

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

**MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION IN THE AWJI ZONE FROM 1996 TO 2011:
PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES**

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ABSTRACT

The 1991 political upheaval and the subsequent Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia published in 1994 laid the legal ground for the implementation of Awji in the primary schools of Awi Administrative zone for the first time in history. This study sheds light on the main vicissitudes of the programme for mother tongue education implemented in Awi Administrative Zone. The study is based on an extensive survey of archival sources available in the area as well as interviews made with people around the study area. The findings indicate that implementation of a programme for mother tongue education in Awi faced several challenges, from scarcity of resources and well-trained staff to scepticism or refusal to join the programme by large groups of Awji speakers.

Keywords: mother tongue education, Awji, language policy, Amharic, federalism, Awi Administrative Zone

INTRODUCTION

The 1994 Education and Training policy of Ethiopia was the third education policy declared in Ethiopia after 1945 (Tekeste Negash, 2006, p. 22). Years before the declaration of this policy, in August 1991 the Ministry of Education established a committee to study the implementation of mother tongue education (MoE, 1983 E.C., p. 12). The committee members presented an action plan in order to train translators, trainers and teachers. In accordance with this action plan, mother tongue education was planned to begin in September 1991 (MoE, 1983 E.C., p. 11). To this end, twenty two languages were declared to be implemented as the medium of instruction in primary schools of Ethiopia. These languages were Tigriñnaa, Oromifa, Awji (also Awngi), Ximtag, Somali, Afar, Aderi (Hareri), Anywak, Nuer, Majang, Sidama, Gedeo, Wolayta, Gamo, Goffa, Dawro, Kambata, Silti, Kefa, Konta, Hadiya and Amharic (Getachew Anteneh & Derib Ado, 2006, p. 50; Küspert-Rakotondrainy, 2014, p. 29 et passim).

This study reconstructs the long process of implementation of the Awji language, the language of the Awi people, as a medium of instruction. Awji is a Cushitic language and is part of the Agāw cluster, together with Ḥamtaṇa, Kemantenay and Bilin (Appleyard, 2003; 2006, p. 3 et passim; Levine, 1974, p. 37). As of 2010, Awji was spoken by 442,716 people (CSAE, 2010, p. 155).

The study is based on qualitative research and fieldwork for an M.A. thesis (Abebe Fentahun, 2012). The main research area of the study is Awi Adminis-

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trative Zone. An emphasis was given to show the prospects and challenges faced during this process. Two questions guided the study: What are the rationales behind the implementation of mother tongue education in Ethiopia in general and in Awi Administrative Zone in particular? How did the policy of mother tongue education emerge in Awi Administrative Zone?

In order to answer these questions, both primary and secondary sources were used, including key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and analysis of archival sources. Key informants were selected based on their immediacy to the subject of study. Teachers, parents, zonal and *woreda* education experts as well as heads of education departments of the area were extensively interviewed. Archival sources were collected from Awi Zone Education department and *woreda* education offices of the study area from September 2011 up to June 2012.

In addition, recent studies focusing the Awji schooling programme have been consulted. Since the implementation of the programme a number of studies have been written with a focus on the programme. In 2002 Dessalew Abawa submitted an M.A. thesis at the department of Curriculum and Instruction at Addis Ababa University. In his work, Dessalew concluded that the implementation of Awji as the medium of instruction in the primary schools of Awi Administrative Zone faced a number of challenges and problems, among them scepticism at the community level, poor resources, and lack of trained teachers (2002, p. 1). Two years later, Melaku Mengistu defended his M.A. thesis in the same University. Melaku, who took part in the programme as Zone Education Office expert and head, focused on the social reception of the programme. He showed that during the programme's implementation a large part of the local Awi community were more inclined towards Amharic as a medium for education due to the prestige this language had in political and socio-economic life (2004, p. 76).

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION IN AWI ZONE

There is a wide consensus that mother tongue education brings pedagogical, psychological, linguistic and cultural benefits not only to children but also to the larger community and the nation as well. Pedagogically, mother tongue education benefits children to ease classroom discussion in order to understand content faster, thereby enhancing the teaching learning process (Daniel Kindie, 2003, p. 15; Melaku Mengistu, 2004, p. 26). Likewise, as Mehrotra points out, "if the medium of instruction in school is a language that is not spoken at home ... the chances of drop-out increases" (1998, p. 479) at an alarming rate. Besides, mother tongue education can be easily carried out with the promotion of second language acquisition. Moreover, mother tongue education brings children into active classroom participation and thus contributes to their greater cognitive development (Daniel Kindie, 2003, p. 15). Indeed, psychologically, mother tongue education makes children fond of their class and consequently experience positively their schooling (id., p. 14). In addition, a child who is instructed through his or her mother tongue will develop a great degree of assertiveness and understanding (Begna Ordofa, 2010, p. 22; Küspert-Rakotondrainy, 2014, pp. 26-27).

Last but not least, mother tongue education can bring more general benefits to the nation insofar as minorities are encouraged to participate in government offices, thus leading to a major integration of ethnic groups and to a greater social security. Indeed, it has been found that the domination of a single language often does not achieve greater national unity or cohesion. Thus, as Melaku Mengistu points out, if a “common national language is established by force, most probably, it results in resentment of nations and nationalities against their national government” (2004, p. 26; see also Watson, 1979, p. 21).

