

Innovations

A Comparative Analysis of Teachers' and Students' Views on the Benefits and Challenges of Using Mother Tongue as a Medium of Instruction at Primary Schools of Ethiopia

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Abstract: *The language of instruction plays a crucial role in the educational development of students and is vital for the realization of effective communication and understanding between teachers and students. The purpose of this study was to understand teachers' and students' views about the benefits and challenges of learning through the mother tongue at primary schools in Ethiopia. The study was guided by comparative analysis methods supported by a quantitative research approach. 105 teachers and 80 students were taken for the study using simple random sampling techniques. A questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Accordingly, mean, standard deviation, and t-test were used to analyze the data. The findings have revealed that when students learn using their mother tongue, they do better in exams, develop confidence, make active participation, learn concepts easily, understand and develop practical skills easily, better understand experiments and experimental procedures, and learn technical words, especially in science subjects. The study has identified the challenges that hinder the usage of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at primary schools: lack of sufficient textbooks, negative attitude towards mother tongue among practitioners, lack of training for teachers on how to use mother tongue as a medium of instruction, and teachers' English /other second language preferences to mother tongue. Thus, the researcher recommends that teachers and educators need to examine their practices and develop ways to authentically engage and legitimize the use of the mother tongue for teaching in primary schools in Ethiopia.*

Keywords: 1. mother tongue, 2. education, 3. primary school, 4. comparative analysis

1. Introduction

Education, whether formal, informal, or non-formal, is communicated to the learners using language (Pajares, 1992). Obanya (2004) links education with the intergenerational transfer of a society's cultural heritage, and the mother tongue is the means for such transmission. If the school does not support learning through the mother tongue, students can become isolated from their culture and education can become countercultural since education cannot be

separated from culture. This means that the importance of language in education is indisputable. It is a reasonable conclusion to say that the success of any educational process depends largely on the language used since it is crucial to the transmission of knowledge (Markosand Abraham, 2020). The language of instruction plays a crucial role in the educational development of students and is vital for the realization of communication and understanding between teachers and students (Ejeh, 2004). What is more, the quality of education is fundamentally determined by language policy. Any education policy and type that ignores the use of the mother tongue in the early years eventually prove unsuccessful and negatively affects children's learning (Nishanthi, 2020).

The use of the child's first language in school has been promoted by many international organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization since 1953 (UNESCO, 1953). UNESCO (1953) further considers the use of the mother tongue as a tool that everyone relies on to learn and express themselves. It is also the basis of thought (Díaz&Pérez, 2015). Since one of the basic principles of education is that learning should move from the known to the unknown, students' prior knowledge is best expressed through the language with which they are most familiar. Cook (2001) found that even advanced second language learners are less efficient at absorbing information from the second language (L2) than from the first language (L1). This means that the mother tongue remains crucial even after learning a second language. However, many children, especially in the developing world, learn very little in school, a truth primarily linked to teaching in a language they do not fully understand. The consequence is that it leads to insufficient learning and acquisition of knowledge and skills, which, in turn, leads to problems like student failure and repetition rates.

Effective teaching and learning require language, either written in textbooks or shared orally in classroom discussions (Oyoo, 2015). Language is also necessary during practical work. Teachers have to explain what they are doing and students have to ask questions (Millar, 2004). Research involving a wide range of educators in various countries has consistently shown that language plays a crucial role in the formation and development of terms. This suggests that a teacher's and student's language is fundamental to teaching and creating the conditions for meaningful learning (Oyoo, 2015).

2. Statement of the problem

In many countries, formal education remains euro-centric and reflects more western academic cultures than the cultures of students and teachers (Mashebe&Denuga, 2015). This phenomenon is a major problem in developing countries, where formal education does not take into account how most students communicate, think, and learn. Poor student performance in school has been attributed to "cultural gaps" between the school curriculum and the environment in which students are socialized (Maschebe&Denuga, 2015). The reputation for poor academic performance in elementary school by students is an issue that needs to be addressed because teaching and learning largely depend on the language of communication (Montag&Akpojisher, 2014).

