English Immersion in Ethiopia: An Explorative Survey of Bilingual Education Typology

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Abstract: *The general objective of this qualitative research was to explore and describe the immersion program of the English-medium private primary schools of Addis Ababa. Out of the two hundred and thirty nine private primary schools, which are operational currently, fifteen schools were selected for a general observation. Thirty-two participants were also purposively selected and interviewed. The data collected through the observation and interview methods were thematically analyzed and interpreted within the theoretical framework of an immersion program. The findings of the explorative survey have shown that the program of the English-medium private primary schools of Addis Ababa could be labeled as an* English Immersion*; the schools may as well be called* English *Immersion Schools. The model is identified as an Early-Partial Typology of Immersion. Better academic and economic advantages were found to be the major motivational forces behind the program. The absence of locally prepared English-Immersion textbooks was spotted as one of the major challenges.*

Background of the Study

An immersion program is one of the types of bilingual education in which the majority of the subjects are taught through a medium of a second or a foreign language (Swain and Johnson, 1997:1). The word "immersion" has a direct connotation of "immersing" students in a language other than their first language or their mother tongue (hereafter, L1).

An English Immersion is a type of immersion in which English is used as the medium of instruction in schools where the learners' first language is not English (Johnstone, 2002a: 20). The main purpose of an English Immersion is to enable students to achieve a high level of proficiency in English, where English is taken as a language of wider communication or as an international language of power (Swain

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and Johnson, 1997:5). As a result, it is assumed that the students will benefit socially, academically, and economically.

There are also indications that an immersion system of schooling might as well facilitate the cognitive development of students (Hamers and Blanc, 2000: 335). There is, however, a competing view which sees many advantages in an education given in the mother tongue of the student (Alidou, et al., 2006: 10-17; Heugh, 2006: 58; Alidou and Brock-Utne, 2006: 85-87). According to this view, instruction in the mother tongue or first language of the child contributes far more to the cultural, affective, cognitive and socio-psychological development of the child than instruction in the second or foreign language (hereafter, L2).

Actually, when "UNESCO published its Report on the Use of Vernacular Languages in Education in 1953, it was commonly thought that if children could have mother tongue literacy and education for the first few years of school (2-4 years), and at the same time also learn the international language of wider communication as a subject, they would develop sufficiently strong literacy skills to be able to switch from mother tongue medium to L2 medium by about Grade 3 or 4" (Alidou, et al., 2006: 14). It is also believed that "instruction in L1 is a necessary condition for school success"; moreover, there are evidences that indicate "literacy development in L1 facilitates literacy in L2" (Hamers and Blanc, 2000:341).

As research findings have shown, "students who have learned to read in their mother tongue learn to read in a second language more quickly than do those who are first taught to read in the second language (Mehrota, 1998: 479; cited in Brock-Utne, 2002:7). However, as Brock-Utne has clearly pointed out, in most African countries this insight is not being acted on. One case she has mentioned is worth citing at length: "The recent spread in Tanzania of private primary schools using English as the language of instruction is a case in point. Parents who want their children in these schools argue that in a time of globalization English is the language of the global village" (Brock-Utne, 2002:7).

In the public (government) school system, there are a good number of African countries which use African languages as the language of instruction. African countries that use African languages as the language of instruction at the level of

Early Primary Schooling are Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Botswana, and Lesotho. African countries that use African languages as the language of instruction in the entire duration of primary education are Tanzania, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Madagascar (Bangbose, 2004: 14).

But this is only in the public school system of the respective African countries. According to Bangbose, in "fee-paying private schools, it is possible to ignore the policy of African language medium in favor of an imported" European language (Bangbose, 2004: 9).

The language policy of the respective African countries is not enforceable in the private primary schools for at least three constraints: the private primary schools are not owned and as a result are not run by governments; middle-class parents who send their children to fee paying primary (or even pre -primary) schools demand early instruction in one of the European languages like English; proprietors of pre-primary and primary schools, who determine the language of instruction policy, " bow to the wishes of the parents, since their aim is to maximize profits through higher enrollment" (Bangbose, 2004:8). Just like the private schools of Tanzania and some other African countries the private primary schools of Ethiopia (especially those in the capital city, Addis Ababa) are using English as the language of instruction starting from Grade one (Personal observation).

In relation to this, it is worth referring to the present policy of language and language education of Ethiopia. The proclamation of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia in 1994 mandates the use of one's mother tongue as language of instruction in the primary level of schooling. The primary level of schooling comprises Grades 1-8 (Ministry of Education of Ethiopia, 2004[1994]). However, the majority of the private primary schools of Addis Ababa seem to have adopted a distinct type of bilingual education. The practice appears to contradict the educational policy of Ethiopia and of the City Administration of Addis Ababa as well.

Most of the private primary schools use English as the medium of instruction both at the kindergarten and primary levels (especially from Grades 1-6). For Grades 7-8 the Addis Ababa City Administration itself has changed the medium of instruction

from the mixed Amharic-English to an all English medium beginning from the academic year of 2006/2007.   Social science subjects like History and Civic education were in the Amharic medium. Mathematics and Science subjects (Chemistry, Biology and Physics) were taught in the English-medium. The mixed medium then changed into an all English- medium. The reason was indicated to be the "push from the society" (Heugh et al., 2007: 57-58).

In using English as the language of instruction at the primary level of education, it might be assumed that the private primary schools of Addis Ababa are striving to enable their students to achieve a higher level of proficiency in English. The main purpose of this study is therefore to explore and describe the *immersion* approach of teaching English as a foreign language by using it as the language of instruction in the program of the English-medium private primary schools of Addis Ababa.

Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study was to explore and describe the "English Immersion Program" of the English-medium private primary schools of Addis Ababa. The specific objectives were to: determine the degree, identify the typology, explain the motivations behind, and look into the possible challenges of the *Immersion Program* of the English-medium private primary schools of Addis Ababa.

Research Questions

In line with the objectives set above, the following research questions were also drawn.

1. What is the degree of the "Immersion-ness" of the program of the English-medium private primary schools of Addis Ababa?

2. What is the typology of the "English Immersion Program" of the English- medium private primary schools of Addis Ababa?

3.What are the possible motivations that force parents to choose the "English Immersion Program" for their children?

4. What are, if any, the potential and actual challenges of teaching children in the "English Immersion Program" of the private primary schools of Addis Ababa?

