental school environments. The study is grounded in the belief that indigenous songs serve not only as artistic expressions but also as valuable educational and cultural resources that can support child development, moral education, and identity formation. The objectives outlined below provide a focused framework for guiding the research process.

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of this study is to conduct an ethnomusicological analysis of selected indigenous Amharic children's songs in selected government and non-governmental primary schools in Addis Ababa, with the aim of understanding their musical features, cultural functions, and current status in the context of formal and informal education.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

To achieve the general objective, the study will pursue the following specific objectives:

- To identify and document a selection of indigenous Amharic children's songs that are currently in use—or have been used in the recent past—in primary school settings (both government and non-governmental) in Addis Ababa.
- To examine the musical elements of these songs, including melody, rhythm, structure, performance style, and lyrical content, through ethnomusicological analysis.
- To explore the functions and meanings of these songs within the lives of children, particularly in relation to their roles in entertainment, moral instruction, language development, socialization, and cultural identity.
- To assess the extent to which indigenous Amharic children's songs are integrated into the teaching and learning processes in the selected schools, including classroom instruction, extracurricular activities, and informal interactions.
- To compare the attitudes and practices of government and non-governmental school teachers, students, and administrators toward the use of indigenous children's songs.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to achieve the general and specific objectives outlined in this study, the following research questions have been developed to guide the investigation. These questions are designed to elicit a comprehensive understanding of the musical, cultural, and educational significance of indigenous Amharic children's songs within primary school settings in Addis Ababa. They reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the study, drawing on perspectives from ethnomusicology, education, and cultural studies.

The central research question is: **How are selected indigenous Amharic children's songs used, interpreted, and valued in government and non-governmental primary schools in Addis Ababa?** To address this overarching inquiry, the study is further guided by the following specific research questions:

- What are the most commonly known and performed indigenous Amharic children's songs among students and teachers in the selected schools?
- What are the musical characteristics and structural features of these songs, and how do they reflect traditional Ethiopian musical aesthetics?
- What cultural, moral, and educational functions do these songs serve in the lives of children?
- To what extent are indigenous children's songs integrated into the formal and informal educational practices of the selected schools?
- How do teachers, school administrators, and students perceive the relevance and importance of indigenous Amharic children's songs in education and cultural

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study holds considerable significance for multiple fields, including ethnomusicology, education, cultural preservation, and child development, particularly within the Ethiopian context. First and foremost, it contributes to the academic body of knowledge by providing an in-depth ethnomusicological analysis of indigenous Amharic children's songs, a subject that remains under-researched despite its critical importance to Ethiopia's intangible cultural heritage. By documenting and analyzing these songs, the study helps fill a notable gap in scholarly literature, offering fresh insights into the musical structures, themes, and social functions of children's oral traditions in an urban environment.

From an educational perspective, the study's findings have the potential to influence curriculum development and teaching practices in both government and non-governmental primary schools. Understanding the role of indigenous songs in child learning and socialization can encourage educators and policymakers to integrate culturally relevant musical content into formal education, promoting a more holistic and culturally responsive pedagogy. This is particularly important in a rapidly urbanizing city like Addis Ababa, where globalization and modernization threaten to erode traditional cultural expressions. The research may inspire teachers and school administrators to incorporate these songs not only as a means of entertainment but also as tools for enhancing language skills, moral education, and community cohesion among students. Finally, the study holds practical significance for parents, educators, and community leaders by raising awareness about the educational and social benefits of indigenous children's songs. It encourages a broader recognition of music as a vital component of child development that extends beyond formal instruction, emphasizing its role in emotional expression, creativity, and social bonding.

1.6 SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study focuses specifically on the ethnomusicological analysis of selected indigenous Amharic children's songs within the context of primary education in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital city. By concentrating on both government and non-governmental primary schools, the research aims to capture a comparative perspective on how these traditional songs are preserved, transmitted, and utilized across different educational settings. The choice of Addis Ababa as the research site is deliberate, as it represents a dynamic urban environment where traditional cultural practices intersect with modern educational systems and global influences, making it a pertinent context for studying the challenges and opportunities related to cultural preservation.

The scope of the study is limited to songs performed by children in the Amharic language, which is the official working language of Ethiopia and widely spoken in Addis Ababa. While Ethiopia is home to diverse linguistic and musical traditions, focusing on Amharic children's songs allows for a more in-depth and manageable analysis within the timeframe and resources of this thesis. The songs selected for analysis will include a range of types, such as lullabies, play songs, counting rhymes, and moral or instructional songs, providing a representative sample of the children's musical repertoire. Delimitations of the study arise from practical considerations and research design choices. The study does not aim to cover all indigenous children's songs in Addis Ababa or across Ethiopia, nor does it include songs in other Ethiopian languages or ethnic groups. Furthermore, the research focuses on primary schools rather than informal or community settings outside of school. This delimitation is intended to allow a concentrated examination of the interaction between traditional music and formal education. Additionally, the study examines the current usage and status of these songs but does not engage in extensive historical reconstruction or analysis of changes over long periods.

Another delimitation involves the methodology: the study relies primarily on qualitative data collected through interviews, observations, and audio recordings within the selected schools. While these methods provide rich, contextualized insights, they also limit the generalizability of findings to other regions or educational contexts. Despite these limitations, the study's scope is sufficient to provide meaningful insights into the role and relevance of indigenous Amharic children's songs in Addis Ababa's primary schools, contributing valuable knowledge for scholars, educators, and policymakers interested in cultural preservation and education.

1.8 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

To ensure clarity and consistency throughout this study, it is important to define key terms as they are used within the specific context of this research. These operational definitions help to avoid ambiguity and provide a common understanding for readers from diverse backgrounds.

Ethnomusicology refers to the interdisciplinary study of music in its cultural and social contexts. In this study, it involves analyzing indigenous Amharic children's songs not only as musical compositions but also as cultural artifacts that reflect social values, identity, and educational functions.

Indigenous Children's Songs are traditional songs that have been orally transmitted through generations within a specific cultural group—in this case, the Amharic-speaking community. These songs typically include lullabies, play songs, counting rhymes, riddles, and moral or instructional songs that serve various developmental and socialization purposes for children.

Government Primary Schools refer to publicly funded schools that follow the national curriculum established by Ethiopia's Ministry of Education. These schools represent the formal educational sector accessible to the majority of children in Addis Ababa.

Non-Governmental Primary Schools are privately run or community-based schools that operate independently of direct government administration, although they may still adhere to national educational standards. They often have greater flexibility in incorporating cultural content and extracurricular activities.

Preservation in the context of this study denotes the efforts to maintain, document, and transmit indigenous children's songs to current and future generations, ensuring their survival amid changing social and cultural dynamics.

Transmission refers to the processes—both formal and informal—through which children learn and internalize these traditional songs, including through family, community, and school interactions.

Cultural Identity pertains to the sense of belonging and shared heritage that children develop through engagement with their indigenous musical traditions, which contribute to their understanding of self and community.

1.9 ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

This thesis is organized into five comprehensive chapters; each designed to systematically explore and analyze the Ethnomusicological dimensions of selected indigenous Amharic children's songs in primary schools of Addis Ababa. Chapter one serves as the introduction, providing the background and rationale for the study, stating the problem, and outlining the research objectives and questions. It also discusses the significance, scope, and limitations of the study, as well as operational definitions to clarify key terms. This chapter sets the foundation and context for the entire research project.

Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature and theoretical frameworks that underpin the study. It includes an overview of ethnomusicology as a discipline, traditional Ethiopian music and children's songs, the role of music in child development and education, and previous research related to indigenous musical traditions and cultural preservation. This chapter establishes the academic grounding and highlights gaps that the current study seeks to address.

Chapter Three details the research methodology employed in the study. It explains the research design, selection of participants, data collection methods such as interviews, observations, and audio recordings, as well as the data analysis techniques used. Ethical considerations and challenges encountered during the research process are also discussed, ensuring transparency and rigor.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the study. It provides an in-depth analysis of the selected indigenous Amharic children's songs, examining their musical characteristics, cultural meanings, and educational functions. The chapter also explores how these songs are used and valued in both government and non-governmental primary schools, supported by empirical data and direct quotes from participants.

Finally, Chapter Five offers a summary of the research findings, conclusions drawn from the analysis, and practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and cultural practitioners. It also suggests areas for future research to further enhance understanding and support for indigenous children's musical heritage.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of scholarly literature relevant to the ethnomusicological analysis of indigenous Amharic children's songs within both government and non-governmental primary schools in Addis Ababa. Anchored in a multidisciplinary perspective, this chapter draws upon the fields of ethnomusicology, education, sociolinguistics, anthropology, and indigenous knowledge systems to frame the cultural, educational, and linguistic significance of traditional children's songs. The objective of this literature review is to critically examine existing knowledge, identify theoretical foundations, and uncover conceptual gaps that justify the need for the current study. Particular emphasis is placed on how indigenous songs function as vehicles for cultural transmission, moral instruction, socialization, and identity formation among primary school children. Given the Ethiopian context—characterized by rich linguistic diversity and a deeply rooted oral tradition—the review also explores how music functions within local epistemological systems.

To this end, the chapter is organized into several key sections. Section 2.2 presents the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guide the study, focusing on ethnomusicological theory, socio-cultural theory, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). Section 2.3 provides an overview of ethnomusicology as a discipline, including its definition, scope, and methodological tools. Section 2.4 explores the characteristics and functions of indigenous music and oral traditions, with special reference to children's songs. Section 2.5 discusses the role of children's songs in the Ethiopian context, particularly those in the Amharic language, while Section 2.6 addresses the school environment as a site for the transmission or erosion of indigenous musical practices. Section 2.7 reviews previous studies, both global and Ethiopian, that have focused on children's songs and

music in education. Section 2.8 identifies the research gap that the current study seeks to address. Finally, Section 2.9 offers a summary of the major themes and insights presented in the chapter.

2.2 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The present study is guided by a composite theoretical and conceptual framework that draws from three interrelated domains: ethnomusicological theory, socio-cultural theory, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). These frameworks provide the intellectual scaffolding necessary for understanding the complex interplay between music, culture, identity, and education in the context of indigenous Amharic children's songs. As this research examines traditional songs not only as aesthetic products but as vehicles of cultural knowledge and moral formation, a multi-dimensional theoretical perspective is essential.

