

Attitudes of Parents and Teachers towards Using Amharic and English as Medium of Instruction in Gondar City Preschools Education, Ethiopia

Kagnew Tarekegn

*Department of Special Needs and Inclusive Education, University of Gondar,
P.O.Box 196, Gondar, Ethiopia
Telephone: (+251) 581 141 236, E-mail: kagnewtk@gmail.com*

KEYWORDS Instructional Language. Mother Tongue. Preschool Children

ABSTRACT The purpose of this study is to examine attitudes and factors in using Amharic and English as medium of instruction in preschools education. It employed explanatory design with randomly selected 384 parents and teachers participants. The findings revealed that parents and teachers' attitude in both private and government preschools were positive toward Amharic, but neutral towards English. In practice, however, the medium of instruction employed is English in private but Amharic in government preschools. The factors responsible for this difference include the fact that the private preschools' administration system favors English and ensures that children and their teachers practice it. Besides, the instruction to pay more attention to English but less attention to Amharic is given by the government, especially in classes which are above grade six. Therefore, feasible educational administration system, and alternative path of instruction using Amharic medium from preschools to higher education institutions would be created to use Amharic at preschool level for context based development of children.

INTRODUCTION

Language is the most important way of expressing ourselves, planning our lives (Smadi and Al-Ghazo 2013), and a tool for producing and exchanging ideas (Takele 2017). It is not only a tool for communication and knowledge but also a fundamental attribute of cultural identity and empowerment, both for the individual and the group (UNESCO 2003a; Takele 2017). Language plays a major role in establishing the social identities and relationships of teachers and students (Tiglu 2015). It is essential for the development and transmission of culture from one generation to the next, and is a manifestation and a product of culture where it is spoken (Minami 2002). Rassool (2007) stated that the importance of using language that people know and can relate to in their learning process is significant, in relation to not only skills and knowledge acquisition, but with regard to language maintenance and cultural reproduction.

UNESCO (2003a) also emphasized the importance of mother tongue instruction in the first few years of education as providing a sound basis for future learning. UNESCO stated that it

is better to introduce foreign language learning, after years of mother tongue instruction, within the framework of intercultural education as a means to promote deeper understanding between communities and nations, and to develop scientific indigenous language. Particularly, the language medium generally does not present a problem in Western societies. Within the Western contexts, education normally takes place through languages that are seen as representing "cultural heritage of their country" (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000: 306).

According to UNICEF (2016), mother tongue based instruction has had a positive effect at all levels of schooling. In developing countries like Africa, there are unresolved questions regarding the choice of language that would best support cultural and educational developments. Since the use of African languages in education are limited and not incorporated into social institutions, it did not provide opportunity for the development of indigenous languages to bring social change. These situations, therefore, have left many indigenous languages underdeveloped (Rassool 2007). The use of English as a medium of instruction in schools and universi-

ties further enhances the neglect of local languages and consequently increases the negative attitudes among students regarding local languages (Tiglu 2015).

Historically, English was seen as a ‘world’ language representing important cultural resources through which “primitive” African people could be ‘civilized’ into cultured western people (Rassool 2007). In actual fact, the African continent constituted complex cultural, and linguistic components incorporating different levels of socio-political organization. For example, in some areas of Africa, particularly in Ethiopia, there were written languages that had histories predating the impact of western dominant culture. Specifically, Geez and its allied forms including Amharic far predated the impact of their dominant culture (Prah 2002). Mazrui and Mazrui (1998) added that there are records of Amharic written verse in honor of Ethiopian kings that can be traced back to as far as the fourteenth century, which is also predating the impact of western dominant culture.

However, language in Ethiopian education policy gave legitimacy to the English language and literature facilitated the transmission of Western knowledge. These language and literature took Africans (in this case Ethiopians) further and further from our-selves to other-selves, and from our world to other worlds (Ngug 1993). As a result, Western mother tongue English historically has left an enduring dilemma with regard to the choice of language policy and practice in Africa in general (Rassool 2007), and in Ethiopia in particular. This enduring dilemma eradicated the traditional school systems embedded in their local culture.

Regarding language-in-education, research findings have shown that learning and development of the mother-tongue scaffolds the acquisition of higher order thinking skills, and enhances additional language learning (Hamayan and Field 2012). However, a foreign language use as a medium of instruction has a negative influence on the students’ results and duration of their study, the behavior of children in class, and the development of their personality (UNESCO 2003a,b; Seidel and Moritz 2009).

Statement of the Problem

Classroom observation and assessment data in some areas of Ethiopia confirm the importance

of mother tongue instruction. For example, stronger mother-tongue schooling has higher student achievement levels at Grade 8 in all subjects, including English; and students can interact with the teacher, with each other and with the content of the curricula in ways that promote effective and efficient learning (Heugh et al. 2007; UNICEF 2016). But, in most of the preschools education in Ethiopia especially in private preschools education, the highly privileged value is the acquisition of a foreign language English than the mother tongue Amharic (Tekeste 2006; Heugh et al. 2007; Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2010).