Review of Literature

History of Immersion

The origin of the immersion program had its roots in Quebec, Canada's province. What will be summarized below is from the well-presented accounts of Hamers and Blanc (2000: 332), Swain and Johnson (1997: 2-3), and Crystal (1987:367). In the 1960s, a separatist movement transformed Quebec into a unilingual French province. French, which was spoken by the majority of the population, was made a working (official) language of the province. However, there were also the Anglo-Quebec minority who were essentially monolingual in English.

It then became apparent to the English-speaking population that economic survival would require high levels of proficiency in French. They should therefore have to make adjustments and become proficient enough in French so as to use it as a working language.

Many of the English-speaking minority had studied French in school that did not provide them with sufficient skills to work in French or to socialize with French speakers. This, in turn, prompted them to provide their children with a better proficiency in French than the one they had attained through the traditional L2 teaching methods. To this effect, a group of parents in St. Lambert, Quebec, began to lobby their school board for improvements in the teaching of French as a second language.

After extensive reading on the different forms of the bilingual education and consultations with scholars in bilingualism (at McGill University), the parents proposed a program in which, from the first day of school in kindergarten, their unilingual English- speaking children would be instructed entirely in French. Finally, the program was labeled by the parents and the school board as an "*Immersion Program*".

The original program became a success and the practice kept on spreading to the other parts of Canada during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Soon after that, the immersion program started spreading and developing in the other parts of the world as well, in different contexts and versions and for different purposes.

Major Purposes of Immersion

In one form or another, immersion has been introduced in many countries, regions, or states other than Canada such as Hungary, Austria, France, Germany, Finland, Australia, Hawaii, Spain, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Africa, and in at least 25 states of the USA (Johnstone, 2002a: 19). Swain and Johnson (1997: 4-6) have organized the purposes with which these countries (regions or states) have developed the program into four major categories. The book which the two authors had edited, "*Immersion Education: International Perspectives",* is the first of its kind. It is organized in such a way as to show the four basic purposes and contexts under which immersion is being introduced and developed around the world.

Immersion in a Foreign Language

Initially, the impetus for the development and spread of French Immersion in Canada was intra-national, not international as such or, in other words, French was taught as a second language and not as a foreign language. Then, French began to be taught as a foreign language in the immersion programs in parts of Canada where French is not spoken by community members. Not surprisingly, then, the use of the term "immersion" spread to the contexts in which the medium of instruction is a foreign language with the purpose of achieving higher levels of target language proficiency (Swain and Johnson, 1997:4).

Immersion for Majority-Language Students

The original goals of the St. Lambert parents were to initiate a school-based program that would promote among their children additive bilingualism-the learning of L2 while developing and maintaining their L1. [In this regard, it is to be recalled that the immersion program was that of minority language-students into the majority language].

However, the original goals were taken up by other parents across Canada where Anglo-phones constitute the majority population (Swain and Johnson, 1997: 4).The other exemplary case worth mentioning is the Swedish Immersion program in Finland where the Swedish-speaking population (6% of the total population) is the minority. This immersion case was studied by Björklind (1997: 85-102).

Immersion for Language Support and for Language Revival

Wherever the number of native speakers declines in a community, the use of immersion in language support and language revival may become crucially important. This is when such a community is determined to maintain its language identity and culture. In such a case, an immersion is likely to be an important means, for reversing or halting the process of extinction. In this regard "parents and community leaders who identify with the target culture but who do not speak the

language themselves, have promoted the use of a threatened language as an L2 medium so that their children can become fluent in the language" (Swain and Johnson, 1997:5).

Immersion in a Language of Power

A "Language of Power" is supposed to provide the means for social, economic, and academic advancement. When this is so, for example, English will not then be acquired for purposes of ethnic solidarity or identity, or to achieve cultural or social assimilation with the community of English speakers (Swain and Johnson, 1997: 5-6).

Under such an immersion program, the target language is acquired for communication across, not within, social and cultural groups. The target variety in those cases need not be identified with that of any particular speech community (Swain and Johnson, 1997: 167). This type of an immersion program is wide spread around the world. Among the many of the cases two are mentioned below:

English Immersion in Singapore: There is a case study by Eng et al. (1997: 190-209) which describes English immersion in preschools, the level at which the educational future of many students is determined, in particular, those most dependent on in-school immersion for their exposure to English. *English Immersion in Hong Kong:* This is a late immersion type implemented at a high school level. There is a case study of the English Immersion in Hong Kong by Robert Keith Johnson (1997:171-189).

Core Features of a Prototypical Immersion Program

According to Swain and Johnson (1997: 6-8), by matching programs against the eight core features, bilingual educators can determine the degree to which their program is an immersion. Moreover, bilingual educators could as well determine kinds of opportunities, constraints, and problems a program that matches these criteria might face as a consequence. According to the same authors, for a program to be labeled as "immersion", the core features outlined below must be present to some extent.

The L2 is a medium of instruction. This feature differentiates immersion, along with many other forms of bilingual education, from contexts where the L2 is taught formally and only as a subject. The assumption underling the use of the L2 as a medium is, in other respects, essentially that of the communicative approach to language teaching. The use of the L2 as a medium is a means for maximizing the quantity of comprehensible input and purposeful use of the target language in a classroom.

The immersion curriculum parallels the local L1 curriculum. The immersion curriculum consists of content subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and Geography taught through the L2. The L2 medium curriculum follows the L1 medium curriculum and is defined in terms of L1 speakers' needs, aspirations, goals, and educational norms, not in terms of those of another speech community located elsewhere.

Overt support exists for the L1. Overt support for the L1 is an essential element within the curriculum, and attitudes toward it are assumed to be positive. At a minimum, the students' L1 is taught as a subject in the curriculum, at some stage and at advanced levels. Often, it is also used as a medium of instruction.

The program aims for additive bilingualism. By the end of the program, L1 proficiency should be comparable to the proficiency of those who have studied through the L1. In addition, a high level of proficiency is achieved in the L2. However, a native speaker level of proficiency will not be expected. This "additive" feature differentiates immersion from the L2 medium programs that result in "replacive" bilingualism. In a "replacive" type of bilingualism, L2 proficiency develops at the expense of the L1. Such a case is also called subtractive bilingualism.