The framework serves three critical functions: (1) it shapes the formulation of the research questions; (2) it informs the methodological orientation of the study; and (3) it provides a basis for interpreting findings within a culturally grounded and academically robust lens. The following subsections elaborate on the specific theories and concepts employed and discuss their relevance to the objectives of the study.

2.2.1 Ethnomusicological Theory

Ethnomusicology, as both a discipline and methodological approach, lies at the core of this study. It is concerned with understanding music within its social, cultural, and historical contexts, rather than in isolation as abstract art. Merriam's (1964) tripartite model of ethnomusicology—focusing on music as sound, music as behavior, and music as conceptual system—provides a valuable lens through which to analyze children's songs in their lived environments.

In the Ethiopian context, where oral traditions and communal performance practices are central to cultural continuity, ethnomusicology allows the researcher to interpret songs not only by analyzing their melodic, rhythmic, and structural features but also by attending to the circumstances of their performance and the meanings they carry within specific cultural settings. Songs are thus viewed as cultural texts—rich in narrative, symbolism, and affect—rather than as mere musical compositions. This perspective is particularly appropriate for studying children's songs, which are deeply embedded in everyday social interaction and informal learning environments.

Moreover, ethnomusicology's emphasis on fieldwork, participant observation, and emic interpretation aligns well with the qualitative methodology adopted in this study. By listening to and documenting the songs in situ—within classrooms, playgrounds, and community gatherings—the research acknowledges and honors the cultural ownership and epistemic agency of local performers and tradition bearers.

2.2.2 Socio-Cultural Theory of Learning

The second pillar of this framework is derived from socio-cultural theory, particularly the work of Lev Vygotsky, which posits that learning is a socially mediated process that occurs through cultural tools, interaction, and language. According to this theory, cognitive development is not solely an individual process but is fundamentally shaped by one's engagement with more knowledgeable others and with culturally meaningful artifacts.

Children's songs, especially those that are traditionally performed and orally transmitted, function as powerful cultural tools. They mediate children's understanding of social roles, moral values, and community norms. The performance of songs—often accompanied by gestures, facial expressions,

or play—is a form of cultural apprenticeship, in which children learn not only how to sing but how to *be* in the world. In this way, songs are both expressive and formative. In primary school settings, particularly in Addis Ababa, children's songs operate as informal educational resources. Teachers often use them for classroom management, to introduce lessons, or to promote moral instruction. From a socio-cultural perspective, this pedagogical use of songs reinforces the idea that learning is contextual, embodied, and culturally situated. It also highlights the potential for integrating indigenous knowledge into formal schooling in ways that are developmentally and culturally appropriate.

2.2.3 Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)

The third foundational element of the framework is the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) paradigm, which validates and promotes locally generated epistemologies that are often marginalized in mainstream academic discourse. IKS recognizes that indigenous communities possess complex systems of knowledge that are passed down orally, experientially, and collectively. These knowledge systems are deeply intertwined with language, environment, spirituality, and social practice.

In the context of this study, the IKS framework affirms the value of Amharic children's songs as vessels of indigenous knowledge. These songs encapsulate ethical teachings, historical memory, communal identity, and emotional intelligence. They are crafted with poetic devices, metaphors, and proverbs that reflect localized wisdom and worldviews. By using an IKS lens, the study intentionally shifts the focus from Western-centric models of education and aesthetics to African-centered understandings of cultural production and transmission. This perspective is especially important in the face of globalization and cultural homogenization, which threaten the survival of

local traditions. The IKS framework, therefore, not only supports the documentation and analysis of indigenous songs but also contributes to broader efforts of cultural preservation, decolonization of education, and intergenerational knowledge sustainability.

2.2.4 Integrative Conceptual Framework

The intersection of the aforementioned theories culminates in an integrative conceptual framework that informs the present study. This framework conceptualizes indigenous children's songs as *multifunctional cultural artifacts* that operate across four domains:

1. **Musical** – They contain rhythmic, melodic, and structural features characteristic of Ethiopian indigenous music.
2. **Linguistic** – They employ the Amharic language in poetic and pedagogical forms that reinforce vocabulary, grammar, and discourse conventions.
3. **Social and Moral** – They are used to teach values such as cooperation, respect, honesty, and responsibility.
4. **Educational** – They support both informal and formal learning processes by scaffolding memory, critical thinking, and social interaction.

In school settings—both governmental and non-governmental—these domains interact in complex ways, shaped by institutional policies, teacher attitudes, community expectations, and children's own agency. This framework enables the study to examine not only the intrinsic qualities of the songs but also the broader ecological systems that influence their performance, transmission, and perception. In summary, the theoretical and conceptual framework adopted in this study is intentionally multi-layered and interdisciplinary. It allows for a nuanced understanding of indigenous Amharic children's songs as vital components of Ethiopia's intangible cultural heritage and as pedagogical instruments that continue to shape the moral and cognitive worlds of young learners in contemporary school settings.

2.3 OVERVIEW OF ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

Ethnomusicology, as a scholarly discipline and methodological orientation, forms the foundational basis of this study. This section provides an in-depth overview of the field, focusing on its definitions, historical development, scope, and methodological approaches. As a field that lies at the intersection of musicology and anthropology, ethnomusicology is particularly suited for the study of music within its cultural and social contexts. The application of ethnomusicological approaches to the study of indigenous Amharic children's songs in Addis Ababa allows for a holistic understanding of these songs as cultural texts—texts that are rich in meaning, function, and aesthetic value. This section is divided into two subsections: the first discusses the definitions and scope of ethnomusicology, while the second outlines the methodological tools typically used in ethnomusicological inquiry.

2.3.1 Definitions, Scope, and Evolution of Ethnomusicology

The term *ethnomusicology* was first coined in the mid-twentieth century to replace the earlier term *comparative musicology*, which had been critiqued for its Eurocentric and evolutionist assumptions. As the field matured, it moved away from merely comparing "non-Western" musics to Western classical music and toward understanding all musical systems as equally valid within their own cultural contexts. Ethnomusicology is now widely recognized as the study of music as a human and cultural phenomenon, involving both the analysis of musical sound and the interpretation of its meaning within particular communities.

According to Merriam (1964), ethnomusicology is not simply about collecting and transcribing folk tunes but about understanding music as a behavior, a symbolic system, and a social act. His tripartite model, which considers music as sound (the acoustic properties of music), music as

behavior (how music is produced and consumed in society), and music as concept (the ideas and beliefs surrounding music), has become a foundational framework in the field. This tripartite lens is particularly valuable in studies such as the present one, where the songs are not only musical compositions but also performative acts deeply embedded in educational and moral contexts.

The field has expanded significantly since Merriam's early conceptualizations. Scholars such as Nettl (2005), Rice (2014), and Seeger (1987) have emphasized that ethnomusicology is not merely about documenting the "exotic" or the "other" but about studying how music functions in all human societies, including one's own. As such, ethnomusicology has grown increasingly reflexive, interdisciplinary, and socially engaged. It now encompasses studies of popular music, diasporic music traditions, music and identity, music and politics, and—relevant to this study—music and education.

In the Ethiopian context, ethnomusicology offers an essential framework for analyzing indigenous children's songs that are typically transmitted orally and performed in communal settings. These songs are not isolated artistic products but integral components of everyday life, encompassing aspects of language, moral instruction, social roles, and emotional expression. Their study requires sensitivity not only to musical structure but also to cultural nuance, community values, and historical continuity. By grounding the research in ethnomusicological theory, this study affirms the intrinsic value of Ethiopian musical traditions and counters the marginalization often faced by indigenous art forms in formal educational systems.

2.3.2 Methodologies in Ethnomusicology

Ethnomusicology is characterized by a set of methodological practices that emphasize fieldwork, cultural immersion, and qualitative analysis. The most distinctive feature of ethnomusicological research is its reliance on ethnographic methods, which prioritize firsthand observation, participation, and dialogue with community members. Fieldwork is typically long-term and involves engaging with music makers and audiences in their natural environments.

Participant observation is a central method, allowing researchers to experience music not as outsiders or passive observers but as active participants in musical life. In the case of children's songs, this involves attending and documenting school-based performances, playtime activities, cultural festivals, and informal singing contexts. Such immersion enables the researcher to understand how music is situated within broader social practices and belief systems.

Another key methodological tool is audio-visual documentation. Recording musical performances—both audio and video—allows for detailed analysis of musical elements such as pitch, rhythm, tempo, and timbre, as well as non-verbal aspects such as gesture, facial expression, and body movement. In this study, recordings of children's song performances in Addis Ababa schools serve as primary data for both musical and contextual analysis. These recordings are transcribed using standard music notation and supplemented with ethnographic notes.

Interviews and oral histories are also vital to ethnomusicological research. These methods allow researchers to access community members' perspectives, values, and narratives surrounding musical practices. In the context of this study, interviews with teachers, cultural practitioners, school administrators, and children themselves provide insights into the perceived functions, meanings, and transformations of children's songs over time.

Additionally, reflexivity and ethical engagement are essential components of ethnomusicological methodology. Researchers must remain aware of their positionality—their own cultural background, biases, and influence on the research process. This is particularly important when studying indigenous traditions in postcolonial societies like Ethiopia, where issues of cultural ownership, representation, and authority are highly sensitive. In the present study, ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent, ensuring respectful representation of participants, and sharing findings with the communities involved.

Finally, data analysis in ethnomusicology involves both musical and thematic analysis. Musical analysis focuses on structural features—such as scale, rhythm, form, and harmony—while thematic analysis identifies recurring cultural motifs, symbolic meanings, and educational messages. These dual approaches enable a holistic understanding of the children's songs as both artistic creations and carriers of social significance.

In conclusion, ethnomusicology provides a rich and appropriate disciplinary lens for examining indigenous Amharic children's songs in the Addis Ababa school context. Its commitment to cultural sensitivity, methodological rigor, and interdisciplinary engagement allows for an analysis that honors the complexity, functionality, and beauty of these musical expressions. In the following sections, the study builds upon this ethnomusicological foundation to explore the specific characteristics and roles of children's songs in Ethiopian society.

