Benefits and Challenges of Amharic as a Medium of Instruction for Ethnic Minority Children at Primary Schools of Konso Zone: A Qualitative Inquiry

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ABSTRACT
The present study examines benefits and challenges of teaching ethnic minority children in non mother tongue or Amharic language at primary schools of Konso Zone. To this end, the study used a qualitative case study design was employed with semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion as the main data gathering tool. The participants of the study were purposefully selected students, teachers, school administrators and students' parents. Semi-structured interview was conducted with ten school administrators and fourteen students' parents and focus group discussion was conducted with fourteen grade four students. The collected data were analyzed thematically and described by inductive processes based on the grounded theory method. The findings of the study indicated some major benefits and challenges of teaching children in second language at primary schools. Finally, based on the findings conclusions and recommendations were forwarded to Woreda Education Office, zonal education desk, regional education bureaus (REB) and Ministry of Education (MoE).
Keywords*:* Language; Ethnic Minority; Amharic Language; Medium of instruction

1. INTRODUCTION
Language is a tool of communication and it is an indicator of cultural identity of an individual or a group (Seidel & Moritz, 2009). It plays a pivotal role to express, transmit, and protect/preserve society's culture and other social capital (Sirbu, 2015). Africa is the world's most linguistically diverse continent (Language Rich Africa, 2015). Ethiopia is one of the horns of African countries with over 80 ethnic groups and languages, in under four language families, (viz., Cushitic, Semitic, Omotic and Nilo-Saharan). Amharic is the federal working language of Ethiopia and belongs to the Semitic language family (Rakotondrainy, 2013).

After the fall of 'Dergue' regime, no part of the past Ethiopian education policy has been left untouched. One of the education policy reforms made by the current government is an introduction of mother tongue as media of instruction at primary school (FDRE, 1994). The introduction of mother tongue at primary school has been strengthened in Ethiopian Federal Democratic Republic Constitution, article 5 and 39 (FDRE, 1994). The rationale behind for the introduction of mother tongue as a medium of instruction is basically for two major reasons: learning in the mother tongue at primary school is the right for the nations and nationalities of Ethiopia and pedagogic advantage for children in the early grades (FDRE, 1994).

In Ethiopia, according to Getachew & Derib study in (2006), only twenty one nationality languages excluding Amharic are introduced as a medium of instruction in the early grades. Although current Ethiopian language policy including constitution give equal right for all nations and nationalities languages to develop and learn in their own nationality languages, but still a number of ethnic minority groups' languages have not been launched as media of instruction in the primary schools due to obvious reasons. As a result, Amharic is medium of instruction at primary school for majority of Ethiopian ethnic minority groups. This paper is; therefore, aimed to investigate the benefits and challenges of teaching ethnic minority children in non mother tongue or Amharic language at primary schools of Konso Zone.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Education and language are inseparable. Education involves the process of communication. The process of communication conducted through language (Seifi, 2014; UNESCO, 2007). Nevertheless, language choice for instructional purpose is debatable issue and not straightforward for countries with multilingual societies (UNESCO, 2007). Although choosing instructional language is complex issue, international organizations like UNESCO promotes mother tongue as medium of instruction at primary school because of its psychological, sociological and pedagogical advantages.

For instance, the 1953's UNESCO declaration confirmed that mother tongue instruction can bridge the gap between home language and the language of instruction in the school. Furthermore, various research findings, for example, the studies conducted by Bethlehem (2016); Ramachandran (2012); Kafata (2016); UNESCO (2007); Yared (2017); Awopetu (2016) found that providing early education for/to children in their mother tongue improves enrollment rate, pupils' participations in learning process, children's learning abilities, pupils grasp things faster and which in turn enhances internal efficiency of the school system than non mother tongue instruction.

The work of Mebratu (2016), on the other hand, found that mother tongue instruction provides psychological advantage for children, because it boosts their self- confidence, psychological stamina, self-expressive skills, clarity of classroom communication and instruction. Education in mother tongue is not only important for pedagogical, sociological and psychological purpose, but also it is the language in which a child finds his/her identity (Seifi, 2014).

The Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) is a higher degree of linguistic diversity than other parts of Ethiopia. It has fifty six (56) ethnic groups, with their own distinct geographical locations, languages, cultures and social identities (UNICEF, 2016). In the different parts of the region, only nine nationality languages have been introduced as media of instruction at primary school in different grade levels (such as Sidama 1–6, Gedeofa 1–6, Koreta 1–6, Wolaitta 1–6, Gamo 1–6, Kambata 1–6, Hadiya 1–6, Silt'e 1–6, Kafenigno 1–4, Kabena 1-4) and the other two nationality languages (Konta and Gofa) are being prepared, but their grade level is not decided and Dawro is given as a subject only according to Smith's (2008) report.

Konso ethnic minority groups are one of the Ethiopian nationalities who found in Southwestern part of the Ethiopia. They have their own language called Afan Konso, culture, norms, customs, and traditions and so on, but still Amharic language is medium of instruction at primary school. The nationality languages which are introduced after the introduction of mother tongue as a medium of instruction are developed up to higher education. In some public universities, vernacular languages are launched as a department. For example, Amharic, Afan Oromo, and Tigrinya are being taught as subjects up to postgraduate level (Getachew & Derib, 2006).

It cannot be denied that introducing all ethnic groups mother tongue as media of instruction is not roazy road to developing countries like Ethiopia due to scarcity of financial and human resources, multiplicity of languages and dialects, using inconsistent strategies to manage the situation, poor attitudes of society towards mother tongue and instructional problems (Hirut,2007). However, it seems that still ethnic minority groups' children could not access to benefits that gain from mother tongue instruction. In addition, as compared to dominant ethnic groups' nationality language, many minority ethnic groups' languages are lagging behind dominant ethnic group languages.

In our country, a substantial amount of studies have been conducted on the language policy of Ethiopia by local, foreign, local and foreign researchers jointly. Local researchers (e.g., Bethlehem, 2016; Yared, 2017; Abeje, 2017; Hirut 2007; Mesfin, 2014; Mebratu, 2014; Mebratu, 2016) mainly focused on the impact, implementation, challenges, benefits and challenges of mother tongue instruction. Foreign and local researchers like Bloor & Wondwosen (1996); Heugh, Benson, Berhanu & Mekonnen (2007); Salawu & Asemahagn (2015) on the other hand, jointly reviewed and studied issues and ideologies of Ethiopian language policy. Furthermore, after the change of Ethiopian language policy in 1991, foreign researchers (e.g., Smith, 2008; Vujcich, 2013; Seidel & Moritz, 2009) generally studied the politics of contemporary language policy of Ethiopia, policy and practice of Ethiopian language policy and changes in Ethiopia's language and education policy.

Although many articles have been written in current Ethiopia's language policy by domestic and foreign researchers, it is evidenced that little attention has been given to the psychological and pedagogical benefits and challenges of Amharic as media of instruction for ethnic minority groups at primary school level. Thus, the main purpose of this article is to fill this research gaps in examining

the benefits and challenges of Amharic as media of instruction for Konso ethnic minority groups at primary school level. The intention of this paper is to seek answers to the following two basic research questions:

1. What are the benefits of using Amharic as media instruction at primary school for Konso minority children?

2. What are the major challenges that face Konso's ethnic minority children while learning their primary education in Amharic language?

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

In this study, a qualitative case study design was used, because it is important to investigate the problem in-depth in one or more real-life settings (case sites) over an extended period of time (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

3.3 Total Population and Sampling Technique

In the study, I employed both purposive sampling technique was used to select primary schools including grades, parents, school administrators and students for interview and focus group discussion. According to Konso Zone Education Office information, there are a total of one hundred primary schools (sixty four full primary school and twenty six first cycles). Of which, I purposefully selected four first cycle rural primary schools that found apart from Karat (the capital town of Konso Zone). And there were reasons for this. In the first place, primary schools which are found in the town and surrounding areas, students are composed of different ethnic groups and able to speak in Amharic language and projected that they face low challenges in learning process as compared to children learning at rural schools because most children from rural areas are unable to speak in Amharic language. In addition, primary schools that found in towns, many teachers are also from different parts of Ethiopia and believed that they have interest in Amharic language as medium of instruction. Hence, I purposefully selected four full primary schools which are found in rural areas, viz., Gamole, Korea Dogottu, Jarso and Gocha full primary schools.

From purposefully selected schools, I also deliberately selected grade four students for focus group discussion. This is because I anticipated that they better understand the focus group discussion questions and raise important points in the focus group than other grades. Among four purposefully selected schools, the focus group participants were selected from Korea Dogottu and Gocha full primary school to make the focus group manageable in terms of time, effort and resources.