Exposure to the L2 is largely confined to the classroom. The prototypical immersion context would be one in which students have little or no exposure to the L2 outside the classroom. In this respect, immersion programs are clearly at a disadvantage compared with some other bilingual programs.

Students enter with similar (and limited) levels of L2 proficiency. In the first immersion school of Canada, for example, a French Immersion class would tend to consist of learners who do not have French as the language of the home.

The teachers are bilingual. Prototypical immersion teachers are bilingual in the students' L1 and the L2 medium of instruction. Students can therefore communicate with the teacher in their L1 when necessary, while the teacher has the language proficiency necessary to maintain the L2 as a medium of instruction and to support and motivate the use of the L2 by the students.

The classroom culture is that of the local L1 community. The high level of the L1/L2 bilingualism already referred to is necessary, but not sufficient for teachers to be able to function effectively in an immersion classroom. The classroom culture of the prototypical immersion program, like its curriculum, is that of the community from which the students are drawn, not that of a community where the target language is the L1.

Variable Features of Immersion

Swain and Johnson (1997: 8-12) have also listed ten variable features which differentiate one immersion program from the other. Variations in any of these features are supposed to have implications for program administration and planning, pedagogy, and learning outcomes. The following are the variable features:

Level within the educational system at which immersion is introduced: Immersion programs are usually described as early, mid, or late. "Early" refers to the students' first contact with immersion at the beginning of their formal education. This usually occurs in Grades 1, 2 or 3. When immersion is introduced at the "mid" level, it usually begins in Grade 4 or 5. When it is introduced at the "late" stage it will either be at Grade 6 or 7. In fact, immersion programs may as well be introduced at the pre - primary, primary, junior secondary, secondary, and even at the tertiary levels of education.

Extent of immersion: Immersion programs may be "full" with no L1 in the curriculum for a year or more, or "partial" with as little as or less than 50% of content subjects taught through the L2.

The ratio of L1 to L2 at different stages within the immersion program: Some immersion programs begin by maximizing exposure to the L2 and then progressively increasing the proportion of the curriculum taught through the L1. Others begin with content-based teaching in the L2 in only one subject and then increase the number of subjects taught through the L2.

Continuity across levels within education systems: Some education systems provide continuity in the immersion program for students moving from one level to another, for example, from elementary to secondary levels.

Bridging support: Immersion programs vary in the support they provide for students moving from L1 to L2 medium instruction. This support may involve a curriculum specifically designed to meet the initial limitations of the immersion students' L2 proficiency, or bridging materials designed to raise the level of the L2 students proficiency rapidly to the level required to follow the standard L1 curriculum through the L2.

Resources: Maintaining two educational media, L1 and L2, necessarily involves heavier demands on resources than maintaining one, whether L1 or L2. In order to implement a curriculum suited to the linguistic needs of and constraints on immersion students, additional teacher-training and staff- development programs need to be mounted in the specific materials developed. Whether provided by the education system, or through the individual initiatives of school principals, teachers, and parents, extra resources have been influential in the success of some immersion programs, and their absence has contributed to the relative failure of others.

Commitment: The commitment of those involved is a prerequisite for success in any educational context, but immersion programs appear to make particularly heavy demands. Given that it takes more time and effort from teachers and students alike to work through the students' L2, and given that immersion may demand resources

over and above what the community already supports, the level of commitment required is not just high; it involves all concerned, from the policymakers to the individual students in the programs for the desired success of the immersion programs.

Attitudes toward the culture of the target language: Attitudes toward the native speaker's culture of the immersion language vary widely from one context and educational program to another. On the one hand, from the language revival perspective, the culture and the language are inseparable. The language is to be acquired so that the culture will survive, thrive, and develop. The cultural commitment of the parents and students involved in revival immersion is not lessened by the fact that the target language is an L2 since strong cultural, emotional and political ties make the language and culture part of these groups' identities. On the other hand, in many immersion programs, the aim is not the membership of a articular target language community. In such instances, the students and their parents will be striving for academic and economic advantages through a high level of bilingualism. However, the students' sense of identity would remain firmly rooted within their first language culture and community.

Status of the L2: In the prototypical immersion context, equal, though not necessarily the same, advantages would derive from either choice of medium of instruction, L1 or L2. In practice, the balance is likely to favor one medium over the other. Where the L2 offers academic and economic advantages, it may be difficult to maintain an L1 program as a credible alternative, particularly at the higher levels within the education system. Where the L2 offers few, or limited career opportunities, the immersion programs themselves may come under threat at higher levels within the education system.

What counts as success in an immersion program: In some contexts, at least initially, the fact that an immersion program has been established at all may count as success. When L2 proficiency is evaluated against students who have studied the target language as a subject, immersion students are frequently considered to be highly successful. Where proficiency and academic performance in the L2 crucially determine students' future academic and career opportunities, comparisons with L1 medium norms may be seen as unimportant. In such a case, even when students

perform poorly in content subjects as compared with L1 student norms, parents might still demand an L2 medium for their children. This is largely due to the advantages a high level of L2 proficiency confers.

Different Models of Immersion Education

A number of different models or types of immersion have been identified, most of which contain the core features but which differ from one another according to the variable features. The following are four of the major models (Johnstone, 2002a: 23):

- Early total immersion

- Early partial immersion

- Late total immersion

- Late partial immersion

An immersion program will be labeled as "Early" when it is introduced at preschool level or in Grade 1; as "Late" when it is introduced at secondary level which might be in Grades 7, 8, or 9. A Total Immersion is one in which almost all the subjects will be taught in the target language. Immersion will be labeled as partial when half of the subjects are taught in the target language and the other half are taught in the first language of the learner.

When seen in combination, it is the *Early Total Immersion Program* that has been making a higher success rate than the other typologies. It has been observed that "students from *Early Total Immersion Programs* invariably develop a more native command of the second language than do students from other immersion programs" (Laurell, 1989: 321).

Research Methodology and Procedures

Research Methodology

The research methodology chosen is qualitative. The basic justification lies in the nature of the explorative study at hand. The study at hand mainly explores attitudes and experiences through the methods of observation and interview. Moreover, the study is also about getting an in-depth opinion from participants. This makes the nature of the study qualitative (Dawson, 2002: 14-15). Thus, it is the nature of the study mentioned that has necessitated the choice of the qualitative research methodology.

