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## Instructional Media and its Impact on Government and Private Schools in Ethiopia

Julia Devardhi, Ph.D.

Geletesa Biftu, M.A. in TEFL

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### Abstract

There is an old Chinese proverb that says: "*Tell me and I will forget; Teach me and I might remember; Involve me and I will learn.*" This ancient proverb reflects the state of language retention and restoration.

Living in a nation constructed of many diverse cultures provides teachers many unique conditions to their already challenging world of education. For centuries language was taught in the home and today the school is usually the place of language acquisition. Nowadays the two environments should work together to enhance exposure and success. Recently, much attention has been focused on the concept of bilingualism and the role of immersion. More and more of this attention is examining the role of immersion and its preference over the transitional bilingual approach (Kagan, 1990, p. 7). This urges us to carefully consider the impact that instructional media has on government and private schools in Ethiopia, which is a country of diversity in its culture and language. Hence, this research paper, "*Instructional Media and its Impact on Government and Private Schools in Ethiopia*" attempts to see if there exists any significant difference in the use of English as an instructional medium in both private and government schools and finally tries to perceive the cumulative effect that might happen due this difference. Apart from this, the paper also discusses the use of the vernacular language as medium of instruction and its possible impact on the learners.

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**Key words: Instructional media/medium, Immersion, Submersion, Use of English**

## **Introduction**

### **Ethiopian School Language Policy**

Spincer (1997:78) says with regard to deciding which language to use and how and when to use as medium of instruction; this is one of the most pedagogically difficult and potentially challenging issue faced by different societies and schools in many countries. Indigenous researches also show that students and members of the school community are frustrated from the immediate transfer, from mother tongue to foreign language or English. (Shemels M. (2004) and Getu A. (2006)

The Ethiopian educational system has undergone so many changes for many centuries until secular education was adopted in the early 1900s. The elites, mostly, had the privileges of getting involved until 1974 when the government tried to reach the rural areas. The current system follows similar school expansion schemes to the rural areas as the previous 1980s system with an addition of deeper regionalization giving rural education in their own languages starting at the elementary level and with more budgets allocated to the Education Sector.

This policy then has encouraged investors to build schools from kindergarten to colleges and universities. These institutions give ‘a better quality’ education and also minimize the large class ratio imposed on government schools. Though only the richer can afford to be involved. The role of English in Ethiopian education is of great value. All the national exams are conducted in English besides higher educational centers run their education in English. Any person with good fluency is also considered as an educated person.

In the teaching learning process it has been said over and over that there is no single best method or approach. This holds true for every teaching and learning regardless of time and space boundaries as it is one of the basic nature of all human beings.

In previous times, before private schools were given due attention, in Ethiopia almost all the learners used to learn in government schools whether they follow this or that kind of approach. But nowadays there are so many private schools; in fact they are so many that it is almost difficult to choose one from the other. As they are very large in number they also follow and use variety of teaching and learning approaches. Among these is their strong focus on the use of second/foreign languages, especially English, as a medium of instruction (MOI).

Ellis, (2008) on Asian EFL on line journal vol.7, Issue 3, Article 1, strongly advises maximizing L<sub>2</sub> input in order to achieve a better result. He said “... substantial portion of the variance in speed of acquisition of children can be accounted for by the amount and the quality of input they receive. The same is undoubtedly true of L<sub>2</sub> acquisition.” Here in the maximization of L<sub>2</sub> input the writer did not imply anything on the abandonment of mother tongue but the fact is using L<sub>1</sub> together with L<sub>2</sub> could be very much useful. The private schools which focus on the maximization of L<sub>2</sub> input, especially English, could, then seem to agree, partially, with Ellis’s idea except for their avoidance of mother tongue. However, some other researches show that the

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use of mother tongue as medium of instruction is far better than using foreign language. On the other hand the Canadian experience, in their immersion program, witnesses that there is no harm in using the foreign language as medium of instruction.

Here, then, we have two conflicting ideas. One followed by the private schools and other by the government schools. The government schools explicitly state and follow the government educational policy whereas the private schools don't. In the government schools vernacular language is widely used, until second cycle primary school (i.e. 5-8) as instructional medium and then as a subject onwards and finally the grade 8, 10 and 12 national exams are given in English. But, the private schools, abandoning the vernacular language strongly focus on the use of English language starting from kindergarten and this is believed to prepare learners for the "big" exams mentioned above as they are conducted in English. Based on these distinct features parents also make their own choices in selecting the schools for their children. In this regard from the researchers' personal experience and observation learners as well as parents prefer private schools.