As it was the case in other regions of Ethiopia, in Awi Zone the implementation of mother tongue education was done within a short time span and with little time for careful planning. According to local informants, the period given to prepare the programme was very short, less than six months: in April 1996 Awi Zone Education Department Officers were told to start preparation works and in September of the same year they were urged to start implementation of the programme (interviews with Mekuriaw Anagaw, Yeshiwas Yismaw, and Zewdie Getahun).

Translation tasks became one of the first and major challenges of the programme. Like many other Ethiopian languages which received official recognition during the same time, Awji also had never been written before. In the past, it was deprived of all official status; it was neither represented in education nor in the administration (interviews with Ambaw Agidew, Bekalu Workineh, and Yeshiwas Yismaw). These factors made manifest the need for experts who should select the orthography, develop standardized grammars and conduct translation of text books and other supplementary reading materials (interview with Mekuriaw Angaw).

To face these problems, during the early stages of the programme, a committee of translation (*Yetirgum gibre hail*) was set up. The criteria for choosing the committee was both fluency in speaking Awji as well as academic qualifications, the minimum requirement being B.A. and B.Sc. holders (interviews with Mekuriaw Angaw and Zewdie Getahun). Following this Awi Zone Education Department selected twelve people: Melaku Mengistu, Zewdie Getahun and Getahun Tsehay were selected as translators of social sciences; Teferi Getahun, Yaregal Alene and Bantihun Mekonnen as translators of language; Belayneh Techane, Belayneh Geremew and Haimanot Admas as translators of mathematics; and Alene Asress, Tilahun Yihun and Solomon Belay were selected as translators of natural sciences (ANRSEBOA, Folder Nr. 92/01, File Nr. 01).

The first task of the translation committee was to select an orthography that faithfully represented the Awji language (Dessalew Abawa, 2002, p. 56). Eventually, the template chosen for preparing the Awji syllabary was the Ge'ez syllabary, which had been used for Amharic and other Semitic languages of Ethiopia and Eritrea. This was in direct disagreement with the language policy drafted in 1991 by the Ministry of Education that recommended the “Latin script for Cushitic languages in particular, and decentralization of language choice” (Smith, 2008, p. 222; on the rationale behind this policy see Küspert-Rakotondrainy, 2014, p. 50). The reason for this choice, which largely fell on the shoulders of government officials (Getachew Anteneh & Derib Ado, 2006, p. 52), is obscure but there is room for speculation. The decision could have been

induced by “a political and symbolic attachment to *fidel*”, a writing system that throughout time has enjoyed a strong prestige in Ethiopia (Smith, 2008, p. 221).

Eventually, the translation committee came up with a modified system of the Ge'ez syllabary (Figure 1) that needed some rearrangements. A first rearrangement included changing the order of the letters: in the Ge'ez syllabary the first order letter is *u* but in the new Awji syllabary it was changed for *o*, while *u* was placed at the bottom of the new Awji syllabary table. The choice tried to follow the order of the Awji letters, which starts with *o* and then continues with *h*, *ñ* ...*u*. Indeed, *o* is the most frequently used letter in Awji while the letter *u* has a much lower frequency. Additionally, as informants explained, the choice also tried to make the letters more easily graspable by the children. Thus, they could learn *o* first and subsequently they could form *h*, *ñ*, and so on from *o* (interviews with Mekuriaw Anagaw, Yeshiwas Yismaw, and Zewdie Getahun).



Figure 1: *Awji Alphabet prepared by the translation committee*
 Source: Awi Zone Education Department, language education curriculum preparation case team.

A second rearrangement was the omission of some characters from the Ge'ez syllabary (ፈ, ጠ, ጫ and ጸ) because the Awi language has no such plosive sounds (Melaku Mengistu, 2004, p. 194). In addition, some other characters found in the Amharic syllabary were omitted on the grounds of their repetition. Thus, from the repeated consonants ሀ, ሐ, ኀ, ሰ, ሠ, ለ, ፀ, the ሐ, ኀ, ሠ and ፀ were omitted from the Awi syllabary. Those letters considered easier to write and understand, ሀ, ለ and ሰ, were selected (interviews with Gebru Mekonnen and Yeshiwas Yismaw).

A third important change was the addition of two new graphemes that did not exist in the Amharic syllabary, ኘ and ኙ. The new graphemes corresponded to two sounds distinctive of Awi and other Agāw dialects, the velar nasal ŋ and the uvular stop q^w (Appleyard, 2006, p. 6). Additionally, two graphemes found in the Ge'ez syllabary (ፀ and ኸ) were preserved but attributed a different sound to the one they had in the Amharic language (Yeshiwas Yismaw, Yitaysh Belay, & Gebru Mekonnen, 2001 E.C., p. ii).

However, in spite of these innovations the new syllabary had its own limitations. For instance, the first order letters of letters in the Amharic syllabary does not exist in Awi. Thus, fluent speakers of Awi cannot pronounce ሰ (*bä*), instead they say ሰ (*ba*). That is, they substitute first order letters by fourth order letters while pronouncing (interviews with Workineh Azale, Yeshiwas Yismaw, and Zewdie Getahun). This issue was not resolved at the time and it was left for future study by linguists.

In April 1996, upon request from the Awi Zone Education Department, the translation committee started translating Amharic text books into Awi in order to be able to start the implementation of Awi in September 1996 (Ethiopian New Year). It needs to be emphasized that the committee was not given any form of training in translation methods (Dessalew Abawa, 2002, p. 86), a factor that eventually contributed to the poor quality of the text books.