Sampling Design and Procedure

The setting of the study at hand was in Addis Abba, the capital city of Ethiopia, where there are more private schools than in the other cities and towns of the country. According to a recent Education Statistics-Annual Abstract of the Education Bureau of the city Government of Addis Ababa, (2007:12), there are 521 primary schools in Addis Ababa. Out of these 521 schools, 239 of them are of the private type. The private primary schools constitute slightly more than 45 percent of the total number of primary schools. The concern of this study is on the 239 private primary schools with special focus on Grades 1-6.

The 239 private primary schools are distributed dis-proportionally in the 10 sub-cities of Addis Ababa. What follows is the list of the distribution of the private primary schools. It was counted and arranged from appendix of the addresses of the private primary schools (Education Statistics-Annual Abstract Education Bureau of the city Government of Addis Ababa, 2007: 115-125).

Table 2:	Sub-city	No of Private Primary Schools
1	Addis Ketema	6
2	Akaki-Kaliti	14
3	Arada	7
4	Bole	23
5	Gullelie	8
6	Kirkos	24
7	Kolfe-Keranio	27
8	Lideta	11
9	Nifas Silk- Lafto	49
10	Yeka	70
	Total	239

On average, each sub-city will have about 24 schools. However, as it could be judged with a slight glance at the table of the geographical clusters, the distribution of the schools is significantly uneven. Having this in mind, the distribution of the schools in the geographic clusters could somewhat be rearranged for the sake of convenience as in Table 3:

Table 3: Private primary schools in three brand clusters

Brand Cluster	Range	Sub-cities	Total No
1	1-20	Addis Ketema (6) Arada (7) Gullelie(8) Lideta (11) Akaki-Kaliti (14)	46
2	21-40	Bole (23) Kirkos(24) Kolfe-Keranio(27)	74
3	41-70	Nifas- Silk Lafto (49) Yeka(70)	119
		Grand Total	239

The type of the sample design to be adopted and the sampling procedure which follow suit will largely be dictated by the nature of the setting described so far. The sampling design chosen is the multi-stage sampling which is a further development of the principle of 'cluster sampling'. When a cluster happens to have a geographic distribution, a cluster sampling will be known as an 'areal sampling' (Kothari, 2004: 65-66). Other than the nature of the setting (which is an areal cluster), the choice in using a combination of sampling procedures is based on the nature of the type of the study which is a small piece of qualitative research (a relatively intensive inquiry) and not a large-scale quantitative undertaking. Moreover, the combination of sampling procedures adopted is to construct a sample which will be manageable and possible with a limited budget and time constraint (Dawson, 2002: 49-53).

With the justifications (given in the preceding two paragraphs) in mind, the sequential procedures followed and the sample size arrived at is demonstrated below (in a step-by- step fashion): There are 10 sub-cities, and with a starting claim of 25% representative sample, we will have 2.5 sub-cities (between 2 and 3); There are 239 private primary schools in the 10 clusters; each sub-city will have 24 schools on average. It follows then that, in the 2.5 sub-cities (as representative samples), we will have a total of 60 (that is, 2.5 X 24) schools; By still going further to limit the size of representative samples, we will have 25% of the 60 schools (25/100X 60) to be 15. Here, the number of sub-cities could conveniently be fixed at 3 (other than the ambiguous 2.5 or 2, which will limit the sample without furthering any cause of manageability). The 3 sub-cities could then be drawn from the three brand clusters formulated one from each. With purposive sampling approach, the sub-cities picked are the following:

Table 4: Three sub-cities selected

No	Sub-city	No of schools
1	Arada	7
2	Bole	23
3	Yeka	70
Total		100

The number of schools (100 in all) in the three sub-cities is nearly 42% of the total number of private primary schools in the city which is justifiably a little more than two- fifth of the whole population.

Now, the question is: How many schools should be taken from each sub-city? Assigning 5 to each could have been easy, had it not been for the highly uneven distribution. So, a need arises to follow a technique of sampling with probability proportional to size (Kothari, 2004: 66-67) as is worked out below [Note that 2 is taken as a starting number; The sampling interval is 7 (15/100 = 6.66)]:

Table 5: A sampling devise used to reach at probability proportional to size

Sub-city	No of	Cumulative total	Sampling procedure	Sample size
Arada	7	7	2	1
Bole	23	30	9,16,23, 30	4
Yeka	70	100	37,44,51,58,65,72,79 ,	10

From what is worked out, thus, one school was selected from Arada sub-city, four schools from Bole, and ten schools from Yeka. In summary, the three sub-cities represented w i t h the number of sample schools selected is as follows:

Table 6: Sub-cities and the number of schools selected

No	Sub - city	No of schools to be selected
1	Arada	1
2	Bole	4
3	Yeka	10
Total		15

In selecting participants for the interview schemes designed, a purposive sampling procedure was chosen. The purposive sampling procedure, which is also known as the non-probability, deliberate or judgment sampling, is chosen because of the relative advantage of time and budget inherent in this method of sampling. The same sampling procedure is also preferred for intensive type studies like the one at

hand (Kothari, 2004:59). Moreover, it is purposive sampling which is "used quite frequently in qualitative research" (Kothari, 2004: 15). Though many informal discussions were made with the directors, teachers and parents, the formal interviews made were distributed as follows.

Table 7: Distribution of interviewees and classrooms observed

Sub city	No. of Schools Selected	No. of Directors interviewed	No. of Teachers interviewed	No. of Teachers interviewed	No. of Classrooms observed
Arada	1	1	1	1	1
Bole	4	1	3	3	1
Yeka	10	3	6	6	2
Total	15	5	10	10	4

As it was only one school that was selected from Arada sub city, one teacher, one director and one parent was selected for interview. In Bole one school was chosen for an interview with the director. The rest three schools were considered for both teacher and parent interview. In Yeka, in a similar fashion, three directors were interviewed from three of the ten schools. From the other six schools teachers and directors selected for interview.

Four scholars on language and language education from Addis Ababa University, and three education experts from the Education Bureau of the City Administration of Addis Ababa were purposively selected and interviewed. All in all, 15 schools were observed and 32 participants were interviewed. Four class room observations were made: one from Arada sub city, one from Yeka sub city, and two from Bole sub city. This time one school from Bole sub city which was not included in the interview posed for directors, teachers and parents was considered.

Data Collection Methods

Two basic instruments of data collection were employed in line with the research questions devised. These are observation and interview methods.

