



<http://www.eab.org.tr>

Educational Research Association  
The International Journal of Research in Teacher Education  
2018, 9(4): 15-24  
ISSN: 1308-951X



<http://ijrte.eab.org.tr>

## **A Study on Students' and Teachers' Perceptions, Challenges and Practices of Using English as a Medium of Instruction: In Focus of Three Public Universities in North Western Ethiopia**

**Zelege Workneh Ayele<sup>1</sup>**

---

### **Abstract**

The aim of this research study was to investigate students' and teachers' perceptions, challenges and practices of using English as sole medium of instruction. More specifically it was intended to examine the perceptions of teachers and students towards using English as a sole medium of instruction in public universities in North Western Ethiopia, to investigate factors that affect teachers and students not to use English as medium of instruction and to inspect the practices of English as medium of instruction in selected universities. To collect the required data, questionnaires, classroom observations and interviews were employed. By using these methods of data collection, the following findings were obtained. In the study universities, there were students perceived that code switching was necessary in bilingual classes. However, there were many students who perceived negatively teachers' code switching in bilingual classes. These different perceptions were based on their ability of communicating in Amharic language. In addition, teachers perceived that student related difficulties and challenges affected teachers not to use English as a medium of instruction. Furthermore, the practice of using English as a medium of instruction within the classroom is not significantly maximized. Students' difficulty and related factors influenced negatively the practice of using English as a medium of instruction. Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made. Firstly, university teachers should understand that when they use Amharic language in the classroom whether or not all of the students able to communicate through this language. Next, instructors who are teaching in universities should maximize using English as a medium of instruction since students are from various Ethnical backgrounds. Finally, Ethiopian secondary schools should work more on students' language competence like supporting English Language clubs and emphasizing language learning for communication etc to minimize student related factors in university.

**Key Words:** Medium of instruction; Classroom language; Practice; Perception; Attitude; Student related factor

---

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer, Injibara University English Language And Literature. [zeliexw@gmail.com](mailto:zeliexw@gmail.com)

*A Study on Students' and Teachers' Perceptions, Challenges and Practices of Using English as a Medium of Instruction: In Focus of Three Public Universities in North Western Ethiopia*

## **1. Introduction**

The development of English as a medium of instruction is a great interest to language and language policy researchers in an era of globalization and internationalization. Despite recognition of a number of implementation problems and constraints, English medium of instruction has been widely introduced into various non-native English-speaking countries (Burns, 2014)

Language is the primary vehicle for learning, instruction, and overall intellectual development. It is not only a means for communicating information; it is also a vehicle for deepening their understanding of important ideas (Kersaint, Thomspson, &Petkova, 2009). In principle, using English, when it is a second or foreign language, as a language of teaching and learning might not be an obstacle to the full development of learners' conceptual abilities, provided they are fully conversant in the language of instruction (Webb, 2004). However, with reference to the African context, researchers show that many African learners are not proficient enough in English to be able to use it appropriately as the language of classroom instruction (Alidou and Brock-Utne, 2011; Kyeyune, 2010; Rugemalira, 2005). This principle implies that in Africa the amount of learning can be limited due to the poor ability of learners as well as teachers in English as a Foreign Language.

Particularly in Ethiopia, English Foreign Language started playing its role since the introduction of modern education. Currently, the Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia (1994) states that English will be taught as a subject starting from grade one for the purpose of international communication and it will be the medium of instruction for secondary education and higher education in the country. So, this document clearly shows that English is the academic language in high schools and universities.

Hence, this language is a key in determining the learners understanding of the subject matter knowledge and ability of performance in both theoretical and practical classes. In this regard, much literature supports that instructional language is a key in education and it is one of the most important factors influencing academic success (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006). This indicates that English as a medium of instruction is an indispensable component of quality education in Ethiopian universities.

Tekeste Negash (2006) as cited in Lemlem (2010) found that the center of the crisis for higher level of education in Africa is the medium of instruction accompanying with academic freedom and inconsistency education policy concerning quality education. However, the researchers could not get local studies on the status of English Language use in Ethiopian Universities, and he was motivated by what he observed from the previous experience. The researcher stayed teaching in Ethiopian University; namely, Debre Tabor University. From this work experience, he faced with serious challenges in using the target language in English classes; moreover, English medium instruction is a one agenda of the university in bringing quality education there. This problem of teaching and learning initiated him to conduct a study on the status of using EFL and the challenges in teaching other courses in addition to teaching English, it needs to see other universities too, in order to reach generalization and to indicate appropriate solutions.