Translating Grade One Amharic textbooks into Awi started on April 10, 1996. According to the action plan by the Zonal Education Department, work should have been completed by May 19, 1996. As expected, the committee faced great challenges in meeting the deadline. An important factor delaying work was stated as follows: "The language itself was not a written language, without any dictionary and thus it took a longtime to find synonymous words for the translation. In consequence, translators spent more time independently, in groups and as whole to find the proper words" (AZEDOA, Folder Nr. 92/01, File Nr. 01).

As it appears, the translation methodology evolved hand in hand with the problems faced by the committee. The first method undertaken was that of word by word translation. Subsequently, translation was done phrase by phrase. Finally, a third method reached wider consensus: it focused on flexible translations. So, any word or phrase which could not be exactly translated would be adopted according to socio-linguistic and cultural grounds of the Awi people (interviews with Aynalem Wollie, Gebru Mekonnen, Yeshiwas Yismaw, and Zewdie Getahun).

In spite of the limited background of its members, the committee showed resourcefulness and resorted to original solutions to the challenges faced. Thus, a strategy consisted of going to the field and searching for the term among the local communities was employed in order to find the specific names for difficult terms. Some members of the group were sent to different areas to inquire about names of animals, plants, and places. For example, no one knew how the tree *wanza* was called, because this type of tree does not grow around Injibara. Therefore, some groups were sent up to Zigem, where the tree species was believed to exist. The trip was successful and the group came back with a local Awji name, ቡጊጊ (interviews with Ayinalem Wollie, Gebru Mekonnen, and Zewdie Getahun).

Another challenge faced by the committee was the existence of two dialects of Awji, which are locally called ‘Dega’ (literally ‘highland’ in Amharic), spoken around Injibara, and ‘Qolla’ (literally ‘lowland’), spoken around Chagni, Zigem and in some parts of Ankesha and Dangila. The translation committee was in confusion about what dialect should be used while transcribing. There are a number of words which the speakers of the Dega dialect use of which the Qolla speakers are ignorant and vice versa. For instance, the word “later” in the Dega dialect is ፋሊጎጎ while in Qolla dialect speakers say አጎጂኛ (interviews with Ayinalem Wollie, Gebru Mekonnen, and Zewdie Getahun). In order to solve such conundrums the committee agreed to use both words in brackets (interviews with Zewdie Getahun and Yohannes Berhanu). Yet, this was done only when the translation was carried out in groups and only when the group had speakers from both dialects. So, which dialect to be selected and implemented for the purpose remains still an unsolved problem (interviews with Mekuriaw Anagaw, Yohannes Berhanu, and Zewdie Getahun).

Whilst translation was going on in 1996 the Awi Administrative Zone Education Department was conducting selection of teachers and pilot schools to be tested in the following academic year, that is in September of 1996. During selection of pilot schools, the Zonal Education Department asked *woreda* education offices to select two schools in each *woreda* where the Awji language is dominant (interviews with Mekuriaw Anagaw, Yohannes Berhanu, and Zewdie Getahun). Subsequently, Zonal Education Department officers selected one school from each *woreda* (Table 1).

Regarding the number of students the Awi Zone Education Department had announced that fifty students should be assigned for every class. This was in Table 1: *Pilot primary schools where mother tongue education was implemented in the 1996/97 academic year*

School	Woreda
Kibi Primary School	Guangu
Qidamaja Primary School	Banja Shikudad
Singuri Primary School	Dangila
Gezehara Primary School	Fagita Lekoma
Urana Primary School	Ankesha Guagusa

Source: AZEDOA, Folder Nr. 92 (01), File Nr. 02.

order to conduct lessons as soon as new text books arrived (AZEDOA, Folder Nr. 92/01, File Nr. 01).

With regards to the teaching workforce, the Awi Zone Education Department was also in charge of their selection. Initially each of the *woreda* education offices selected three teachers, thus raising the total number of instructors to fifteen (Table 2).

Table 2: Teachers selected for pilot schools through *Awji* medium for 1996/97 academic year

Teachers' Name	School	Woreda
Mulat Shibabaw Gebeyehu	Kibi Primary School	Guangu
Mesfin Zeleke Alemie		
Demelash Amsalu Aynie		
Kassahun Workineh Biru	Qidamaja Primary School	Banja Shikudad
Workineh Kebede Hailu		
Semahegn Alemu Akalu		
Dangnaw Bitew	Singuri Primary School	Dangila
Gashaw Sewnet		
Alemayehu Asfaw		
Gebbru Mekonnen Alemie	Gezehara Primary School	Fagita Lekoma
Melese Yenealem Shiferaw		
Mulat Kassahun Aynie		
Hiruy Alemayehu Moges	Urana Primary School	Ankesha Guagusa
Aynalem Wellie Ambi		
Alemu Getahun Tessema		

Source: AZEDOA, Folder Nr. 92(01) File Nr. 1.

Subsequently, the instructors, under the supervision and with finance from the Amhara National Regional State Education Bureau, were given training at Dessie Teachers' Training Institute (now upgraded into Teachers' Training College) (AZEDOA, Folder Nr. 92(01), File Nr. 03). As the training was of a general character and it did not focus on teaching through the medium of *Awji*, the programme failed to meet the actual needs of the teachers (interviews with Aynalem Wollie, Dagne Bitew, and Gebbru Mekonnen). Indeed, some of the teachers complained that the training had nothing to do with the implementation of the *Awji* language as medium of instruction (interviews with Ambaw Agidew, Chekol Alamirew, Mekuriaw Anagaw, and Zewdie Getahun).

