
Stakeholders' Perceptions Related to Transition from Mother Tongue to English Medium of Instruction

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Abstract: This study explored the perceptions and practices surrounding the transition to English medium of instruction and identified differences in practices related to the grade level at which transition was made across all regions in Ethiopia. The study adopted mixed design. In-depth interviews were conducted with selected regional council staff and Regional State Education Bureau experts, Colleges of Teacher Education staff, heads of Parent-Teacher-Student Association, principals, and cluster supervisors. Questionnaire was administered to mother-tongue language teachers and parents. Classroom observations were also conducted with non-language teachers who were supposed to use English as medium of instruction. The findings revealed that there is regional difference in terms of transition from the use of mother-tongue language to English as medium of instruction and most of the study participants lack information about the way the decision was made and who made the decision. However, the study uncovered that the decisions to transition to English as medium of instruction were not in contradiction with the country's Education and Training Policy. Besides, the decisions did not consider prerequisite factors and were not based on empirical evidences. Rather, the decisions were the result of a spontaneous and impulsive response to the dissatisfaction of parents and other members of the community about the quality of education. There is strong need among the respondents for early transition. More parents than teachers perceived the effects of early transition to English as medium of instruction favorably and believed that transition to English as medium of instruction in earlier grades is the best option.

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Background of the Study

There were different practices related to the use of language of instruction in Ethiopia since the beginning of formal schooling in 1908, when Emperor Menelik II opened the first primary school, Ecole Imperale Menelik, in Addis Ababa (Fasika, 2014). According to Pankhrust (1969), schools used foreign languages as a medium of instruction, such as French, English, and Italian. During the Italian Occupation from 1935 to 1941, Ethiopia officially changed the medium of instruction to mother-tongue (Heugh et al., 2007; Seifu, 2014). The Italians divided Ethiopia into six administrative regions where the language of instruction was different in all regions (Teshome, 1979; and Pankhrust, 1969). When the Italians withdrew, Emperor Haile Selassie's government chose English as the medium of instruction. The first national curriculum published in 1947, stated that Amharic should be the medium of instruction for all subjects in the first two grades (Grade 1 and 2) with gradual transition to English beginning in the third grade (Solomon, 2008). Solomon further stated that Amharic became the language of instruction at the elementary level for the first time with the 6-2-4 educational structure of the country.

Following the curriculum, in the revised constitution of 1955, Amharic remained the medium of instruction in the elementary schools throughout the country and English continued to serve as medium of instruction for the secondary level and above (Heugh et al., 2007). In the 1960's, the study conducted by the Department of Research and Curriculum Development (RCD) of the Ethiopian Ministry of Education on the use of mother-tongue instruction in Ethiopia still maintained Amharic as medium of instruction for primary levels. Their logic was that children should be taught in a language with which they were relatively familiar. However, it should be noted that there were good number of children who did not speak Amharic (Heugh et al., 2007).

In 1976, although it was only on paper, the government declared that nationalities were given the right to use their languages for educational and administrative purposes (Heugh et al., 2007; Fasika, 2014; Getachew & Derib, 2006). After the declaration, fifteen Ethiopian local languages (Afan Oromo, Wolaita, Somali, Hadiya, Kambata, Tigirigna, Sidama, Gedeo, Afar, Kafa, Mochigna, Saho, Kunama, Silti, and Amharic) were used for a national literacy campaign (Getawachew & Derib, 2006; Katrin & Janine, 2009; Wondwosen Jan, 2009) in non-formal education modes. In the formal education, however, Amharic continued as the only “language of instruction and administration” (Heugh et al., 2007).

The use of mother-tongue instruction was put in place in Ethiopia in 1994 with the country’s new education and training policy. The policy recognizes the student’s mother-tongue as an appropriate medium of instruction, particularly at the primary level (grades 1-8). Generally, the policy implicitly states 9th grade as the level of transition from mother-tongue to English medium of instruction. However, the policy allows regions to select language and determine and decide the grade level at which the transition from mother-tongue to a selected language as the medium of instruction occurs. Currently, 51 different languages are being used as the medium of instruction in different parts of Ethiopia (Ministry of Education, 2016).

Regional states in Ethiopia use different models for the transition to instruction in English. For instance, in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Region (SNNPR), Gambela, and Benishangul-Gumuz Regions, the transition from the mother-tongue to English takes place at grade 5. In Amhara, Afar, Harari, and the two chartered cities of Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa, the transition happens at grade 7. In the Oromia, Tigray, and Somali Regions, the transition occurs at grade 9 (Ministry of Education, 2016). These different practices, although falling under the mandate of each regional state, show the absence of clear guidelines to monitor and augment the transition from instruction in the mother-tongue to English. It is clear that

learning in a language for which children are not yet prepared poses challenges in learning. The transition to a second language ideally should be preceded by instruction of prerequisite skills in the language that is to be used as the medium of instruction. It is unclear whether regions' varied timing of the transition to English has been informed by empirical data on such prerequisite skills.

Statement of the problem

Despite difference in practice and the importance mother-tongue instruction many families in Sub Saharan Africa believe that children already know their mother-tongue at home, and therefore, should learn in English at schools. Learning in English is seen as an opportunity to develop language competence for secondary education, secure job, introduce modernity, and creates prospect for future success. Due to this, some parents are not supportive of instruction through mother-tongue language (Walker & Mackenzie, 2016; Heugh et al., 2007).

It is not only parents who feel that English is more important than mother-tongue but the system as well values English language as vital as mother-tongue language. For example, national examinations (grades 10 and 12) in Ethiopia are conducted in English. Teacher training programs are being conducted in English. These trainings do not focus on equipping teachers to teach neither in mother-tongue nor in English. Teachers' English language skill is not as per the level of expectation. In addition, and learning materials used for primary school teachers are in English. There are clear variations of practice of transitioning from MT to English as MOI among regions in Ethiopia. We believe these variation and absence of standard needs to be conceptualized and studied by way of creating agreed upon standard for transition from MT to English MOI.

The purpose of this study was to explore the existing transition practices and teachers' and parents' perception of the transition from mother-tongue to English medium of instruction. More specifically, the study addressed the following research questions:

- What is the existing practice related to transition from mother-tongue to English medium of instruction across different languages?
- What preconditions to the transition were considered?
- What standards were followed by regions when deciding the grade at which to transition?
- What are the perceptions of stakeholders about the transition?

Review of Related Literature

Language can become barrier for gaining knowledge or developing skills if students are not familiar with the language of instruction. Daby (2015), from the online study conducted on teachers, reported that the nature of school language can be a barrier to the academic achievements of students at primary level. Owu-Ewie and Eshun (2015) in their review of related literature showed that students who are proficient in the language of instruction generally perform well in subjects taught in that language. They further reported that students who are not proficient in the language of instruction generally perform poorly in subjects taught in that language. For example, Simasiku, Kasanda, and Smit (2015) reported that members of the community attributed poor performance of Namibian children on exam to the use of English medium of instruction where English was not the language spoken in the community.