No matter what the literature or the government say the private schools are teaching using the foreign language. Parents, knowing or not knowing the effect of mother tongue are sending their children believing that their children might learn better in private schools. Therefore, it is this observation that initiates this research. For parents, then, as part of the society, assuming English language as highest stage of knowledge might drive from such general stereotypic belief.

The private schools, as any institution found in the country, are supposed to be governed by the rules and regulations of the country to perform their duty. One of the rules they should follow with regard to language reads:

*"Cognizant of the pedagogical advantage of the child in learning in mother tongue and the right of nationalities to promote their language, Primary education will be given in nationality languages." Ministry of Education (1994)*

In addition the 1953 UNESCO declaration says "Every effort should be made to provide education in mother tongue". These rules work in the government schools. However the private schools publicly announce their focus on English starting from elementary level as their medium of instruction.

The focus on the English language, as already discussed, might have derived from the strong need of knowledge of the society which the society believe that it is manifested through speaking good English. Here an important aspect to note is that the private schools adherence to English language is not only limited to encouraging students to speak the language but as far as reinforcing negatively the vernacular language speakers. Speakers of Amharic in these schools, from putting tags which reads "Amharic Speaker" on their chests to severely punishing, are negatively rewarded.

## **Medium of Instruction**

Medium of instruction, according to the guide line for the development of language education policy in Europe 2003, “is the language in which the teaching of other subjects is carried out in schools and universities”. This language is the kind of language that needs due consideration when designing as it might handicap the teaching learning process.

It is generally understood that the major target in educational reform is the curricula. In light of this, it is no wonder that the reform covered all disciplines at all levels of educational structure as stated in the policy. Thus, it covers “broad areas of knowledge and skills that enable the students to develop their mental, physical and social responsibilities” ( ICDR: 1994: 1-2) achievable through core subjects categorized as Language, Mathematics, Natural Science, Social Science and Aesthetics.

## **Language**

1.1 Mother Tongue: The content is such that it serves as a medium of instruction at primary level. In addition it has been considered to be instrumental to develop self-reliance and psychological motivation, and retain social and cultural values as well as “retain self identity’.

1.2 Foreign Language: The need for international understanding has been the rational has made essential. Thus English as a long established foreign language used for this purpose have continued to be one of the languages taught. It is also a medium of instruction at secondary and tertiary education.

1.3 National Language: This is a lingua franca of the population apart from being the official language of the Federal Government. In view of this, it is offered at all levels of the education system.

It is widely agreed that it is better for children if their first years of schooling are in their first language even if it the dominant language in the society as it advances the child’s cognitive literacy. Edelsky, 1991:70 on PRAESA Occasional papers no.11 says, “It is difficult to learn skill with instructional nonsense in any language but it is probably easier to learn it in the first language”. As it has been said a child will learn better if the medium of instruction is in his/her own language for better understanding of the subject matter. The assumption is that children have a strong affiliation towards their language and teaching them with foreign language would mean forcing them to do extra cognitive activity.

On the other hand sometimes learners learn in foreign languages from the beginning of their school years. The Canadian “immersion program” is one of these kinds. The purpose of these programmes is to ensure more efficient acquisition of a second or a foreign language. In other countries a medium of instruction other than the first language is introduced later. The purpose of these programmes is to enhance the effectiveness of foreign language learning by greater exposure to and increased use of the language in a greater variety of ways. In fact studies conducted on immersion programs show that early immersion programs are superior to delayed immersion programs. Students involved in the Canadian immersion program achieved a high

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level of proficiency in French. Similarly, evidence shows that students involved in the early immersion programs in Ethiopia achieved a high level of English proficiency, and Ethiopian students English proficiency started to deteriorate after the introduction of the delayed immersion program.

## **Models of Instruction**

There are four main models of instruction used specifically with the English Language Learner. The four models presented are: Submersion, Immersion, Sheltered Immersion, and Bilingual Education. When discussing the models of instruction, they all have the same goal, "the acquisition of English language skills so that the language-minority child can succeed in English-only mainstream classroom" (Cazden, 1992). However, there are three main factors that provide the distinctions between them: whether the first language is utilized in instruction; how long the student receives ESL support; and the training of the teachers. In addition, many issues often have a large impact on these. However, three factors such as money, availability of ESOL trained teachers, availability of bilingual teachers, and beliefs of the administration and public are the most pertinent ones. But, in this paper we discuss only two of the above models, the Immersion and Submersion programs.