### **Objectives of the Study**

#### **General Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this research is investigation of Students' and teachers' Perceptions, challenges and Practices of using English as sole medium of instruction: the case of public universities in Amhara National Regional State.

#### **Specific Objectives of the Study**

More specifically, the study has the following objectives.

## *A Study on Students' and Teachers' Perceptions, Challenges and Practices of Using English as a Medium of Instruction: In Focus of Three Public Universities in North Western Ethiopia*

- Examining the perceptions of teachers and students towards using English as a sole medium of instruction in public universities in ANRS
- Investigating factors that affect teachers and students not to use English as medium of instruction
- Inspecting the practices of English as medium of instruction in selected universities

### **Methods of the Study**

#### **Research Design**

In this study, descriptive survey was used as descriptive survey describes and interprets what is and seeks to find out the conditions or relationships that exist, opinions that are evident or trends that are developing. It reports a given phenomenon as it is (Akuezuilo, 1993 and Adana, 1996). It involves collecting data in order to test hypotheses or answer research questions concerning the current status of the subject of a study. Typically, data for a descriptive survey study were collected through questionnaire, interview and observation. These attributes appropriately suit this study; hence, the study adopted the descriptive type for collecting and analyzing data.

#### **Population, Samples and Sampling Techniques**

The populations of this study were all teachers and under graduate students of public universities which were found in Amhara National Regional State, Northern Western Ethiopia. In order to select sample study areas and sample respondents from the entire population, multi stage cluster sampling technique was used. From the three generation universities, one university from each generation had been selected, and samples were drawn from the clustered colleges and departments. By using lottery method, Debre Tabor University, Debre Markos University and Bahir Dar University had been selected as study areas since there was homogenous population which is possible to generalize. The sample size from these universities was drawn from the students as well as from the instructors. Sample students determined by using the following formula.

$$n = \frac{Za/2^2pq}{w^2}$$

#### **Where;**

n = the minimum sample size

Za/2= level of confidence (95%=1.96)

P= the proportion of PI practice in the area assuming that 50%

Q=1-p (50%)

W= margin of error (5%)

Based on the above formula, the minimum sample size for this study were 384 sample students. But by considering multistage cluster nature if the study the researchers used a design effect of 2 and taking 2% of none response rate and the final sample size were **783 sample students**. By using the same formula, from the total teacher populations of the study, **768 instructors** are the samples without considering non response rates. Hence, the total sample sizes were **1551students and instructors**.

### **Data Gathering Instruments**

#### **Questionnaire**

This tool was employed to collect preliminary information on attitudes of teachers and students to use English as medium of instruction, the factors that affect not to use English and the practices of using English among teachers and students. The questionnaire had three parts. The

*A Study on Students' and Teachers' Perceptions, Challenges and Practices of Using English as a Medium of Instruction: In Focus of Three Public Universities in North Western Ethiopia*

first part targeted on respondents' preliminary information. In the second part, a questionnaire on 5-Lickart Scale was designed to investigate students' and teachers' attitude towards the use of English as a medium of instruction and the practice of using English in classroom. Questionnaires on 4-Lickart Scale were designed to investigate variables that trigger students and teachers to switch a code as the last part of the questionnaire.

**Classroom Observation**

Observation of classroom interactions was involved teachers' lectures and students' class activity or demonstration. The researchers themselves as a non-participant observer conducted observations by using prepared observation checklists. This tool enabled to witness and documents the actual practice of the classroom medium instructions among the teacher participants and students. This tool used to triangulate a data obtained from the questionnaire.

**Interviews**

The reason of using interview in data collection process is to supplement the data which was obtained by using questionnaires and observations. Semi-structured interview was used to strengthen the data collected through other instruments and to investigate detail information on the extent of teachers' use English as a classroom language and student related factor. Also, students' attitude in using English was strengthened by the interview in addition to what was obtained from the questionnaires.

It was conducted with two instructors and five students selected by simple random sampling technique within the sample size from every sample departments.

**Analysis and Discussions of Results**

**Results Obtained from Teacher' Questionnaires**

By using teachers' questionnaires, factors which were affecting the practice of using English as a medium of instruction and teachers' practice of using English as instructional language in the classroom addressed in this section. To analyze the data descriptive statistics such as mean value and inferential statistics like correlation and regression were used, and the obtained results are explained under every table. In addition, results obtained by using classroom observation were triangulated and explained with the description of results which were collected by teachers' questionnaires.