In arguing for the advantage of teaching in mother-tongue languages, Bender, Dutcher, Klaus, Shore, and Shore (2005) indicated that mother-tongue instruction increases access and equity, improves learning outcomes, reduces repetition and dropout rates, has socio-cultural benefits, and lowers overall costs that would be expended for education. Similarly, Heugh, Benson, Berhanu, and Mekonnen (2007) described that learning in mother-tongue is an advantage for students because it allows students to interact with the teacher in ways that enhances effective and efficient learning. Many others recognize the advantages of mother-tongue instruction in enhancing children's understanding of the content they learn (Maseko & Dhlamini, 2014) and in laying a

cognitive and linguistic foundation for learning additional languages (Ball, 2011). According to Ball, children learn the second language quickly if they are taught in their mother-tongue throughout primary school and transit gradually to academic learning in the second language. Pflapsen (2015) also believes that learning in mother-tongue language lays a solid foundation for the acquisition of second language and improves learning outcomes. In emphasizing the importance of providing mother-tongue instruction in primary school, Heugh et al. (2007) further report that regions that students provided primary schooling with strong mother-tongue instruction showed higher student achievement at grade 8 in all subjects, including English. World Bank (2005) in emphasizing the advantages of learning in mother-tongue languages indicated that an education system which does not consider local culture and language is characterized by low intake, high repetition and high dropout rates. According to this report, learners may find it difficult to perceive the relevance of education if given in unfamiliar language. Learning concepts and competencies becomes difficult if the instruction is in a different language. That is, students may learn little or nothing unless they can understand the language of textbooks and the language used by teachers. Related to this point, Wolff (2005, p. 3) stated “language is not everything in education, but without language, everything is nothing in education.” That is, if learners fail to make simple communication with their teachers there is little to be gained from spending resources on new curricula, programs, classrooms, textbooks, or technology. Hence, the language teachers use in the classroom is important.

Apart from the advantages of providing primary education in mother-tongue language, the practice of using mother-tongue language as medium of instruction at primary education level varies from country to country. Muthwii (2004), for example, mentioned that in Kenya mother-tongue language Kalenjin is used as medium of instruction in primary classes 1–3, and English or Kiswahili from primary class 4 on, where the children are on average 9 years old. In Uganda, mother-tongue is used as medium of instruction in lower primary classes 1-3 (Humphry, 2013).

Edzordzi (2015) reviewed the education policy of Nigeria and indicated that in Nigeria the child's mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community is used as medium of instruction at the pre-primary level and in the first three years of the six-year primary education, and English is taught as a school subject. The researcher further indicated that English is used as the medium of instruction and the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community continues to be studied as a school subject from the fourth year onwards.

Decisions about language are always political. Deciding which language(s) to use as the language of instruction has proven to be a challenge in some areas due to the linguistic diversity particularly in urban areas (Walker & Mackenzie, 2016). As mentioned earlier, the choice of Medium of Instruction in Ethiopia has changed throughout history as different political bodies have had control.

The presence of multiple mother-tongue languages in most regions of Ethiopia is another challenge for effective implementation of teaching in mother-tongue language. Regardless of the presence of minority mother-tongues, regions pick one working language, in most cases the dominant language of the region, for instructional purpose. As a result, some children are learning in languages other than their mother-tongue. This poses difficulty in learning to read and write in the language.

The other challenge related to the use of English as medium of instruction is the frequent switch between two or more languages in a classroom where teachers are expected to teach in English. Baker (2001) and Owu-Ewie and Eshun (2015) also reported the common practice of language shifting in bilingual or multilingual classrooms. They mentioned that the use of two languages in a bilingual classroom is regularly practiced sometimes without any official backing from the policy makers. A possible explanation for code switching is English language competence problem of both teachers and students. For example, in a study conducted on two Tanzanian schools, Mwinsheikhe (2009) found that the use of English as medium of instruction is a problem for majority

of the teachers and students. Both teachers and students were unable to express themselves clearly in English which implies the presence of language barrier in students' learning. In such situation code switching and integrating mother-tongue language and foreign language in a lesson is of great value. Baker (2001) added to this point and argued that switching of languages in the classroom has some potential advantages such as the promotion of deeper understanding of the subject matter, the development of skills in the weaker language and the facilitation of home-school cooperation.

Methodology

This research used a mixed-method approach with focus on quantitative method and involved the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data. The mixed-method approach offsets the limitations inherent in each approach and leads to results with greater validity because the method addresses questions from different perspectives and ensures that there are no "gaps" in the data to be gathered (Creswell, 2008). Quantitative data were collected from teachers and parents of school-aged children. In addition to quantitative data qualitative data were collected from relevant staff from the regional council; staff from Regional States Education Bureaus (RSEBs), Zone Education Departments (ZEDs), and Woreda Education Offices, primary school supervisors, principals, members of Parent Teacher and Student Associations (PTSA), and mother-tongue instructors of colleges of teacher education. The sampling procedures used were both random and purposive sampling. Nearly all regions and the two city administrations were included in the study. A total of 16 languages were selected purposively out of 51 languages used as medium of instruction in the country. After identifying the languages, 19 zones were randomly selected except for Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) where the three zones representing the major language groups were included purposively. A total of 57 schools were randomly selected from 19 zones.

A total of 699 respondents (276 parents, 273 teachers and 150 students) were included in the quantitative sample. The sampling procedure used for selecting mother-tongue teachers depended on the number of mother-tongue teachers available in the school. In the schools where there were more than five mother-tongue teachers, five were selected randomly using lottery method. When there were five or fewer teachers, all of them were included in the sample. Parents who were accessible and willing to participate in the study were selected purposively. On the other hand, the selection of principals (N=27), cluster supervisors (N=27), PTSA heads (N=46), regional council members, experts from regional states education bureaus, zone and woreda education office (N=30), and staff from colleges of teacher education (N =18) was entirely purposive. These participants were included in the study by virtue of the position they assumed in their school. In addition, 99 non-language teachers were selected from all regions and the two city administrations for classroom observation. Teachers who were observed in the classrooms while teaching were not used for completing the questionnaire. The researchers employed the following four types of data collection instruments: interview protocol, questionnaire, classroom observation checklist, and focus group discussion protocol. More specifically, three different sets of interview protocols were employed (one for education experts and regional council representatives, one for principals and cluster supervisors, and another for College of Teacher Education [CTE]staff) to uncover the respondents' views regarding the practices related to transition from mother tongue to English medium of instruction. Similarly, two separate sets of questionnaires for teachers and parents were used to get their perceptions of early and late transition. Furthermore, checklist was used to observe language use by non-mother tongue language teachers during instruction and FGD protocol was used with students to get their views about the transition from mother tongue to English medium of instruction. These four types of instruments together were employed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Data collection took place with the help of trained field assistants. Quantitative data were entered and cleaned using statistical software using SPSS version 21 and analyzed using both descriptive

and inferential statistical procedures. Qualitative data were analyzed using NVivo 11, a qualitative data analysis software. A codebook was developed before coding the qualitative data. A list of definitions for the codes accompanied the nodes to ensure that coders categorized data consistently. The researchers identified themes and then refined these during the analysis based on the nodes developed and used for analysis. The analysis involved identifying and categorizing responses, determining their frequency, and examining differences among groups.