Accordingly, fourteen (nine male and five female) students were selected based on the suggestion of classroom teacher. On the other hand, ten school administrators who have ample work experiences (such as school principals and vice principals and department heads) consisting of eight male and two female were purposefully selected for interview. Furthermore, I intentionally called the parents of students who were participated in the focus group session for interview purpose in order to easily access students' parents. Of which, twelve were male and the remaining two were of them were female ones.

3.4 Data Gathering Tools

The data for the study was collected via semi-structured interview, focus group discussion. All data gathering instruments were prepared in English language and translated into Afan Konso language using Amharic letters, because Latin letters that used to write in Afan Konso language are not formally introduced at school. I prepared semi-structured interview for school administrators and students' parents as "it allows informants the freedom to express their views in their own terms" (Cohen & Crabtree 2006, p.2). Again, I conducted focus group discussion with students to get a rich data and to compare results among different groups as recommended by Freitas, Oliveira, Jenkins & Popjoy,1998).

3.5 Data Gathering Procedures

Permission to conduct the study was sought from the Education Office of Konso Zone. After I got permission, recruitment of study facilitators was conducted. I recruited eight teachers whose mother tongue language is Afan Konso from purposefully selected schools to translate my interview and focus group guide questions to parents and students.

Once permission process and recruitment and training of research facilitators has been completed, the study target groups were introduced about the purpose or details of the study and their informed

consents were secured and convenient time for them was also considered. Furthermore, the study subjects were informed that individually focused report will never appear in any part of this paper and all information provided by them is remains confidential. Afterwards, data gathering process was conducted turn by turn with the study participants.

The interview session was conducted with ten (eight male and two female) school administrators and fourteen students' parents that consisting of twelve male and two female parents. School administrators' interview was conducted in their respective offices in Amharic language and later translated into English language. The parents' interview was carried out at Gocha and Korea Dogottu full primary schools in their first language (Afan Konso) via assigned translator to reduce the communication block and then translated into English language.

Upon the completion of interview sessions, focus group discussions were conducted with fourteen (nine male and five female) grade four students per session (the first seven students were organized as group one and the remaining seven students were categorized as group two) at their respective schools. The group size was decided according to Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick (2008) advice for optimum size from six to eight participants with maximum of twelve (excluding researchers).

3.6 Data Analysis Method
In this study, I employed qualitative aspect of data analysis. Initially, I read the interview and focus group transcripts thoroughly to gain a sense of the data and to evaluate the data without bias. I continued this holistic evaluation of the data multiple times, and assigned labels for emerging themes. I then organized the emerging themes into the major themes and sub themes. Finally, the emerged major themes and sub themes were described in the inductive process using the grounded theory method.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
Major Benefits of Teaching Ethnic Minority Children in Second or Amharic Language
The empirical data that I collected via interview and focus group discussion revealed the following major benefits of teaching ethnic minority children in Amharic language. In different parts of this paper, I used non- mother tongue or second language or national language interchangeably to refer Amharic language.

Motivates Children and Parents
In this study, a number of participants described that teaching children in second language (hereafter referred to as L2) mainly motivates children and their parents. From students' parents, Duba and Berito, in interview session underscored the psychological benefit of teaching children in Amharic language. Duba's answer is very short and clear: "our children have motivation to learn unknown language (Amharic) than known language (Afan Konso)" (Male, interview participant-10). Berito, additionally shared his personal experience: "I have two children who are attending their primary education in grade four. Occasionally, I check my children's interest towards learning in Amharic language and both of them are happy by learning in Amharic language" (Male, interview participant-14).

I further asked students' parents about whether they have positive impression on current medium of instruction or not. Kara, the parent of Alemitu, said that: " it motivates us too, because tomorrow our children are advantageous by knowing national language" (Male, interview participant-11). Gelebo, Desta's parent, added that: "am happy as my children are learning in a new language" (Male, interview participant-8). Kenchero, the parent of Abebech, has strengthened Kara's and Gelebo's thought and his response is representative of others' opinion:

> *Learning in Amharic language is important to understand their environment in two Ethiopian languages. They know one object in our mother tongue and learn that object in Amharic language at school. For example, in Afan Konso,"Dhaka" is "Dingay" in Amharic meaning stone in English. Thus, it motivates us and our children as well (Male, interview participant-5).*

On top of parents concern, from school administrators, Guyita, vice principal at Gamole full primary school, expressed that "since Amharic is national language, it motivates teachers to teach, students to learn and parents to send their children to school" (Male, interview participant-5). The another school administrator, Bekele, vice principal at Korea Dogottu full primary school, noted that "in short,

students are happy by learning all subjects in Amharic language though they face some difficulties in classroom learning processes" (Male, interview participant-2).