Observation: The observation method was chosen to collect data in response to research question number 1: *What is the degree of the "Immersion-ness" of the program of the English-medium private primary schools of Addis Ababa?* (See Appendix A for the observation checklist.) .To this end, 15 general observations were made in the selected 15 private primary schools. Four specific classroom observations were also made

Interview Schemes: Three interview schemes were designed in line with research question numbers 2-4.

Interview Scheme 1: This scheme was designed in line with research question number 2: *What is the typology of the supposedly "English Immersion Program" of the English-medium private primary schools of Addis Ababa?* The interview questions were addressed to 10 teachers, and 5 directors of the selected 15 schools. (See Appendix B for the interview scheme 1.)

Interview Scheme 2: This scheme was designed in line with research question number 3: *What are the possible motivations that force parents to choose the supposedly "English Immersion Program" for their children?* The questions under this scheme were addressed to 10 of the parents of the children from the selected 15 schools. (See Appendix C for the interview scheme 2.)

Interview Scheme 3: This scheme was designed in line with research question number 4 of the study at hand: *What are, if any, the potential and actual challenges of teaching children in the supposedly "English Immersion Program" of the private primary schools of Addis Ababa?* The questions under this scheme were addressed to three of the education experts from Education Bureau of the City Administration of Addis Ababa and to four of the scholars of language and language education of Addis Ababa University. (See Appendix D for the interview scheme 3.)

Data Analysis Methods

The method of data analysis employed was a qualitative type. Out of the four major types of data analysis identified by Dawson (2002: 115-120), the thematic

analysis type was chosen. A thematic analysis is highly inductive, that is, the themes emerge from the data and are not imposed upon it by the researcher. In this type data collection and analysis may take place simultaneously. Background reading can also form part of the analysis process (Dawson, 2002: 115-116). Thematic analysis could also be deductive when the investigation is done within a certain framework (Creswell and Clark, 2007: 131-133).

Accordingly, almost all the qualitative data obtained through the observation checklist and the interview schemes were analyzed thematically within the theoretical framework adopted. There was however, one exceptional case in which the qualitative data obtained were quantified. This was made in the endeavor to determine the degree of immersion which was measured against the eight core features of a prototypical immersion program.

A Note on Terminology

First Language (L1): The language first acquired as a child. First language is also known as a mother tongue or native language (Crystal, 1987: 421). A mother tongue is also known as a local or familiar language which is the language of the immediate community best known to the child. Thus, mother tongue education could be extended to a language best known to the child (Alidou et al., 2006: 4-5).

Amharic is the medium of instruction in Grades 1-6 in the public schools of Addis Ababa. No other Ethiopian languages are used in public primary education. However, there are children whose first language may not be Amharic. The assumption for these children might be that the children will be bilingual; that they have already been exposed to Amharic by the time they enter schools (Heugh, et al., 2007: 57-58). For the sake of convenience, in this study, it will be assumed that Amharic is the L1 of the children in Addis Ababa. In this case, by L1 we mean the language most familiar to the children.

Findings

Findings from the Observation Checklist

Eight items were incorporated in the observation checklist. All the items listed are the core features of immersion developed by Swain and Johnson (1997:5-8). They were adopted in the observation checklist to determine the degree of "immersion" practiced in the private primary schools surveyed. Under this sub-section the findings from the observation made will be presented item by item.

Item 1- English is a medium of instruction for at least 50% of the content subjects taught. It was found that in the 15 schools surveyed at least half of the content subjects are taught in English. What was observed in all the fifteen schools has shown that the basic curriculum is all in English. There are subjects like Science, Mathematics and Social Science which are taught in the Amharic medium without the due emphasis. The purpose of this practice appears to be only for the sake of formality.

Item 2- The immersion curriculum parallels the local L1 curriculum. This was not found to be the case in any of the schools surveyed. Two of the schools surveyed use American textbooks. The other thirteen have Indian textbooks which, as they indicated, are cheap in price and easily accessible. The majority of the schools use the foreign textbooks as they are. Few of them have claimed to have made adoptions; they were not however willing to show them to the present researcher.

Item 3- Overt support exists for L1. An overemphasized support exists for L2, English; that is true. But this is not the case for L1, which is Amharic in the majority cases. The number of periods allotted for Amharic per week does not exceed three except in one school, which are five. This is unlike other major subjects which may have from 6-8 periods per week. Whereas for other subjects the teachers are either a Diploma or Degree holders, in some of the schools, the Amharic teachers are only high school graduates. In all of the schools surveyed Amharic is not encouraged as a medium of instruction and interaction. Some of the schools have an explicit ground rule which forbids the use of Amharic in the school compounds.

Item 4- The program aims for additive bilingualism. This issue is especially concerned with the achieved higher proficiency level in English which is not made possible at the expense of L1, Amharic in our case. As was mentioned in the preceding sub-section, it was not possible to say an overt support exist for L1, Amharic. This puts the additive nature of bilingualism in question. Though the result appears to have been gained at some expense of L1, Amharic, the achieved proficiency level of English of the students in the private primary schools surveyed was found to be promising. Through the observations made in the classrooms and during recess times in the school compound, it was learned that the students could speak English naturally and spontaneously.Their written English is also very good for their age. Many of the students have a well-cultivated reading culture. Coming across a fourth or fifth Grade student reading a hundred or so pages long novel is so common.

In classrooms, the students could easily interact with their teachers and among themselves easily in English. There are variations, however, across the schools surveyed. In some of the private schools, the proficiency level of the students is highly astonishing. This was especially true with the schools established relatively earlier, sometime in the middle of the 1990s.

Item 5- Exposure to the L2 (English) is largely confined to the classroom. This could not be otherwise as there is no largely known English speaking community in the capital. Thus, the learners' exposure to English is largely, if not completely, confined to the classroom. There are, nevertheless, some parents who

take time to interact with their children in English. Though in rare cases, it was also learnt that there are some students who spend their vacation in Europe or the USA where they will usually have an exposure to English. The other means of exposure to English which might be worth mentioning is the television. Through a question posed to some students and teachers, it was learned that almost all the students have the habit of watching foreign films of one sort or another through the many channels available to them at home. A private primary school's reputation is usually identified with the achieved proficiency level of English of its students. There is also a seemingly possible correlation of the level of "reputation" with the amount of the school fees charged. The higher the reputation the higher is the amount of school fee. The highly reputed private school may charge up to an annual school fee of 10, 000 Ethiopian Birr per student or even more. With the less reputed and recent schools, the annual school fee could go down to 1,600 Birr per student.