Currently, it is also common to observe that the use of English as medium of instruction in preschools education in Ethiopia especially in private preschools seems to promote the ideology and practices from abroad, with very little attention to traditional and culturally appropriate language use. In actual fact, English is used as medium of instruction in most of the private preschools education in Ethiopia (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2010; Kassahun 2013; Rixon 2013), particularly in Gondar City. The global dominance of English has generated a number of myths on the value of English in local contexts as well as in the national language ecology (UNICEF 2016). It is even common to see and hear of some private preschool campuses that discourage the use of the mother tongue Amharic and encourage the use of the foreign language English. Some sayings that discourage the use of Amharic in most private preschools are “Amharic does not help people to cross the river; throwing a stone and speaking Amharic in the school campus is strictly forbidden; etc”. Thus, the dominant use of English and avoidance of Amharic as medium of instruction for preschool age children in Gondar city private preschools raised questions regarding whether this practice is preferred by parents and teachers (as the first responsible bodies for child development) or not, so as to deliver culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate education.

Surprisingly, these practices contradict the local policies. For example, according to Transitional Government of Ethiopia (1994), the Education and Training Policy supports the use of mother-tongue as the medium of instruction not only at preschool level but also up to the completion of primary school level. Since every lan-

guage is sufficient to give high cognitive skills to its users; a foreign language cannot be a substitute for the mother-tongue, and it should be avoided until the child fully acquired their mother tongue (UNESCO 1953), because the use of language as a medium of instruction requires proficient use of the four skills: reading, listening, writing and speaking in English (Genene 2017). Besides, allowing English to dominate education and other public spaces is likely to obstruct the development of Ethiopia's own languages (UNICEF 2016). The question is, "why is English still dominant in private preschools when research findings and the Ethiopian education policy has emphasized the importance of mother tongue?"

Of course, there are controversies about the factors that affect the choices of language as medium of instruction. Some of the broadly suggested factors are the impact of globalization, the attitude of parents and teachers of preschool children in using English, and/or high profit demand of preschool owners by providing children with new language that is English. On the other hand, when the mother-tongue is seen as a key symbol of group identity, as a cultural core value, vital to their community and ethnic identity, parents and teachers' attitude towards their mother-tongue will be very positive (UNESCO 2003b). Consequently, they tend to practice their mother tongue in every situation. Otherwise, if they view the mother tongue as a hindrance to economic mobility and integration into international society, they develop negative attitude towards their mother-tongue; then they tend to avoid it and use English.

Therefore, parents and teachers are the first responsible bodies for children's development and then their attitude is considered as main factor that affects the choices of language as medium of instruction in preschool education (Kassahun 2013). So, the purpose of this paper is to examine the attitude of teachers and parents towards using Amharic and English as medium of instruction, and to investigate determinant factors that affect their choices of language in Gondar city preschools education.

Objectives

The general objective of the paper is to examine the attitudes of parents and teachers and the determinant factors that affect the use of

mother tongue Amharic and/or English as medium of instruction in Gondar city preschools education.

The specific objectives of the paper are:

- (a) To examine whether a significant difference in attitude towards Amharic/English exist between private and government preschool participants;
- (b) To examine whether a significant difference in attitude towards Amharic/English exist between parents and teachers;
- (c) To discover whether a significant difference in attitude towards Amharic/English exist between private and government preschool parents;
- (d) To determine whether a significant difference in attitude towards Amharic/English exist between private and government preschool teachers;
- (e) To find out the context in which the use of Amharic and/or English is more dominant;
- (f) To identify factors influencing the practice of using Amharic and/or English as medium of instruction.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Explanatory mixed research design was employed in this study, and the attitude differences among parents and/or teachers due to their demographic variables were investigated in particular. It was also used to explain a factor that made the use of Amharic or English as a medium of instruction dominant for preschool age children.

Sampling Techniques and Samples

The total number of preschools in Gondar city during the study data collection time, in 2015/16, was 66, out of which 42 were government and 24 were private preschools with a total population of 11,378 teachers and parents. Categorically speaking, there were 269 teachers' population (155 in private and 114 in government preschools) and 11,109 parents' population (4,603 in private and 6,506 in government preschools).

Using a scientific formula, 384 representative samples of teachers and parents in 16 government and 6 private preschools were selected using stratified sampling technique. More spe-

cifically, 96 teachers (56 in private and 40 in government preschools) and 288 parents (168 in private and 120 in government preschools) were selected by using cluster and simple random sampling techniques, respectively. Note that the lists of children in each classroom from all selected preschools were received and children in each classroom in both private and government preschools were randomly selected. Parents of the selected children were taken as the samples of the study and, then communicated either by the researcher or the classroom teacher in order to get brief instruction and fill the questionnaire. In addition, 14 teachers, 21 parents, 4 preschool principals and 2 Gondar city administration preschool education experts were selected purposively for FGD and Interview.