### **Immersion Program**

Immersion doesn't mean sink or swim, as opponents argue. All English immersion means that English – not the student's native language – is the primary language of instruction in classrooms and progress toward English fluency is the main goal.

Language immersion is an approach to foreign language instruction in which the usual curricular activities are conducted in a foreign language. This means that the new language is the medium of instruction as well as the object of instruction. Immersion students acquire the necessary language skills to understand and communicate about the subject matter set out in the school's program of instruction. They follow the same curricula, and in some instances, use the same materials (translated into the target language) as those used in the non-immersion schools of their district. (Lambert & Tucker (1972); Swain and Lapkin (1982); Genesee (1983, 1987, 1995))

"Immersion" has been a convenient term, used freely by schools and the media for an increasingly popular form of foreign language education. Unfortunately, in most cases, the term is misused. For many, the term "immersion" seems to imply any class that is taught through the medium of a second language. However, simply teaching a content class (e.g. Math, Music, Science, etc.) in a foreign language is not immersion. The most commonly used definition of immersion comes from Fred Genesee of McGill University, one of the world's leading authorities on immersion education. On page one of his seminal book "Learning Through Two Languages: Studies in Immersion and Bilingual Education" (1987, Newbury House) he provides the following definition of immersion:

*"Generally speaking, at least 50 percent of instruction during a given academic year must be provided through the second language for the program to be regarded as immersion. Programs*

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*in which one subject and language arts are taught through the second language are generally identified as enriched second language programs." (p.1)*

Although bilingual education can be traced back to 3000 BC, the form of bilingual education called immersion education is generally accepted to have started in Quebec, Canada. In 1965, a group of English-speaking parents succeeded in initiating an experimental immersion kindergarten for their students. Their goal was to ensure that their children achieved a high level of French, as well as English, in Quebec where the French-speaking majority were asserting their rights and taking more power in the political and economic fields. Since then, French immersion has spread across the country and is found in every province and territory (for example 7% of the total student population in Ontario is in French immersion). Over 320,000 students in Canada are in some form of immersion program. French immersion is overwhelmingly a public school program so that all students have the option of entering early immersion (starting in kindergarten or grade one), middle immersion (grade 4 or 5) or late immersion (grade 6 or 7) (Lambert & Tucker (1972); Swain and Lapkin (1982); Genesee (1983, 1987, 1995); de Courcy (1993), and Baker (1996)).

According to many researchers like Snow (1986) and the mentioned above, a growing body of research on immersion education has shown that immersion students consistently meet or exceed academic expectations in the following areas:

**Foreign language skills:** Immersion students by far outperform students in traditional foreign language classes. Although students usually do not become “native-like” in the foreign language, they do become functionally proficient in the immersion language and are able to communicate according to their age and grade level.

**First language skills:** In the early years of first language instruction, there may be a lag in first language reading and writing skills. By the end of elementary school, however, immersion students do as well or better than students in “first language-only” classes.

**Content areas:** Immersion students achieve in academic areas as well as students in “first language-only” programs.

**Cultural sensitivity:** Immersion students are more aware of and show positive attitudes towards other cultures.

A great deal of research has centered on foreign language acquisition in various school settings. Over the past thirty years, due in large part to the success of immersion programs, there has been a shift away from teaching language in isolation and toward integrating language and content. Language is acquired most effectively when it is learned in a meaningful social context. For young learners, the school curriculum provides a natural basis for foreign language learning, offering them the opportunity to communicate about what they know and what they want to know, as well as about their feelings and attitudes. Important and interesting content provides a motivating context for learning the communicative functions of the new language. Young children are not interested in learning language that serves no meaningful function.

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First language acquisition, cognition and social awareness go hand in hand in young children. By integrating language and content, foreign language learning, too, becomes an integral part of a child's social and cognitive development.

Formal and functional characteristics of language change from one context to another. An integrated language and content model in an elementary school setting provides a wide variety of contexts in which to use the foreign language.

Due to such advantages learners acquire from this program, according to a 2003 survey by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), there are over 400 schools in 27 states of the USA that offer total, partial or two-way immersion programs in 11 different languages. In addition to the USA, language immersion (usually based on the Canadian model) has spread to Australia, South Korea, Finland, Hungary, Hawaii, Spain, South Africa, Hong Kong and Japan. In Australia, for example, immersion programs are offered in French, German, Chinese, Indonesian and Japanese. In fact this same program, though not documented, has been practiced in the beginning of modern education in Ethiopia as French was the medium of instruction.