In April 1997, during a workshop arranged by the Awi Zone Education Department, the teachers assigned to teach through Awji media of instruction from pilot schools met with the translation committee as well as local elders in Awi Zone (interviews with Ambaw Agidew, Chekol Alamirew, Mekuriaw Anagaw, and Zewdie Getahun). On this occasion, one local elder per *woreda* was selected on the basis of fluency in Awji, knowledge of the community's culture and reading and writing skills (AZEDOA, Folder Nr. 92/01 File Nr. 01, Letter's Order Nr. 4666, date 30/07/1989 E.C; BWEEOA, Folder Nr. 117, File Nr. 31). During the workshop, elders participated in providing local terms, place names and sayings (interviews with Ambaw Agidew, Mekuriaw Anagaw, and Zewdie Getahun; AGWEAOA, Folder Nr. 334, File Nr. 47). The meeting was also used by the teachers to become acquainted with new words, with forms of pronunciation and meanings they were not familiar with (interviews with Aynalem Wollie, Dagne Bitew, and Gebru Mekonnen).



Figure 2: Teachers taking an introductory lesson on how to teach through the medium of Awji, Injibara, Pubic City Hall, 1996
Source: Awi Zone Education Department Documentation Center.

Implementation of mother tongue education in the Awi Zone started in 1996 at the five pilot schools and in 1997 at all the schools in those areas where Awji is the dominant language. From the initially selected fifteen teachers only ten started teaching: each school had one principal teacher and one supporting teacher. One teacher was considered to be enough to take over teaching duties at each school but a supporting teacher was added for emergency cases (interviews with Aynalem Wollie, Dagne Bitew, Gebru Mekonnen, Mekuriaw Anagaw, and Zewdie Getahun).

Additionally, the Awi Zone Education Department announced an arrangement of fifty students per class for every pilot school (AZEDOA, Folder Nr.92/01, File Nr. 01). Yet, it soon became evident that in some schools the number of students was larger. Thus, at Urana Primary School, in Ankesha *woreda*, the number of students was sixty (AGWEAOA, Folder Nr. 334, File Nr. 47) and the total number of students registered in the five schools at the beginning of the school year reached 300 (interviews with Mekuriaw Anagaw and Zewdie Getahun). From this number those who completed grade one were 263 (AZEDOA, General Report of Education sector, from 1987-2004).

In September 1997 a large scale implementation of mother tongue education started. The numbers of schools supposed to commence education through the medium of Awñi were sixty five (interviews with Mekuriaw Anagaw and Zewdie Getahun). In these schools more than 8,553 students were registered at the beginning of the school year (AZEDOA, General Report of Education sector, from 1987-2004). Twenty two schools out of these sixty five schools were found in Guangua *woreda* (GWEOOA, Folder Nr. 1150, File Nr. 64), the former Metekel *awraja*. Accordingly, the number of teachers assigned to teach in these schools also increased dramatically and about 120 teachers were assigned.

The criterion for selecting the schools to implement Awñi as medium of instruction was made on the basis of language coverage. Yet, a few problems emerged. Firstly, in those communities that spoke Amharic or Gumuz children continued to be taught in Amharic. Secondly, the selection of schools in which to implement Awñi as a medium of instruction was difficult. Besides, it also became difficult to assign teaching staff due to the fact that local teachers had been trained through the medium of Amharic and a number of them were reluctant to take the assignment (interviews with Dagne Bitew, Gebru Mekonnen, Mekuriaw Anagaw, and Zewdie Getahun).

In parallel to these developments, the Amhara National Regional State Education Bureau was responsible for the publication of the text books. In August 1997, the Awi Zone Education Department sent the files of seven translated text books ready for printing to the National Regional Education Bureau. Yet, the Regional Bureau rejected some of the documents on the basis that they did not fulfill the requirements of publications (ANRSEBOA, Folder Nr. 10, File Nr. 05). This fact delayed the arrival of textbooks at the schools and ultimately discouraged a number of students from attending class through the medium of Awñi. So initially the students from the pilot schools had to complete grade six with the help of typewritten and photocopied text books (interviews with Ambaw Agidew, Aynalem Wollie, Bekalu Workineh, Chekol Alamirew, Dagne Bitew, Gebru Mekonnen, Mekuriaw Anagaw, and Zewdie Getahun).

FROM WIDESPREAD SCEPTICISM TO MASSIVE EXPANSION

Teaching Awñi thus confronted the regional authorities and instructors with several challenges. Firstly, the local communities received the programme with scepticism (interviews with Aynalem Wollie, Dagne Bitew, Mekuriaw Anagaw, and Zewdie Getahun). During earlier times both the Awi people and their language had been regarded as inferior by government officials and regional rulers. Indeed, the neighbouring Amhara speakers used to refer to Awñi language generally in negative terms. Such an attitude is embodied in the Amhara epit

ወንዝ የግያሻግር ቋንቋ (*wānz yāmayaṣagər qwanqwa*) which describes Awñi as ‘A language which cannot help to cross a river’.