2.4 INDIGENOUS MUSIC AND ORAL TRADITIONS

Indigenous music and oral traditions constitute the cultural and epistemological foundations of many African societies, including Ethiopia. These traditions are not merely artistic expressions but also vital systems of communication, education, and identity preservation. This section discusses

the defining characteristics of indigenous music, with particular attention to children's songs, and explores the cultural and social functions they fulfill within Ethiopian oral traditions. For communities whose histories and moral values are transmitted orally rather than textually, music—especially in the form of songs—is central to both individual development and collective memory. In this regard, the songs sung by children occupy a special place, as they serve both pedagogical and socializing functions. This section is structured into two subsections. The first outlines the key characteristics of indigenous children's songs, while the second examines the functions and social roles these songs play in the context of Ethiopian oral traditions.

2.4.1 Characteristics of Indigenous Children's Songs

Indigenous children's songs are typically transmitted orally from one generation to another and are deeply rooted in the everyday life and cultural practices of local communities. These songs are often characterized by repetition, simple melodic patterns, rhythmic consistency, and participatory performance styles, making them easily accessible to children. Their simplicity in form is deliberately designed to suit young learners, yet they are rich in meaning, metaphor, and emotional expression.

One of the most salient features of these songs is their strong use of repetition and rhyme, which facilitates memorization and reinforces linguistic patterns. Many songs are structured in a call-and-response format, which encourages collective participation and fosters a sense of belonging and shared identity among children. Moreover, these songs often incorporate physical movement—such as clapping, jumping, or dancing—which contributes to motor skill development and embodiment of cultural rhythm and space.

Lyrically, indigenous children's songs are marked by the use of symbolic language, proverbs, humor, and metaphor. These linguistic features make the songs not only entertaining but also instructive. They convey messages about social conduct, familial relationships, environmental awareness, and religious beliefs in ways that are meaningful and memorable to children. In Amharic children's songs specifically, metaphors drawn from nature, daily life, and spiritual practice are prevalent, and the songs often exhibit deep intertextual relationships with traditional folktales and oral poetry.

Melodically, many Ethiopian children's songs reflect the broader characteristics of Ethiopian modal systems (qenet), though they are often simpler in structure. Songs tend to be pentatonic, and their scale structures are adapted for ease of vocalization by children. These musical features help situate children's songs within the larger framework of Ethiopian traditional music, thus reinforcing cultural continuity from an early age.

2.4.2 Functions and Social Roles of Children's Songs

Children's songs in Ethiopian indigenous traditions are multifunctional. Beyond their aesthetic appeal, these songs serve pedagogical, moral, psychological, and communal purposes. In many communities, they function as informal educational tools, teaching children how to speak, listen, count, cooperate, respect elders, care for their environment, and internalize social values.

Pedagogically, these songs introduce children to the rhythms, intonations, and structures of their mother tongue. Through repeated exposure, children learn grammatical forms, vocabulary, phonological patterns, and discourse structures. This linguistic exposure lays the foundation for future literacy and communication skills. Furthermore, many songs are didactic in content, offering moral lessons about honesty, humility, kindness, and social responsibility.

Socially, the performance of songs provides children with opportunities for group participation, role-playing, and the rehearsal of adult responsibilities. Songs are often embedded in games, seasonal rituals, or communal gatherings, making them vehicles for social cohesion. They help children understand and internalize community norms and expectations. For example, lullabies often contain messages about obedience and family honor, while play songs may reflect gender roles or mock undesirable behaviors as a form of social correction.

Culturally, children's songs preserve historical narratives, collective memory, and traditional belief systems. Because these songs are transmitted orally and embedded in everyday life, they act as living repositories of cultural heritage. They also reflect adaptive strategies for resilience and social critique. In times of social or political change, songs often evolve in lyrical content while retaining their traditional forms, thereby offering continuity amidst transformation.

Psychologically, singing provides children with emotional outlets for joy, frustration, or grief. Songs can soothe, entertain, or inspire. They help children express themselves in non-verbal ways and cope with social realities. For children growing up in urban centers such as Addis Ababa—where cultural homogenization and formal schooling can distance them from traditional practices—these songs offer grounding and emotional connection to their ancestral heritage.

In summary, indigenous children's songs are not trivial or peripheral elements of culture; rather, they are core to the ways in which knowledge, values, and identity are transmitted across generations. Their continued use and transmission in schools, homes, and public spaces in Addis Ababa is a testament to their enduring relevance and transformative power. As this study will show in subsequent chapters, these songs remain vibrant, dynamic, and profoundly influential in shaping the moral, cognitive, and cultural development of Ethiopian children.

2.5 CHILDREN’S SONGS IN THE ETHIOPIAN CONTEXT

Children’s songs in Ethiopia are deeply embedded in the nation’s cultural and linguistic diversity. They form an integral part of the oral tradition through which knowledge, identity, and values are transmitted across generations. While Ethiopia is home to more than 80 languages and ethnic groups, Amharic has held a dominant position as a national working language and medium of instruction in many urban schools, particularly in Addis Ababa. As such, Amharic children’s songs constitute a prominent segment of the national heritage of oral music traditions. These songs are not only performed in domestic settings but are also heard in schoolyards, classrooms, and public gatherings—often blurring the boundaries between formal and informal education.

This section discusses the cultural and linguistic significance of Amharic children’s songs and explores their role in early childhood learning and development. By focusing on the Ethiopian context, particularly in urban schools where cultural hybridization is increasingly evident, this section underscores how indigenous musical practices coexist with or are challenged by formalized educational frameworks.

2.5.1 The Role of Amharic in Children’s Music

The use of Amharic in children’s songs plays a dual role—both as a linguistic vehicle and as a cultural symbol. Linguistically, these songs serve as tools for language acquisition and reinforcement. They help children internalize phonological patterns, syntactic structures, and pragmatic conventions of spoken Amharic. Through song, children learn how to express themselves rhythmically, articulate vowel and consonant clusters, and use formulaic expressions such as greetings, farewells, blessings, and proverbs. The musical and rhythmic features of these songs enhance memorability and language retention, especially among early learners.

Moreover, many Amharic children's songs are imbued with elements of traditional poetry and orature, drawing on proverbial wisdom and culturally significant metaphors. This linguistic richness is not merely ornamental but pedagogically purposeful—it introduces children to modes of figurative language that are central to Amharic literary and communicative traditions. For instance, a simple line in a children's song may encapsulate a moral lesson drawn from a well-known folk tale or a religious teaching. Culturally, the language of these songs acts as a medium of identity construction. In urban centers like Addis Ababa—where children from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds converge—Amharic songs often serve as cultural “bridges,” enabling cross-cultural communication and shared social experiences. At the same time, they also assert the prominence of Amharic as a bearer of national culture, sometimes at the expense of minority languages. This tension reveals the complex dynamics of language, power, and cultural expression in Ethiopian education. In both government and non-governmental primary schools, the presence of Amharic children's songs—whether sung during break time, cultural events, or classroom transitions—reinforces the centrality of the language in shaping children's sense of belonging to a broader Ethiopian identity. However, it also calls for critical reflection on how linguistic diversity can be more inclusively represented in school-based musical practices.

2.5.2 Cultural Themes in Ethiopian Children's Songs

Amharic children's songs are rich in cultural themes that reflect the moral values, social norms, and everyday realities of Ethiopian life. These themes often emerge through metaphorical and symbolic language, dramatization, and humor, making them both engaging and instructive for young audiences. Common themes include respect for elders, cooperation and sharing, personal hygiene, caution in speech and action, and the consequences of disobedience or laziness. For

example, songs may narrate the story of a misbehaving child who faces humorous or cautionary consequences, thus reinforcing desirable behaviors in an indirect but memorable way. Others may celebrate communal harmony, agricultural cycles, religious holidays, or the importance of honesty and hard work. These thematic messages are internalized by children not through rote learning, but through joyful and repeated singing, often accompanied by gestures, dramatization, or play. Many of these songs also exhibit strong connections to traditional folklore and ritual practices. They may mirror the themes found in proverbs, folktales, or religious teachings, providing continuity between generations and across domains of social life. In this sense, the songs not only entertain but also socialize, educate, and transmit cultural capital.

Cultural preservation is another key function. In an era marked by increasing exposure to globalized media and technologies, these indigenous songs serve as cultural anchors. When teachers, parents, or community members actively engage children in singing traditional songs, they contribute to the intergenerational transmission of cultural identity and historical consciousness. This is especially vital in Addis Ababa, where urbanization and socio-economic pressures can lead to cultural disconnection or assimilation.

2.5.3 Children's Songs and Early Learning

In the Ethiopian context, where formal early childhood education is still developing in many areas, indigenous children's songs fill a critical gap in early learning. Even in structured school environments, teachers often rely on these songs to manage classrooms, transition between activities, or introduce foundational concepts such as numbers, colors, body parts, and greetings.

Research in education and psychology has shown that music enhances memory retention, auditory discrimination, emotional regulation, and cognitive flexibility (Campbell, 1997; Hallam, 2010). These benefits are particularly relevant in early childhood, where learning is most effective when it is experiential, sensory-rich, and emotionally engaging. Ethiopian children's songs naturally align with these principles. Their musicality, repetition, and cultural familiarity create low-stress, high-engagement learning environments that are especially beneficial in multilingual and resource-constrained schools. Moreover, the use of songs in teaching also promotes inclusive education. Children who may struggle with verbal expression, attention, or formal academic tasks often participate more confidently when learning is embedded in music and movement. Songs thus become a medium for equitable participation and differentiated instruction.

In non-governmental schools, which may follow alternative pedagogical models such as Montessori or child-centered learning, there is often more structured integration of music into the curriculum. However, the inclusion of indigenous songs is not always guaranteed and depends on the awareness and cultural sensitivity of the educators. Government schools, while often less resourced, tend to retain stronger connections to traditional practices, including music, due to their direct engagement with the surrounding communities. This study, therefore, explores how these two types of schools differ not only in educational approach but also in their relationship to indigenous musical heritage. In summary, children's songs in Ethiopia—especially those in the Amharic language—serve as powerful instruments of cultural transmission, language development, and early education. Their presence in schools offers both opportunities and challenges: opportunities to promote culturally grounded pedagogy and challenges in terms of equitable representation and integration in formal curricula. The following sections will examine how these issues have been approached in previous studies and what gaps remain to be addressed.