At last, I tried to ask children in focus group concerning how do they feel their education in Amharic language. From focus group discussion one (henceforth referred to as FGD-1) participant, Kalma, responded that: "I am happy!" (Male, FGD-1 participant-3). I looked for differences in views from this group but the remaining six students are also happy in current medium of instruction as Kalma said. However, another participant from focus group discussion two (hereinafter referred to as FGD- 2), Bekumsa, further added that: " it motivates me!" (Male, FGD-2 participant-4). The rest six students from the same group shared Bekumsa's thought.

I again repeatedly asked them "why they are happy" in learning their education in Amharic language. A few children in both focus groups attempted to provide some reasons but most were kept silent! From FGD-2, Kusiya, answered that: "because it is new language!"(Male, FGD-2 participant-2). In addition, Desta, one of participants in FGD-1 said: "as it is national language of the country" (Male, FGD-1 participant-5). In sum, from the above perspectives of my study subjects one can understand that teaching children in Amharic language motivates children to learn and parents to send their children to school.

Improves Children's Social Interaction

The study participants explained that teaching children in national language at early grades enhances their social interaction with other Ethiopian nations and nationalities. They reported that if our children learn in their mother tongue or Afan Konso, they can hardly interact with others, because Afan Konso language is spoken by few Konso people. Their observation is concurrent with Miller's (2000) contention on the value of language spoken by many people for social interaction in his empirical study that conducted in Australian high schools between immigrant and English speaking students. He realized that non-English speaking students discriminate themselves from English speaking children due to language barrier.

Similarly, participants of this study noted that fail to teach children in the language that spoken many people like Amharic creates social interaction problem among students when they interact with others. Among students' parents, Kussiya, the Kalma's parent, in the interview session said that "teaching our children in Afan Konso language at primary school is simply off-putting our children here at Konso. Since Amharic language is spoken in different parts of the country, our children can easily interact with others" (Male, interview participant-4). Orkaydo, the parent of Barsha, further added on Kussiya's view. Here are some quotes that taken from his interview answer:

> *Teaching children in mother tongue limits our children's social interaction with others. For instance, we can see children who are learning in their mother tongue at primary school in our surrounding, however, these children are unable to interact easily with neighborhood children who speak in Amharic language (Male, interview participant-3).*

Another interview participant, Kansite, the parent of Kirubel and the remaining eleven parents stressed on the interaction value of Amharic language in the market places. And the following quote is his concern that extracted from interview transcript:

Teaching our children in Amharic language is not only important to children to interact with others at school, but also in the market places (the place where buying and selling processes take place). If you go to our town Karat (the capital town of Konso) merchants are from different corners of Ethiopia and interact with you in Amharic language than Afan Konso (Male, interview participant-3).

Kansite's observation is consistent with Bloor's & Wondwosen's (1996) study finding that identified Amharic language as the language of the capital.

In addition, school administrators underlie on the importance of learning early education in Amharic language for social interaction when the children join further education. In connection to this, Wondifrew, principal at Gocha full primary school says:

In my understanding and personal experiences, in Ethiopian higher education institutions, students, teachers, university community members and others mainly use Amharic language for interaction purpose than other languages. Thus, when our children join higher education, they can easily interact with other nations and nationalities children without any constraint (Male, interview participant-4).

Another participant, Debebe, department head at Korea Dogottu full primary school added that:

Many primary schools are here at our surrounding, but secondary schools are not opened in many kebeles and hence found in towns. Most children in towns speak and interact with others in Amharic language at secondary schools than Afan Konso. Thus, teaching children in Amharic language improves our children's social interaction when they join secondary school (Male, interview participant-6).