Item 6- Students enter with similar (and limited) levels of L2 (English) proficiency. All the private primary schools surveyed have their own preschools or kindergarten (school) where the children will have a three years stayed. Though the schools largely admit students from other kindergartens, the majority of their students in the Grades had their pre-schooling in the same school. Even if there are significant differences observed among the private schools, it is at the kindergarten level that English as a medium is introduced. Some preschools do not even teach any literary skills in Amharic, everything is taught in English. Hence, by the time the children are admitted into their first Grade, they have already achieved some level of proficiency in English. This achieved level of proficiency in English becomes significantly higher in the highly popular private primary schools in the capital than the less popular ones.

Item 7- The teachers are bilingual. Teachers in a prototypical immersion program are expected to be proficient in both the L1 of the learners and the L2 medium of instruction. In our case, the question was whether there are expatriate teachers in the private primary schools and whether the Ethiopian teachers are proficient enough in English.

Some ten or so years back, one could have easily spotted two or three expatriate teachers in a private school. The expatriate teachers were mostly Indians. However, no expatriate teachers were encountered in all the schools surveyed; all were Ethiopians, bilingual in at least Amharic and English. The Amharic part could have helped, as in prototypical immersion program, the students to communicate with the teacher in their L1 as and when necessary. This was not however found to be the case in the majority of the schools surveyed as speaking in Amharic is "not what the teacher is paid for" as a director of one of the schools surveyed has confirmed to the present researcher.

Other than the L1 (Amharic), what is expected of a teacher in a prototypical immersion program is a good proficiency level of L2 (English in our case). The immersion teacher is expected to have "the language proficiency necessary to maintain the L2 as a medium of instruction" so that, he/she could "support and motivate the use of the L2 by the students" (Swain and Johnson, 1997:7). One could wonder if this could be the case in the private primary schools in Addis Ababa.

As was the case in the achieved proficiency level of English of the students, this needs a separate and formal evaluative research. But, from the informal observations made, the proficiency level of English of the teachers is not any different from the other, for example, government schools. Except in some special cases, all the teachers in the private primary schools do not seem have a higher level of proficiency in English.

All the directors communicated have nevertheless said that they take all the due care in recruiting teachers with the priority given to the teachers' proficiency in English. As a result, with the reservation of one director of the private primary schools, in the opinion of the others, all their teachers have a good command of English. However, according to the observation of one of the experts in the Education Bureau of Addis Ababa, most of the teachers in the private schools do not have any special proficiency in English worth mentioning.

Item 8- The classroom culture is that of the local L1 community. This concerns the balanced bilinguality of immersion teachers and the immersion curriculum. The issue of the bilinguality of teachers is dealt with in the preceding

sub-section. The very fact that the immersion teachers are bilingual in L1 and L2 is one of the factors that could assure the classroom culture to be that of the L1 community. The second factor is the curriculum. As was mentioned in the previous sub-section, all the private primary schools surveyed use foreign textbooks which in the majority cases are Indian. It is in this case that the students will be obliged to deal with such place names like Calcutta, Bombay, and Delhi; Taj-Mahal is also the other frequent term. As many of the teachers interviewed had indicated these place names are not easy to be replaced by Ethiopian terms as it is with personal names in isolated sentences. In this regard, then, the classroom culture cannot be claimed to be completely that of the L1 community. Moreover, there are celebrations like the European Christmas and Carnivals that emphasize a culture other than that of the L1 community. In the majority of the schools surveyed, anything "Ethiopian" seems to be labeled "backward" and "traditional".

Taken together, four of the eight core features are "fully" present; three of them are partially present; and one of the eight core feature is "totally" missing. Quantitatively, if we assume for all the eight core features to carry equal weight and we assign arbitrarily 10 points to each, we can calculate roughly the percentage of the presence of the core features. Note: 5 points are assigned for the partially present features; zero, for the totally missing.

Table 8: Quantitative representations of core features of immersion

Core Feature	Points Assigned out of 10
1	10
2	0
3	5
4	5
5	10
6	10
7	10
8	5
Total	55 of 80

55 out of the expected 80 points would yield a 68.75 per cent. Thus, when seen quantitatively, nearly two third of the core features are present. This is when all the eight core features are given equal weights.

The full presence of four of the eight core features warrants the use of the term "immersion". The partial absence of the three core features (3, 4, and 8) erodes the completeness of the "immersion-ness" of the English-medium program of the primary private schools under survey. The total absence of the other core feature (an immersion curriculum that parallels the local L1) calls the use of the term "immersion" into question. However, there are no evidences that would render the program as "submersion" as it is defined in section 1.7. Hence, the whole program could only be termed as an incomplete "English Immersion" which fulfills about 70 per cent of the core features of a prototypical immersion program with some 30 percent short of the core features of an ideal immersion program.

Findings from the Interview Scheme 1

The interview questions posed under this scheme were all based on the ten variable features of immersion formulated by Swain and Johnson. The questions were all addressed to the administrators (in two of the cases these were the owners) and teachers of the private primary schools surveyed. Though the number of variable features was only ten, the number of items in the interview scheme was significantly more than ten. This was only to get elaborated responses which are cross-checked and cross-examined. The findings are therefore organized in terms of the ten variable features.

Variable Feature 1- Level within the educational system at which immersion is introduced. It was found that the level at which the English-medium introduced is at Grade 1. In most of the cases, this actually goes back to the preschool level. This makes the immersion program an "Early" type of immersion.

Variable Feature 2- Extent of immersion. This feature is concerned about the number of subjects taught in L2, English in our case. In all the fifteen private primary schools surveyed a double-type of curricula was found to be in use. Though with different degrees and emphasis all make use of the Ethiopian curriculum and

textbooks. But in addition to that there is a second type of "curriculum" which makes these schools unique. The majority of them use Indian textbooks as they are or with slight changes. Few of the schools make use of American textbooks. The double-type curricula makes it difficult to label the program as either a "full" or a "partial" immersion. A full type of immersion is a case where almost all subjects are taught in L2; a partial type when at least 50% of the subjects are taught in L2.