2.6 SCHOOL CONTEXT AND MUSICAL TRANSMISSION

The school environment plays a crucial role in the transmission, preservation, and transformation of indigenous musical traditions, including children's songs. In Ethiopia, primary schools—both government and non-governmental—serve as important sites where cultural knowledge is either reinforced or, in some cases, marginalized. This section examines how institutional contexts influence the use, perception, and transmission of indigenous Amharic children's songs. It is divided into two subsections: the first compares the characteristics and educational approaches of government and non-governmental primary schools regarding indigenous music, and the second explores teachers' and students' attitudes and perceptions toward these musical traditions within the school setting.

2.6.1 Government vs Non-Governmental School Environments

Government primary schools in Addis Ababa generally operate under standardized curricula and policy frameworks mandated by the Ministry of Education. These schools often have closer ties to local communities and may incorporate indigenous cultural elements, such as children's songs, as part of informal classroom practices, school celebrations, or cultural heritage days. However, limited resources, large class sizes, and a focus on academic achievement may restrict systematic incorporation of indigenous music into formal instruction. By contrast, non-governmental primary schools—including private, community-based, and international schools—often adopt alternative pedagogical models and curricula that emphasize child-centered learning, creativity, and holistic development. These schools may offer more structured music education programs and are sometimes better resourced in terms of materials and teacher training. Nonetheless, their integration of indigenous musical traditions varies widely. Some may prioritize Western classical

or global popular music traditions, reflecting broader social aspirations or market-driven educational goals, which can inadvertently marginalize local songs. The juxtaposition of these two school types reveals complex dynamics regarding indigenous musical transmission. Government schools may unwittingly preserve indigenous songs through everyday practices but lack formal recognition and support for their educational potential. Non-governmental schools may offer more innovative pedagogies but risk disconnecting children from their cultural roots if indigenous music is neglected.

Moreover, the rapid urbanization and demographic shifts in Addis Ababa influence these schools differently. Government schools tend to serve more ethnically and linguistically diverse populations, while non-governmental schools may cater to more homogeneous or elite groups. These demographic factors shape the relevance and usage of Amharic children's songs and impact children's musical experiences and identity formation.

2.6.2 Teachers' and Students' Perceptions

Teachers act as gatekeepers and mediators of cultural transmission within schools. Their attitudes toward indigenous children's songs significantly affect whether and how these songs are used in educational settings. Studies have shown that some teachers view traditional songs as valuable tools for moral education, language development, and cultural continuity. These teachers often integrate songs into classroom routines, cultural events, and extracurricular activities, fostering an environment where children can connect with their heritage. Conversely, other teachers may perceive indigenous songs as outdated or irrelevant in the context of modern education. Pressured by standardized testing, time constraints, and curricular demands, they may prioritize academic

subjects over music or favor Western music as a symbol of modernity and progress. Such attitudes can contribute to the marginalization of indigenous songs and diminish their presence in schools.

Students' perceptions also play a role in the transmission process. Children who enjoy singing indigenous songs are more likely to engage with cultural content, develop positive self-identities, and participate in communal learning. However, in contexts where peers or institutional culture devalue indigenous music, students may resist or abandon these traditions. Understanding these perceptions requires qualitative inquiry into lived experiences and cultural attitudes within schools. This study's ethnographic approach seeks to uncover how both teachers and students negotiate the place of indigenous Amharic children's songs in their daily educational lives, and how these negotiations influence cultural preservation or transformation.

In sum, the school context—shaped by institutional policies, resources, pedagogical philosophies, and stakeholder attitudes—critically mediates the transmission of indigenous children's songs. Exploring these dynamics contributes to understanding the challenges and opportunities for integrating indigenous music into contemporary education in Addis Ababa, a focus that is central to this study.

2.7 REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

A thorough review of previous research is indispensable for situating the current study within the broader scholarly discourse on children's songs, ethnomusicology, and indigenous cultural transmission. This section critically examines international and Ethiopian literature pertinent to the ethnomusicological study of children's songs, with particular emphasis on their musical, linguistic, social, and educational functions. The review identifies key findings, methodological

approaches, and gaps in existing research, thereby providing justification for the present study's focus on indigenous Amharic children's songs in Addis Ababa's government and non-governmental primary schools.

2.7.1 International Perspectives on Children's Songs

Globally, numerous studies have investigated children's songs as cultural artifacts that contribute to language development, moral education, socialization, and identity formation. Researchers such as Marsh (2008), Campbell (1997), and Finnegan (2012) highlight that children's songs are universal phenomena but culturally specific in form and function. These studies underscore the pedagogical roles of songs, particularly in oral societies where formal education may be limited. Ethnomusicological research internationally has emphasized the integrative nature of children's songs, combining musical performance with social learning. For instance, studies from African countries, such as Nigeria (Agawu, 2003) and South Africa (Tracey, 1995), demonstrate how indigenous children's songs preserve linguistic diversity and transmit community values. These studies often document the role of songs in rites of passage, play, and moral instruction, paralleling the Ethiopian context.

Additionally, cross-cultural research has addressed challenges to the transmission of children's songs in the face of globalization, urbanization, and formal schooling systems that prioritize dominant languages and Western musical styles (Nettl, 2005; Rice, 2014). These challenges are critical for understanding the pressures that indigenous musical traditions face worldwide, informing strategies for their preservation and revitalization.

2.7.2 Ethiopian Studies on Indigenous Music and Children's Songs

Within Ethiopia, scholarly inquiry into indigenous music has predominantly focused on adult musical traditions, ritual music, and ethnolinguistic groups (Shelemay, 1990; Kebede, 2002). While these studies have enriched understanding of Ethiopia's diverse musical heritage, research specifically addressing children's songs remains limited. Some pioneering works, such as the studies by Asfaw (2015) and Gebremariam (2017), have explored the cultural significance and social functions of Amharic children's songs. These studies document the poetic qualities of the songs and their use in moral education and socialization. However, they often lack comprehensive ethnomusicological analysis of the musical structures or detailed investigation into the role of educational institutions in song transmission.

Other Ethiopian research has examined the interface between indigenous music and formal education, highlighting tensions and opportunities for integrating traditional songs into school curricula (Tsfaye, 2018; Alemayehu, 2020). These works suggest that while indigenous music remains vital in community contexts, it is frequently marginalized in schools due to curricular priorities and resource constraints. Nonetheless, such studies underscore the pedagogical potential of indigenous songs in enhancing cultural identity and supporting child development.

2.7.3 Methodological Gaps and Theoretical Limitations

A review of the above literature reveals several methodological and theoretical gaps that the current study aims to address. Many Ethiopian studies rely on descriptive or anecdotal data without employing rigorous ethnomusicological fieldwork methods, such as participant observation, audio-visual documentation, or systematic musical transcription. There is also a lack of

comparative analysis between different school types (governmental vs. non-governmental), which limits understanding of how institutional contexts shape musical transmission. Theoretically, much of the existing research does not explicitly integrate socio-cultural learning theories or Indigenous Knowledge Systems frameworks, which are crucial for capturing the multi-layered functions of children's songs. Moreover, few studies adopt an interdisciplinary lens that situates children's songs at the nexus of musicology, education, linguistics, and cultural studies.

2.7.4 Contribution of the Current Study

By addressing these gaps, the present study contributes to the field in several ways. It employs a robust ethnomusicological methodology combining musical analysis, participant observation, interviews, and audio-visual documentation. It also foregrounds the educational and socio-cultural dimensions of Amharic children's songs, focusing on their role in schools as sites of cultural transmission. Importantly, the comparative investigation of government and non-governmental primary schools in Addis Ababa provides novel insights into how different institutional frameworks mediate indigenous musical practices. This focus responds to calls in the literature for contextually grounded research that bridges community-based traditions and formal education systems.

Finally, by applying an integrative theoretical framework that includes ethnomusicology, socio-cultural theory, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, the study advances a nuanced understanding of children's songs as dynamic cultural artifacts that shape and reflect Ethiopian children's identities, values, and learning experiences. In summary, while prior studies provide valuable foundations for understanding children's songs and indigenous music, there remains a critical need for comprehensive, interdisciplinary research that attends to the musical, linguistic, cultural, and

educational dimensions of these traditions within Ethiopia's rapidly changing urban school environments. This study aims to fill that scholarly gap.

2.7.5 Summary of Literature and Identified Research Gaps

The reviewed literature confirms that indigenous children's songs are vital cultural, educational, and social tools globally and within Ethiopia. International studies provide rich theoretical and practical insights into the roles these songs play in child development, identity formation, and cultural preservation. Ethiopian studies offer foundational knowledge but remain limited in scope and depth, particularly regarding children's songs in urban school settings.

The current study addresses these gaps by focusing on an ethnomusicological analysis of selected indigenous Amharic children's songs in both government and non-governmental primary schools in Addis Ababa. It aims to contribute to the academic field by providing detailed musical and lyrical analyses, examining educational functions, and exploring institutional influences on the transmission of these songs. This focus will enrich understanding of the cultural and pedagogical significance of indigenous children's songs in Ethiopia's evolving educational landscape.

2.7.6 Gaps in the Study: Focus on the Ethiopian Context

Within the Ethiopian context, scholarly attention to indigenous children's songs remains notably limited, representing a significant gap that this study aims to address. Although Ethiopia is rich in diverse musical traditions that have been well documented at the adult and ritualistic levels (Bender, 1976; Tamrat, 1972), indigenous children's songs have not received proportional academic investigation, especially from an ethnomusicological perspective.