Lastly, Girma, department head at Gamole full primary school, relates the value of learning in language that spoken by many people and social interaction. His response typically summarizes others' concern:

For human being, it is natural to move from place to place. When you move from place to place, knowing the language that spoken by many people is important. In our case; for example, Amharic and some other Ethiopian languages are cross national or inter-ethnic. Therefore, when our children move to attend further education like secondary and tertiary education, move to urban areas due to family and other related cases, they can easily interact with others (Male-interview participant-9).

In addition, I asked focus group discussants whether learning in Amharic language improves their social interaction with others. All children in FGD-1 and FGD-2 said: "Yes!". I further asked them "how" but as grade four students their response was very short. Although FGD-1 participants not replied on how learning in Amharic language improves children's social interaction, Kusiya, one of FGD-2 respondents replied: "when we meet with others" (Male-FGD-2 participant-2). The other students in this group have similar opinion with Kusiya's response.

To sum up, according to above information we can become aware of that teaching children in the language that spoken by many is important for their social interaction when they move from place to place to different purposes.

Makes Children to be Competent at National Level

Most participants particularly children's parents and school administrators described that learning in national language makes the children to be competent at national level. Among students' parents, Kedayo, the parent of Genet, reacted to my interview question by asking me a question:

What is the purpose of education? Paused her talking for a moment! Then when she was answering, she said that the purpose of education is educating or teaching students to know unknown. Our children already know Afan Konso, so why we educate our children in Afan Konso language? Rather educating our children in Amharic language creates good opportunity for them to know national language and to be competent at national level (Female, interview participant-9).

On the other hand, only Guyo, the parent of Kaliso, has shared somewhat different opinion as compared to others because he stressed on the value of teaching primary school children in both Amharic and mother tongue (Afan Konso) languages. The following conversation made between Guyo and me in interview session:

Guyo: In my opinion, our language (Afan Konso) should not be forgotten. Language is our identity! Hence, our children should learn both in Amharic and Afan Konso languages.

Zelalem: Are you not interested in present medium of instruction?

Guyo: No, but our language should be also promoted like others.

Zelalem: Ok, what is your language choice for medium of instruction at early primary education?

Guyo: In my opinion, Amharic should continue as a medium of instruction at early grades, but Afan Konso should begin as one subject from grade one in order to improve our language (Male, interview participant-7).

School administrators further added on how teaching children at lower grades makes them competent at national level. Wondifrew, school principal at Gocha full primary school; Guyita, vice principal at Gamole full primary and Asamenu, vice principal at Jarso full primary school school have consistently replied that children have opportunity to know national language at first cylce grades and this turn improves their competence at national level when they grow up and interact with others. Wondifrew responded that:

If we teach our students in their mother tongue, they don't know Amharic language that the current government recognized as official language of Ethiopia. Therefore, teaching them in Amharic language is important for them to be competent at national level (Male, interview participant-4).

Guyita, on the other hand, remembered another researcher's study conducted on related topic before three years back and said: "for the question that you asked me about the benefits of teaching children

in Amharic language, I have also similar response for you as what I responded to previous researcher". The following interchange occurred between me and Guyita during interview session:

Guyita: Even not only teaching in Amharic language at primary school, but also the children should learn in English language properly at primary school too.

Zelalem: Ok, why?

Guyita: You don't know the reason while smiling...learning in Amharic language makes the children nationally competent, whereas English language boosts their international competence.

Zelalem: Are you interested in present media of instruction?

Guyita: Sure! But international language (English) should be given due attention.

Zelalem: So, what is your language choice at primary school?

Guyita: In my opinion, in both first and second cycle primary schools, English should be medium of instruction and Amharic should be given as a subject (Male-interview participant-5).

Asamenu, further connects language of instruction with children's competence. Her response is somewhat in-depth and typically summarizes the remaining seven interviewees. Here are some quotes taken from her answer:

We want our children to be competent at national and international level. We are living in a dynamic world....paused her talking for a moment and in a serious mood. Why we limit our children in mother tongue?....again stopped talking and responding... No..No, with nodding her head to left and right side. Thus, teaching our children in Ethiopian national language makes our children to be competent at national level (Female, interview participant-10).

In general, from the above empirical information we can observe that teaching children in L2 makes them to be competent at national level though some participants have various perspectives in language choice for early grades.

Major Challenges of Teaching Ethnic Minority Children in L2 or Amharic Language
Although the study participants shared some major benefits of teaching children in Amharic language at early primary school, however, they have also reported the following major challenges of using L2 as a medium instruction.