**Table 1 The Aggregate Mean of Teacher Related Difficulties and Challenges**

Aggregate item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The aggregate mean on teacher related difficulties and challenges	768	2.2	.61

As can be seen in the table above, the aggregate mean value of teacher related difficulties and challenges were 2.2. This data was collected by using six questionnaires as can be seen in the appendix section. According to the given number for likert scale responses in the given question this mean value almost represented teacher related difficulties and challenges were at mild challenge level.

**Table 2 The Aggregate Mean Value of Student Related Difficulty and Challenges**

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Student-related difficulties and challenges	768	3.11	.68

Within the above table 2, the aggregate mean value obtained from student related difficulties and challenges are 3.11 which obtained from four items of questionnaires. According to

*A Study on Students' and Teachers' Perceptions, Challenges and Practices of Using English as a Medium of Instruction: In Focus of Three Public Universities in North Western Ethiopia*

teachers' response, this status of student related difficulties and challenges were significant level.

**Table 3 Factors Enforce Teachers to Use Mixed Code in the Classroom**

Aggregate item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Factors may enforce teachers to use mixed code in the classroom	768	2.75	.458

As stated under the aggregate item of table 3, the mean value of factors which enforced teachers to use mixed code in the classroom is 2.75. As can be seen in the appendix of teachers' questionnaires, this mean value is obtained from four levels of lickert scale responses, and this aggregate result implied that those factors usually enforce teachers to use mixed code in the classroom.

**Table 4 The Practice of Using English as a Medium of Instruction**

Aggregate item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. The practice of using English as a medium of instruction	75	2.30	.278

As can be seen above, the obtained result from teachers' questionnaires on practice of using English as a medium of instruction is 2.30 mean values. This aggregate mean indicates that more than half of the total teachers' time they used English as a medium of instruction; nevertheless, by nearly equal time of these teachers, English language was not used.

During observation, it was seen that teachers were mixing Amharic language in explaining academic concepts in the classroom. However, it was observed that a few students could not communicate through Amharic language. Such practice of using local language in multi cultural classroom might resulted bias among students in a classroom.

**Table 5 The Correlation of Various Factors with Students' Practice in Using English as a Medium of Instruction**

Factors		Practice	
1.	Teacher related Difficulties and challenges	Pearson Correlation	-.35
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.047
2.	Student-related Difficulties and challenges	Pearson Correlation	-.716
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.04
3.	Factors may enforce teachers to use mixed code in the Classroom	Pearson Correlation	-.63
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.0466

As can be seen above, Pearson's correlation coefficient of the relationship between the independent variable teacher related difficulties and challenges with the dependent variable the practice of using English as a medium of instruction is -0.35. According to these responses, it can be implied that there was weak and opposite relationships between teacher related difficulties and challenges with teachers' practice of using English as a medium of instruction.

Next to this, the correlation coefficient of students' related difficulty and challenge with the practice of using English as a medium of instruction was -0.716 in Pearson's correlation. This correlation coefficient number indicates that there was a strong correlation between those two independent and dependent variables.

*A Study on Students' and Teachers' Perceptions, Challenges and Practices of Using English as a Medium of Instruction: In Focus of Three Public Universities in North Western Ethiopia*

Finally, in the above table 5, the relationship between factors may enforce teachers to use mixed code in the classroom and the practice of using English as a medium of instruction is -0.63 in Pearson's correlation coefficient. In other words, there was average relationships between factors may enforce teachers to mix codes and the practice of using English as a medium of instruction. Accordingly, when these factors increased, the practice of using English decreased oppositely.

**Table 6 Regression Result of Student Related Difficulties and Challenges to Teachers' Practice of Using English as a Medium of Instruction**

Independent variable	Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
	Beta	
1 Student-related difficulties and challenges	-.446	.004

Dependent variable: Practice

In table 6 the standardized coefficient, Beta value of student related difficulties and challenges on the practice of using English as a medium of instruction is -.446. This means if other variables remains constant, student related difficulties and challenges predicts to decrease the practice of using English as a medium of instruction by 44.6 percent.

**Table 7 Regression Results of Factors May Enforce Teachers to Use Mixed Code in the Classroom**

Independent variable	Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
	Beta	
1 Factors enforced teachers to use mixed code in the classroom	-.327	.038

Dependent variable: Practice

In table 7, the prediction of factors enforced teachers to use mixed code in the class on the dependent variable the practice of using English as a medium of instruction was -.327 Beta coefficient. The implication of this number is one unit of factors enforce teachers to use mixed code in the classroom decreased 32.7 of the practice of using English as a medium of instruction.