In addition, as indicated above, the Zonal Education Department faced stiff resistance during the selection of Awñi teachers because the same teachers who were identified as fluent speakers of the language hesitated to teach through Awñi. Various reasons were suggested for this. One was the widely held belief that speaking Awñi resulted in social marginalization (interviews with Aynalem Wollie, Bekalu Workineh, Mekuriaw Anagaw, Yeshiwas Yismaw, and Zewdie Getahun). In addition, teachers claimed that “... Awñi is given in rural areas, but not in towns, our mobility to towns would be restricted” (Dessalew Abawa, 2002, p.85).

Archival sources obtained from Fagita Lekoma Woreda Education Office (Addis Kidam) are consistent with this issue raised by local informants. An archival letter written by the *woreda*'s Education Office (FLWEOOA, Folder Nr. 19, File Nr. 03) states the despair of some officials concerning the direction taken by the programme. Thus, at one of the schools, Chiguali Primary School, only one teacher was assigned to teach about 260 students in a section due to the lack of instructors willing to teach through Awñi. In the same document the then education office representative, Degarege Mesfin, wrote: “... those teachers who were assigned to teach through Awñi just because they were speakers of the language were not willing to teach. They justified their refusal by saying that they did not know the language [Awñi] well”. Degarege also critically stated that the *woreda* received only eight music, eight sciences and two Awñi parcels of books for Grade One in October 1997 to be distributed to the selected eight schools within the *woreda*. He was also the first person to raise awareness of the fact that the radio lessons that were planned to be given in Awñi had not yet started. Moreover, he accused zonal education officers of not listening to his warnings about the above mentioned problems.

But an even more serious complication emerged when local communities hesitated to send their children to the schools integrated within the Awñi programme. Some even overtly refused and instead sent their children to other neighboring schools or to towns where Amharic was the medium of instruction (interviews with Alganeh Reta, Ambaw Agidew, and Bekalu Workineh). Since Amharic is the language of literacy and social prestige, a number of Awi people preferred to see their children become fluent in Amharic. Thus, one elder had the following to say on the Awñi schooling programme: “Awñi language is not a working language in government offices ...Awñi language is spoken in Awi zone only, so, when our children move to other places outside Awi zone, they will face problems of communication with those who do not know Awñi Our children already knew Awñi at home, which is enough for communication. We want them to learn in Amharic” (Dessalew Abawa, 2002, p. 85). Some community members even tried to openly boycott the programme. The elders around Injibara Primary School presented a petition from the community in which they said that they were bilingual and that their children's first language was Amharic. So they claimed that education at Injibara Primary School should be through the medium of Amharic (interviews with Alganeh Reta, Bekalu Workineh, Mekuriaw Anagaw, and Zewdie Getahun). It was clear that the local community's reluctance towards the programme emanated from a “lack of full

understanding and exploitation of the psychological, educational and social advantage” of mother tongue education (Melaku Mengistu, 2004, p. 39).

In order to respond to the claim raised by Injibara elders the Zonal Administrative Council ordered the Zonal Education Department to form a committee to check the claim of the community around Injibara town. The committee ultimately recognised that children around this school could speak Amharic fluently and thus substituted Awñi in favour of Amharic at Injibara Primary School. News of this decision rapidly spread to other areas. Soon most of the community people were marching to Zonal Administrative Council pledging in favor of Amharic language at the schools where their children were taught. Yet, the Council, as a final solution, announced that it could not accept any new request made against the implementation of Awñi as the medium of instruction (interviews with Alganeh Reta, Bekalu Workineh, Mekuriaw Anagaw, and Zewdie Getahun).

As it seems, the local communities who were more resolute in rejecting the programme were led by a few active Awi leaders. These leaders based their opposition on a single phrase from the education and training policy of Ethiopia that states: “... Nations and nationalities can either learn in their own language or can choose among those selected ...” (Transitional Government of Ethiopia, 1994, p. 23). They thus presented their case as one where government officials from the Awi zone were working ‘against’ government policies. Accordingly, the leaders mobilized local people against sending their children to the school integrated into the programme (interviews with Mekuriaw Anagaw, Zewdie Getahun). It is worth mentioning that this idea became later the banner of most of the political parties during the 2005 Ethiopian elections (interviews with Alganeh Reta, Ambaw Agidew, and Bekalu Workineh), which was generally “shaped by ... nationalist discontent .., [and against] ethnic federalism” (International Crisis Group, 2009).

Last but not least, many students proved to be quite reluctant to learn through the medium of Awñi. While visiting Awi areas during the initial years of mother tongue instruction, some students responded that they wanted to learn through the medium of Amharic although they were not fluent speakers of Amharic (interviews with Mekuriaw Anagaw, Yeshiwas Yismaw, Yohannes Berhanu, and Zewdie Getahun).

Yet, there were also supporters of the programme, both among the children and the parents. Thus, a widespread opinion among parents was that if their children were taught in Awñi they could understand the contents and concepts taught during schooling easily because they were fluent speakers of the language. In this regard, the parents emphatically pointed out that their children were at greater advantage because in that system they could easily communicate with their teachers and ask about concepts which they had not understood. Moreover, if the language of instruction was in Awñi, the parents could follow up the day to day activities of their children. These arguments by local elders coincide with the findings of Getachew Anteneh and Derib Adoon on the advantages of learning in the mother tongue (2006, pp. 50-51). Some parents also expressed their happiness at seeing how Awñi became a written language: “Formerly, it was believed that Awñi could only serve for speaking and not to be used for writing” they said, “but now we have seen Awñi serving as medium of

instruction” (interviews with Algameh Reta, Bekalu Workineh, Mekuriaw Anagaw, and Zewdie Getahun).