It is well known that the mother tongue is the best medium to teach a child. For Ethiopia, a multilingual, multiethnic, and culturally pluralistic country, implementing education in the mother tongue is not a problem-free endeavor (Hirut Wolde Mariam, 2008). Ethiopia is a country with a rich and diverse ethnic/linguistic makeup with 85 actively spoken languages. However, English and Amharic remained the medium of instruction for much of the country's history at primary schools. It was not until 1974, when the socialist government took power, that the use of other ethnic languages for didactic purposes was emphasized.

After the change of government in 1991, Ethiopia's education system is in a state of upheaval. According to the Federal Government Law, a centralized administration has been replaced by a decentralized one. Ministry of

Education, which was heavily centralized in the past, is now decentralized in many Federal States, district offices, and departments that are demarcated along ethnic lines. In addition to the decentralization of competencies, the decentralization process has brought various initiatives of change, among them the change in the language of education (Alemu, Ababayehu, Tekleselassie, 2015). Since 1994, mother tongue-based education has been implemented especially at the primary level to improve literacy rate and academic success, as well as increase appreciation of local languages and cultures (Wolff, 2011). More than 30 languages are used as the language of instruction or as a subject in primary schools (Derash, 2013). Several of these languages are used in the training of primary school teachers (Anteneh and Ado, 2006). Ethiopia's 1994 Education and Training Policy states that "primary education is taught in mother tongue languages" (FDRE, 1994: p. 23). The underlying assumption of the guideline (as stated in the policy document) is that the language of learning is the "mother tongue" of all children living in the area where the language of the respective nationality is spoken.

Concerning this change, there are many debates in the country. Some Ethiopian scholars argue that the use of many mother tongue languages for instruction is vital for addressing issues related to a child's right to learn using the first language and to make learning more practical and real. Others suspect its academic and human right benefits and argue from a political point of view by saying that shifting from a language to many languages threatens the integrity of nations, nationalities, and people and create more division. As a researcher my position is clear. Though there are challenges, it is mandatory to use children's first language for teaching subjects, especially in primary schools in Ethiopia because of its immense academic and scientific benefits. With this intention, therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand Teachers' and Students' views about the benefits and challenges of learning through the Mother tongue in Ethiopian Primary schools. Moreover, the study intended to make a comparative analysis of teachers' and students' views on the benefits and challenges of using the mother tongue in primary schools

3. General and Specific Objectives

3.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study was to understand teachers' and students' views about the benefits and challenges of learning through the Mother tongue in Primary schools in Ethiopia

3.2. Specific Objectives

Specific objectives were:

- To find out teachers' and students' views about the benefits of learning through Mother tongue in Primary School of Ethiopia
- To find out teachers' and students' views about the challenges of learning through Mother Tongue in Primary schools of Ethiopia.
- To make a comparative analysis of teachers' and students' views on the benefits and challenges of using the mother tongue in primary schools

4. Research Methodology

The study was guided by comparative analysis methods supported by a quantitative research approach. Comparative research or analysis is a broad term that includes both quantitative and qualitative comparisons of social entities. Social entities may be based on many lines, such as geographical or political ones in the form of cross-national or regional comparisons (Castilla, 2004). In this study, the researcher intended to compare teachers' views with that of students concerning the benefits and challenges of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction.

The researcher has chosen to conduct this research in ten government primary schools found in the Arsi zone located in the central part of the Oromia Region, Ethiopia. It is located in the middle of Oromia, connecting the western regions to the eastern ones.

The target populations of this study are two main groups (Teachers and students). 105 teachers and 80 students were taken for the study using simple random sampling techniques.

The study from which this article emanated used a questionnaire as a data collection tool. The questionnaire was used to elicit data from teachers and students.

Quantitative data collected through a questionnaire was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS version 20. Accordingly, mean, standard deviation and t-tests were used.