Data Collection Instruments

The following data collection instruments were used in this study: (a) Attitude questionnaires administered for teachers and parents; (b) Focus group discussion (FGD) guide for teachers; (c) Interview guide for parents, preschool principals and city administration education experts; and (d) Observation rating scales that is, one scale for preschool teachers and the other for preschool children.

The Attitude Questionnaire

The attitude questionnaire administered for parents and teachers contained 11 similar items. The 11 items were adapted from previous three studies such as, the study conducted in Kuwait University by Alenezi (2010) to investigate students' language attitudes towards a mother tongue Arabic and a foreign language English as a medium of instruction; the study conducted in Libyan secondary school by Abidin et al. (2012) to measure students' attitudes towards learning English; and the study conducted in Saudi Arabia elementary school by Al-Nofaie (2010) to investigate the attitudes of teachers and students towards using Arabic in English classroom. Out of the 11 items, the attitude of participants towards Amharic was measured through 5 items; and their attitude towards English was also measured through 6 items.

The items were put in a 5-point Likert scale from Level 1: Strongly Disagree to Level 5: Strongly Agree to determine teachers and par-

ents' level of agreement. The content and face validities of the adapted questionnaire was checked by the judgment of professionals. Moreover, pilot test was conducted by using similar participants to the main study participants. Finally, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the scale with the pilot study result was .731, which is acceptable.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide

The focus group discussion guide containing 9 open ended items was constructed by the researcher after reading different related literature. The FGD was employed with one private and one government preschools teachers. The FGD participants were 14 teachers who had filled the questionnaire in order to explain why they agreed or disagreed previously in the attitude questionnaires. Two FGD were conducted with six and eight groups of teachers, one in private and the other in government preschools.

Interview Guide

FGD with parents was difficult due to the fact that they were not willing to discuss on the issues in groups. So, 21 parents, four preschool principals and two city administration preschool education experts were the participants our of interview sessions. The number of parent participants in the interview (9 parents in private and 12 parents in government preschools) was up to the saturation of data. The FGD guide and the interview guide contained the same questions.

Observation Rating Scales

These were two forms that had been employed in a study by Al-Nofaie (2010). The purpose of teachers and children's observation rating scales were to observe the context of teachers and children's use of Amharic and/or English in preschools education. Each observation scale contains 14 items with 5-points scale levels: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often and Always. The children and their teachers were well informed about the observation process and purpose. Then, they gave their consent to be observed after briefing the purpose of the study and establishing rapport between observation participants and the observer.

RESULTS

Introduction

From a total of 384 participants, 318 of them completely filled the questionnaire making seventeen percent of the questionnaires that were either incomplete or not returned to the researcher. This means that only 318 filled questionnaires were considered for data analysis and seventeen percent of them were discarded. The data collected through the attitude questionnaire were analyzed based on the following guideline or criteria.

The attitude of 318 participants towards Amharic was measured through 5 items with possible minimum mean value $M = 5$ and maximum mean value $M = 25$. If the attitude mean score of participants towards Amharic is greater than or equal to 17.50, their attitude towards Amharic is positive. If the mean score is between 12.50 and 17.50, their attitude towards Amharic is neutral. And, if it is less than or equal to 12.50, the participants' attitude towards Amharic is negative. Similarly, the attitude of 318 participants towards English was measured through 6 items with possible minimum mean value $M = 6$ and maximum mean value $M = 30$. If the attitude mean score of participants towards English is greater than or equal to 21.00, their attitude towards English is positive. If the mean score is between 15.00 and 21.00, their attitude towards English is neutral. Finally, if it is less than or equal to 15.00, their attitude towards English is negative.

Attitudes in Private and Government Preschools towards Amharic and English

In this section, the independent sample t-test analysis was carried out to examine the attitude differences towards Amharic in private and government preschools, and towards English in private and government preschools (see Table 1

for the details). The attitude mean value or score towards Amharic in private preschools was 18.63 which is greater than 17.50, indicating that participants' attitude towards Amharic in private preschools was positive, and the attitude mean score towards Amharic in government preschools was 17.53 which is also greater than 17.50, indicating that participants' attitude towards Amharic in government preschools was positive. Moreover, there was statistically significant attitude mean difference of participants towards Amharic between private and government preschools, $t(316) = 2.98, p < .01$. This means that though the attitude of participants towards Amharic both in private and in government preschools were positive, their attitude towards Amharic in private preschools was more significantly positive than the attitude towards Amharic in government preschools.