In all the schools surveyed, all the subjects were found to be taught in English. Somewhat paradoxically, the same subjects are also taught in Amharic. The differentiation is done by the labels like Science in Amharic, Science in English and Mathematics in Amharic, Mathematics in English.

The extent of immersion then could only be labeled as "Partial". In combination with the variable feature 1, the whole type could as well be labeled: "Early Partial".

Variable Feature 3: The ratio of L1 to L2 at different stages within the immersion program. In this regard, no significant variation was found in the ratio of L1 to L2 in all the Grades 1-6. If there is any variation worth mentioning, two of the surveyed schools were found introducing the Ethiopian curriculum latest by Grade 3. Or else, it is the same "double-curricula" that spans across all the Grades, 1-6.

Variable Feature 4: Continuity across levels within education systems. The continuity across levels is whether English will be used as a medium of instruction in secondary and tertiary levels. No question was posed for interview to address this issue as it is self-evident that English continues to be the language of instruction in secondary and tertiary levels of education in Ethiopia. All the government and private schools in Addis Ababa introduce the all English-medium of instruction at Grade 7.

Variable Feature 5: Bridging support. This concerns the supports immersion schools provide when students move from L1 medium to L2 medium. In this regard, all the private primary schools surveyed were found to be "unique". All the bridging support seems to have been settled at the preschool level.

Variable Feature 6: Resources and staff development. The issue of resources concerns the designing of a special curriculum, preparation of textbooks and other supplementary materials. These in turn demand a special teacher-training and staff-development.

Except in a rare case where the adaptation of foreign textbooks was claimed to have been effected, in all the schools surveyed, it was learned that other than importing foreign text books and acquiring supplementary local materials, a special "immersion curriculum" is missing. On the top of that, no school director or school teacher interviewed has mentioned an instance of a special "teacher-training". And none of those interviewed have ever heard of the term "immersion".

Variable Feature 7: Commitment. The level of commitment required for an immersion program is not just high as it is with any educational endeavors. When it comes to an immersion program, the commitment required is especially "higher". It demands the involvement of all the stakeholders. This may extend right from policy makers at the top, down to the individual students in the program (Swain and Johnson, 1997:10). What we have in the middle would be the school owners, directors, parents and teachers.

Through the interviews conducted it was learned that the majority of parents who send their children in the private primary schools strongly support the English-medium practice. As mentioned by some of the teachers interviewed, there are parents who extend their support by donating materials and providing even professional advises.

However, the respective management of the schools does not seem to go beyond putting the practice into effect. In at least one case, it was learned that there is a school which has done a real job in adapting textbooks. The students are not, however, allowed to take such textbooks home. This is for the fear that the textbooks will be copied by some other private schools which have not yet adapted their own.

The weak concern and commitment from the management of the private schools could as well be seen in the attention taken towards the training of their teachers. As it was indicated in the preceding sub- section, in all the interviews conducted, no one

had claimed to have heard of such a thing called an "immersion program".

The other missing support is from policymakers and executives in the educational system of the country and from Educational Bureau of the City Administration of Addis Ababa. Actually, the majority of the private primary schools seem to play a hide-and-seek game with the supervisors from the Education Bureau. When the supervisors appear, they teach the Ethiopian curriculum; the moment the supervisors are out of sight, they return back to the English-medium.

Thus, the commitment level could not be stated as complete as there are reluctances from the school owners and administrators. Moreover, the policy of the country on instructional language in the primary level of schooling does not favor what the majority of the private primary schools are doing: using foreign textbooks and an all English-medium of instruction.

Variable Feature 8: Attitudes toward the culture of the target language. In a prototypical English Immersion program where English is seen as a language of wider communication, the students and their parents alike strive for academic and economic advantages by achieving a higher level of proficiency in English which will not be accomplished at the expense of the children's first language, culture and identity. As a result, the students' sense of identity would remain firmly rooted within their first language, culture and community (Swain and Johnson, 1997: 11).

All the descriptions made above do not seem to apply to all the schools surveyed. The whole practice seems to identify the English language with foreign cultures. Many of the teachers interviewed have expressed their scorn for the Ethiopian curriculum and the Amharic language; some have even gone so far as to list all the reasons in the world to ridicule the Amharic language. The majority of the students also reflect the same attitude. One of the Amharic teachers interviewed have pointed to the researcher that she has been so hurt by the disdains of the students for Amharic. As a result, she has developed a bitter dislike for the teaching of Amharic. She has further said that "If I had choices, I will not teach Amharic for all the money in the world."

Hence, from what was found to be the case in the majority of the private primary schools surveyed, attitudes towards the culture of the target language have "wrongly" reached the point of near "worshiping". This is also aggravated by the students' dislike shown for the Amharic language. This "dislike" may logically extend to the culture of the local community as well. The whole phenomenon will then put the identity of the students in question if anything "Ethiopian" is being ridiculed.

Variable Feature 9: Status of the L2. The majority of the private schools accord a high status to English. All the teachers and directors of the schools interviewed have invariably emphasized that it is not Amharic but English that offers academic and economic advantages.

Variable Feature 10: What counts as success in an immersion program. From all the interviews conducted, all the administrators and teachers alike have stressed that achieving a "high level of proficiency in English" is what counts as success, before and more than anything else. As some of those interviewed have particularly pointed, this is what the parents of the children are expecting.

Findings from the Interview Scheme 2. This second type of interview was conducted with ten parents of the students from the fifteen selected schools. The ten parents were randomly selected and contacted. Though there were some more related ones, the one basic question addressed to the parents interviewed was: *What do you think is the advantage of sending your child(ren) to an English-medium private school?* The data from the responses of the parents were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed. Accordingly, what follows could be taken as part of the explanation obtained for the third research question set beforehand: *What are the possible motivations that force parents to choose the supposedly "English Immersion Program" for their children?*

What follows is the summary of the parental responses. It is presented in the way the individual parents have explained the reasons: (a) I want my child to be able to properly speak, write, and read in English. I never had such a chance. I would then like to be compensated through my child. (b) We are in the age of globalization. The world is becoming a small village. English is one of the international languages or probably the only language through which we can reach the rest of the world. I do

not want my child to stay behind such a progress for lack of a good command in English. (c) I want my child to join one of the universities in Europe or in the USA. (d) A student who had already developed a good command of English will have no difficulties upon joining our English-medium high schools and universities. (e) English is the language of science and technology. English is the order of the day; and English is about civilization. (f) If you speak good English, you will be respected and honored; be it here in Ethiopia or elsewhere in the world. For an educated person, a high command of English would mean a high standard of living. (g) If you could speak good English you will gain respect both at home and abroad. And, I want my child to be a respectable citizen.