In this research, ethical issues were considered in the following ways:

Firstly, the researcher took the position that whatever the participants told him was true for it is their reality. The researcher never allowed his experience and philosophy to influence him to question some experiences of the participants. The researcher did this consistently throughout the study. Secondly, the researcher informed participants about the overall purpose of the research and its main features, as well as the risks and benefits of participation in the study. Thirdly, the researcher took full responsibility for the participants, including issues such as ensuring confidentiality and avoiding harmful practices that affect the participants. In ensuring confidentiality, the researcher did not reveal the private data and identities of the participants. The researcher never mentioned their names and their addresses.

5. Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion

5.1. Response Rate of the Questionnaire

Out of the 115 questionnaires distributed to the teachers, 105(91.3%) were returned and filled correctly and the rest 10(8.7%) teachers' questionnaires were rejected because their responses were incomplete. Regarding the questionnaire of students, 80(97.6%) were returned and filled correctly and the rest 2(3.4%) students' questionnaires were rejected, because their responses were incomplete, thereby generating a return rate of 94.9 percent. Babbie (1998) suggests that a 50% response rate is adequate, 60% response is considered good and a 70% response rate is considered better. If is more than 80, it is best.

As can be seen from item one in Fig.1, about the sex distribution of teachers, 60 % of them were males and 40 % were females. This indicates that the majority of the respondents in the selected primary schools were males. From this, one can recognize that the number of females in the teaching profession is smaller than males in the study area.