On the other hand, the attitude of participants towards English in private preschools was 19.14 which lay between the attitudes mean score of 15.00 and 21.00. This indicated that participants' attitude towards English in private preschools was neutral, and the attitude mean score towards English in government preschools was 18.04 which is also between 15.00 and 21.00, indicating that the attitude of participants towards English in government preschools was neutral. Generally speaking, there is more favorable or positive attitude towards Amharic in private preschools than in government preschools. However, the attitudes towards English both in private and in government preschools are neutral.

Parents and Teachers' Attitude towards Amharic and English

Here the attitude of parents towards Amharic and English was compared with the attitude of teachers towards Amharic and English respectively (See Table 2 for the details). The attitudes mean score of parents towards Amharic was 18.05 which is greater than 17.50 indicating that the

Table 1: Independent samples t-test of participants' attitude difference between private and government preschools

Language	Preschool type	N	M	SD	df	t	Sig
Amharic	Private	173	18.63	3.07	316	2.98	.003
	Government	145	17.53	3.26			
English	Private	173	19.14	4.41	316	2.25	.025
	Government	145	18.04	3.99			

Table 2: Independent samples t-test between parents and teachers' attitude toward Amharic and English

Language	Participants	N	M	SD	df	t	Sig
Amharic	Parents	226	18.05	3.14	316	0.38	.708
	Teachers	92	18.20	3.40			
English	Parents	226	18.65	4.31	316	0.37	.715
	Teachers	92	18.45	4.06			

attitude of parents towards Amharic was positive, and the attitude mean score of teachers towards Amharic was 18.20 which is also greater than 17.50, indicating that the attitude of teachers towards Amharic was positive. Although the mean scores difference between the attitudes of parents and the attitudes of teachers towards Amharic was not significant, $t(316) = 0.38, p > .05$, their attitude towards Amharic were positive.

On the other hand, the attitudes mean score of parents towards English was 18.65 which is between 15.00 and 21.00, indicating that the attitude of parents towards English was neutral, and the attitudes mean score of teachers towards English was 18.45 which also lay between 15.00 and 21.00, indicating that the attitude of teachers towards English was neutral. As a result, the difference of attitude mean scores between parents and teachers towards English was not significant, $t(316) = 0.37, p > .05$, that is, their attitude towards English were similarly neutral. In general, these findings indicated that both parents and teachers held positive attitude towards Amharic as their preferred medium of instruction in preschools. However, both parents and teachers were not sure about accepting English as the medium of instruction in preschools. This implied that some other external factors may affect the choice of English as the medium of instruction at preschool level.

The comparison of attitudes of parents and teachers towards Amharic and English is more general, and it did not show the attitudes of par-

ents in private and in government preschools as well as attitudes of teachers in private and in government preschools. So, these specific comparisons were carried out as follow by employing one way ANOVA data analysis technique (see Table 3 for the details). The attitudes mean scores of parents in private and in government preschools towards Amharic were 18.65 and 17.51 respectively, which were greater than 17.50, indicating that their attitudes towards Amharic both in private preschool and in government preschool were positive, and the attitudes mean scores of teachers towards Amharic in private and in government preschools were 18.58 and 17.65 respectively, which are also greater than 17.50, and which indicate that their attitudes towards Amharic both in private and in government preschools were positive.

Furthermore, the statistically significant differences in attitudes mean scores among the four groups towards Amharic were observed, $F(3, 314) = 2.96, p < .05$; then, using Tukey post hoc comparisons, there were significant attitude mean difference towards Amharic between parents in private preschool and parents in government preschool. Otherwise, there was no statistically significant attitudes mean difference between the remaining groups. This implied that though positive attitudes towards Amharic were observed among the four groups (that is, teachers in private preschools, teachers in government preschools, parents in private preschools, and parents in government preschools), only

Table 3: One way ANOVA of attitude among parents and teachers in private and government preschools

Language	Specific group of participants	N	M	SD	F	Sig
Amharic	Parents in private	107	18.65	2.98	2.96	.033
	Parents in government	119	17.51	3.19		
	Teachers in private	52	18.58	3.28		
	Teachers in government	40	17.65	3.54		
English	Parents in private	107	18.91	4.66	3.30	.021
	Parents in government	119	18.42	3.97		
	Teachers in private	52	19.65	3.82		
	Teachers in government	40	16.86	3.88		

the attitudes mean score of parents in private preschools was more significantly positive than the attitudes mean score of parents in government preschools to use Amharic as medium of instruction in preschools education.

Additionally, the attitudes mean scores of parents towards English in private and in government preschools were 18.91 and 18.42 respectively, which lied between 15.00 and 21.00, indicating that the attitudes of parents towards English both in private preschools and in government preschools were neutral, and the attitude of teachers towards English in private and in government preschools were 19.65 and 16.86 respectively, which also lay between 15.00 and 21.00, indicating that the attitudes of teachers towards English both in private preschool and in government preschools were neutral.