Findings of the Study

Demographic Characteristics of Parents and Teachers

The average ages of parents and teachers who participated in the study were 42.14 and 31.32 with standard deviations of 9.832 and 8.008, respectively. The minimum and maximum ages of parents were 22 and 68 years, respectively and that of teachers were 21 and 59 years, respectively. Parents from all kinds of occupations (e.g., accountant, cleaner, contractor, daily laborer, evangelist, farmer, civil servant, NGO employee, etc.) were represented in the study, the most represented being farmers (27.17%), teachers (16.30%), merchants (11.59%), and civil servants (6.52%). The table below presents the educational background of parents and teachers who completed the quantitative data collection tool.

Table 1: Educational Background of Parents and Teachers

Educational Level of Respondents	Parents (M=194 & F=82)		Teachers (M=203 & F= 70)	
	N	%	N	%
Cannot read and write	38	13.76	-	-
Read and write	8	2.90	-	-
Elementary (1-8)	89	32.25	-	-
Secondary (9-12)	46	16.67	-	-
10+	25	9.10	16	5.86
12+	14	5.10	2	0.73
Certificate from TTI	2	0.72	1	0.37
Diploma	21	7.61	103	37.73
Bachelor Degree	30	10.87	131	47.99
Master Degree	1	0.36	10	3.66
Missing	2	0.72	10	3.66
Total	276	100.00	273	100.00

As data revealed, the educational level of relatively larger proportion of parents (32.25%) was elementary education most of which had completed grade 8. The second larger proportion represents parents who had secondary education (16.67%) followed by parents who cannot read and write (13.76%).

Current Practices Surrounding the Transition to English as the Medium of Instruction

The analysis of the data gathered with regard to the current practices surrounding the transition to English as medium of instruction yielded that regions differ in the duration of use of the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction. Both qualitative and quantitative data revealed that in the SNNPR, Gambela, and Benishangul-Gumuz, mother-tongue is used as medium of instruction only for the first cycle primary education and transition from the mother-tongue to English as the medium of instruction at grade 5. In three regions (Afar, Amhara, and Harari) and two city administrations (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa), the transition to English happens at grade 7. In the regions of Tigray, Oromia, and

Somali, the transition to English occurs at grade 9. One can therefore observe that the majority of regions and the two chartered city administrations begin to use English as the medium of instruction in the second cycle of primary education (i.e., grade 5 and above). The remaining three regions (Oromia, Somali, and Tigray) use English as the medium of instruction in secondary schools only. Although the policy stipulates that primary education should be delivered in the student's mother-tongue, it also provides nations and nationalities with the right to use either their own language as the medium of instruction or choose from a list of languages selected on the basis of national and countrywide distribution (FDRE, 1994).

There is slight difference in the way English is used as the medium of instruction. In some regions and/or city administrations (for example, Addis Ababa), English is used as the medium of instruction for all subjects. In others (for example, Amhara), English is used as the medium of instruction for the four science subjects (biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics) at grades 7 and 8, while mother-tongue language is commonly used for social sciences (civics, physical education, and arts).

Responsibility for Making Decision about Transition to English

There are different views regarding the body which was responsible for making decision related to transitions. Most respondents (CTE Experts, Principals, and Supervisors) suggested that the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education) was responsible for the decision, having consulted with members from regions, zones, and woredas. For instance, a school principal from Oromia said: "It is the Ministry of Education who might decide." Another interviewee from CTE indicated that discussion occurred at the national level, different stakeholders participated in the discussion, and the decision was a result of this discussion. The interviewee from Hawasa CTE reported: *on country level, stakeholders participated in the discussion. Educated individuals also participated in the discussion. Although there is no information*

whether colleges participated in the discussion, the decision was made after all stakeholders participated in the discussion.

Others suggested that the regional education bureaus were responsible for the decision. For example, a staff member from Hawassa CTE stated: "... The decision is made by the regional government in consultation with all respective zones." Some of the respondents (for example, a respondent from the Hawassa CTE) linked the decision to the Education and Training Policy: *for there is a policy that grants right for each region to decide its own medium of education, I think Regional Education Bureau and Regional Council passed the decision (on) medium of instruction in the region.*

An instructor from the CTE in Tigray agreed: *The Education and Training Policy approved this. The Education and Training Policy says primary education should be given in mother-tongue. This is implemented in our region.* Others reported that higher government bodies participated in the decision-making process: *Education bureau in consultation with other higher government bodies who lead the political affairs in this country made the decision.* In summary, most interviewees seemed to believe that the Ministry of Education and higher officials at the regional level were responsible for making the decision to transition from the mother-tongue to English as the medium of instruction for some or all subjects. Some interviewees also believed that CTEs and schools were consulted during the decision-making process.

The study also explored whether teachers and parents had information about who made the decision to transition from the mother-tongue to English as the medium of instruction in their respective regions. To this end, 27.5% of teachers and 19.6% of parents who participated in the study believed that the decision was made by regional education bureaus, while 14.7% and 19.6% of teachers and parents, respectively, believed that the decision was made by the regional government council. Relatively large proportions of teachers (33.3%) and parents (36.2%) believed that the Ministry of Education made the decision. These figures

suggest that teachers and parents lack information about the decision-making process.

When analyzed by the grade at which the transition to English occurs, larger proportions of parents (44.1%) than teachers (26.7%) in grade 5 transition regions believed that the Ministry of Education made the decision to transition to English. Similarly, 42.7% of teachers and parents (40.8%) in grade 7 transition regions believed that the Ministry of Education made the decision to transition to English in regions where the transition occurs at grade 7. On the other hand, 32.8% of teachers and 13.3% of parents knew that the decision to transition to English at grade 9 was made by the Ministry of Education and is aligned with the country's Education and Training Policy. The majority of parents (40.0%) grade 9 students indicated that regional governments made this decision. In general, the data revealed that both teachers and parents were unclear about who was responsible for making the decision to transition to English as the medium of instruction. The details are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Teachers' and Parents' Knowledge of the Decision-Making Process

Who decided that the transition would take place at this grade level?	Grade Level at Which the Transition to English Takes Place												Total			
	Grade 5				Grade 7				Grade 9							
	Teachers		Parents		Teachers		Parents		Teachers		Parents		Teachers		Parents	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The regional education bureau	43	35.8	31	26.3	22	24.7	10	10.2	10	15.6	13	21.7	75	27.5	54	19.6
The regional government/council	24	20.0	14	11.9	8	9.0	16	16.3	8	12.5	24	40.0	40	14.7	54	19.6
The Ministry of Education	32	26.7	52	44.1	38	42.7	40	40.8	21	32.8	8	13.3	91	33.3	100	36.2
The school	1	0.8	-	-	1	1.1	1	1.0	-	-	1	1.7	2	0.7	2	0.7
The community	1	0.8	1	0.8	4	4.5	2	2.0	1	1.6	8	13.3	6	2.2	11	4.0
Don't know	17	14.2	17	14.4	14	15.7	13	13.3	23	35.9	4	6.7	54	19.8	34	12.3
Non-response	2	1.7	3	2.5	2	2.2	16	16.3	1	1.6	2	3.3	5	1.8	21	7.6
Total	120	100.0	118	100.0	89	100.0	98	100.0	64	100.0	60	100.0	273	100.0	276	100.0