In spite of the challenges faced, Awi instruction has experienced a significant surge since the moment the programme was started. Thus, mother tongue education, which started in 1996/97 in five schools, with merely ten teachers and 263 students, was extended in 2011/12 to 227 schools, while the number of teachers increased to 2,346 and that of students to 107,878 (Figures 3 and 4).

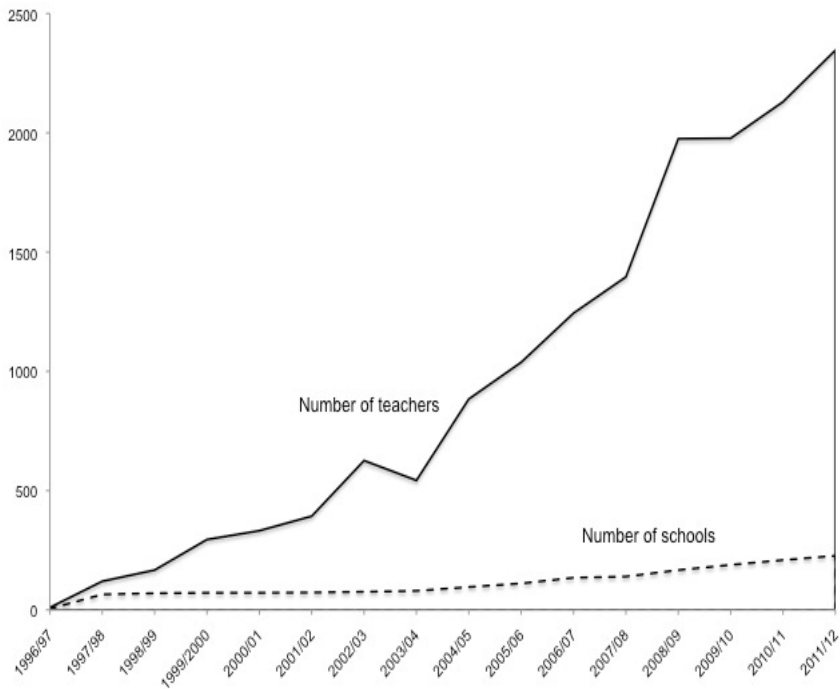


Figure 3: Number of teachers participating in the Awi schooling programme and number of schools hosting it, 1996 to 2012

Source: yearly reports of Awi Zone Education Department.

Some progress was also achieved at the institutional level. Until 1998 it was the Amhara National Regional State Education Bureau that was responsible for coordinating and financing mother tongue education in the Awi zone. In the same year the Education Bureau managed to decentralize the authority by giving responsibility to Zonal Education Departments (ANRSEBOA, Folder Nr. H+8, File Nr. 01). To this end the Bureau prepared a proposal aimed at establishing an All-round Research and Training Center. Eventually the Awi Zone Education Department accepted the project proposal and asked the zonal council for legal establishment. Accordingly, the zonal councils’ office funded

the Zone Education Department with about 50,000 ETB for preparation works (AZEDO, Folder Nr. 92/01, File Nr. 03). The Training Centre was officially opened on November 9, 1999 (ANRSEBOA, Folder Nr. 09, File Nr. 01).

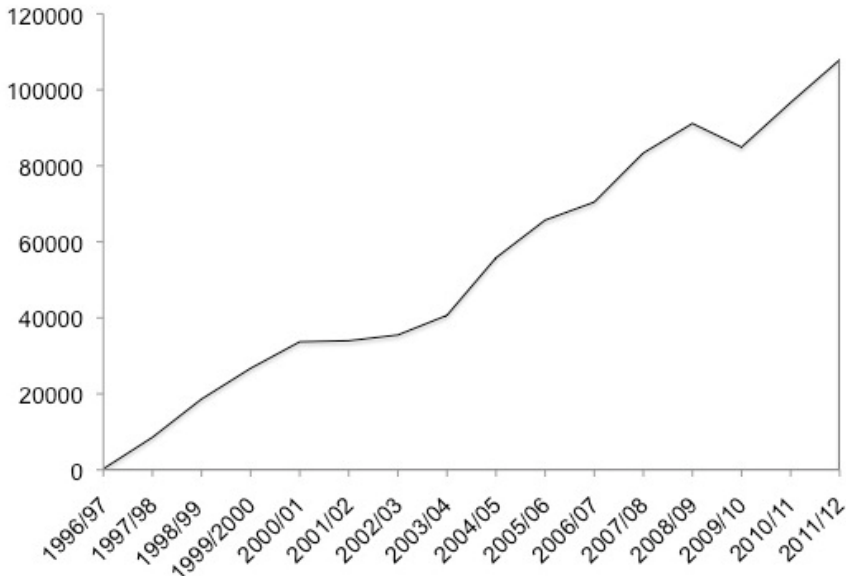


Figure 4: Number of students receiving instruction in Awji, 1996 to 2012
 Source: yearly reports of Awi Zone Education Department.

Since its establishment, the centre has carried out important tasks. Among these are facilitating translations of textbooks, printing and distribution of books and providing training to teachers who teach through the medium of Awji. Moreover, the centre has striven to develop and secure the sustainability of the Awji language in the zone (interviews with Mekuriaw Anagaw, Yeshiwas Yismaw, and Zewdie Getahun).