### 3.2 Results Obtained from Students' Questionnaires

Students' questionnaires focused on collecting information regarding to teachers' practice of code switching, students' perception of code switching and students' perception of using English as a medium of instruction. Base on their convenience, the data obtained from some items of questionnaires were analyzed separately in applying item analysis. Whereas, the remaining data collected by other items of questionnaires analyzed by using their aggregate mean according to their uniformity to be grouped in to similar variable.

**Table 8 Students' Response on Teachers' Practice of Code-switching**

No.	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Does Your Bilingual teacher use his mother tongue in class?	783	1.47	.56557
2.	How much does your bilingual teacher code switch?	783	2.33	1.12828
3.	When did your bilingual teacher use his mother tongue in class?	783	2.46	1.25618

*A Study on Students' and Teachers' Perceptions, Challenges and Practices of Using English as a Medium of Instruction: In Focus of Three Public Universities in North Western Ethiopia*

As it can be seen from the above table, students responded with the mean value of 1.47 on the given question that if their bilingual teachers use mother tongue in class. This mean value is the average of two categorical response options. This dichotomous response of 1 stands for “yes” and 2 stands for answer “No”

By the second question, students were asked to answer the percentage of code switching their teachers practiced, and they answered with the mean value of 2.33 that represented from 50% up to 90%. In addition to this, in the last item of the above table, students confirmed that with the mean value of 2.46 on the given question to know when teachers used their mother tongue. This number stands for teachers used their first language to explain their ideas in sentences level. From this specific result, it can be concluded that code switching was practiced at sentences level for academic conversation in the study universities.

From classroom observation, it was found when class activities were given to be done in pairs and groups, students were using their first language as a medium of communication among them. This students' practice of using their own mother tongue might influence teachers not to be motivated to use English language as instructional media.

**Table 9 Students' Response on Teachers' Practice on Code-switching**

No.	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
4.	Do you think it is necessary for teachers to code switch in bilingual classroom? Why?	783	1.33	.80
5.	How much do you think is it proper to code switch?(if you don't agree, you can ignore this	783	2.57	1.0

As it can be seen, item 9 asked students about the necessity of code switching by the teachers in bilingual classes. Accordingly, the students confirmed that the importance of code switching with the mean value of 1.33. In line to this, at item 5, the students thought that the amount of using mother tongue to be practiced in the classroom indicated that 2.57 mean value which means near to ten up to fifty percent is necessary. According to students' interests, they required from ten up to percent usage of their first language during learning in the classroom.

**Table 10 Students' Response on their Perception of Code-switching**

No.	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
6.	Do you think it is more effective for teachers to code switch than to teach only in English?	783	2.2	.91
7.	If your bilingual teachers talk to you with different codes, what's your impression?	783	1.47	1.20
8.	When you speak with people who use two or more codes, do you think what the hearers' impression?	783	1.57	.84

Within the above table by item 10, students were asked that if they thought teachers' code switching was more effective than teaching in using English only. For this given question, students responded with the mean value of 2.2 by which students thought that teachers should use it to explain at sentences level.

Further, by using item 7 students were asked what their impression was when their bilingual teachers talked them with different codes, and they answered it with the mean value of 1.47 which indicates there were students felt positive and negative impression on switching codes in different languages. Regarding to item 8, it asked students to know the hearer's impressions about people who used two or more codes. Hence, students reacted for this question with the mean value of 1.57. This mean was obtained from dichotomous responses, and the results can be generalized according to students' response, the hearers' impression was more of negative.

*A Study on Students' and Teachers' Perceptions, Challenges and Practices of Using English as a Medium of Instruction: In Focus of Three Public Universities in North Western Ethiopia*

During students' interview, most students explained that they felt comfort when their instructors explain concepts by using Amharic language. But others who were not able to communicate through Amharic perceived that as they were neglected in the teaching learning process.

**Table 11 Students' Response on their Perception of Code-switching**

No.	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
9.	When other student code switch, what's your impression?	783	1.6	.72
10.	As a language phenomenon, what do you think about using other language over English in class room?	783	1.6	.68

In the above table, students were asked what their impression was when other student code switched. They gave their answers with the mean value of 1.6 that indicated there were students with negative impression as well as positive impression. Similarly, students responded with the mean value of 1.6 for the question they were asked to answer as a language phenomenon what they thought about using other language over English in classroom. Again, this number represented there was negative impressions as well as positive impressions on the students' side.