Interaction Between Teacher and Student
As stated in Hall & Wash (2002) classroom interaction between teachers and students is one of the primary means by which learning is accomplished in the classrooms. However, proper interaction between teachers and students has not been well practiced among schools which use L2 as a medium of instruction like Konso primary schools.

In this study, many study participants explained that using L2 as a medium of instruction creates interaction problem between teachers and students in the classroom as well as out of the classroom. They boldly expressed that as a medium of instruction teachers use Amharic language in the classroom, but students hardly listen and attend the lesson and this in turn affects smooth interaction between teachers and students and their learning. Guyita, vice principal of Gamole full primary school in interview session has noted that:

Learning can be takes place when there is mutual understanding between the teachers and students. Students should understand what the teacher is talking about and vice-versa. In our school; for instance, there is lack of mutual understanding between teachers and students because of language barrier. Students in the school as well as out of school speak in their mother tongue called Afan Konso, but teachers use Amharic language in the classroom. This creates interaction problem between students and teachers (Male, interview participant-5).

Among department heads, Debebe, Girma and Gezahegn have related thought with what Guyita responded. Debebe explained that:

Teachers especially from other areas could not easily interact with students in the classroom and out of the classroom. For example, I am Amharic language teacher for grade four students. When students want to ask me a question, they use their mother tongue, but I don't know Afan Konso language. How can I interact with these students? Thus, it is challenging to interact simply with my students (Male, interview participant-6).

Girma, additionally explains:

In the classroom, some children attempt to use Amharic language to ask a question especially a teacher who did not speak in Afan Konso, but they cannot fully express their intention to their teacher

due to language barrier and the teacher also could not understand what they are asking or saying about. Hence, there is misunderstanding between children and teacher (Male, interview participant-9). Gezahegn, describes conflicts that arise between teachers and students or students and students as a result of linguistic limitations and his response is representative of other's view. Here are some quotes that taken from his answer:

Teacher-student interaction is a critical problem at our school. If the teacher is basically from other areas other than Konso can hardly manage conflict when it arises in the school between teacher with student and student with teacher or student with student. Sometimes non Afan Konso speaker teachers bring students who engaged in conflict to school administrators who can able to speak in Afan Konso language. It is time consuming to resolve conflicts that happen in the school. Hence, student-teacher interaction in the classroom is the very challenges among non Afan Konso speaker teachers and Afan Konso speaker students (Male, interview participant-8).

To end with, I attempted to examine the teacher-student interaction from students themselves. In the first place, I asked FGD-1 participants "which language speaker teachers can you easily interact with?" (*hints given like to ask for help, question and so on*). Children in both groups said: "with Afan Konso" speaker teachers. I asked them "why?". Kaliso, felt that:"since our mother tongue is Afan Konso" (Female, FGD-1-participant-6). The other participants in this group have analogous notion with Kaliso's answer. I further asked them: "how can you interact with non Afan Konso speaker teachers?". Desta, from same group, instantly said: "it is very difficult!" (Male, FGD-1 participant-5). The remaining children simply agreed on Desta's outlook. In addition, FGD-2 subjects were also forwarded parallel attitude with FGD-1 participants.

In general, as evidenced in the above empirical data using L2 as medium of instruction at primary school leads to poor interaction between teachers and students in the classroom and outside of the classroom.

Children's Engagement in Learning Process

As suggested by scholars like Park (2003) pupils' active engagement in learning process is important to understand more, learn more, remember more and appreciate the relevance of what they have learned, than students who passively receive what we teach them. Nevertheless, as witnessed from the data, children's engagement in learning process is weak at Konso primary schools due to medium of instruction. Kasech, one of department heads at Jarso full primary school explained that "current method of teaching promotes students' active engagement in the learning process, but our students are passive in the classroom as Amharic is L2 for them" (Female, interview participant-7). Girma, department head at Gamole full primary school, further shared his personal experience on how learners' engagement is low especially in group discussions. In his own words:

In my class; for example, I provide group tasks to students to make the learning process more active. After group formed, some of my students are simply looking at me, some others are chatting with each other in their mother tongue; some others are playing with each other. I order them to do the task but they did not understand me. I cannot speak in Afan Konso! How can I make the class more active in such way? So, I don't want to apply group discussion in my class. I simply present the lesson and some of my students may understand what I am saying (Male, interview participant-9).