Another piece of progress has been the opening of a Department of Awngi Language at Debre Markos Teachers' Training College in the academic year 2006-07. Until the 2007/08 academic year teachers using Awji were not trained in the local language, a fact that resulted in poor quality of education. With the establishment of the department of Awji forty trainees from the Awi zone were assigned there specifically to get training in how to teach Awji as a subject. The training led to a certificate level and not to a diploma level. In 2007/08 120 trainees were assigned to be trained through the medium of Awji. Yet, as there was no curriculum designed specifically for those students they were trained through the medium of Amharic. In the following year 120 new trainees were assigned from the Awi Administrative zone into the Teachers' Training College. These trainees were expected to be trained at the level of certificate. However, in the same year, the Teachers' Training Policy of the country eliminated certificate level training. Consequently, two types of diploma programmes, cluster diploma (training teachers for grades 1-4) and linear diploma (training teachers for 5-8 grade levels), were started. More recently, in order to tackle these shortcomings in the teachers' background, M.A. level trainers

were assigned by the Zonal Education Department to teach at the college once their fluency in Awji was attested (interviews with Berhanu Assaye, Mekuriaw Anagaw, Yohannes Berhanu, and Zewdie Getahun).

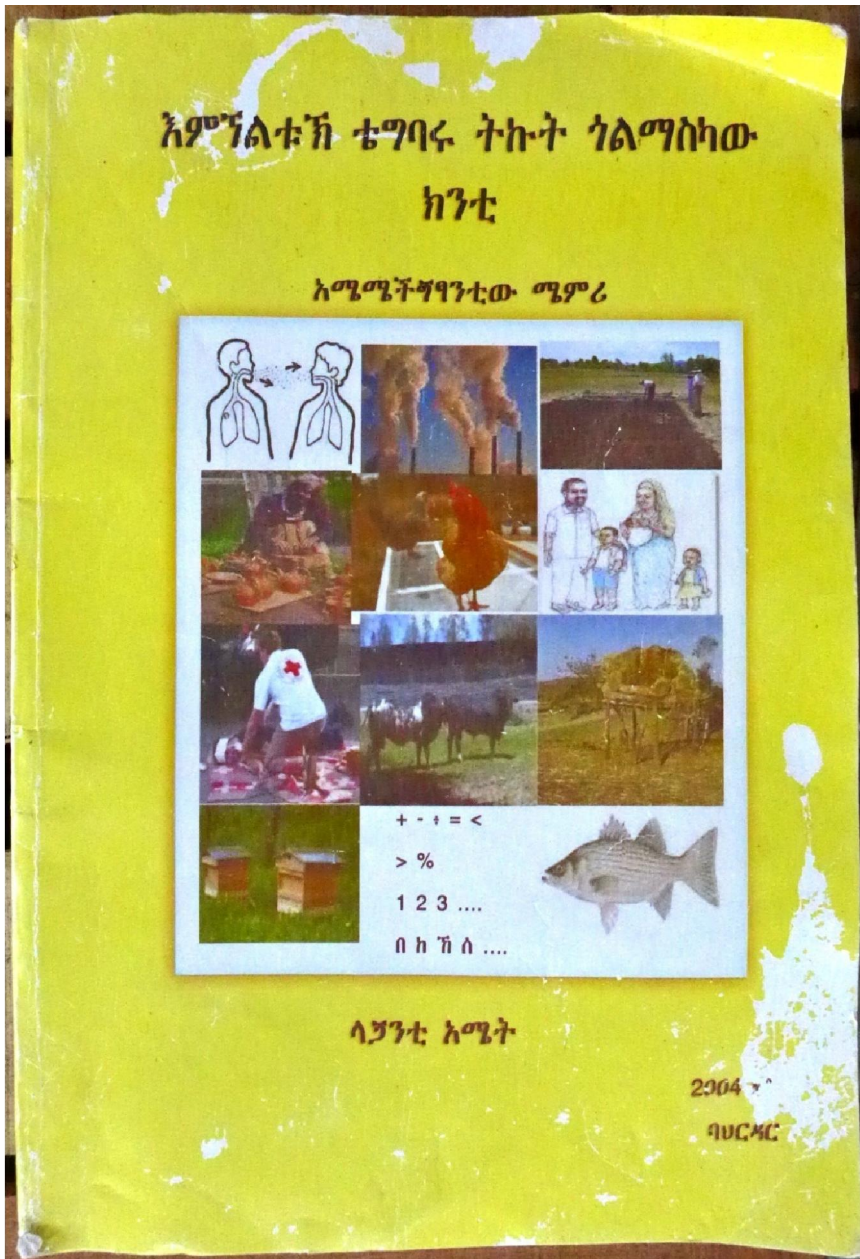


Figure 5: Awji text book prepared for teenage students; Abebe Fentahun, Həruy Alāmāyyāhu & Asmālaše Bākälä, 2004 E.C.
Source: author's own data.

In March 2009 the Injibara Teachers Training College (ITTC) was established. In the summer of the same year the college started its work by using the compound of Injibara Higher Education Preparatory School until its building would be completed (Injibara Teachers' Training College, 2011a, p. 6). In June 2011 329 trainees who trained in cluster level diploma graduated from the College (interviews with Berhanu Assaye, Mekuriaw Anagaw, Yohannes Berhanu, and Zewdie Getahun; Injibara Teachers' Training College, 2011a).