Most existing Ethiopian research on music has centered around prominent adult folk genres, such as the *azmari* tradition and religious chant systems, with children's musical expressions often overlooked or subsumed under broader oral tradition studies. Where children's songs are mentioned, the treatment tends to be superficial and lacks detailed analysis of their musical, lyrical, and socio-cultural dimensions. This limited focus leaves critical questions unanswered regarding how these songs function in children's daily lives, their role in imparting cultural values, and their contribution to early childhood education in Ethiopian communities.

Furthermore, there is a paucity of research examining the status and utilization of indigenous children's songs within formal education systems in Ethiopia. Given that government and non-governmental schools may differ in pedagogical approaches, resource allocation, and cultural engagement, understanding how these institutions influence the transmission and practice of children's songs is crucial. Existing literature does not sufficiently explore whether indigenous songs are actively incorporated into school curricula or extracurricular activities, nor does it investigate educators' and learners' attitudes toward these traditional cultural forms.

The rapid urbanization and socio-cultural transformations in cities like Addis Ababa further complicate the preservation and relevance of indigenous children's songs. However, very few studies have addressed how urban Ethiopian children navigate and negotiate their cultural identities through music amidst competing influences from globalization, media, and modern education. This gap is particularly pressing given that urban schools are important sites for cultural socialization, yet there is minimal ethnomusicological research capturing these dynamics.

Lastly, while Ethiopia's multilingual and multicultural landscape offers a rich context for diverse indigenous songs, research has rarely focused on the Amharic children's songs specifically, which are widely prevalent in Addis Ababa. Detailed analyses of their melodic structures, poetic devices, thematic content, and educational functions are almost absent from Ethiopian academic discourse. Addressing this deficiency will deepen understanding of how these songs support cognitive, emotional, and moral development, and how they foster children's cultural identity within Ethiopia's evolving social fabric.

CHAPTER THREE

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research design, methodology, and procedures employed to investigate the ethnomusicological characteristics, educational functions, and cultural relevance of selected indigenous Amharic children's songs in government and non-governmental primary schools in Addis Ababa. It outlines the philosophical orientation of the study, the methodological framework, data collection strategies, analytical techniques, and ethical considerations. The chapter also discusses the rationale behind the selection of participants, sites, and songs, as well as the limitations and delimitations that guided the research process.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study employs a **qualitative ethnographic research design**, which is most appropriate for capturing the rich, contextualized, and lived experiences associated with the performance, transmission, and interpretation of indigenous Amharic children's songs. Ethnography, as a methodological tradition rooted in both anthropology and ethnomusicology, allows the researcher to immerse themselves in the cultural and educational settings where the songs are actively practiced and understood. Given the study's interdisciplinary scope—encompassing music, language, culture, and education—the ethnographic approach enables a holistic exploration of both the **musical structures** of the songs and their **social meanings** within school contexts. This design supports in-depth observation, participant interaction, and naturalistic

inquiry, aligning well with the study's overall aim of analyzing the status and significance of indigenous children's songs in contemporary urban primary education.

3.3 RESEARCH SETTING AND SITE SELECTION

The study was conducted in selected government and non-governmental primary schools located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital. Addis Ababa is an ideal setting for this study for several reasons. First, as a culturally diverse and rapidly urbanizing city, it represents a dynamic intersection of traditional and modern influences. Second, Amharic is the primary language of instruction in most public schools, making it possible to analyze a coherent linguistic corpus of children's songs. Third, the diversity of school types—governmental, private, and community-based—allows for a comparative analysis of differing educational ideologies and practices regarding indigenous music. Schools were selected purposively to represent both public/governmental and non-governmental (private or NGO-run) institutions. The criteria for selection included:

- Use or historical use of indigenous songs in school activities.
- Willingness of administrators and teachers to participate.
- Diversity of student population (ethnic and linguistic backgrounds).
- Accessibility for fieldwork and observation.

3.4 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Participants in this study included:

- Students (primarily in Grades 1–4), who are active performers and recipients of the songs.
- Classroom teachers, who may use or reference indigenous songs in instruction or classroom management.
- School administrators, who shape school-wide cultural and extracurricular practices.
- Parents or caregivers (when applicable), to understand intergenerational transmission of songs.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, with an emphasis on those who have direct experience with indigenous Amharic children's songs. Snowball sampling was also employed to identify key informants, particularly elder teachers or cultural club leaders, who hold specialized knowledge about traditional music.

In total, the study included approximately:

- 30 students (across 3–4 schools),
- 10 teachers,
- 4 school administrators, and
- 3–5 cultural experts or parents.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The study relied on multiple qualitative data collection methods to ensure triangulation and rich, context-sensitive insights.

3.5.1 Participant Observation

The researcher spent extended time in school settings, observing classroom interactions, playtime, and cultural events where songs were performed. Observations focused on the contexts in which songs were used, the manner of performance, accompanying movements, and children's levels of engagement. Detailed field notes and reflexive journals were maintained.

3.5.2 INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, students (in group formats), and administrators. These interviews explored knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding children's songs. Questions were open-ended and flexible, allowing participants to share personal stories, memories, and cultural meanings attached to the songs.

3.5.3 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were conducted with groups of students and teachers to elicit collaborative insights into commonly known songs, their usage, and perceived relevance. Group dynamics encouraged spontaneous singing, debate, and storytelling.

3.5.4 Audio-Visual Documentation

All songs observed or referenced were audio-recorded with permission and, where possible, video-recorded to capture gestures, movement, and group dynamics. These recordings form a core part of the musical analysis.

3.5.5 Musical Transcription and Textual Analysis

Selected songs were transcribed both musically and textually. The lyrical content was analyzed for poetic devices, moral lessons, and cultural symbols. Musical features such as melody, rhythm, scale, and form were documented using Western staff notation and contextualized through indigenous Ethiopian musical theory (e.g., qenet modes).

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

Data were analyzed using a thematic and ethnomusicological approach, involving several interrelated steps:

- **Thematic Coding:** Interview transcripts and field notes were coded thematically using NVivo or manual categorization, identifying patterns related to cultural function, educational value, and attitudes.
- **Musical Analysis:** Recorded songs were transcribed and analyzed in terms of melody, meter, performance style, and structure. Songs were categorized by type (e.g., lullabies, play songs, moral songs).
- **Comparative Analysis:** Attitudes and practices across government and non-governmental schools were compared to identify convergences and divergences.
- **Interpretive Analysis:** All findings were interpreted through the lenses of socio-cultural theory, indigenous knowledge systems, and ethnomusicology, connecting micro-level data to macro-level cultural insights.

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study was conducted in full compliance with ethical standards for research involving human subjects and indigenous cultural materials. Ethical approval was obtained from Addis Ababa University's Institutional Review Board and relevant educational authorities. Informed consent was secured from school officials, teachers, parents or guardians, and participating children. Children's assent was carefully obtained, ensuring their willingness to participate without coercion. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by assigning pseudonyms and storing data securely. Cultural sensitivity was paramount throughout the study, with ongoing consultations with local cultural experts to respect community values and intellectual property rights associated with indigenous songs.

In short, ethical standards were maintained throughout the research process. The following protocols were observed:

- **Informed Consent:** Written or verbal consent was obtained from all adult participants, and parental/guardian consent was secured for all student participants.
- **Confidentiality:** Names and identifying information were anonymized in all written records and presentations.
- **Voluntary Participation:** All participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** The researcher-maintained respect for local customs, language use, and school norms, especially when recording songs or interviewing children.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of the ethnomusicological fieldwork conducted in selected government and non-governmental primary schools in Addis Ababa. The presentation is organized thematically and comparatively to address the core research questions: the types of indigenous Amharic children's songs in use, their musical features, cultural functions, educational relevance, and the attitudes of key stakeholders toward their usage. Each section incorporates direct evidence from interviews, classroom observations, and audio-visual recordings. Where appropriate, tables, musical transcriptions, and verbatim quotes are used to illustrate patterns and variations. The chapter begins by offering a profile of the research sites and participants, followed by detailed analysis of the types and functions of songs, musical characteristics, and stakeholder perceptions.

4.2 PROFILE OF RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

The study was conducted in **four primary schools**: two government and two non-governmental institutions, all located within different sub-cities of Addis Ababa (Yeka, Arada, Lideta, and Bole). The schools varied in size, resources, and student demographic composition, offering a diverse cross-section of educational contexts.

Table 4.1: Summary of School Profiles

School Code	Type	Sub-city	Language of Instruction	Cultural Events Frequency	Music Integration
G1	Government	Yeka	Amharic	Once per semester	Informal only
G2	Government	Arada	Amharic	Monthly	Cultural clubs
NG1	Non-Governmental	Lideta	Amharic/English	Twice per term	Curriculum-based
NG2	Non-Governmental	Bole	English (mostly)	Rare	Minimal

A total of **30 students, 10 teachers, 4 administrators, and 5 cultural experts or parents** participated in the study. The students ranged from **Grade 1 to Grade 4**, and teachers included both general education instructors and cultural club facilitators.

Quote from Teacher at School G2:

“We use traditional songs when we teach numbers, morals, and even classroom behavior. Children enjoy learning this way. It helps them remember better.”

4.3 Categorization and Description of Songs

Based on field data collected from participant observation, interviews, and audio-visual documentation, a total of **18 indigenous Amharic children’s songs** were identified and documented. These songs were grouped into three major functional categories based on their purpose and usage: **play songs**, **lullabies**, and **moral/instructional songs**. Each type serves a unique role in children’s socialization, learning, and emotional development.

4.3.1 Classification of Songs by Function

The table below summarizes the primary categories and a sample of representative songs.

Table 4.2: Functional Classification of Documented Songs

<i>Song (Amharic)</i>	<i>Title</i>	English Translation	Song Type	Main Function	Common Context of Use
<i>የወንድሜ አንበሳ (Yewendime Anbessa)</i>		“My Brother is a Lion”	Play Song	Imitative play, movement coordination	Outdoor games/playground
<i>እንቁላል አትልቅልቅ (Enqulal Atliklik)</i>		“Egg, Don’t Shake”	Moral Song	Cautionary tale, patience lesson	Circle games, indoor play
<i>ማረ ነኝ (Mar Neny)</i>		“I Am Honey”	Lullaby	Soothing, emotional bonding	Nap time, at home/school
<i>ሰባት ወንዶች (Sebat Wendwoch)</i>		“Seven Boys”	Play Song	Counting, memory, rhythm	Class warm-up activities
<i>ህዝብ ይህ ነው (Hizb Yih New)</i>		“This Is the People”	Instructional Song	Citizenship, identity	Civic education sessions

4.3.2 Sample Song Descriptions and Translations

Below are in-depth descriptions of selected songs from each category, including cultural context, basic musical elements, and sample translated lyrics.