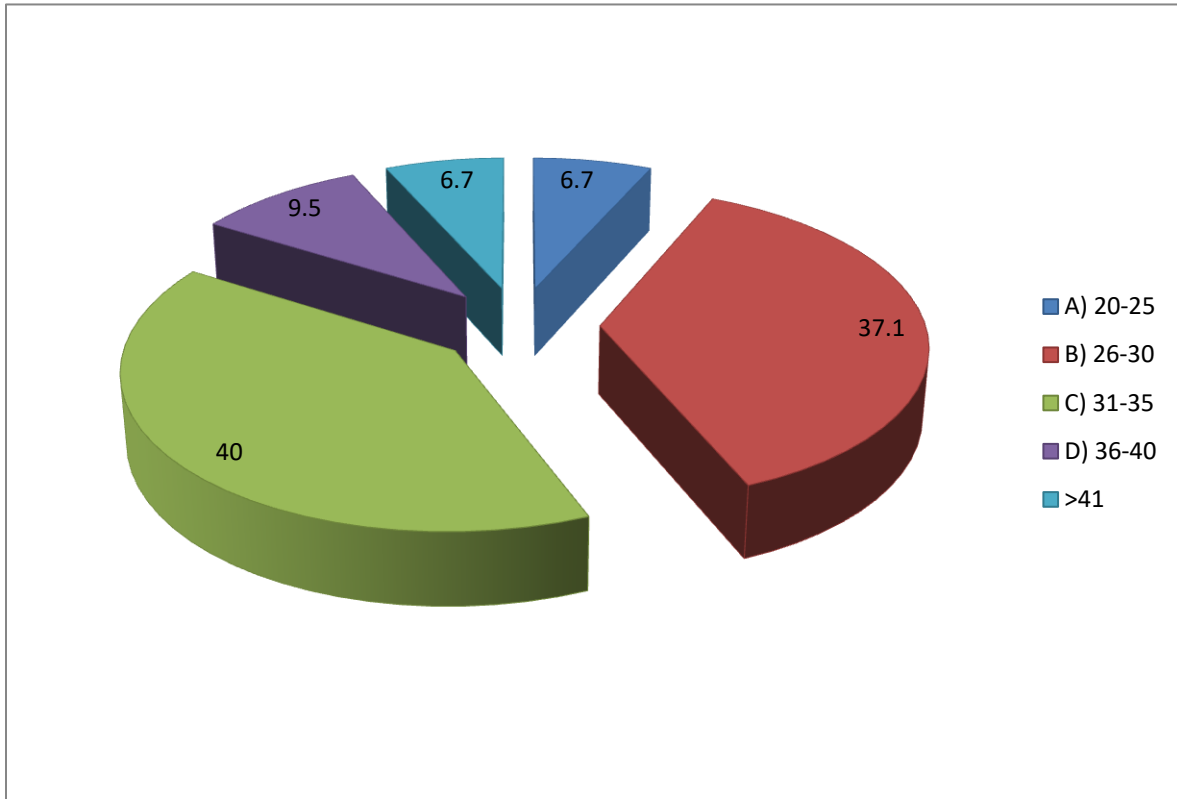


Fig 2Age of the Teacher Respondents

Looking at age structure, 6.7 % of teachers were in the age category of 20-25 years, 37.1 % of teachers were between 26-30 years; 9.5 % of teachers were in between 36-40 years and only 6.7 % of teachers were above 41 years. 40 % were in between 31-35 years of age. The above data showed that the majority of respondents were in an active/working age group.