### **Submersion Programme**

Next the characteristics of submersion settings that are followed by some of the private schools in our country are discussed by Cohen and Swain (1979) and Baker (2006). Right from the beginning, L2 learners are taught with native speakers. This can create communication problems and insecurity in the learners. If L1 support is provided, it is of the 'pull-out' kind, which stigmatizes the L2 child and also deprives learners of the opportunity to progress in content subjects. The language teachers are typically monolingual and thus unable to communicate with the learners in their L1. In some cases, the learners are actively discouraged from speaking in their L1. The students' low academic performance may reflect the low expectations that teachers often have of the students, particularly those from certain ethnic groups (for example, Mexican American students in the United States). Reading material and subject-matter instruction in the L1 is not available, resulting in increased insecurity in the learners. Parental involvement in the school programme is usually limited. There are often problems with the learners' social and emotional adjustment to school.

A mother tongue maintenance programme, which is followed by the government schools, are based on enrichment theory, according to which high levels of bilingualism are seen as a cognitive and social advantage. This contrasts with deficit theory, which views bilingualism as a burden and as likely to result in cognitive disadvantage. The results of research strongly suggest that additive bilingualism (the goal of mother tongue maintenance) confers linguistic, perceptual, and intellectual advantages (Swain and Cummins, 1979). Skutnabb-Kagnas pointed out that mother tongue maintenance can take two forms. In the weaker form, pupils are given classes in their mother tongue, directed at developing formal language skills, including full literacy. In the stronger form, pupils are educated through the medium of their mother tongue.

The avoidance of the foreign language is still continuing, at least at primary level. At primary level all the subjects are given using the vernacular language (mother tongue) and English is

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given as a subject which might not take 4 to 6 periods a week. This is manifested on section 3, 5, 1 of the education and training policy which reads:

*“Cognizant of the pedagogical advantage of the child in learning in mother tongue and the right of nationalities to promote the use of their languages, primary education will be given in nationality languages.”*

### **Language Use in Private Schools**

Learning content-area subjects through the medium of a foreign language has become increasingly popular in many countries. A great deal of research has centered on foreign language acquisition in various school settings. Over the past thirty years, due in large part to the success of immersion programs, there has been a shift away from teaching language in isolation and toward integrating language and content. This shift is based on four principles:

1. Language is acquired most effectively when it is learned in a meaningful social context. For young learners, the school curriculum provides a natural basis for foreign language learning, offering them the opportunity to communicate about what they know and what they want to know, as well as about their feelings and attitudes.
2. Important and interesting content provides a motivating context for learning the communicative functions of the new language. Young children are not interested in learning language that serves no meaningful function.
3. First language acquisition, cognition and social awareness go hand in hand in young children. By integrating language and content, foreign language learning, too, becomes an integral part of a child's social and cognitive development.
4. Formal and functional characteristics of language change from one context to another. An integrated language and content model in an elementary school setting provides a wide variety of contexts in which to use the foreign language. (<http://www.opencube.com>)

Using English as medium of instruction from the beginning of schooling is not new in Ethiopia. As indicated above, early immersion programs in Ethiopia started with the beginning of modern education in the country in both public and private schools. As stated earlier the government schools strictly follow the idea of ‘teaching the child in his own language.’ But the problem is that after teaching the learner in his own language for some time the ‘big’ examinations like grade 8, 10 and 12 exams are conducted using the foreign language, English.

The private schools on the other hand use the second language starting from the early schools. Under such circumstances, then, it might be foolishness to compare government school students with private school students who had the experience of foreign language starting from kindergarten. Fear of the exams might not only force parents to send their children to these schools other factors like the social need for English language can also be one good motive, and according to many researchers, learners learn best when they have a clear social need for the L2. This social need is highly varied, however. (For example, it can derive from the desire for power and status, from the use of the L2 as a medium of instruction, from the importance learners

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attach to achieving social cohesion, or from the ‘gaming’ that takes place in peer groups.) (Asian EFL Journal)

Our society, as part of the world, has strong stereotypic values for English. According to the revised draft of guide for the development of language policy in Europe, these values refer to the belief and perception about the relative richness or poverty of languages which, according to the guide, may be expressed:

*“In terms of the ‘image’ of a language and it’s culture, the ‘sound’ of a language – ‘melodious’, ‘harsh’ etc – or its usefulness and capacity for expression – ‘not unable to communicate scientific ideas’, ‘a logical language’, ‘not a proper language because it is not written’, ‘useful because of its high status’ etc”. (Guide for the development of language policy in Europe, 2003)*

These stereotypic ideas could often have detrimental impact on the learner’s own language.