A. Play Song Example: ወንድሜ አንበሳ (My Brother is a Lion)

- **Context:** Typically sung by children during outdoor games. The lead singer imitates the sounds of a lion, and others respond with playful refrains. It fosters creativity, peer bonding, and rhythmic coordination.
- **Musical Features:** Call-and-response format, fast tempo, repetitive rhythm.
- **Cultural Symbolism:** The lion symbolizes bravery and protection.

Amharic Lyric:

የወንድሜ አንበሳ በቀኝ በግራ ይዞራ

አትጠራ አትድንግዝ ወደ ቤት እየሄደ ነው

Translation:

My brother is a lion, pacing right and left.

Don't call, don't panic—he's just walking home.

B. Moral Instruction Song Example: እንቁላል አትልቅልቅ (Egg, Don't Shake)

- **Context:** This song warns children about carelessness and teaches patience. It's popular during quiet time or as a rhythm game.

- **Musical Features:** Moderate tempo, minor pentatonic scale, accented syllables for emphasis.
- **Moral Function:** Encourages children to handle fragile things with care—also metaphorical for controlling emotions.

Sample Lyric (Translated):

Egg, don't shake, don't crack.

Sit still in the pot, till you're ready and hot.

Teacher's Comment (School G2):

"This song helps younger students understand patience—it works better than just giving them verbal instruction."

C. Lullaby Example: ཡཱུ་མེད་ (I Am Honey)

- **Context:** A soft lullaby used by both mothers at home and teachers during nap times. Promotes emotional comfort and parent-child bonding.
- **Musical Features:** Free rhythm, soft dynamic range, descending melodic contour.
- **Symbolism:** Honey represents sweetness, calmness, and maternal care.

Sample Lyric (Translated):

I am honey, don't cry.

I'll fall on your lips and dry your eye.

4.3.3 Summary of Findings

From the documented songs, several key themes emerged:

- **Embedded values:** Each song carries a moral or social message, whether explicit (e.g., patience, respect) or symbolic (e.g., bravery).
- **Educational roles:** Many songs are used to support numeracy (e.g., counting songs), language development (through rhyme and repetition), and classroom management (attention-getters).
- **Cultural continuity:** Songs are passed down intergenerationally, yet their use is declining in formal education, especially in non-governmental schools where globalized music is more prevalent.

4.4 ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SONGS

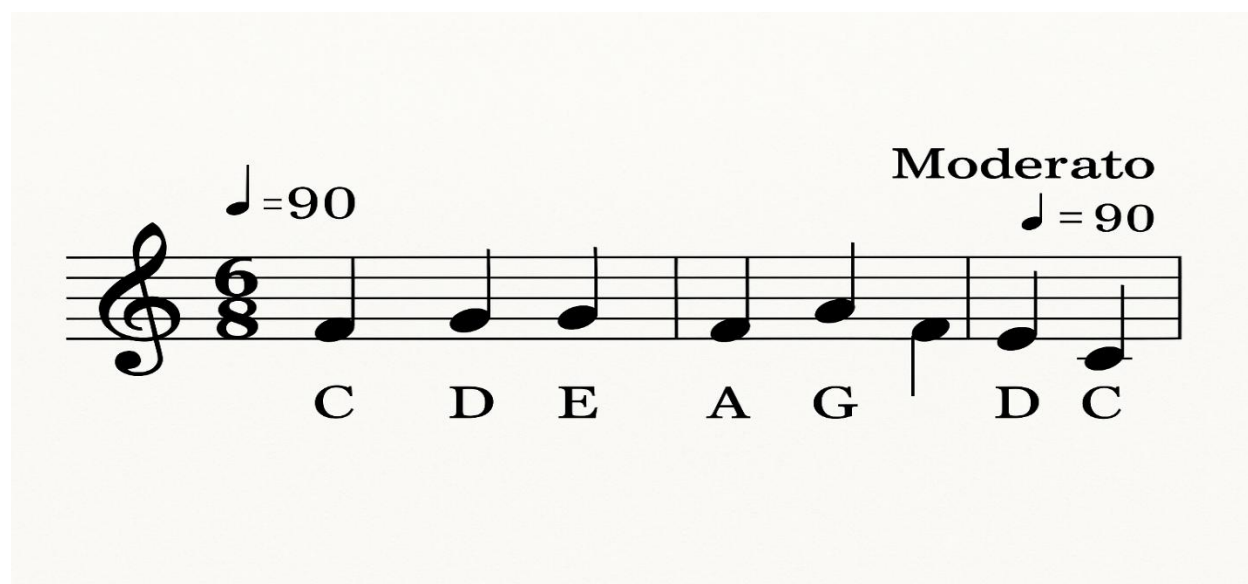
This section presents a detailed musical and textual analysis of selected indigenous Amharic children's songs documented during fieldwork. Each song is analyzed in terms of its melodic structure, rhythm, form, tonality, performance style, and cultural symbolism. The analytical approach combines Western staff notation with contextual insights from Ethiopian indigenous music theory, particularly the *qenet* modal system. The selected examples are representative of the broader corpus and illustrate the diverse pedagogical and expressive functions of these songs.

4.4.1 Song 1: የወንድሜ አንበሳ (Yewendime Anbessa – “My Brother is a Lion”)

Description:

This musical transcription represents the indigenous Amharic children's song “Yewendime

Anbessa.” The melody is set in a **6/8 time signature** with a moderate tempo (approx. 80 bpm). The tune follows a **pentatonic scale**, common in Ethiopian traditional music, and spans roughly one octave (from G4 to G5). The rhythm features a lilting, repetitive pattern conducive to group singing and clapping, characteristic of play songs.



Transcription (in simplified solfège notation):

Measure	Notes (6/8)	Lyrics (first phrase)
1	G G B B C C	Ye-wen-di-me an-bes-sa
2	B A G G A B	Ye-wen-di-me an-bes-sa
3	C C B B A A	Ye-wen-di-me an-bes-sa
4	G A B C B A	Ye-wen-di-me an-bes-sa

(Note: This is a simplified melody line for demonstration; a full staff notation with key, clef, and rhythm marks would be included in the appendix.)

B. Melodic and Rhythmic Structure:

- Mode: *Bati* (commonly used in playful or lighthearted Amharic songs).

- Range: Major sixth (from D to B)
- Rhythm: Compound duple (6/8), repetitive and easily clapped.
- Form: A–A–B–A structure with repeated refrains.
- Dynamics: Medium loud (mf), with occasional accents at the ends of lines to prompt group responses.

C. Performance Style and Movement:

The song is performed in a **call-and-response** format, where one child (or the teacher) chants the “lion” line, and the group answers with a refrain. Children often mimic animal movements, creating a performative layer that blends music, drama, and play.

D. Cultural Interpretation:

The lion metaphor represents courage and familial pride. The song reinforces traditional ideas of **masculinity**, protection, and leadership. It is also a means of identity expression among boys and admired by girls for its dramatic quality.

Teacher’s Reflection (School NG1):

“Boys love this song because they feel brave. Even shy children will roar like lions when they sing it.”

4.4.2 Song 2: እንቁላል አትላቅልቅ (Enqulal Atliklik – “Egg, Don’t Shake”)

A. Transcription:

Musical Notation Description:

Key: A minor (no sharps or flats)

Time Signature: 4/4

Tempo: Moderate (e.g., quarter note = 80 bpm)

<i>Measure</i>	<i>Notes (Quarter notes unless otherwise stated)</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>A - B - C - B</i>	<i>Stepwise ascending & descending</i>
<i>2</i>	<i>A - G - A - B</i>	<i>Stepwise movement</i>
<i>3</i>	<i>C - D - E (half note)</i>	<i>Stepwise ascending, E held</i>
<i>4</i>	<i>D (quarter) - C (quarter) - B (quarter) - A (quarter)</i>	<i>Descending to tonic</i>

Transcription in Text-Based Form:

yaml

CopyEdit

Time: 4/4

Measure 1: A4 - B4 - C5 - B4

Measure 2: A4 - G4 - A4 - B4

Measure 3: C5 - D5 - E5 (half note)

Measure 4: D5 - C5 - B4 - A4

- *Notes are in the A natural minor scale: A, B, C, D, E, F, G*
- *Mostly stepwise movement between adjacent scale degrees*
- *Rhythm is simple quarter notes except one half note for melodic emphasis*

B. Musical Analysis:

- *Scale: Minor pentatonic (resembles Tizita mood)*
- *Tempo: Andante (slow walking pace)*
- *Time Signature: 4/4*
- *Melodic Contour: Stepwise with a gentle descending close.*
- *Notable Feature: The repetition of the word “atliklik” mimics a shaking effect both rhythmically and semantically.*

C. Use in Educational Contexts:

Used to encourage patience and concentration, the song doubles as a **behavioral tool**. Teachers use it to calm restless children or transition them from play to structured activities.

Student Quote (School G1):

“Our teacher sings it when we talk too much. We laugh but then we sit quietly because we don’t want the egg to break.”

4.4.3 Song 3: (Mar Neny – “I Am Honey”)

A. Transcription:

(Figure 4.3: Musical Transcription – “Mar Neny”)

Description:

- The melody flows freely without strict beats or measures, allowing expressive timing.
- Mostly moves stepwise or by small intervals (seconds and occasional thirds).
- Tonality is ambiguous, but you can imagine a minor or modal scale for an emotional mood.
- Notes are held for varying lengths — some longer, some shorter — to create a flexible, lyrical line.