Appropriateness of Grade Level at Which Transition to English Takes Place

With regard to the appropriateness of grade level at which transition takes place, experts from Gambela and Benishangul-Gumuz stated that the grade level for transition takes place in their respective regions is appropriate (with the exception of one interviewee from Gambela, who responded: "I don't know"). On the other hand, experts from SNNPR had mixed views about the appropriateness of the grade level at which the transition takes place. Some experts supported the idea that grade 5 is the appropriate level for the transition to take place. For instance, one expert argued: "There will be no confusion when the students reach higher grades if they start using English as the medium of instruction in grade 5." Others disagreed, with one explaining: "Students in grade 5 are not mature enough to learn concepts in a foreign language such as English, which is not spoken in their communities." One expert recommended grade 8 as the appropriate level for the transition to English as the medium of instruction.

In contrast, some principals and supervisors from SNNPR and Dire Dawa suggested that the transition should start earlier, beginning in grade 1. They supported an earlier transition because teaching in the mother-tongue only goes up to the upper primary level and thereafter is in English. This group of respondents therefore felt that it would be very helpful for students to develop competence in English for learning purposes as early as possible. They went on to say that students should start learning all subjects in English from grade 1, while studying their mother-tongue as a subject at the same time.

In Afar, Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa, and Amhara, the transition from the mother-tongue to English as the medium of instruction takes place at grade 7. Although experts from Afar and Dire Dawa supported this, those from Addis Ababa and Amhara had mixed views. One expert from Dire Dawa who supported the transition occurring in grade 7 commented: ". . . higher education is in English. It is said, 'English is the key to

knowledge.’ . . . Let alone the students, our teachers’ English proficiency is very low; we are transferring the same thing.” This expert appeared to suggest that the way in which English is taught is partly to blame for the problem that students are facing in learning in English, irrespective of the grade level at which the transition to English takes place. Principals and supervisors agreed that students face a dual burden of studying content and language at the same time. An expert from Addis Ababa indicated that he would still not be satisfied if the transition began at grade 5 (as in SNNPR), and would instead prefer it to begin in the lower grades. In Amhara, experts again held opposing views. One supported starting the transition at grade 7, while another suggested that “starting it from lower grades of four or five would be much better.”

In Oromia, Ethiopia Somali, and Tigray, the transition to English as the medium of instruction begins in grade 9. Experts from Oromia and Tigray agreed that transitioning from the mother-tongue to English in grade 9 was appropriate. However, experts, CTE professionals, supervisors, and principals of schools from Oromia and Tigray agreed that the grade level at which the transition to English takes place is less important than other issues in the education system, namely training of competent teachers, the quality of education and the teaching of languages. For example, one expert from Oromia stated: *Using mother-tongue does not really affect students’ performance in English. What matters is only the way we teach both languages. Sometimes untrained people teach language.*

An expert from Tigray who supported the transition at grade 9 argued: “The change of medium of instruction cannot solve all the problems. We have to improve the quality of education so that students can learn better.” Another expert from Tigray commented: *Students learn English starting grade 1 all through up to grade 9, but they cannot read and write in the language. What is going on all these eight years? Changing the medium of instruction will not bring solution.*

Some experts also expressed concern that if a language other than the mother-tongue was used for instruction, students might have problems learning content and the language simultaneously. As observed in the responses of CTE instructors, most of the CTE instructors interviewed reported that the grade at which the transition to English occurs (whether grade 5, 7, or 9) was appropriate and argued that the problems learners are facing in learning in English were the result of poor teaching methodology and poor preparation for the transition to English as the medium of instruction, rather than the grade at which the transition occurred.

The quantitative data gathered from parents also indicated that it is not the medium of instruction that matters in students' learning, but rather teachers' ability to instruct their students effectively. Approximately 60% of parents in fifth-grade-transition regions, 74% of parents in seventh-grade-transition regions, and 50% of parents in ninth-grade-transition regions believed that teachers' ability to teach effectively was more important than the medium of instruction.

Responses of experts from Ethiopia Somali region were also mixed. Several supported the current grade level at which the transition from the mother-tongue to English takes place, arguing that students can understand content better when they learn it in their mother-tongue (that is, Af-Somali) for the first eight years and then transition to learning in English at grade 9. However, several other experts from the region opposed transitioning at grade 9 for different reasons. Some stated that students learn the language better when they are younger or in the lower grades, and that they should therefore begin using English as the medium of instruction in the lower grades. Others stated that starting to use English in the lower grades would help students improve their knowledge of English, which would widen opportunities for those students. Experts who opposed transitioning to English at grade 9 felt that it would be better to introduce English as the medium of instruction in grade 5, 6, or 7.

Respondents from CTEs in Addis Ababa, Gambela, SNNPR, Amhara, Tigray, and Afar felt that grade 5 was an appropriate grade level at which to transition to using English as the medium of instruction. An expert from Kotebe Metropolitan University explained: "I think grade 5 is the most appropriate level. It will help them develop and practice their English skills better." An expert from the Gambela CTE commented: . . . *transition level must remain as it is but English, MT and Amharic be taught extensively in order for them to cope up with subjects at grade 5 . . . it was found out that most of people in the region have good ground in English than Amharic so, that came as a reason to begin English as early as in grade 5.*

There are experts from Gambela who suggested even lower grade for transition. For example, an expert from the Gambela Nuer CTE commented that the current level at which the transition to English takes place is "not appropriate . . . English as a medium of instruction should begin from grade 1. They should take their mother-tongue as only one subject."

On the other hand, PTSA members in Benishangul-Gumuz appeared to support use of the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction not only in primary and secondary schools, but also in college. One PTSA member commented: *It will be most appropriate if the mother-tongue continues as [the] medium of instruction until grade 12 and college level. This is essential for knowledge and understanding the contents. But to communicate worldwide we should also keep both English as a subject to be taught parallel to mother-tongue.*

PTSA members in Afar expressed that grade 7 was an appropriate grade level for transitioning to English as the medium of instruction. However, PTSA members in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa were found to have mixed views. Some felt that grade 7 was an appropriate grade level for transitioning to English, but others felt that the transition should take place earlier than grade 7. One PTSA member from Dire Dawa explained:

It was appropriate at the time but as to me, I now prefer if the transition is made at the lower grade because the sign of failure is observed when the student reaches grade 10, grade 11 and/or grade 12 and failure not to pass grade 8 as well is the impact of the language. Therefore, I prefer the transition to be in place at lower grade, starting from grade 5; as a subject from the beginning . . . but from grade 5 as medium of instruction.