The use of English in these schools as medium of instruction according to many scholars can be the manifestation of the hegemony of the language. Rima, V. (2000) on PRAESA occasional paper, says that grade 10 Xhosa speaking students have shown a strong desire towards English. The writer says that some students even think that their mother tongue or any other African language are not as important as English. The main reasons given by these students are: The predominance of English “in this world” in television, movies, receipts... ,it is the language that every one uses and understands, it is the worlds’ official language but other languages are spoken by a few people, and higher education is given by English, etc. The writer also adds “the prominence of English worldwide has had impact” on these students. The process of colonization placed a higher value on European languages, and English in particular.

### **Hegemony of English language and Instructional Medium in African Schools**

*I think English important than Xhosa and other African languages. Because if you go to school the teacher they will teach you English and the time goes on and you will see that English is imported than Xhosa. Me I’m saying English is an important language in the whole world.....*

Like the student who wrote the above paragraph, many learners need very strong proficiency in at least one other language than their mother tongue and for almost all learners English is a language of high priority and this officially acknowledges that English is the language of the world, at least as many believe, and one that most people struggle to learn.

In light of the supremacy of U.S.A. over the world economy, politics, science and technology and above all cultural invasion and the effect of the long colonization of British over the past century, the hegemony of the English language is built on a solid rock. In countries like ours, where people think that a person who speaks, even a broken, English is an educated person assuming that this language has a great value will not be at fault, as literacy and modernization is highly associated with foreigners and foreign languages, especially English.

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One of the biggest manifestations of the value given to a language is its use in the education as medium of instruction. The language that is believed to be helpful to the learners, pedagogically, psychologically and perhaps politically, is assigned to be the medium of instruction.

According to PRAESA occasional papers, referring to Ansre, G 1977, many African countries use English as medium of instruction. In Kenya particularly the government used English as medium of instruction. The main rationalizations given for the use of European language in schools instead of the domestic ones are:

1. The cost of producing educational materials in the indigenous languages is expensive in both money and human effort.
2. The world is ‘shrinking’ and pupils need an international language to be able to have dealings with people from different countries and large groups.
3. With so many languages and tribes in these countries, and since one of the languages is developed enough for use in giving modern technological education, we must give preference to teaching in the languages which have a highly developed technical and scientific terminology and concepts.

But, researchers in the field have different views on the second language acquisition. Among this is Krashen’s “Input hypothesis”. Based on this hypothesis different researchers have suggested their ideas. In this regard many of them agree on the extensive L<sub>2</sub> input. Ellis, R., (2005), principles of instructed language learning, www.Asian EFL Journal, says:

*“It can be claimed with confidence that, if the only input students receive is in the context of a limited number of weekly lesson based on some course book they are unlikely to achieve high level of L<sub>2</sub> proficiency.”*

On the same site he mentioned three, very simple, as he puts it, ways of extensive use of L<sub>2</sub>. These are: to maximize the use of L<sub>2</sub> inside the classroom, create opportunity to use L<sub>2</sub> outside the classroom, and establish self-access centers which students can use outside class time

Among the above stated ways of maximizing extensive L<sub>2</sub> inputs, if we take number one, for example, is achieved mainly through communication, communication between teacher and learners and learners among themselves. Barnes (1969) says that communication, which he prefers to call “social interaction”, can be performed in the foreign language. This, encourages teachers of young learners to extend the use of English (L<sub>2</sub>) in the four categories; language, procedure, subject matter and life, is also indicated in Brumfit (1984).

Creating, opportunity to use L<sub>2</sub> outside the classroom in our case (Ethiopian context) might be a little bit different as our learners have limited, if it even exists, opportunity to use English outside of classroom. The self access centers like library, computer lab, and etc... are also expensive and are not easy both to acquire and to use. Therefore maximum use of L<sub>2</sub> inside the classroom is undoubtedly of a great value and Singleton (1989) has also emphasized the extensive input of foreign of second language saying: “Children will only acquire a native accent if they receive massive exposure to the second language.” But still as Krashen (1985: 46) states, for learners, as Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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in our case, “the only input is teachers’ or classmates’ talk - both do not speak L2 well”. Learners in such environments are exposed to the language only in the classroom where they spend less time in contact with the language, covering a smaller discourse type. The limited exposure to the target language and lack of opportunities to practice speaking in such environment do not allow the communicative abilities of L2/FL learners to fully develop.