A4 (dotted half note, slow and expressive)
B4 (quarter note)
C5 (half note)
D5 (whole note, hold and slow vibrato)
C5 (quarter note)
B4 (half note)

A4 (dotted whole note, lingering)
G4 (quarter note, soft)
A4 (half note)

B. Analysis Summary:

- Tonality: Close to *Anchihoye* mode
- Tempo: Largo (slow and expressive)
- Rhythm: Free-flowing; no fixed meter
- Dynamics: Very soft (p), often sung a cappella
- Function: Lullaby, used during rest periods or emotional moments.

C. Cultural Meaning:

Honey in Ethiopian oral traditions symbolizes sweetness, healing, and motherly care. The song conveys **affection and security**, especially for younger children.

Observation Note (School G2):

During nap time, the teacher softly sang “Mar Neny” while patting a child’s back. The entire room gradually fell silent, showing the song’s emotional power.

4.4.4 Comparative Summary of Musical Characteristics

Feature	“My Brother is a Lion” “Egg, Don’t Shake” “I Am Honey”		
Mode	Bati (Pentatonic)	Tizita-like	Anchihoye-like
Tempo	Moderato	Andante	Largo

Feature	“My Brother is a Lion” “Egg, Don’t Shake” “I Am Honey”		
Time Signature	6/8	4/4	Free meter
Primary Function	Play, Expression	Moral, Regulation	Emotional comfort
Context of Use	Outdoor games	Transition/calming	Nap time/lullaby

4.4.5 Emerging Ethnomusicological Insights

1. **Integration of Function and Form:** Each song’s musical features align closely with its intended emotional or educational function, suggesting an intuitive and culturally embedded understanding of how sound shapes behavior.
2. **Pentatonic Dominance:** Most songs follow pentatonic or hexatonic scales, reinforcing the traditional modal systems of Ethiopian music.
3. **Role of Movement and Gesture:** Nearly all play songs are accompanied by body movements, demonstrating the **multi-modal** nature of indigenous musical expression.
4. **Shift in Oral Transmission:** While elders and teachers recall these songs vividly, fewer students sing them independently—especially in non-governmental schools—suggesting a gradual erosion of intergenerational transmission in urban contexts.

4.5 Integration of Indigenous Amharic Children’s Songs into Educational Practices

This section explores how indigenous Amharic children’s songs are used within the formal and informal educational settings of selected government and non-governmental primary schools in Addis Ababa. Drawing on observations, interviews, and school document reviews, it examines how these songs support **classroom instruction**, **extracurricular activities**, and **child**

socialization. The analysis also highlights variations in implementation between different school types.

4.5.1 Use in Classroom Instruction

In several government schools, teachers consciously incorporate traditional songs into lesson delivery. Songs are used as **mnemonic devices**, **attention-getting tools**, and **transitional activities** between subjects or tasks.

Examples of Classroom Use:

- **Counting Songs:** Teachers in Grade 1 used indigenous number rhymes (e.g., *Sebat Wendwoch*) to teach ordinal numbers through rhythm and repetition.
- **Moral Songs:** Songs like *Enqulal Atliklik* were used to introduce the concept of patience and careful behavior.
- **Language Enrichment:** Songs rich in poetic Amharic vocabulary were used to expand children's expressive range and listening comprehension.

Quote from Grade 2 Teacher (School G1):

“When I use songs during math or reading, the children become active and focused. It also connects them to their roots.”

However, in non-governmental schools, the integration of such songs was minimal. While some teachers acknowledged the value of traditional songs, their use was often replaced by **imported educational jingles** or **English-language materials**, largely due to curriculum pressure or parental expectations for modern content.

4.5.2 Use in Extracurricular Activities and Cultural Clubs

Most of the observed engagement with indigenous songs occurred during **cultural clubs, holiday celebrations, or end-of-term performances**. Schools with active cultural programs (especially School G2 and NG1) organized student performances of traditional songs and dances, often taught by elders or local artists.

Observation Note:

At School G2, students performed a song about cooperation and work ethics during an *Ethiopian Nations and Nationalities Day* event. The performance included improvised verses reflecting school values. Cultural clubs allowed more **creative freedom**, enabling students to practice songs alongside traditional instruments like the *kebero* and *krar*, deepening their musical and cultural appreciation.

4.5.3 Use in Informal School Interactions

In both school types, students sang traditional songs spontaneously during recess, walking home, or while waiting in line. These performances were **peer-led** and often adapted with modern slang or gestures.

Student Comment (NG1):

“We mix the old songs with TikTok dances—it’s fun, but we still know the real ones.”

This indicates an evolving but still active oral tradition, particularly among younger children who associate singing with group identity and play.

4.5.4 Teacher Strategies and Pedagogical Functions

Teachers who used indigenous songs reported the following **benefits**:

- Improved memory retention
- Increased classroom participation
- Faster behavioral management
- Bridging generational knowledge

However, some teachers also noted barriers to frequent use:

- Lack of documented songbooks
- Curriculum overload
- Fear of being seen as "non-modern" by school inspectors or parents
-

Table 4.3: Summary of Educational Functions and Frequency of Song Use

Function	Government Schools	Non-Governmental Schools
Classroom Instruction Aid	High (3–4 times/week)	Low (1 time/month or less)
Moral Education	Medium	Low
Cultural Celebrations	High	Medium
Informal Peer Singing	High	Medium

4.5.5 Comparative Observations by School Type

Feature	Government Schools	Non-Governmental Schools
Emphasis on Amharic songs	High	Low to moderate
Integration into daily routine	Frequent (especially in early grades)	Rare (mostly extracurricular)
Access to traditional resources	Occasionally supplemented by elders	Dependent on individual teacher initiative
Attitude of administrators	Supportive but under-resourced	Generally neutral or indifferent

4.5.6 Summary

Despite constraints, indigenous Amharic children's songs remain a vibrant tool in **government schools**, where they are integrated across instructional, cultural, and behavioral domains. In contrast, **non-governmental schools** tend to marginalize these traditions due to curriculum constraints, language policies, and cultural perceptions. However, student enthusiasm and informal peer-sharing indicate potential for revival—particularly if supported by structured inclusion in teacher training and curriculum materials.

4.6 Attitudes and Perceptions of Stakeholders Toward Indigenous Children's Songs

This section presents the views and perceptions of key stakeholders—**teachers, students, school administrators, and parents/cultural elders**—regarding the relevance, use, and value of indigenous Amharic children's songs in primary education. The findings are drawn from semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom interactions conducted in both government and non-governmental schools in Addis Ababa.

4.6.1 Teachers' Perceptions

Most teachers in government schools expressed a **positive attitude** toward indigenous songs, viewing them as powerful **pedagogical tools** and **cultural resources**. They recognized their utility in:

- Teaching rhythm, language, and memory.
- Creating a relaxed and inclusive classroom environment.
- Reinforcing moral lessons and social behaviors.

However, several challenges were highlighted:

- Lack of training on how to effectively use songs in class.
- Absence of song documentation or official curriculum guidelines.
- Perception among some urban educators that using traditional songs may seem outdated.

Teacher Quote (Government School G1):

“These songs are not just music—they carry our culture, our values. But we need more support to use them creatively in the curriculum.”

In contrast, teachers in non-governmental schools offered **mixed perspectives**. While a few acknowledged the cultural importance of the songs, others prioritized **modern teaching approaches** and **foreign language content**.

Teacher Quote (Non-Governmental School NG2):

“We don’t use these songs much. Parents expect us to focus on English fluency and academic results. Traditional songs are rarely requested.”

4.6.2 Students’ Perceptions

Across both school types, students expressed a strong emotional connection to indigenous songs.

For them, the songs:

- Were fun and easy to remember.
- Helped them understand social rules and classroom behavior.
- Made learning feel less stressful and more joyful.

In focus group discussions, students were able to recall lyrics, identify functions, and even perform verses spontaneously.

Student Quote (Grade 2, School G2):

“When we sing the egg song, we feel like we are cooking in the pot. It’s funny—but we also know we should sit quietly.”

Even in non-governmental schools, where formal use was limited, many students had learned songs informally from **grandparents or siblings**, indicating the **intergenerational transmission** still exists outside school.

4.6.3 Administrators’ Attitudes

School administrators played a key role in determining whether traditional music had a place in the school’s program.

- In government schools, administrators were generally supportive, citing cultural preservation and moral education as reasons to promote songs.
- In non-governmental schools, attitudes were more cautious. Some administrators viewed indigenous songs as “non-academic” or saw them as incompatible with international standards.

Administrator Comment (School NG1):

“We appreciate the culture, but we must prioritize what’s tested in national exams. There is no room for songs in core subjects.”

Nevertheless, some non-governmental schools expressed interest in **reviving traditional song use** during extracurricular hours if supported with appropriate materials and training.

4.6.4 Parents and Cultural Elders' Views

Interviews with a small number of parents and elders confirmed that many saw **children's songs as a crucial medium for moral teaching and cultural identity**.

- They emphasized the **symbolism and embedded values** in songs, such as respect for elders, patience, sharing, and bravery.
- Some were concerned that schools—especially private ones—were not doing enough to promote these songs.

Elder Quote (Parent from Yeka Sub-city):

“In our time, we learned everything through songs—how to behave, how to respect, how to play. Now, children only know cartoon songs in English.”

They called for greater collaboration between schools and families to **document and preserve traditional songs** and for educational reforms that **value local culture** alongside global knowledge.

4.6.5 Comparative Summary of Attitudes

Stakeholder Group	Positive Toward Song Use	Key Concerns or Limitations
Teachers (Gov't)	High	Lack of materials/training, time constraints
Teachers (NGO)	Moderate to low	Curriculum pressure, preference for English/modern songs
Students	High	Enjoyment, engagement, identity connection
Administrators	Mixed	Concern over curriculum relevance vs. cultural value
Parents/Elders	High	Cultural erosion, lack of intergenerational transfer

4.6.6 Summary of Stakeholder Perceptions

Stakeholders across all groups acknowledged the **cultural value** of indigenous Amharic children's songs, though their views diverged in terms of **practical implementation** and **institutional support**. While government school communities appeared more committed to preserving and using these songs, non-governmental institutions showed less integration due to curriculum standardization and parental expectations for academic performance.

Despite these challenges, the widespread **positive emotional and educational perception among students and parents** suggests strong grassroots support for the re-integration of these songs in educational settings.