In general, these specific findings indicated that both parents and teachers in private and in government preschools had positive attitude towards Amharic but the attitude of parents in private preschools was more significantly positive than the attitudes of parents in government preschools towards the use of Amharic as medium of instruction in preschools education. However, both parents and teachers were also not sure about the use of English as medium of instruction in preschools education. This also implied that beyond the attitude of parents and teachers, there may be some external factors that affect the choice of English as the medium of instruction at preschool level.

Factors that Affect the Practices of Amharic and English as Medium of Instruction

This section presents the qualitative findings collected through interviews with parents of preschool children and preschool principals, and with Gondar city administration preschool education experts; focus group discussions with preschool teachers; and observations with preschool children and their teachers.

In preschools education, there is a big range of variations in subjects taught for children that is, four subjects such as Amharic, Mathematics, English, and Environmental sciences are taught in almost all government preschools using Amharic medium of instruction, except the English subject which is taught in English medium. In contrast, nine subjects are taught in most of the private preschools, namely: Amharic, Mathemat-

ics, Environmental sciences, Aesthetics and sport, General English, English phonetics, English grammar, writing English, and Mathematics in English. The first five subjects are officially approved by concerned education officials and the last four subjects are not officially approved by concerned education officials but taught secretly in private preschools. Therefore, all the nine subjects are taught using English medium of instruction, except the Amharic subject which is taught in Amharic medium.

In order to answer the question, “why is the mother-tongue Amharic not used as the medium of instruction in private preschools education if the attitudes of parents and teachers towards Amharic are positive but the attitudes of them towards English are neutral in private preschool settings?” Private preschool principals believe that English is not only a global language and fundamental to technology, but that it is also the language used as the medium of instruction in Ethiopian schools after completing grade six and its higher education institutions. They added that the Ethiopian government in its Education and Training Policy gives priority to mother-tongue (in this case Amharic) as the medium of instruction up to grade eight. In practice, however, the government of Ethiopia in general the Amhara National Regional State in particular did not implement Amharic up to grade eight, rather, it stopped at grade six in the region to be used as medium of instruction. The other perception is that subjects taught in English in Ethiopian primary schools become increasingly complex and difficult when the grade level gets increased. Therefore, private preschool principals believed that these children cannot shoulder such problems related to English unless they lay foundation in English at preschool level. As a result private preschools are forced to place more emphasis on English language in order to better prepare preschool children at the root level of their development to be competent from preschool level to higher education institution levels, and then to become competent at the global market.

The interview results of most parents indicated that there is no chance of getting Amharic used as medium of instruction in Ethiopian secondary schools and higher education institutions. For Ethiopian children, the chance to learn subjects through mother tongue Amharic medium is locked by English above grade six. If so,

preschool children have no chance to avoid English and use Amharic even if their parents prefer the mother tongue Amharic as medium of instruction. In addition, parents expressed that government preschools are not well resourced as compared to private preschools in terms of school facilities and buildings, safe and healthy school environment for children, human power, budget and communication with parents, therefore, most of the parents are forced to send their children to private preschools where English dominates as the medium of instruction.

The focus groups discussion findings of teachers also revealed that most of the private teachers prefer to use their mother tongue Amharic than English but private preschool administration system do not allow teachers to practice Amharic as medium of instruction, rather, English is dominantly practiced. In other words, the preschool administration system, particularly the private one ensures that children and their teachers practice English as medium of instruction more dominantly than Amharic. Moreover, preschools teachers revealed that the education policy is developed by the government but not yet fully and effectively implemented. They believed that the existing big gap between the language in education policy and its implementation is the fault of the government due to several reasons.

One of these is that there is no preschool curriculum developed by the government body. The responsibility is left to each preschool. Each private preschool then has open chance to bring different foreign books and preschool curriculums which is highly dependent on English, and there is no supervision system established by the local woreda education offices and experts for the quality of preschools education. The preschool owners, therefore, are in a competition to bring the curriculum of internationally known countries and enforce the preschools community to implement such curriculum which is entirely dependent on English and out of local contexts.

The concerned (or Gondar city administration) preschools education officials indicated that they prefer Amharic to be used as medium of instruction in preschools education in line with the education and training policy of Ethiopia. In practice, however, there is no clear mechanism of supervisions especially in private preschools unlike primary and secondary schools.

Furthermore, government intervention is very minimal because the responsibility of preschools education is mostly left to private owners who believe that they could make huge profits if they implement English, which in turn affects the local language use of preschool children that could have promoted context based development as children.