Since the beginning of formal education in Ethiopia there were couple of languages used as instructional medium in schools: French, Italian and English and if we trace back the history of education in Ethiopia, English has taken the vast majority of time being taken as medium of instruction, well, at least above elementary level. Currently, the medium of instruction in all the government elementary schools is the native or vernacular language and English above elementary level. On the other hand the private schools take English as medium of instruction as early as the beginning of kindergarten. Apparently some researchers like Leona Fröhlick-wark also say that if the child is given window of opportunity to start learning foreign language, English in our case, or any second language at the age of five with play centered approach and gradually shift to a more conscious and cognitive at later ages it will be most valuable for them. (Brumflt, Moon and Tongue 1984). This though does not mean that we should abandon the mother tongue of the learner for this might end up in a huge disaster, loss of one’s identity, but subjects like mathematics and science, says the writer, could be given in the foreign language, English, with other subjects given in the native language (Tongue, 1984:112). Edle Gravie (1984) on the other hand says the following in acknowledging the importance and use of L<sub>1</sub> in order to help the L<sub>2</sub> development:

*“If possible, L<sub>1</sub> should be made to help the L<sub>2</sub>. An activity could be conducted in L<sub>1</sub> first and later in the second language. A story told in polish today could be repeated in English tomorrow.”*

This, of course, is very necessary as a learner might be confused when faced with new language. Therefore it is of a great importance to let the learner keep in mind that other than L<sub>1</sub> other languages can also help communicate so that the learner might acquire the language naturally.

A survey done by the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg shows that language has a direct relationship with learners’ academic performance. Many researches on the field also believe that language, especially L<sub>1</sub> when used as a medium of instruction, can enhance learners’ cognitive development Baker (2000), Cummins (2000) and Skutnabb-Kagnas (2000). Perhaps this might be one good reason why our country’s educational policy adheres to the use of L<sub>1</sub> as MOI. It is also due to this very reason that a large amount of budget is allocated for the educational purposes. Though, L<sub>1</sub> and academic performance are closely related, more than 150 research studies conducted during the past 35 years strongly support what Goethe, the German philosopher, once said: The person who knows only one language does not truly know that language. The research suggests that bilingual children develop more flexibility in their thinking as a result of processing information through two different languages. When children continue to develop their abilities in two or more languages throughout their primary school years, they gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively and eventually develop better academic performance.

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Language and education being pedantic an alternative view is presented by Mac Swain and Rolstad. They say that literacy (roughly reading, interpreting and reading) or education is an academic construct rather than a component of language ability. In the development of the second language then "...ability difference in an L2 will very likely be perceived as a component of success in the academic development".

But still the view that language and education are virtually inseparable seems to overweigh. Getu (2006) in his thesis says:

*"Education, as one of the dominant means to development, cannot be successfully attained without incorporating into educational system the vehicle of human culture, civilization and human tool of communication: Language."*

Therefore education cannot happen without the support of language. But now it is "which language" is what schools and school community in Ethiopia are confused about, as the choice between the hegemony of English over the academic effect of mother tongue is the decision that most people have a blurred image about and are unable to take any appropriate decision.

In this regard many researches show that language and knowledge are very much interwoven. A person thinks, talks, listens, reads and writes in a language which shows that he/she knows everything with a language. In fact language is not only a social phenomenon (like, reading or writing), but is a biological capacity and need that humans are born with. It is crystal clear that academic performance cannot be seen without language as a background that projects academic performance.

## **Language and Academic Performance**

*"Many linguists and educationists are working hard, with devotion, to make people literate. ...Still the world's literacy rates are either not improving or are improving at much slower rate ... why? I claim that the wrong choice of medium of education is the main pedagogical reason ... and most 'development aid' supports the wrong language. Why?"* (Skutnabb-kangas 2000: xx-xxi. As sighted on PRAESA occasional papers no.6)

It is obvious that language is a key to knowledge. For a learner to perform ways in which knowledge is acquired, listening and reading, receptive skills, he has to have a better understanding of the language in which the material is written or spoken. Then the importance of language in literacy for the development of a nation cannot be overemphasized, because language is central to access learning. According to Obanya (2004p.234), "Human development through Education seeks to reinforce the individual's capacity to perform the essentially human functions...This is what makes language the major object and subject of Education". Language literacy is crucial for increased participation in a world that has transformed from industry- based economy to a knowledge- based economy.