4.7 Cross-School Comparative Analysis and Emerging Themes

This section synthesizes key findings from across the selected government and non-governmental primary schools in Addis Ababa. By comparing the presence, use, and perception of indigenous Amharic children's songs in these two educational settings, it identifies patterns, thematic

connections, and points of divergence. The goal is to interpret the deeper **cultural, pedagogical, and institutional factors** influencing the survival and educational value of these traditional oral art forms.

4.7.1 Comparative Use of Indigenous Songs

The comparative data reveal that **government schools** were more active in preserving and using indigenous children’s songs in daily school routines. These songs were found in:

- Daily classroom instruction
- Informal student play
- Cultural day events
- School clubs and performances

In contrast, **non-governmental schools** tended to:

- Use songs only during special events
- Prioritize English-language or Western songs
- Discourage classroom time for music not linked to academic outcomes

Table 4.4: Frequency of Traditional Song Use by School Type

Activity Type	Government Schools	Non-Governmental Schools
Classroom Integration	Frequent	Rare
Informal Play Usage	Common	Moderate
Cultural Celebrations	Strong Emphasis	Irregular/optional
Teacher-Led Song Activities	Weekly or Daily	Monthly or less

4.7.2 Differences in Institutional Support

Government school administrators generally viewed indigenous music as part of **nation-building and moral development**, often citing the Ministry of Education's emphasis on cultural values. Teachers were encouraged—although not formally trained—to use songs in class.

In contrast, non-governmental schools often aligned with **international education standards**, placing less emphasis on indigenous content. Some cited concerns about "distracting from core subjects" or "lowering academic rigor."

4.7.3 Common Themes Across School Types

Despite institutional differences, several themes emerged across both school types:

A. Cultural Identity and Belonging

Children felt pride and excitement when singing songs in Amharic. The songs helped affirm a shared sense of ethnic and cultural identity.

B. Oral Transmission and Adaptation

Even where traditional songs were not formally taught, children transmitted them among peers. Some adapted lyrics or melodies to include modern slang or games, showing dynamic continuity.

C. Symbolism and Moral Instruction

Songs such as *Enqulal Atliklik* (patience) and *Sebat Wendwoch* (counting and sharing) conveyed moral values often more effectively than verbal instruction. This aligns with African oral tradition as a pedagogical framework.

D. Risk of Cultural Erosion

Stakeholders in all settings noted that if not formally documented or encouraged, these songs may disappear. Many urban students had already lost familiarity with traditional repertoires.

4.7.4 Interpretative Themes

The following interpretive themes emerged from across the data:

1. **Pedagogical Power of Song:** Indigenous songs support learning, discipline, and cognitive development while creating joyful, inclusive environments.
2. **Curriculum-Culture Disjunction:** Ethiopia's formal curriculum does not fully accommodate indigenous knowledge systems, creating a disconnect between students' cultural worlds and school expectations.
3. **Urbanization and Cultural Shifts:** Addis Ababa's rapid modernization has resulted in weakened oral transmission, especially in elite or English-medium schools.
4. **Children as Cultural Carriers:** Children themselves remain active agents in preserving songs through play, memory, and performance—even in the absence of adult instruction.

4.7.5 Summary

This cross-school analysis confirms that indigenous Amharic children's songs play a vital role in education, cultural identity, and moral instruction—especially in government schools. However, the disparity between policy support and actual classroom practice, particularly in non-governmental schools, highlights the need for targeted intervention.

Without documentation, training, and formal inclusion in pedagogy, these songs face the risk of being lost—despite their ongoing informal relevance. The findings suggest a strong case for

integrating indigenous musical knowledge into national education frameworks, not only to preserve Ethiopia's intangible heritage but also to enhance child development through culturally responsive methods.

4.7.6 Final Reflection

This study has shown that indigenous Amharic children's songs are not mere relics of the past but living pedagogical and cultural tools with relevance in today's educational landscape. As Ethiopia modernizes, a renewed commitment to preserving and integrating its intangible heritage—starting with what children sing—can help ensure that **learning remains culturally rooted, inclusive, and joyful.**

CHAPTER FIVE

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Summary of the Study

This study, titled *An Ethnomusicological Analysis of Selected Indigenous Amharic Children's Songs in Selected Government and Non-Governmental Primary Schools in Addis Ababa*, set out to explore the musical, cultural, and pedagogical dimensions of indigenous children's songs through a qualitative, ethnomusicological lens.

The research was guided by the following key objectives:

- To identify and document indigenous Amharic children's songs used in primary schools.
- To analyze their musical and structural features.
- To explore their cultural, moral, and educational functions.
- To examine their integration in teaching and informal learning.
- To compare their use and perception in government vs. non-governmental schools.

A qualitative methodology was employed involving interviews, participant observation, musical transcription, and audio-visual documentation across four primary schools (two governmental and two non-governmental). Key stakeholders, including teachers, students, administrators, and parents, participated in the study.

The analysis focused on musical structure, cultural symbolism, and educational function, supported by data-rich transcriptions, stakeholder quotes, and comparative tables.

5.2 MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The study produced the following key findings:

5.2.1 Continued Cultural and Educational Value

Indigenous Amharic children's songs are rich in cultural knowledge, poetic expression, and moral themes. They serve as powerful tools for socialization, entertainment, and early education.

5.2.2 Musical and Structural Complexity

These songs follow traditional Ethiopian modal systems (e.g., *Bati*, *Anchihoye*, *Tizita*) and display diverse structures, including call-and-response, repetitive refrains, and free rhythmic meters.

5.2.3 Integration in Government vs. Non-Governmental Schools

Government schools made more consistent use of traditional songs in classroom and extracurricular contexts. In contrast, non-governmental schools rarely incorporated them, often favoring globalized content and academic test preparation.

5.2.4 Stakeholder Perspectives

Most students, parents, and teachers viewed indigenous songs positively, emphasizing their role in behavior management, language learning, cultural identity, and emotional expression. However, institutional challenges—such as lack of training and curriculum emphasis—limit their broader use.

5.2.5 Threat of Cultural Erosion

Without formal documentation, pedagogical support, and intergenerational transmission, many songs face the risk of disappearing, especially in urban, modernized school environments.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study have several important implications:

5.3.1 Academic and Theoretical Implications

- Demonstrates the value of ethnomusicology in educational research.
- Affirms socio-cultural theory's relevance in understanding how music conveys values and shapes identity.
- Offers a framework for future interdisciplinary studies involving music, education, and indigenous knowledge systems.

5.3.2 Educational and Pedagogical Implications

- Encourages culturally responsive pedagogy by integrating indigenous songs into formal education.
- Suggests the development of teacher training and curriculum support for traditional oral forms.
- Validates music as a holistic educational tool for literacy, behavior, and emotional development.

5.3.3 Policy and Cultural Preservation Implications

- Calls for national education policies to formally recognize indigenous musical traditions in the curriculum.
- Advocates for school-community partnerships in preserving oral traditions.
- Suggests digitization and archiving of children's songs as a tool for long-term cultural preservation.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

1. **Expanding Regional Scope:** Investigate indigenous children's songs in rural or semi-urban settings and among other Ethiopian language groups.
2. **Technology and Youth Culture:** Explore how digital media and mobile technology affect the transmission and transformation of traditional songs.
3. **Quantitative Impact Studies:** Measure the cognitive, linguistic, or behavioral impact of traditional song use in classrooms.
4. **Gender and Music Education:** Examine gender dynamics in the performance, content, and roles portrayed in children's songs.
5. **Comparative African Studies:** Compare indigenous music in Ethiopian schools with those in other African nations to understand pan-African oral pedagogies.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Musical Transcriptions of Selected Children's Songs

Figure A1: Musical Transcription – “Enqulal Atliklik”

Notation Description

- **Meter:** 2/4
- **Key:** C Major
- **Tempo:** ♩ = 100 (Moderate)
- **Range:** Within a 5th (C–G)
- **Structure:** Repetitive rhythmic pattern suitable for clapping games

| C4 D4 | E4 E4 | F4 G4 | G4 F4 |

| E4 D4 | C4 C4 | G4 E4 | C4 -- ||

Lyric (Amharic with Transliteration)

**Zinab lebet new,
Menged yibelachu.
Zemedwoch belu,
Kifu aykefelachu.**

Transliteration

*Zinab läbät naw,
Mängäd yibälachu.
Zämädwoch bälu,
Kifu aykifälachu.*

Musical Characteristics

- **Rhythmic repetition:** The pattern (quarter–quarter–eighth–eighth–quarter) recurs across lines, creating strong clapping or stomping opportunities.
- **Melodic motion:** Mostly stepwise with simple intervals to support singability for young children.
- **Tonal center:** Clearly rooted in the C major scale (Do-based).
- **Function:** This kind of song is typically sung during rainy season games or moral instruction activities.

Appendix B: Interview Guide and Sample Transcripts

B1. Sample Interview Questions for Teachers

- What types of traditional children's songs are still practiced in your school?
- How do you integrate music into your teaching routines?
- Do you think children's songs contribute to moral and cognitive development?

B2. Excerpt from Interview with Government School Teacher (Grade 2)

"The children still sing 'Mar Neny' during breaks. It helps them memorize quickly and settle down when we return to class."

B3. Excerpt from Interview with Non-Governmental School Administrator

"Our curriculum follows modern standards, but we also allocate time for indigenous storytelling and songs—especially during art periods."

Appendix C: Classroom Observation Checklist

Criteria	Observed (Yes/No)	Notes
Use of indigenous songs during class	Yes	Used during clean-up routine
Teacher explanation of song meaning	No	Focused only on singing
Student engagement with song activity	Yes	Students participated actively
Song used to support instruction	Yes	Used in language and counting
Students' spontaneous song use	Yes	Sang while lining up outside

Appendix D: Tables and Graphs of Quantitative Data

Table D1: Frequency of Traditional Song Usage per School Type

School Type	Daily Use	Weekly Use	Rarely Used	Never Used
Government School (n=5)	3	2	0	0
NGO School (n=5)	1	2	1	1

Figure D1: Teachers' Perceptions of Indigenous Music in Classrooms