DISCUSSION

There is more favorable attitude towards Amharic in private preschools than in government preschools in Gondar city, and the attitudes toward English both in private and in government preschools are neutral. According to Tiglu (2015) the attitude of the Ethiopian people towards their language is positive. They connect their language with their identity because it facilitated self-administration in their own local area. However, in practice about eight subjects are taught using English medium of instruction in private preschools even subjects not approved by the government education office were taught secretly through English medium of instruction for private preschools children. The reason for the avoidance of Amharic and practice of English as medium of instruction in private preschools did not emanate from the attitude of parents and teachers; rather, it is related to the preschool administration system and other external factors. Regarding these findings, most teachers and parents are in favor of using mother-tongue since they believe in mother-tongue as a symbol of their identity, natural language facilitator to self-administration and learning strategy (Al-Nofaie 2010; Tiglu 2015).

So, "why is mother-tongue Amharic not used as medium of instruction in private preschools?" As Heugh (2003) stated, some researchers and many other education stakeholders misunderstood the early success, and then suggested an early transition to English. However, if the number of years of mother-tongue instruction decreases from 8 to 0 years, then there would be a serious drop in achievement in English as a subject and across the entire curriculum. So, the dominant practice of English language as a medium of instruction in most private preschool settings may be due to lack of awareness of the disadvantage of early transition to English or the benefits that could be derived from the use of mother tongue. Kassahun (2013) also stated

that in the name of academic achievement, young children in Ethiopian preschools are being placed in very structured programs, which are in contrast to the theoretical arguments.

Parents and teachers have positive attitude towards Amharic to be used as the medium of instruction in preschools, but both parents and teachers were not sure about the use of English as the medium of instruction in preschools. More specifically, parents and teachers in private and in government preschools have positive attitude towards Amharic but the attitude of parents in private preschools was more significantly positive than the attitudes of parents in government preschools regarding the use of Amharic as medium of instruction in preschools education. However, both parents and teachers were also not sure about the use of English as medium of instruction in preschools education. This implied that the choice of English as medium of instruction at preschool level may be affected by external factors which are beyond the attitude of parents and teachers.

Therefore, why are some subjects secretly taught in English as medium of instruction or without the approval of concerned education officials for children in private preschools? Why is Amharic used as a medium of instruction in government preschools? There is no uniform preschool curriculum developed by the government body. The responsibility is left to each preschool. Each private preschool, then, has open chance to bring different foreign books and preschool curriculums which is highly dependent on English. The preschool owners, therefore, are in a competition to bring in the curriculum of internationally known countries and ensure that the preschools community implements such curriculum which is entirely dependent on English and out of local contexts. Furthermore, government intervention is very minimal and the responsibility of preschools education is mostly left to private owners who believe that they could make huge profits if they implement English.

On the one hand, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (2010) stated that most parents are not fully aware of their crucial role in their children's development and/or lack basic parental competences. Therefore, they may not know which language is most important for their children to use as medium of instruction at the preschool age level. Besides, the dominant use of English is due to the assumption that English

as medium of instruction helps children learn English and, further, that the earlier English becomes as medium of instruction, the more successful students will be in school, in examinations and in life. The assumption is that if children learn all subjects in English, their English language ability would increase. However, as stated by Heugh et al. (2007) and Genene (2017), the reason for the success of these children are not related to early transition to English as medium of instruction, rather, their successes are related to the socio-economic resources of their parents, excellent educational resources of the education system, ample supply of learning materials, small class sizes etc.

On the other hand, according to Kuspert-Rakotondrainy (2014), some Ethiopian parents believe that strong Amharic will offer their children portable language skills within the wider Ethiopian context and that learning resources are more plentiful in Amharic. Moreover, Ministry of Education (2002) and Tiglu (2015) stated that language is not only a medium of instruction for the people, but also a symbol of identity. According to Ministry of Education, the reasons why people ought to be taught in their mother tongue before and during the primary school level are given as follows: (a) learning in a mother tongue enables the student to understand lessons easily, and avoids problems associated with language barriers; and (b) using a language for instruction enables it to continue to be a living language and saves it from possible extinction. This also enables students to appreciate and master science and technology. UNESCO (2003a) also supports mother tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers. As UNESCO (2003b) stated, members of a speech community are not usually neutral towards their own language. They may see it as essential to their community and identity, and use it without promoting.

Furthermore, as Hamayan and Field (2012) have also stated, everywhere in the world students who study in their mother tongue are better able to learn to read and write efficiently, understand mathematical concepts, and develop high levels of academic competence. According to Berhanu (2009) and Takele (2017), English is more of a foreign language than a second language in Ethiopia. This is mainly because En-

English is so infrequently used in daily life outside the classroom and students do not have the opportunity to learn the language informally. In such a situation, it is no longer appropriate to call English a medium of instruction; rather, it has become a medium of obstruction. Amharic featured most often as the language of economic opportunity at national level. Messay (1999) also argued that no country has modernized its culture, language and society by wholesale importation of westernization. The only way out for countries like Ethiopia is to anchor modernization on the language, traditional values and beliefs of the Ethiopian people.