## **Previous Trend**

### **Before Emperor Haileselesie I**

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Modern education started in Ethiopia in the late nineteenth century with the advent of catholic and protestant missionaries. When the first school was opened in Addis Ababa in 1908 the curriculum included four foreign language (French, English, Arabic, and Italian) and two indigenous languages (Amharic and Geez). Pankhrust, (1974:87) says that in the first modern school in Ethiopia (Menelik II) French language was used as medium of instruction and other languages like English, Arabic and even the native language Amharic were given as a subject.

### **During the Regime of Hailese laise**

After Hallesillaise regained power in 1941, even the missionary activities in education sector was ordered to use Amharic in their schools after 1944 directive according to Getachew A and Derib A (2006) “Which reads: “Amharic shall be the general language of instruction in Ethiopia, and missionaries are expected to comply with it by learning Amharic and teaching via Amharic.” After the declaration of the revised constitution of 1955 Amharic become a full-fledged medium of instruction at primary level throughout the country.

### **During Derg**

Following the 1974 revolution, the ‘Derg’ took power and according to Getachew. A and Derbib. A (2006) “adopted a socialist ideology” but not the language. And still Amharic (Vernacular language) remained veto power in education in government schools.

A research done by Tibebe (1987) shows that there was a significant difference in learners’ level of proficiency between the government and the mission schools learners, according to him that was manifested on the “Success of mission school students” and “failure in academic achievement and dropping out of the government school students”. He also added the mission school students used to join the “privileged” departments like engineering, medicine and so on and successfully graduated where as the government school students staggered to graduate from the “less Privileged” departments.

The study shows that:

*The ministry of education’s English language curriculum is primarily geared to direct the learning-teaching activity in these two schools centrally, so as to prepare students of similar academic background with respect to the grade levels they complete.”*

“But”, says the researcher “this goal, according to these findings, seems to be far from being achieved.” Tibebe Alemayehu (1987).

### **Current Trend (Language across the Curriculum at Elementary Level)**

The main purpose or the primary concern of any education is to change individuals in a better way. It is with this insight that any curriculum is designed.

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The Ethiopian curriculum, passing through different significant changes has reached its current status, and this current level of the curriculum is believed to go with the current needs of the society, taking into consideration what it's been through and what is to come.

It is clearly indicated on the Ethiopian constitution that all schools must use the vernacular language as medium of instruction at the lower level. In this case in Ethiopia, currently, based on the second article of the developed charter which reads as:

*“Nations, Nationalities and people have the right to self determination. Accordingly each nation, nationalities and people has the right to preserve and guard its identity, develop its culture and history and use its own language.*

In the light of the above discussion, many researchers like, Krashen and others, believe that language acquisition, happens through meaningful step by step exposures to the language. The language especially that has been learnt this way, especially L<sub>2</sub>, remains in the learners' mind for a longer period of time. It would also be beneficial if the print material in the target language is widely available (Krashen, 1993).

### **Use of Vernacular**

In Ethiopia, particularly now a days, the government schools use mother tongue (L<sub>1</sub>) or the vernacular language of that area based on the UNESCO declaration of 1953 which strongly associates ones' language and identity. This declaration and many other researchers suggest that ignoring child's mother tongue is ignoring ones' own birth right and abandoning human rights.

Children, immature as they are and as they have very limited exposure to this vast world, have a tremendous affiliation to their mother tongue this could be one of the many good reasons why many learners at their early school years feel much burden and be forced to drop out when struck by a non-native language. It is also for this reason that MacNabb (1989) based on research findings, calls the use of vernacular (mother tongue) “a crucial matter” in education and criticize the use of unfamiliar or foreign language as medium of instruction saying: *“The gravest handicap that he (the learner) can suffer... is to be unfamiliar with the language of instruction.”*

Many researchers believe that factors that necessitate the use of mother tongue in education are primarily pedagogical and psychological, not to mention the political issues interlinked. These two factors, they say, determine the children's motivation towards learning and security of their emotional balance. Using school language that is totally different from home language, then, can disrupt the child's emotion and may lead to losing interest in what he/she is learning and may even scare the learner to go to school.