PTSA members from Oromia, Tigray, and Ethiopia Somali also had mixed opinions about the appropriateness of the grade level. Some felt that grade 9 was appropriate because students at this level are mature enough to learn all their subjects in English. Others believed that the transition should take place earlier, specifically at grade 7.

Other experts and PTSA members, particularly those from regions that have several ethnic groups and therefore several languages (typically SNNPR and Dire Dawa) tried to highlight the problems of adopting the mother-tongue in their respective regions and describe why the transition to English should start sooner rather than later. One expert from SNNPR explained: "Our mother-tongue languages are not well developed." Another commented: "If Wolayttatto continues to be the medium of instruction beyond grade 5, it will not be good." Others from SNNPR offered different justifications for using English as the medium of instruction. For example, one respondent explained: *If you are to teach grade 7, for example, there have to be adequate, trained teachers who can teach in the target grade level. There have to be teachers who know well the language. However, it is observed that in some nationalities' language, this was not fulfilled. There is a problem.*

This expert appeared to suggest that absence or shortage of trained teachers in mother-tongue languages had forced the region to use English as the medium of instruction from grade 5. In other words, the region would have chosen to continue using mother-tongue languages as mediums of instruction until grade 7, at least, had there been trained teachers.

In summary, the interviews with education experts on the appropriateness of the grade level at which the transition to English currently takes place captured generally mixed views (although opinions were not evenly divided). In some regions (e.g., Gambela, Tigray), almost all experts clearly stated that the grade level at which the transition currently takes place in their respective region is appropriate. In most of the other regions, however, the experts' views were mixed. Many seemed to support the current grade level in their respective regions, but many others disagreed with the current practice, arguing that English needs to be introduced as the medium of instruction earlier than is now the case in each region. Some recommended transitioning to English in the lower grades (including grade 1), while others suggested grade 5, 6, or 7.

PTSA members also had mixed views about the appropriateness of the grade levels at which the transition from the mother-tongue to English as the medium of instruction take place. In those regions where the transition takes place in grade 5 or 7, the majority of PTSA members indicated that the grade level was appropriate. However, in the regions where the transition occurs in grade 9, the majority of PTSA members stated that the grade level was not appropriate. According to the latter respondents, grade 7 or an even lower grade would be more appropriate.

Teachers and Parents Preference for the Level of Transition

The study also explored teachers' and parents' preferences regarding level of transitioning from the mother-tongue to English as medium of instruction. The data generally showed a tendency among teachers and parents to prefer an early transition rather than a late transition. For example, 31.1% of teachers and 29.0% of parents would have preferred that the transition takes place below grade 5.

Table 3: Teachers' and Parents' Preferred Grade Level for Transitioning to English

Respondents	At what grade level do you think the transition from mother-tongue to English as medium of instruction should take place?												Total	
	Below grade 5		Grade 5		Grade 7		Grade 9		Other		Non-response		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Teachers	85	31.1	87	31.9	83	30.4	13	4.8	1	0.4	4	1.5	273	49.7
Parents	80	29.0	91	33.0	44	15.9	22	8.0	14	5.1	25	9.1	276	50.3
Total	165	30.1	178	32.4	127	23.1	35	6.4	15	2.7	29	5.3	549	100.0

The data revealed that only 6.4% of respondents preferred the transition to take place at grade 9. On the other hand, 62.5% of respondents were in favor of transition at grade 5 or below. When asked to explain the reasons for their preferences, respondents indicated that they believed that children would develop better language skills if the transition took place early, and that they would become successful at learning other subjects in English.

Further analysis of the data by grade of transition revealed that only 7.8% of teachers and 11.9% of parents in regions with a transition in grade 9 would prefer the transition from mother-tongue to English to stay at grade 9. Among teachers and parents in regions with a grade 5 transition, 53.3% and 45.6%, respectively, preferred a transition before grade 5.

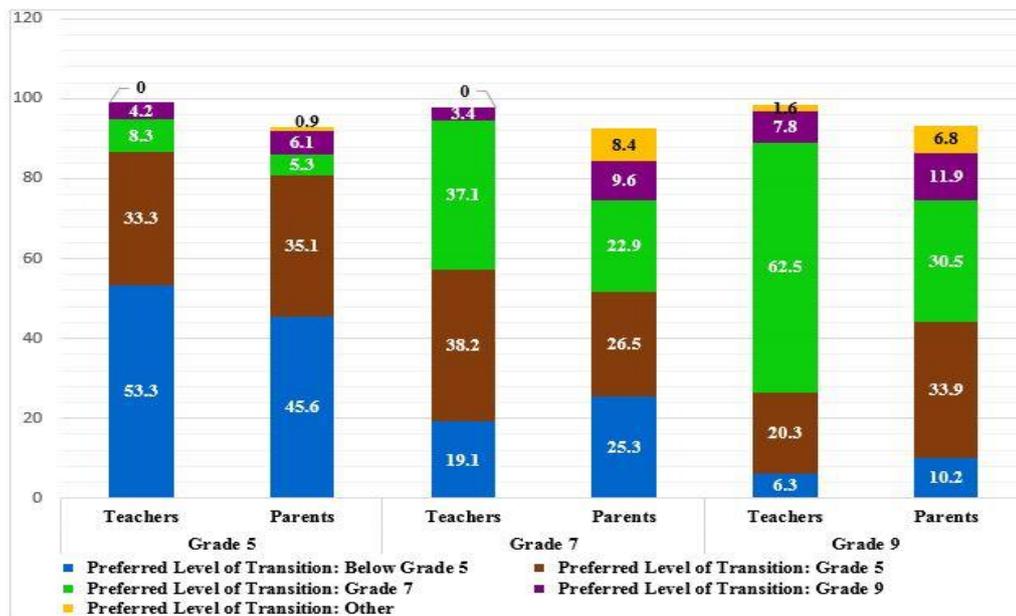


Figure 1. Teachers' and Parents' Preferred Grade for Transition, by Grade at Which Transition Occurs

Preconditions Considered and Standards Followed During Decision Making

Although the questions were about the preconditions (e.g., research findings) considered when deciding about transitioning from the mother-tongue to English as medium of instruction, experts and others cited the country's constitution as the main condition that permits regions to use their mother-tongue as the medium of instruction. One expert from Gambela explained: "It may be the fact that every nation has the right to develop its own mother-tongue." Another expert from the Somali region stated: ". . . the constitution allowed every nation to develop its mother-tongue, particularly, towards culture, education and to make it the working language of the region." Other experts, principals, supervisors,

and PTSA members from Dire Dawa advanced similar views regarding the rights of nations and nationalities to use their respective mother-tongues as mediums of instruction, as stipulated in the constitution. As these questions were not intended to elicit responses related to the constitutional rights of nations and nationalities, these responses suggest that the interviewees have no information about preconditions that should have been followed in making decision about level of transition.