Private preschool principals believed that English is not only a global language and fundamental to technology, but that it is also the language used as the medium of instruction in Ethiopian schools after completing grade six and its higher education institutions. Moreover, subjects taught in English in Ethiopian primary schools become increasingly complex and difficult when the grade level gets increased. Therefore, private preschool principals believe that these children cannot shoulder such problems related to English unless they lay foundation in English at preschool level. In line with these findings, Graddol (2006) noted that English has become 'basic skills' in education globally, and English abilities are important in terms of linking one country with the rest of the world, obtaining the world's understanding and trust, enhancing international presence and further developing our nation (Hagerman 2009). Heugh et al. (2007) also stated that there are a number of assumptions about English. Some of these assumptions include: English language ability of children will improve if they use English as a medium of instruction; and when children reach Grade 9 they will not have any problem in using English as a medium. According to Kemshall (2002), English as a global language constitutes dual meanings. It does not only facilitate our understanding of the world, but also limits our perception and understanding of the phenomena around us, including social process, social institutions and cultural forms.

The qualitative findings indicated that there are unorganized administration system of preschools and superficial supervision system in the side of the government body about preschools education in general, medium of instruction in particular. In favor of these findings,

UNESCO (2005) also pinpointed the lack of a responsible body, a distinctive curriculum, guidelines, or quality assurance systems as major problems in both private and government preschools in Ethiopia. In addition, parents expressed that government preschools are not well equipped as compared to private preschools in terms of school facilities, buildings, safe and healthy school environment for children, human power, budget and communication with parents. Due to these reasons, most of the parents are forced to send their children to private preschools in which English is practiced as medium of instruction. And the private preschool administration system ensures that children and their teachers practice English as a medium of instruction more dominantly than mother tongue Amharic. According to Tiglu (2015), the zonal government does not encourage the community to use their language, and there are no clearly stated objectives and strategies on language use and development.

This practice is due to the perception of private preschool administrators or owners who believe that an early exposure of children to English language could make them successful at higher education institutions, and this in turn attracted parents to send their children to private preschools. In reality, however, the success of children at the later age is not dependant on early exposure to English language; but rather to a context based learning process.

CONCLUSION

The attitude of parents towards Amharic in private preschools is more significantly positive than the attitude of parents in government preschools. However, the attitudes of parents towards English in private and in government preschools are similarly neutral. The same is true for teachers. Thus, the dominance of English as medium of instruction in private preschools did not intrinsically emanate from the attitude of parents and teachers; rather, it emanated from some other external factors.

Some of the external factors include, the ignorance of government bodies to preschools education in allocating relevant resources; lack of culturally and developmentally appropriate preschools curriculum; lack of clear supervision systems at woreda level; implementation of foreign or culturally irrelevant books in private preschools; the administration system of private

preschools, the less attention given to Amharic by the government, and lack of alternative schools as well as higher education institutions which uses Amharic as medium of instruction.

The subjects taught to preschools children in government preschools are different from the subjects taught in private preschools including the hidden subjects taught to preschools children in private preschools. The medium of instructions are Amharic even in government preschools and English in private preschools. These existing gaps in practice between private and government preschools violate the rights of all children in receiving developmentally appropriate education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The gaps existing in subjects taught and medium of instructions for preschool children at both private and government preschools should be in the context and age appropriate to children. In other words, children either in private or in government preschools should receive developmentally appropriate education which is taught through culturally relevant language.

The dominance of English as medium of instruction in private preschools is not preferred by parents and teachers, but it is rather dictated by external factors which include the policies of the preschool managers. Therefore, trainings relating to the advantage of mother tongue and the disadvantage of early transition to foreign language should be provided to managers/owners of private preschools education. Otherwise, individuals who have graduated with early childhood care and education should be assigned as preschool principals or managers.

The Amhara regional state and Gondar city education officials should establish feasible working mechanisms with professionals of child development and other relevant stakeholders to provide culturally and developmentally appropriate preschools curriculum and text books; to establish clear administration and supervision system from woreda education level to school level; and to attain the desirable goals of preschool education in general.

The government, especially the Amhara National Regional State, should give respect and more attention to Amharic by making it the medium of instruction parallel to English at secondary schools as well as at higher education

institutions in order to respond to the parents and teachers' preferences and to promote culture based education in the country. Finally, further study should be conducted with zonal, regional and federal levels education officials included as participants of the study so as to disclose other external factors aiding the dominance of English as medium of instruction in private preschools as opposed to by the positive tendency of teachers and parents who prefer the use of Amharic.