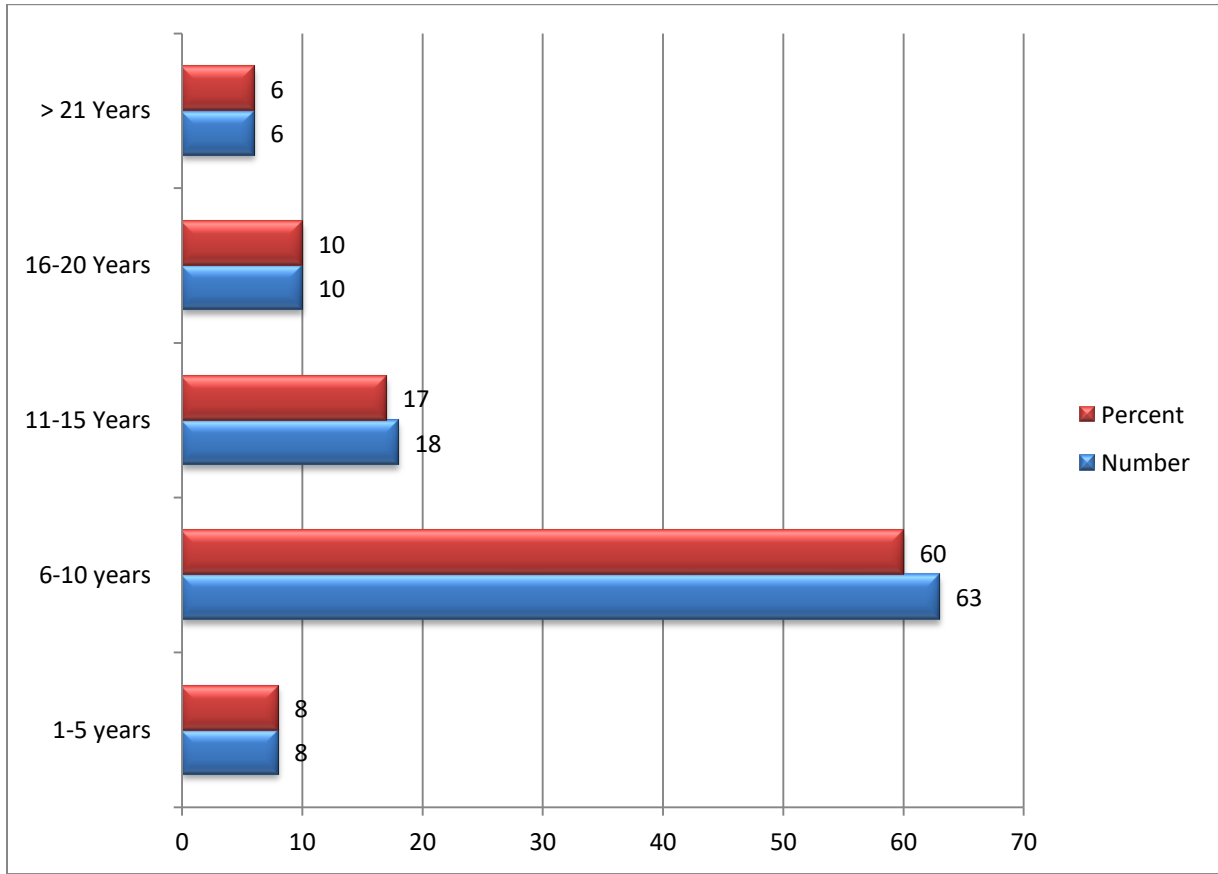


Fig 3 Teaching Experiences of Teacher Respondents

As can be seen in above Fig.3, 8(8%) of teachers had 1-5 years of work experience, 63(60%) of teachers had 6-10 years of work experience, 18(17%) of them had 11-15 years of work experience and 10(10%) of teachers had work experience of 16-20 years. The remaining 6(6%) teachers had work experience of greater than 21 years.

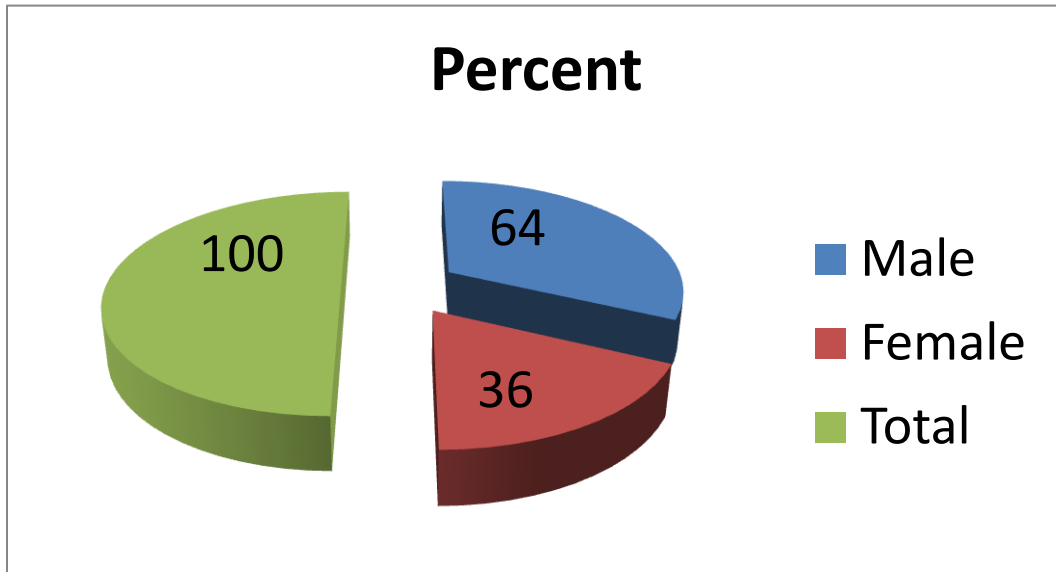


Fig 4 Sex of Student Respondents

As can be observed in the above figure, 64% of the respondents were males and 36% were females.