**Table 12 Students' Response on their Perception of Code-switching**

No.	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
11.	Which is the key stage for the development of your bilingual competence?	783	2.25	1.3
12	Do you think it is relevant between your foreign language development and the code switching of your teachers in class?	783	2.47	1.1
13	What do you need most in bilingual class?	783	2.31	1.2

Item 11 asked students about the key stage of development for their bilingual competence. The mean value of their response is 2.25, and this number can represent students' idea that they develop bilingual competence in secondary level of education. By next item 12, students were asked to know their thinking on the relevant between their foreign language development and their teachers' code switching in class. Accordingly, the mean value of students' response on this item is 2.47. This mean value indicates that code switching was relevant on students' foreign language development.

Finally, item 13 asked students regarding to their need in bilingual classes. For this questionnaire item, they responded with mean value of 1.2 which means they need professional knowledge in bilingual classes.

From students' interview, it was found that students believed that using mother tongue in foreign language classroom is important. They explain that starting primary schools, students used bilingual dictionaries, and this past experience influenced them to know new words and terms they need translation in to local languages. However, as researchers knew from their experience, local languages did not well develop to describe scientific terms. Thus, maximizing using English explanation to know scientific terms and concepts might make students more effective students learning in long run.

Further, for the asked oral question, students explained that secondary and elementary education levels are a better stage of learning to develop their foreign language competence. This perception might limit their effort to develop English language competence at university level.

**Table 13 The Aggregate Result on Perceptions of students towards Using English as Medium of Instruction**

No	Aggregate item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
14.	The aggregate result of students' perception on using English as instructional media	783	2.81	.90

The result in the above table represented that the aggregate mean values of students' perception of using English as a medium of instruction those were obtained through eight items of questionnaires. Thus, as it is seen there, the aggregate mean values of these items were 2.81 that mean students had positive perception towards using English as a medium of instruction.

**Table 14 The Aggregate Result on Perceptions of students towards Using English as Medium of Instruction**

No.	Aggregate item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
15.	Students' perception in using English medium	783	2.48	1.32

Within the above table, item 15 represented the aggregate result of two questions which were measuring students' perception of using English as a medium of instruction. As can be seen, the mean value result obtained from the two items of questionnaire was 2.48. In other words, this mean value implied that if students were forced not to use their mother tongue in the classroom, they would develop negative perception towards the target language English.

#### 4. Conclusions

Based on the findings obtained from questionnaires, observations and interviews, students' perception towards code switching is both positive and negative. Students who perceive positively to the code switching believed that using first language could develop foreign language competence. Whereas students who could not communicate in Amharic, they preferred learning in English only. Teachers perceived that student related difficulties and challenges limit them not to use English as a medium of instruction. In addition to this, the practice of using English as a medium of instruction within the classroom is not significantly maximized. Student related difficulty and other related factors influence negatively the practice of English as a medium of instruction.

#### 5. Recommendations

Depending on the conclusions of the study, the following suggestions are made

- University teachers should understand that when they use Amharic language in the classroom whether or not all of the students able to communicate through this language.
- Instructors who are teaching in universities should maximize using English as a medium of instruction since students are from various Ethnical backgrounds.
- Ethiopian secondary schools should work more on students' language competence like supporting English Language clubs and emphasizing language learning for communication etc to minimize student related factors in university.

#### Reference

Alidou, H. & Brock-Utne, B. (2011). Teaching Practices - teaching in a Familiar Language. *Optimizing learning, Education and Publish in Africa: the language factor. A Review and Analysis of Theory and Practice in Mother Tongue and Bilingual Education in Sub-Saharan Africa.* UIL/ADEA.

*A Study on Students' and Teachers' Perceptions, Challenges and Practices of Using English as a Medium of Instruction: In Focus of Three Public Universities in North Western Ethiopia*

- Burns, A. (2014). "English as a Medium of Instruction: Challenges for Vietnamese Tertiary Lecturers". **The Journal of Asia TEFL**. 11(3).
- Education and Training Policy. (1994). **Addis Ababa**: ST. George Printing Press.
- Francis, D. J., Rivera, M., Lesaux, N., Kieffer, M., & Rivera, H. (2006). **Research-Based Recommendations for Instruction and Academic Interventions**. Portsmouth, NH: Center on Instruction. Retrieved from <http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/ELL1-Interventions.pdf>
- Kersaint, G., Thompson, D., & Petkova, M. (2009). **The nature of mathematics language. In Teaching mathematics to English language learners**. New York: Routledge.
- Kyeyune, R. (2010). Challenges of using English as a medium of instruction in multilingual contexts: A view from Ugandan classrooms. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*. 16 (2).
- LemlemTelila. (2010). Review of some recent literature: Identifying Factors that Affect Ethiopia's Education Crisis. 2 (2)
- Rugemalira, J. M. (2005). Theoretical and practical challenges in a Tanzanian English medium primary school. Online resource