REFERENCES

- Abidin MJZ, Pour-Mohammadi M, Alzwarei H 2012. EFL students' attitudes towards learning English language. The case of Libyan secondary school students. *Asian Social Science*, 8(2): 119-134.
- Alenezi AA 2010. Students' language attitude towards using code-switching as a medium of instruction in the college of health sciences: An exploratory study. *ARECLS*, 7: 1-22.
- Al-Nofaie H 2010. The attitudes of teachers and students towards using Arabic in EFL classrooms in Saudi public schools: A case study. *Research on Youth and Language*, 4(1): 64-95.
- Berhanu B 2009. Language Determination in Ethiopia: What Medium of Instruction? In: S Ege, H Aspen, T Birhanu, B Shiferaw (Eds.): *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 2-6 July 2007, Trondheim, Norway. Addis Ababa: AAU Press, pp. 1089-1101.
- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2010. *National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education*. Addis Ababa: Minister of Education.
- Genebe B 2017. *What Kind of Education System and Indigenous Knowledge to Ethiopia: How and Why English Became a Medium of Instruction for Ethiopians?* Amharic Version. Addis Ababa: Far East Trading Plc.
- Graddol D 2006. *English Next*. London: British Council.
- Hagerman C 2009. English language policy and practice in Japan. *Osaka Jogakuin University Journal*, 6: 47-64.
- Hamayan E, Field RF 2012. Language Policy: Mother Tongue Support. From <<http://www.beaconhill.edu.hk/content/language-policy.pdf>> (Retrieved on 13 December 2014).
- Heugh K 2003. A re-take on bilingual education in and for South Africa. In: K Fraurud, K Hyltenstam (Eds.): *Multilingualism in Global and Local Perspectives*. Stockholm: Centre for Research on Bilingualism, pp. 47-62.
- Heugh K, Benson C, Berhanu B, Mekonnen A 2007. *Study on Medium of Instruction in Primary Schools in Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education.
- Kassahun T 2013. Professionalism in early childhood education and care in Ethiopia. What are we talking about? *Childhood Education*, 89(3): 152-158.
- Kemshall H 2002. *Risk, Social Policy and Welfare*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

- Kuspert-Rakotondrainy S 2014. Language policy and political identity in the light of socio-political changes in Ethiopia: A comparative case study among the Gumuz and Shinasha. *Ethiopian Renaissance Journal of Social Sciences and the Humanities*, 1(1): 25-39.
- Mazrui A, Mazrui AA 1998. *The Power of Babel: Language and Governance in the African Experience*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Messay K 1999. *Survival and Modernization: Ethiopia's Enigmatic Present (A Philosophical Discourse)*. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press.
- Minami M 2002. *Culture-specific Language Styles: The Development of Oral Narrative and Literacy*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Ministry of Education 2002. *The Education and Training Policy and its Implementation*. Addis Ababa: MoE.
- Ngug WT 1993. The language of African literature. In: P Williams, L Chrisman (Eds.): *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, pp. 435-456.
- Prah KK 2002. Education, Mother-Tongue Instruction, Christianity and Development of an African Culture. *Paper Presented at the International Conference on Visionen fur das Berufliche Bildung System in Africa*, 13-15 February, Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS), Loccum, Germany.
- Rassool N 2007. *Global Issues in Language, Education and Development: Perspectives from Postcolonial Countries*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Rixon S 2013. *British Council Survey of Policy and Practice in Primary English Language Teaching Worldwide*. London: British Council.
- Seidel K, Moritz J 2009. Change in Ethiopia's Language and Education Policy – Pioneering Reforms? In: S Ege, H Aspen, T Birhanu, B Shiferaw (Eds.): *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 2-6 July 2007, Trondheim, Norway.
- Skutnabb-Kangas T 2000. *Linguistic Genocide in Education or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.
- Smadi OM, Al-Ghazo A 2013. Jordanian teachers' attitudes toward foreign language teaching and their relationship to these teachers' classroom practices. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 4(17): 62-87.
- Takele T 2017. *The Language Usage in Ethiopia*. Amharic Version. Addis Ababa: Zekaryas Printing Press.
- Tekeste N 2006. *Education in Ethiopia. From Crisis to the Brink of Collapse*. Stockholm: Elanders Gotab AB.
- Tiglu GN 2015. *Language Planning and Policy in the Silte Zone*. PhD Dissertation, Unpublished. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University.
- Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1994. *Education and Training Policy*. 1st Edition. Addis Ababa: St. George Printing Press.
- UNESCO 1953. *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education (Monograph on Fundamental Education-VIII)*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO 2003a. *Education in a Multilingual World*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO 2003b. Language Vitality and Endangerment. *Document Submitted to the International Expert Meeting on UNESCO Program Safeguarding of Endangered Languages*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO 2005. *Early Childhood Care and Education in Ethiopia. EFA Global Monitoring Report*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNICEF 2016. The Impact of Language Policy and Practice on Children's Learning: In-depth Case Study in Ethiopia. From <https://www.eddataglobal.org/documents/index.cfm/LB_Ethiopia_Yr_2_results.pdf> (Retrieved on 11 March 2016).

Paper received for publication on October 2017
Paper accepted for publication on January 2018