Among the motivations, the issue of quality education and the desire for an overall academic achievement might be treated aside from the other issues which directly focus on the English language. It was mentioned by the parents interviewed that at private schools the class-size is an ideal one; private schools usually have from 25-30 students in a class which is not a case in most government schools. Hence, because of at least class size, students in private schools will have a better chance of getting all the necessary attention from their teachers. There is also a good follow-up in the progress of each and every student. Such and other factors enable private schools to provide quality education.

Keeping the issue of quality education apart, the motivations for choosing English-medium private schools could be thematically grouped into two major areas:

- *For a secured academic progress and further education, both at home and abroad;*
- *For a secured career and better job opportunities, both at home and abroad.*

According to the view of the parents, both the academic and career advantages will be possible if their children could achieve a higher level of proficiency in English right from their childhood and before it is too late. It is believed then that this could be possible if they could let their children to attend the all- English-medium private schools.

Findings from the Interview Scheme 3

This third interview scheme was designed in line with the fourth research question: *What are, if any, the potential and actual challenges of teaching children in the supposedly "English Immersion Program" of the private primary schools of Addis Ababa?* The objective was to gather the opinions and attitudes of scholars on language and language education and experts of education on the possible "side effects" and "shortcomings" of the English-medium program. To this end, seven scholars on language and language education and experts of education were interviewed: four of them were from the College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University; three of them were from Education Bureau of the City Administration of Addis Ababa. All of the four scholars on language and language education from Addis Ababa University were PhD holders.

Three of the scholars from Addis Ababa University strongly opposed the practice of using English- medium at the primary level of schooling which prevails in the majority of the private primary schools in Addis Ababa. What follows is a summary of their argument.

On the teaching of English as a subject, the scholars argued that it is possible to teach English effectively as a subject. They also said that research evidence shows the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction will also be instrumental in improving the learning of a foreign language as a subject which may as well serve as a medium of instruction in the secondary level of schooling and even beyond that.

On the advantages of using a mother tongue medium of instruction, the three scholars are of the opinion that using a mother tongue medium of instruction is what is pedagogically advisable: When the mother tongue of children is used as a language of instruction, teachers and students communicate better. This will in turn lead to a better teaching on the part of the teachers and a better learning on the part of the students. Moreover, in a mother tongue education, the children will develop a respect for their identity and culture. In our context, the question will then be about identity, about being an Ethiopian.

In a similar vein of argument the three scholars pointed out the possible disadvantages of using an L2- medium of instruction, especially at the primary level of schooling: There will be a weak interaction and communication in the classrooms; this will lead to a poor understanding or even confusion in the lessons taught. The children may as well develop an unfavorable attitude towards their language, culture and identity.

The three experts of education from the Education Bureau do not also support the English-medium practice of private primary schools. From their practical observation, the following are some of the shortcomings they have spotted: There is a gap of communication and interaction between teachers and students; The students are highly loaded with learning "duplicated" subjects through the "double curricula" employed.

There is less focus on the mastery of content subjects; The students are becoming strangers to the Ethiopian culture, History and Geography and they are developing a dislike for anything Ethiopian and their pride in their identity is being compromised and eroded.

The solution they suggested is the following: By using supplementary materials and effective methods of teaching, it is possible to enable students to achieve the necessary level of proficiency in English; this would be possible by teaching English only as a subject.

The fourth scholar from Addis Ababa University has a different opinion. According to him, the English- medium program in the private primary schools of Addis Ababa is a type of an "Immersion Program". In his view, by attending such schools, the children's first language and identity will not be "threatened".

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Degree of Immersion: Out of the eight core features, four were fully present; three of them were partially present; one core feature was totally missing; this is an immersion curriculum. All in all, about seventy per cent of the core features were present. The program of the English-medium private primary schools of Addis Ababa could therefore be called an *English Immersion Program.* However, as one core feature is fully missing, the program may have to be taken only as incomplete.

Typology of Immersion: The typology was identified as *Early Partial English Immersion.* From the perspective of commitment, an official recognition and support was found to be missing. The typology is therefore an *Early-Partial English Immersion.*

Motivation: Academic and economic advantages were found to be the major motivations behind the program of the English-medium private primary schools of Addis Ababa. The major purpose of the *English Immersion* is immersion in a language of power which is English in our context. English in such cases is taken as an international language of wider communication. Here, the main motivations for an *English Immersion* are academic and economic advantages.

Challenges: One of the major challenges identified is the absence of an immersion curriculum. Consequently locally prepared English-Immersion textbooks were also missing. The absence of locally prepared English-medium textbooks puts the *immersion program* in question.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions arrived at, the following recommendations are forwarded. The English- medium private primary schools of Addis Ababa may have to consider the possibility of enabling their students to achieve a higher level of proficiency in English by teaching English only as a subject using effective methodologies and supplementary materials.

However, if they insist on using the "*English Immersion Program*" which they are not well aware of, they should design an English-Immersion curriculum which parallels that of the Ethiopian curriculum. English-medium textbooks should then be prepared based on the special curriculum designed. Forming a "confederation" of private schools may help to avoid duplication of efforts. In this way, basic uniformity in curriculum could as well be established. They should also aim for an additive bilingualism by giving an overt support for Amharic. They may as well reduce the number of subjects taught. One of the ways of achieving this could be by varying the ratio of Amharic-medium subjects to English- medium subjects across the Grade levels. The private primary schools should also base their practice in line with the major principles of an immersion program. Finally, it will be of benefit if these schools train their teachers for immersion teaching and regularly evaluate their "English-Immersion" programs.

The Ministry of Education of Ethiopia may have to take either one of the following two measures. It should strictly enforce the implementation of mother tongue education in the private primary schools. This measure should, however, be preceded or followed by launching model public (government) primary schools which demonstrate the possibility of enabling students to achieve a higher level of proficiency in English by teaching English intensively only as a subject. If not, it should officially recognize the "English Immersion Programs". When this is done, guidelines and parameters must be set for the accreditation, follow-up, regulation and evaluation of the programs.

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