Among the CTE instructors, almost all stated that they did not have information about their college being consulted as part of the decision-making process. Their responses do not imply that there is no concrete evidence that colleges were consulted about when the transition from the mother-tongue to English would occur, nor is there evidence that any studies were conducted on investigating the preconditions for making the transition at the CTE level. The dean of Sekota CTE, for instance, stated that there was “no valid evidence telling me that there was any study to serve the purpose of language policy change made by any government initiative.” An instructor from Gambela CTE expressed a similar view: “I did not come to learn something that there is a study conducted, only policy makers worked on that until implementation.”

Others, particularly those from Amhara, identified public pressure as the main precondition that led the regional government to make its decision about the transition to English as the medium of instruction. For example, one expert from Amara commented: *The public was strongly demanding that primary school children be allowed to learn in English. When the public pressure was at stake, the regional government had to refer to the provisions of Education and Training Policy which states that the region may adopt its preferred modality assessing the objective conditions.*

In general, the CTE education experts, supervisors, principals, and PTSA members from different regions provided differing responses to the question. For example, an expert from Oromia indicated that the decision was made based on the experiences of other countries, while

an expert from Dire Dawa suggested that the decision was made because the community and teachers requested it. An expert from SNNPR stated that the decision was made based on the ideas of the community, while another interviewee from SNNPR suggested that the situation on the ground led the region to use English as the medium of instruction, instead of continuing to use the mother-tongue in higher grades. In line with this, an expert from Afar stated the absence of trained mother-tongue teachers as a factor on the ground which dictated the decision.

Other education experts, including principals and supervisors from SNNPR, considered job opportunities in other regions of the country in general, and in the different zones of their own region in particular as condition or precondition that led to the decision about the grade level at which the transition from mother-tongue to English would take place. One expert explained:

I can say SNNPR is a model in this respect to other regions. The assumption might be that students will be successful in their line of business/job when assigned to different regions of the country. There is a probability that students might be assigned in South Omo, Sidama, or Masha in the region. Communication issue might have been considered during the decision. There are around 56 ethnic groups in our region. So, students who join the other ethnic groups in the region or other regions of the country will be effective in their career because of the transition.

On the other hand, many interviewees clearly stated that they did not know what preconditions led to the decision about transitioning to English as medium of instruction. According to some of these respondents, they were not aware of the preconditions because they did not hold their current position when the decision was made. In summary, interviewees' responses suggest that it is difficult to identify which conditions or preconditions guided or informed decisions regarding the

transition to English as medium of instruction. The majority of interviewees apparently had no idea how the decision was made

Interviewees were also asked about the standards regions followed when deciding about the grade level at which the transition from mother-tongue to English would take place. PTSA members provided no relevant responses to the question, and most of the experts provided no clear information about the standards regions followed. Other experts clearly stated that they did not know about the standards regions followed because they did not hold their current position when the decision was made. Some also indicated that they did not have access to any written documents related to the matter through their office.

Very few experts considered research findings and international experiences as standards regions should follow and mentioned that no research findings or international experiences were identified and followed by regions while making decision. An expert from one of the regions suggested that no study informed the decision. He had the following to tell: *The change is made simply to cool down the public demand without any planned and digested study. Whether this change is beneficial or has produced good results is yet to be seen.*

Another expert was also of the opinion that no study had been conducted to guide the decision:

The universal right and standard is actually to teach primary students in the mother-tongue. However, the practices of teaching the sciences in English resulted in students' poor performance in these subjects. The motion circulated easily among the public. The government did not make an investigation to concretize the real causes and then go for a decision. Yet the pressure was so intense that the decision was made.

CTE instructors, primary school principals and supervisors also had no knowledge of any consultations or studies that were used in the decision-

making process. Only directives from higher offices were mentioned as justifications for changes being made in schools.

Other experts suggested that even though regions may not have conducted their own investigations, they may have drawn lessons from the experiences of other regions, particularly those that had gone down different paths. For example, according to an expert from Amhara, using English as medium of instruction for some subjects at grade 7 was demanded on the basis of information the public had got from other regions. Going a step further, the expert clarified that the decision was based on the practices of other regions (e.g., Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa) that were using English as medium of instruction at grade 7.

In short, most of the respondents provided no information about the standards regions followed when making decisions about the grade level at which the transition to English would take place, largely because the respondents did not have any information to share. Admitting that no investigation was conducted to inform the decision, some experts confirmed that regions learned their lessons from experiences of other regions and city administrations

Parents' Perception of the Transition to English as Medium of Instruction

In the interviews held with PTSA members, one of the questions asked parents was about their perceptions regarding the transition from mother-tongue to English as the medium of instruction. One PTSA member from SNNPR stated that parents had a positive view and supported the transition to English in grade 5. The interviewee also mentioned parental support for using the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction in grades 1–4. Another PTSA member from SNNPR explained why parents supported the transition to English:

When the medium of instruction changed from SidaamuAfoo to English, the issue was presented to us. Parents were also called upon and briefed on the issue. They accepted it and said that, English as medium of instruction is essential to the students. They said that instead of having jobless students at the end of the day, it is better to teach them in English.

These parents' implicit assumption was that learning in English would widen students' job opportunities after they had completed their education because they would be able to communicate with people not only in their own zone or region, but also in other regions of the country. Other PTSA members from the same region also supported the transition from the mother-tongue to English as medium of instruction. Asked about parents' perceptions of mother-tongue instruction and the transition to instruction in English, a PTSA member commented that "parents in this community are illiterate farmers and they prefer their own language instead of English as medium of instruction." However, the same PTSA member argued that students are learning not only to serve their own community, but to work in other regions as well. For this reason, they need to be proficient in the working language of the federal government and in English.

Unlike in SNNPR, parents in Benishangul-Gumuz tended to support use of the mother-tongue as medium of instruction not only in primary school, but also at the secondary school level, although at the beginning of delivery of instruction through mother-tongue they did not believe that using the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction would be useful. In Gambela, PTSA members indicated that parents supported the transition to English as the medium of instruction at grade 5.

PTSA members from Afar and Addis Ababa indicated that parents had positive perceptions of the transition. On the other hand, PTSA members from Oromia, Tigray, and Ethiopia Somali had mixed opinions about parents' perceptions of the transition. Some parents supported the

transition to English in grade 9, while others felt that the transition should take place at grade 7.

The study employed questionnaire to explore teachers' and parents' opinions about using the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction - for example, whether they believed that using the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction for the first eight grade levels enhanced students' understanding of what they learned, or whether they believed that an early transition to English as medium of instruction was useful. The quantitative data revealed that most of the respondents did not favor use of the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction for a longer period. For example, as indicated in Table 4, 68.1% of teachers and 52.5% of parents disagreed with the following statement: "Mother-tongue should be used as medium of instruction beyond grade 8." Similarly, 53.5% teachers and nearly 71% of parents agreed that it would be more useful if the transition from mother-tongue to English happened earlier.