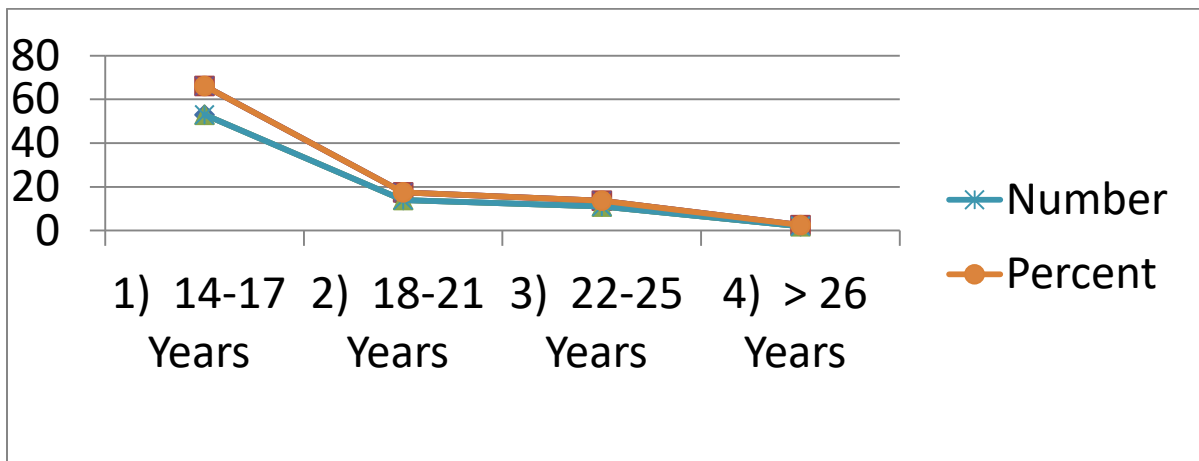


Fig 5 Age of Student Respondents

The above figure indicates that 68.8% of the students were in between 14-17 years of age and 17.5% were in between 18-21 years. The remaining 13.7% of the students were in between 22-25 years of age.

M=Mean and SD=Standard Deviation N=Sample population

Table 1: Response of Respondents Regarding the Benefits of mother Tongue for Students

SN	Items	Respondents Type				t-value	p-value
		Teachers (N=105)		Students (N=80)			
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	Students who can read and write in their mother tongue easily learn science concepts	4.24	1.15	3.73	1.51	-2.96	.063
2	Students do better in exams when they are taught in their mother tongue	3.39	1.08	3.56	1.24	-2.30	.022
3	Students are more confident when allowed to ask questions in their mother tongue	3.90	1.08	3.88	.945	5.60	.060
4	Using mother tongue for instruction enables students to interpret information obtained more adequately and correctly	4.36	1.16	3.59	1.32	-1.46	.145
5	Teaching using in mother tongue allows students to develop practical skills easily	4.12	1.28	4.49	1.20	-1.61	.009
6	Classroom participation is enhanced if students are allowed to use their mother tongue	4.37	1.38	3.91	1.36	-1.91	.047
7	Students better understand experiments and experimental procedures when they are taught using their mother tongue	4.22	1.20	4.12	1.15	.454	.651
8	Mother tongue makes learning effective whether it is written in textbooks or shared orally during the discussion	4.45	1.60	3.57	1.26	-4.14	.060
9	Students learn technical and nontechnical words in a better way when taught in their mother tongue than in English or second languages	3.90	1.23	4.04	1.03	-.722	.472
10	All learning follows through smoothly once learners have attained some proficiency in their mother tongue	3.55	1.19	3.90	1.04	3.19	.062

As can be seen in Table 1 item 1, the calculated high mean value of teachers (M=4.24, SD=1.15) and students (M=3.73, SD=1.51) indicated that students who can read and write in their mother tongue easily learn science concepts. On the other hand, the calculated t-test value (t=-2.96, p<0.05) showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the two respondents on the issue since the P-value of 0.063 is greater than the alpha (α) level of 0.05.

Table 1 item 2, the calculated mean of teachers (M=3.39, SD=1.08) and students (M=3.56, SD=1.24) also revealed that students do better in exams when they are taught in their mother tongue. On the other hand, the calculated t-test value (t=-2.30, p<0.05) showed that there is no statistically significant difference between teachers and students as the P-value of 0.060 is greater than the alpha (α) level of 0.05.

Further, it can be observed from the same table of item 3, the calculated mean of teachers ($M=3.90$, $SD=1.08$) and students ($M=3.88$, $SD=.945$) showed that students were more confident when allowed to ask questions in their mother tongue. In this regard, similarly, the calculated t-test value ($t=5.60$, $p<0.05$) showed that there is a statistically significant difference between teachers and students on the issue.

As indicated in the same Table of item 4, the calculated mean of teachers ($M=4.36$, $SD=1.16$) and students ($M=3.59$, $SD=1.32$) showed that using the mother tongue for instruction enables students to interpret information obtained more adequately and correctly in the classroom. On the other hand, the calculated t-test value ($t=-1.46$, $p<0.05$) showed that there is no significant difference between teachers and students on the issue.

As illustrated in Table 1, item 5, respondents were requested, the calculated mean of teachers ($M=4.12$, $SD=1.28$) perceived as low while students ($M=4.49$, $SD=1.20$) showed that teaching using their mother tongue allows students to develop practical skills. On the other hand, the calculated t-test value ($t=-1.61$, $p<0.05$) showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the two respondents on the issue.