Debebe, another interview participant and department head, provided additional insights on current medium of instruction and students' engagement in learning process. The remaining seven school administrators focused on what Debebe said. The following quote shows Debebe's response that taken from his interview excerpt:

Amharic is not mother tongue to Konso children and hence they can hardly listen and speak in Amharic language. Thus, they are not actively participate in the classroom activities such as group discussions, asking questions and class works and so forth. Language is very important in the instructional process. If students learn by the language that they do not know, obviously, their involvement in instructional process is low as compared to mother tongue instruction (Male, interview participant-6).

I further asked children in FGD-1 & FGD-2 how often they actively participate in the classroom activities or not. Abraham, one of FGD-2 participants said that: " rarely" (Male, FGD-2 -participant-7). I asked them again "why?". Barsha and other participants from the same group replied: "language problem" (Male, FGD-2 participant -1). I asked "do you mean that the language you are learning is

difficult to understand?". Most discussants said: "Yes!". I said: "Why?". All of them answered: "Amharic language is not our mother tongue". I patiently tested FGD-2 by posing similar questions but got comparable response from this group as well.

All in all, as studied by Brock-Utne (2007) in most African classrooms, students' involvement in learning process is low due to linguistic problem. Likewise, as it can be observed from Konso primary schools, students' participation in learning process is low because of using L2 as a medium of instruction at primary school level.

Difficulty in Understanding the Lesson

The participants of this study responded that teaching children in non mother tongue leads to difficulty to understand the lesson in the classroom. Girma, one of department heads at Gamole full primary school in interview session explained that:

Students face challenges to grasp the concept of lesson because of language problem. In tests, I construct very simple questions to check whether my students understand simple concepts and information, but they perform poor results. After tests, I always ask my students to explain the reason behind for poor academic performance? They mainly raise medium of instruction. In my opinion, if the medium instruction is Afan Konso, students can easily understand the lesson and perform good results in tests (Male, interview participant-9).

Another interview participant, Asamenu and Bekele, answered a relatively similar concern with what Gima said. Asamenu explains:

As far as my understanding concerned, societies as well as children are happy in present medium of instruction at primary school. Indeed, student's interest is important in learning process, however, interest by itself is not enough to make the teaching and learning process more effective. For your surprise, we have many grade eight students who cannot properly write their names in Amharic language. Thus, what is the value of teaching children in Amharic language at lower cycle primary school? (Female, interview participant-10).

Bekele adds:

Children are not good in four language skills (writing, reading, speaking and listening). In our school, for example, there is no pre-formal school and children directly enroll in grade one without counting /learning letters and numbers. This handicapped children from understanding four language skills up to grade eight. Besides, teaching children in Amharic language is another challenge to understand basic language and literacy skills (Male, interview participant-8).

Furthermore, children themselves revealed the intricacy to understand the lesson while learning in Amharic language though their response is short. I asked FGD-1 and FGD-2 children "can you easily understand the lesson taught only in Amharic language while learning?". Many children in both groups said "No!". I asked them again "so, how do you understand the lesson?". Kebede, from FGD-1 said: "we understand when the teacher translates Amharic into Afan Konso" (Male-FGD-1 participant-2). I asked the focus group members whether all teachers translate Amharic into Afan Konso while teaching. Children in both groups said: "No"! So, how they teach you, I asked them again? Kalucha, from same group and section responded that: " only in Amharic language" (Female-FGD-1 participant-7). I raised one more question to the group about whether the lesson is clear when the teacher translates Amharic into Afan Konso. All of them said: "Yes!".

I, lastly, asked the focus group discussants whether they thought the media of instruction is changed into their mother tongue. Nevertheless, in both groups, all of the students consistently replied: "No!". I posed another question "why?". Most children in FGD-1 as well as FGD-2 not answered to my question but some students said: "because it is national language!".

Generally, according to the above information, we can deduce that using Amharic language as a medium of instruction at early grades lead to difficulty to understand the lesson during learning even though they have no thought on change of medium of instruction in their mother tongue.