Table 4: Teachers' and Parents' Perception of the Use of Mother Tongue as Medium of Instruction

Items			Level of Transition								Total	
			Grade 5		Grade 7		Grade 9		DK		N	%
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
I would be happy if mother tongue becomes medium of instruction even at higher/secondary level	Teachers	Disagree	78	65.0	70	78.7	38	59.4	-	-	186	68.1
		Agree	41	34.2	19	21.3	24	37.5	-	-	84	30.8
	Parents	Disagree	60	52.6	32	38.6	44	73.3	9	47.4	145	52.5
		Agree	54	47.4	50	60.2	15	25.0	9	47.4	128	46.4
Learning in mother tongue language at least for the first 8 grade levels enhances students understanding of what is learned.	Teachers	Disagree	84	70.0	64	71.9	48	75.0	-	-	196	71.8
		Agree	36	30.0	25	28.1	16	25.0	-	-	77	28.2
	Parents	Disagree	55	48.2	34	41.0	33	55.0	9	47.4	131	47.5
		Agree	59	51.8	49	59.0	27	45.0	9	47.4	144	52.2
It would be more useful for students if the transition from mother tongue to English is made earlier.	Teachers	Disagree	62	51.7	41	46.1	23	35.9	-	-	126	46.1
		Agree	58	48.3	47	52.8	41	64.1	-	-	146	53.5
	Parents	Disagree	35	30.7	16	19.3	20	33.3	5	26.3	76	27.5
		Agree	79	69.3	63	75.9	40	66.7	13	68.4	195	70.6

Teachers and parents were also asked if they believed that students would have difficulty understanding school subjects as a result of the transition to English, and whether the transition would help students to progress in their learning. Data analysis revealed conflicting results for teachers. For example, as shown in Table 5, 70% of teachers believed that students would have no problem understanding school subjects

taught in English as a result of the transition. At the same time, however, 75.5% of teachers disagreed that “the transition from mother-tongue to English made at a given grade level helped students to progress well in their learning.” Furthermore, 70.8% of teachers in the grade 5 transition regions, 66.3% of teachers in the grade 7 regions, and 75% of teachers in the grade 9 regions felt that the transition from mother-tongue to English as the medium of instruction would not help students to become fully competent in using English by the time they reached tertiary education.

Table 5: Teachers’ and Parents’ Perception of the Effect of Transition to English Medium of Instruction

Items			Level of Transition								Total	
			Grade 5		Grade 7		Grade 9		DK		N	%
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Students have difficulty understanding their school subjects because of the transition to English as a medium of instruction is made at this level.	Teachers	Disagree	89	74.2	71	79.8	31	48.4	-	-	191	70.0
		Agree	29	24.2	17	19.1	32	50.0	-	-	78	28.6
	Parents	Disagree	48	42.1	34	41.0	15	25.0	5	26.3	102	37.0
		Agree	66	57.9	48	57.8	45	75.0	13	68.4	172	62.3
The transition from mother tongue to English made at this grade level helped students to progress well in their learning.	Teachers	Disagree	88	73.3	66	74.2	52	81.3	-	-	206	75.5
		Agree	32	26.7	23	25.8	12	18.7	-	-	67	24.5
	Parents	Disagree	37	32.5	24	28.9	27	45.0	10	52.6	98	35.5
		Agree	77	67.5	57	68.7	33	55.0	8	42.1	175	63.4
I believe that the transition at this grade level has helped students to develop satisfactory levels of reading and writing in English.	Teachers	Disagree	87	72.5	57	64.0	52	81.3	-	-	196	71.8
		Agree	33	27.5	32	36.0	12	18.7	-	-	77	28.2
	Parents	Disagree	35	30.7	23	27.7	28	46.7	12	63.2	98	35.5
		Agree	77	67.5	60	72.3	32	53.3	7	36.8	176	63.8
The transition at this level helps students to become fully competent to use English as medium of instruction by the time they reach tertiary level education.	Teachers	Disagree	85	70.8	59	66.3	48	75.0	-	-	192	70.3
		Agree	35	29.2	29	32.6	16	25.0	-	-	80	29.3
	Parents	Disagree	35	30.7	22	26.5	27	45.0	8	42.1	92	33.3
		Agree	77	67.5	59	71.1	30	50.0	11	57.9	177	64.1

Among parents, 63.4% believed that the transition to English would help students to progress in their learning, and 64.1% (67.5% in grade 5 regions, 71.1% in grade 7 regions, and 50% in grade 9 regions) believed that the transition would help students become fully competent in using English in their future learning. Generally, more teachers had unfavorable views than parents regarding the benefits of transitioning to English in all three categories of regions.

A difference was also observed between teachers and parents regarding their overall perceptions of the effects of the transition to English.

Parents in grade 5 and grade 7 regions had more favorable perceptions of the effects than teachers. (Similar proportions of parents in ninth grade regions had unfavorable and favorable perceptions regarding the effects of the transition.) This difference may be explained by the fact that parents want their children to have early access to English as the medium of instruction (one of the study's findings). The result could also reflect the difficulties teachers face when teaching subjects in English, due to both students' English language skills and the teacher's capacity to use English as the medium of instruction.

Students' Views on the Transition to English

Students who participated in focus group discussions had mixed views on the transition to English, and their views were not related to the different transition grade levels. Among those who had positive views, most raised points were related to the usefulness of English for further education and for widening one's knowledge, understanding, and communication skills. Others thought English is useful because it is an international language.

Students in regions with a grade 5 transition, for example, felt that this early transition was better for their education. Some even felt that it would be helpful to transition earlier than grade 5. Some of these students saw an early transition to English as particularly beneficial in preparation for the grade 8 regional examinations and grade 10 national examination, which are in English. Some acknowledged that the transition was useful despite the challenges it presented for them at first.

In contrast, many students stated negative views about the transition to English. For many, the transition was apparently sudden, and left them confused. According to students from Oromia region (which transitions in grade 9), for example, after grade 8 they "suddenly" started learning 10 subjects in English, and this was frustrating. They argued that most students do not understand English and the other subjects taught in it, and thus score poorly on examinations.

The students with negative views attributed the problems they faced in English to three points. First, some believed that their poor performance in English and in subjects taught in English was due to their weak background in English in lower grades. Second, some felt the teachers themselves could not communicate well in English, often switching to the mother tongue while teaching. For example, one of the students said that “there are teachers who can’t teach in English.” Third, there were students who thought English was difficult simply because students neither try to communicate in English nor read materials written in English in other contexts. According to these students, even if teachers provide assistance, students often score low, and this in turn discourages teachers.

In short, despite advancing opposing views about the transition to English, many from both sides appeared to support transition at an earlier grade. Of those for whom the transition was at grade 5, for example, many advocated transitions at an even earlier grade. Among the students in regions with the transition at grade 7, there was a general preference for transition at grade 5 or earlier. And similarly, the students in regions with a grade 9 transition tended to cite the benefits of transitioning at grade 7 or earlier.