By now, ITTC is training about 1,254 trainees in regular programmes, 2,219 in extension programmes and about 4,101 summer trainees (1,788 summer regular and 2,313 summer extension) (Injibara Teachers' Training College, 2011b). It needs to be emphasized that the language of training is not uniquely Awji but also includes Amharic and English. The teachers of the College are also involved in parallel activities, such as research on Awji dialects, language, and the preparation of a dictionary (interviews with Berhanu Assaye, Mekuriaw Anagaw, Yohannes Berhanu, and Zewdie Getahun).

CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of Awji as the main language of education in the Awi Zone has been a long and difficult process. The quantitative data show that there has been a significant increase in the number of students as well as in the human and material resources invested since the programme of mother tongue instruction in the Awi Administrative Zone was launched in 1996. Moreover, the establishment of ITTC, which is designed to train teachers specifically with the local language, can be considered as a matter of success. Yet, such positive developments should not hide the fact that the programme has been punctuated by pitfalls and that a number of issues remain unresolved. The first issue is the paradox that while Awji has reached an official status in the education system it remains still alien to the public administration, where Amharic continues to be prevalent. So those educated in Awji language can face serious challenges once they enter the labour market, which is mostly Amharic speaking. Secondly, the failure to set up an Awji radio station has been an important shortcoming for it is this media that is called for to provide the necessary pedagogical support for the students in their early grades. Finally, the large scale implementation of the programme, covering all school grades, has been at the detriment of the learning of Amharic, which still continues to be the prevalent language across the nation in the public sector, in industry and the economy. After all, fluency in Amharic can be an essential asset and students from the Awi Zone might want to seek employment in regions other than their own. Such issues will need to be addressed by policy makers and education professionals in order to give full potential to the mother tongue education programme in Awi.

DISCLAIMER

This paper is based on a Master thesis with the title "Mother Tongue Education in Awi Zone From 1996 To 2011: Dilemmas and Implementation" defended at Bahir Dar University in 2012. It bears mention that the text of the thesis was plagiarized and published by a former colleague of mine, Alemayehu Erkihun Engida, under his name and without my permission. The reference to the

plagiarizing text is: Alemayehu Erkihun Engida, "Historicizing teaching in Awni as a mother tongue language at primary schools of Awi Nationality Administrative Zone: Challenges and implementation", *Academic Journals*, 10(7), 2015, 861-869, doi: 10.5897/ERR2015.2084

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LIST OF INFORMANTS

Name of Informant	Age	Date of Interview	Place of Interview	Remarks
Alganeh Reta (ato)	89	11/03/2012	Injibara	A former member of <i>Nech</i> Lebash army during the Imperial period. Since the Derg period until the last two years he was employed as guard of Injibara Primary School. Now he is retired and lives at the town of old Injibara.
Ambaw Agidew (blatta)	82	01/04/2012	Azena	He has been <i>chaqa shum</i> around Azena <i>kebele</i> from 1967-1971. From his reserved <i>kebele</i> peasants he used to collect tributes. Currently he is retired and lives in Azena town
Aynalem Wollie (ato)	46	01/04/2012	Gimjabet	He was one of the first teachers selected to teach through the medium of Awñi at Urana Primary School (Ankesh Guagusa Woreda). Currently he works at Ankesh Guagusa Woreda Civil Service Office.
Bekalu Workineh (ato)	66	11/03/2012	Injibara	He was member of Ethiopian Air Force for about three years. He was also one of the participants of <i>Zemecha</i> in 1975 and 1976. From 1977-2007 he has served as a Primary school teacher. Currently he is retired and lives in the town of old Injibara.
Berhanu Assaye (ato)	41	11/05/2012	Kossober	He was head of Awñi unit at Debre Markos Teacher's College. Currently he is Language Trainer at Injibara Teacher's College.
Chekol Alamirew (ato)	87	09/05/2012	Gimjabet	The son of patriot <i>girazmach</i> Alamirew Bizuneh, he has served as Chairman of Agew Gimjabet <i>kebele</i> from 1965-1970. Currently he lives in the town of Agew Gimjabet.
Dagne Bitew (ato)	43	05/04/2012	Kossober	He was one of the first teachers selected to teach through the medium of Awñi at Singuri Primary School (Dangila Woreda). Currently he works in Awi Administrative Zone Education Department.
Mekuriaw Anagaw (ato)	56	10/03/2012	Kossober	He was head of Awi Administrative Zone Education Department for a long period. Since June 2009 he is working as the dean of Injibara Teachers College.
Workineh Azale (ato)	51	12/05/2012	Dangila	He was member of Awi Administrative Zone Education Department as Natural Science Radio Education lessons producer. Currently he works at Dangila <i>woreda</i> .
Yeshiwas Yismaw (ato)	52	05/04/2012	Kossober	He was a teacher for a long period of time and also head of Ankesh Guagusa Woreda Education Office. Currently he works at Awi Administrative Zone Education Department.
Yohannes Berhanu (ato)	49	11/05/2012	Kossober	He was member of Awi Administrative Zone Education Department as head of Radio Education Unit and as Language Radio Education lessons producer. Currently he is Language Trainer at Injibara Teacher's College.
Zewdie Getahun (ato)	58	12/03/2012	Kossober	He was a member of Awi Administrative Zone Education Department, head of All Round Research and Training Center in Awi Zone and of the first Translation Committee. Currently he is Deputy Dean at Injibara Teacher's Training College.