In a situation where learners hardly see English newspapers do not watch TV and are exposed to their first language for the greater part of the day after school, which means reduced input of English, when the learners experience difficulty in communicating an idea because they lack the necessary target language resources they may code mix or resort to their L<sub>1</sub> /code switch to make up the insufficiency. Learners might also feel anxiety because of their poor English. Feelings of anxiety, apprehension and nervousness are commonly expressed by second/foreign language

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learners in learning to speak a second/foreign language. These feelings are considered to exert a potentially negative and detrimental effect on communication in the target language. Anxiety according to Muhammad Tanveer exists in every language whether L<sub>1</sub> or L<sub>2</sub> but it is more severe in L<sub>2</sub>:

*“Speaking, either in first (L1) or second/foreign (L2/FL) language in different situations, particularly the situations that demand public speech, tend to be anxiety provoking. However, the anxiety experienced when speaking in a second/foreign language seems to be more debilitating than the anxiety experienced when speaking in the first language.”*(Muhammad Tanveer, 2007)

Let alone very immature children, even the older ones also have a stronger affiliation towards their first language. Experiments comparing the use of English and Arabic as a medium of instruction in medicine and engineering were conducted by the Arabic Language Academy in Jordan. In those experiments, 30% of the students failed when English was used as a medium of instruction as opposed to 3% failures when Arabic was used as a medium of instruction. On another survey, done at Kuwait University, Al-Hajj Eissa and Al-Mutawa (1988) asserted that use of English as a medium of instruction posed many problems for students at the College of Science such as: 64% of the faculty surveyed reported that the students’ English proficiency level was low; 66% reported that the students’ comprehension of scientific concepts was poor; 76% reported that the students were de-motivated; 48% indicated that students had difficulty comprehending their English textbooks and 54% indicated that students had difficulty comprehending lectures delivered in English, in addition to the students poor writing, spelling and speaking skills. Moreover, science students found instructors’ explanations in English difficult to understand; they could not follow lectures, could not take notes and had poor knowledge of English scientific terms. Studying in English required more effort and more time than studying in Arabic. (Asian EFL Journal: Reima Al Jarf, December 2008)

The above example once again proves that sometimes it is necessary to use the mother tongue in order to enhance the understanding of the learners. Language learning is a cognitive activity that relies on encoding, storage, and retrieval processes, in answering how proficient one must be in a language (linguistic and cognitive) before transfer to another language can take place Cummins draws a distinction between two levels of language proficiency—surface aspects such as pronunciation, fluency, etc and underlying cognitive or academic proficiency.

The distinction was made in order to:

*...conceptualize ‘language proficiency’ in such a way that the developmental interrelationships between academic performance and language proficiency in both L1 and L2 can be considered.* (Cummins and Swain, 1986:152)

In Ethiopia, particularly now a days, the government schools use mother tongue (L<sub>1</sub>) or the vernacular language of that area based on the UNESCO declaration of 1953 Which strongly

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associates ones' language and identity. This declaration and many other researchers suggest that ignoring child's mother tongue is ignoring ones' own birth rights and abandoning human rights.

English being the lingua franca of the world, the ministry of education stipulates English as medium of instruction, depending on the regions; say Daniel and Abebayehu on instructional language policy in Ethiopia Vol.37. No 3 and 4, 2006 "English assumes the role of medium of instruction starting at grades 5, 7 or 9". Though Ellis R. (1994) says that generally younger learners are successful in learning second or foreign languages perhaps the belief is that this might help millions of poor Ethiopian students to remain in schools than dropping out because of burden of foreign language.

## Conclusion

Educational system has one basic principle behind and that is to back up learners with basic knowledge, skills and values that guide them in their personal, social and professional efficiency. This is a kind of system that Farrant (1981) and many other scholars believed would be a universal phenomenon that every society should deal with. This study has the following enormous significance in the identification of language implementation in both the government and private schools and also the possible outcomes due to this difference. Therefore the study will have great value in these areas such as to identify if there is any significant difference in language practices in both schools. Second, it tries to see if there is any pertinent academic performance, due to the implementation of instructional medium that the schools choose to use. Third, it encourages and acknowledges the result of difference in the medium of instruction so that both parties utilize the 'best' of the finding.

Getu (2006) in his thesis says:

*"Education, as one of the dominant means to development, cannot be successfully attained without incorporating into educational system the vehicle of human culture, civilization and human tool of communication: Language."*

The result of this study clearly indicates the society's needs a variety in medium of instructions. Though there is a high need for English due to different reasons the subjects could not avoid assuming Amharic as one of the important MOI.

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Julia Devardhi, Ph.D.  
Faculty Member  
School of Foreign Language Studies  
Haramaya University  
Dire Dawa  
Ethiopia 251  
[devardhi.julia@gmail.com](mailto:devardhi.julia@gmail.com)

Geletesa Biftu, M.A. in TEFL  
Lecturer  
Department of English  
School of Foreign Language Studies  
Haramaya University  
Dire Dawa  
Ethiopia 251  
[galojoy@gmail.com](mailto:galojoy@gmail.com)

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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