Teachers’ Use of English as Medium of Instruction

Principals and supervisors reported that most teachers of primary grades were not well trained to teach all subjects in English. CTE instructors shared this opinion. For example, CTE instructors from Amhara commented: *“they do not have sufficient English skills. Most of the teachers are below the standard . . . Because they lack English language skill . . . Generally, teachers do not use English exclusively as medium instruction”*

CTE instructors also felt that they were doing their best when training the teachers, but graduates from CTEs were blamed for not being comfortable using English as medium of instruction. One of the CTE

instructors interviewed stated: “Teachers have problems in the medium of instruction. The students also have similar problem. Even the English teachers have such big problems.”

The great majority (96%) of supervisors and principals in all regions also stated that teachers mixed other language(s) with English while teaching (mostly English and their mother-tongue or Amharic). When identifying reasons for mixing languages, most mentioned the low levels of communicative ability in English among both teachers and students. One interviewee explained: *Teachers mix English and mother-tongue as they teach the subjects. They feel students would not follow them if they made it fully in English. To increase students’ participation in class they teach to a large extent in mother-tongue language.*

Similarly, another principal from the Amhara stated:

I think English is a problem for teachers too . . . Teachers of non-language subjects can comfortably teach in their own mother-tongue and face challenges when teaching in English . . . Although there are teachers who prefer to teach in English, most teachers prefer not to use it because they have poor English skill.

A supervisor from the Oromia region expressed the problem as follows:

The problem is vicious. Teachers who had serious language problem as students become teachers after training. They become teachers without solving their own language deficiency. Most of the people who have come to be teachers do their jobs with insufficient language ability to teach in English, because they are victims of the problem. They often turn to mother-tongue language.

As a possible solution to the problem of using English for teaching and learning, a respondent from SNNPR suggested: *If the teachers’ capacity in English were improved, they would not face difficulty of teaching in*

English. Moreover, if they are trained for one year, they would improve for the next year. Students also improve.

Another respondent mentioned introducing an English language improvement program in schools as a means of improving English usage in schools. Although teachers are expected to use English as the medium of instruction after transition, the existing practice appeared to be different. Consistent with the qualitative data, the quantitative data reveal that only 9.5% of teachers used English exclusively while teaching non-language subjects. The majority of teachers used English mixed either with Amharic or another mother-tongue language while teaching.

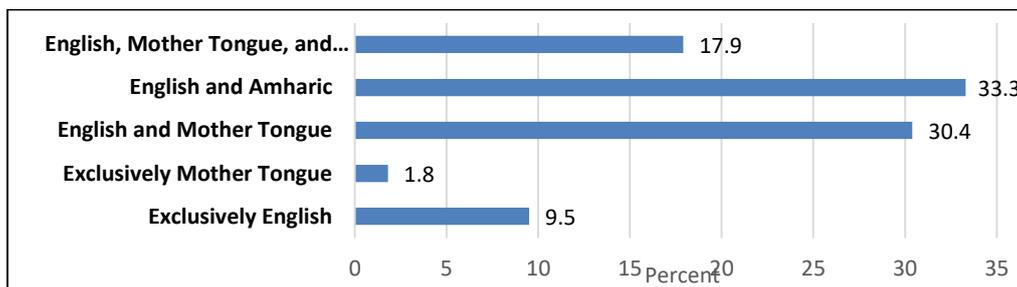


Figure 2. Teachers' Language Use While Teaching

About 33% of non-language teachers used a combination of English and Amharic, and 30.4% used English and another mother-tongue. Examination of the data by region reveals that the proportion of teachers who exclusively used English as medium of instruction in all regions is small. For instance, no teachers from Afar, Oromia, or Harari reported exclusively using English while teaching. Relatively sizable proportions of teachers from Gambela, Ethiopia Somali, and Tigray exclusively used English at the transition grade level. On the other hand, 90%, 81%, and 46.7% of teachers from Oromia, Tigray, and Harari, respectively, used mother-tongue languages while teaching students at their transition grade level. Mixing English with Amharic during instruction was not a

common practice in Tigray, Ethiopia Somali, and Oromia Regional States.

Data obtained from classroom observation revealed that the average time teachers spent using English as the medium of instruction was 21.04 minutes, with a standard deviation of 12.57 minutes out of the total possible 45 minutes. The minimum and maximum time spent teaching in English was 0 minutes and 45 minutes, respectively.

Parents were asked what language they thought would be most useful for their child after transition. About 40.6% of parents reported that they would prefer that teachers use English in combination with the mother-tongue and Amharic, and 23.9% of parents expressed a preference for teachers using English and the mother-tongue interchangeably during instruction. Only 9.8% parents preferred exclusive use of English as the medium of instruction after transition. This is a very small proportion. Although parents prefer early transition to English medium of instruction, the majority of parents favor the use of English in combination with other languages. When examined across transition levels, 48.2% of parents in regions with a grade 5 transition preferred English in combination with a mother-tongue and Amharic. The parents in all the three categories of regions preferred the use of three languages and suggested that children should learn the three languages (English, their mother-tongue, and Amharic) at about the same time, and should get the chance to develop them equally. These parents believed that the use of the three languages enhances children's learning and improves their performance.

Conclusion

There is regional difference in terms of transition from the use of mother-tongue language to English as medium of instruction. It appeared that regions and city administrations used their rights as stipulated in the policy while setting the level of transition. Three regions and two city administrations practice transition at grade 7, three regions at grade 5, and three regions at grade 9. Most of the study participants lack

information about the way the decision was made and who made the decision.

Diverse views were observed regarding the body responsible for making the decision. However, most of the respondents felt that higher bodies (higher officials from Ministry of Education and regions) made the decision with no or little consultation of parents, teachers, and other stakeholders. It can be inferred from the data that no transparent decision-making process was followed while making the decision. Regardless of who made the decision, the study uncovered that the decisions to transition to English as medium of instruction were not in contradiction with the country's Education and Training Policy.

Besides, the decision did not consider some prerequisite factors and was not based on empirical evidences. Rather, it was the result of spontaneous and impulsive response to the dissatisfaction of parents and other members of the community about the quality of education. Regions did not follow any standard while making decisions about the level for transition to English would take place.

Although literature emphasizes the importance of longer time for mother-tongue as medium of instruction, there is strong need among the respondents for early transition. The majority of the respondents agreed that mother-tongue language should not be used as medium of instruction for grades 7 and 8. Study participants also showed interest that the transition to be even earlier as children should develop competence in the English language that would help them in later learning.

Despite the fact that there is a tendency among teachers, parents, and other respondents to prefer an early transition, there are respondents who emphasized the importance of teachers' methods of teaching. The way children are taught to read and write rather than the level of transition that determines children's learning to read. This also depends

on the way teachers are trained. The study uncovered that there is a need to revisit the way primary school teachers are trained.

More parents than teachers perceived the effects of early transition to English as medium of instruction favorably and believed that transition to English as medium of instruction in earlier grades is the best option. On the other hand, although teachers were expected to exclusively use English as medium of instruction after transition, most teachers failed to exclusively use English while teaching non-language subjects. Shifting from English to mother-tongue or Amharic is a very common practice in most classrooms. Students also have difficulty in understanding what is taught in English as perceived by teachers.

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