Teachers Use Two Languages During Instructional Process

In most African countries, teachers use two or three languages in classroom teaching via safe talk, code switching or code-mixing, because instruction is given in a language that is not normally used in students' immediate environment or a language which neither the learner nor the teacher understands (Obanya, l980 as cited in Brock-Unte,2005). As researched by Brock-Unte (2005) in Tanzanian and

South African secondary schools, teachers use Kiswalli and English interchangeably in classroom teaching even though English is medium of instruction. Likewise, in Ethiopian classrooms like Konso primary schools, principally, Afan Konso speaker teachers use both Afan Konso and Amharic languages for instructional purpose. Among study subjects, school administrators and students reported that irrespective of subjects taught, teachers use two languages (Amharic and Afan Konso) during instructional process except non Afan Konso speaker teacher. Asfaw, principal of Gocha full primary school during interview session mentioned that:

Some schools which are found in towns, many children can able to speak and listen in Amharic language; however, in rural schools like ours, students are hardly speak and listen in Amharic language. Hence, it is difficult to use and teach our children using merely in Amharic language. Therefore, we use both Amharic and Afan Konso languages during classroom teaching (Male, interview participant-1).

Guyita, another interviewee and vice principal at Gamole full primary school says: " *to make the lesson more inclusive and reduce misunderstanding among students, Afan Konso speaker teachers use both Afan Konso and Amharic languages while teaching"* (Male, interview participant-8).

Girma, department head at Gamole full primary school, shared the idea of Asfaw and Guyita, but he uncovered lack of competence among teachers to teach in Amharic language and his response summarizes others' opinion. Here are some quotes taken from his answer:

Not only students, but also for many teachers like as students, Amharic is L2 and they have also lack of proficiency in language to teach children in Amharic language properly. So, they prefer to use their mother tongue in the classroom teaching (Male, interview participant-9).

In addition, Asamenu and Gezahegn are department heads and further added on the use of two languages in the classroom teaching. The following interchange made between Asamenu and me during interview session:

Zelalem: you are department head and teacher in this school. Hence, which language that you frequently use during instructional time?

Asamenu: In my class, I use two languages (Amharic and Afan Konso), unless my students are unable to understand what am talking about in the classroom.

Zelalem: Ok, you use both Amharic and Afan Konso languages while teaching, but after class which language would prefer to interact with your students?

Asamenu: This is obvious....with a lot smiling! I use Afan Konso language, because it is my mother tongue and my students as well.

Zelalem: Good! you can speak both Amharic and Afan Konso, but as I heard there are some non Afan Konso speaker teachers. So, how these teachers interact with their students? And then she explains:

Asamenu: In the classroom, these teachers use merely Amharic language. Some children can identify them and try to ask them unclear ideas in Amharic language. In the out of classroom interaction, they also attempt to approach these teachers in Amharic language. But honestly speaking, non Afan Konso speaker teachers face challenges to interact with students in the classroom and out of the classroom (Female, interview participant-10).

Gezahegn's response is also not far from what Asamenu responded. Gezahegn admits: "Any teaching process depends on audience. Our audiences are Afan Konso speaker students; therefore, I use both Afan Konso and Amharic languages" (Male, interview participant-8). I raised similar questions that I asked Asamenu, but obtained alike response from Gezahegn too.

I further asked FGD 1 and 2 discussants about "in which language the classroom teacher teaches you?". Children in FGD-1 and 2 sessions replied that "both Amharic and Afan Konso languages". I asked them again "as I heard, you have non Afan Konso speaker teachers and hence which language they use in classroom teaching?". Discussants in two groups said: "in Amharic language only!". I further asked them "how often Afan Konso speaker teacher use two languages while teaching?". Most children in both focus group responded: "Always!".

In general, according to the above information one can notice that many teachers use two languages such as mother tongue and L2 during classroom instruction in schools even though the medium of instruction is Amharic.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the study, the benefits of teaching children in non-mother tongue are discussed. The findings of qualitative data revealed that teaching children in Amharic language motivates children and parents, improves children's social interaction and makes children to be competent at national level. Although teaching children in Ethiopian national language at primary has a lot of benefits, however, using second language as a medium of instruction at early grades has its own challenges like interaction problem between teacher and student in the classroom and outside of the classroom, children face difficulty in understanding the lesson, teachers' use of two languages during instruction process. And hence, government bodies such as woreda, zonal and regional education bureaus, including ministry of education should revisit the existing challenges that akin to pedagogic and related issues via conducting researches, follow up and support to improve the instructional process at primary schools of Konso Zone.

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