As can be seen in Table 1, item 6, the calculated mean of teachers ($M=4.37$, $SD=1.36$) and students ($M=3.91$, $SD=1.36$) showed that classroom participation is enhanced if students are allowed to use their mother tongue. On the other hand, the calculated t-test value ($t=-1.91$, $p<0.05$) showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the two respondents on the issue. Table 1, item 7, in this regard, the calculated mean of teachers ($M=4.22$, $SD=1.20$) and students ($M=4.12$, $SD=1.08$) revealed that Students better understand experiments and experimental procedures when they are taught using their mother tongue. On the other hand, the calculated t-test value ($t=1.15$, $p>0.05$) showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the two respondents on the issue.

Table 1 items 8, the calculated mean of teachers ($M=4.45$, $SD=1.60$) and students ($M=3.57$, $SD=1.26$) indicated that the Mother tongue makes learning effective whether it is written in textbooks or shared orally during the discussion. On the other hand, the calculated t-test value ($t=-4.14$, $p<0.05$) showed that there is no statistically significant difference between teachers and students on the above issue.

Table 1, item 9, the calculated mean of teachers ($M=3.90$, $SD=1.23$) and students ($M=4.04$, $SD=1.03$) showed that students learn technical and nontechnical words better when taught in their mother tongue than in English or a second language. On the other hand, the calculated t-test value ($t=-.722$, $p>0.05$) showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the two respondents on the issue.

Table 1 item 10, the calculated mean of teachers ($M=3.55$, $SD=1.19$) and students ($M=3.90$, $SD=1.04$) identify that all learning goes smoothly once learners have attained some proficiency in their mother tongue. On the other hand, the calculated t-test value ($t=3.19$, $p<0.05$) showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the two respondents on the issue.

Therefore, the above results generally show that students learn better when the mother tongue is used especially in lower grades. The comparative analysis of the results of teachers and students shows similarity as far as the benefits of using the mother tongue are taken into account.

Table 2: Response of Respondents on the Challenges of using Mother tongue language as a Medium of Instruction

M=Mean and SD=Standard Deviation N=Sample population

As can be seen in Table 2 item 1, the calculated high mean value of teachers (M=3.88, SD=1.18) and students

SN	Items	Respondents Type			
		Teachers (N=105)		Students (N=80)	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	There is a lack of sufficient textbooks and teacher guides prepared in the mother tongue language	3.88	1.18	3.81	1.10
2	The whole school system does not encourage teaching and learning in the mother tongue language	3.7	1.16	3.92	1.20
3	The language used in classrooms is not properly translated to the mother tongue language	3.10	1.28	3.63	1.18
4	Not using mother tongue language at home or using mixed language at home affects its usage	3.59	1.18	3.35	1.27
5	There is a lack of using the updated syllabus and teachers' guides supporting mother tongue language	3.46	1.40	3.53	1.18
6	Teachers' preferences for English/second language to mother tongue language in teaching subjects affect their development	2.23	1.16	3.55	1.33
7	Lack of using technologies like plasma and social media for additional gain while mother tongue is used	3.93	1.32	3.28	1.32
8	The negative attitude of learners, parents & society about using mother tongue language teaching in classrooms	3.50	1.22	3.58	1.33
9	Lack of teachers' professional commitment in delivering the content of using mother tongue language	3.58	1.21	3.95	1.08
10	Lack of short-term training for teachers on how to deliver contents of science using mother tongue	3.52	1.20	3.57	1.05

(M=3.81, SD=1.11) indicated that there is a lack of sufficient textbooks and teacher guides prepared in the mother tongue language. Table 1 item 2, the calculated mean of teachers (M=3.7, SD=1.16) and students (M=3.92, SD=1.20) also revealed that the whole school system does not encourage teaching and learning in the mother tongue

language. Further, it can be observed from the same table of item 3, the calculated mean of teachers ($M=3.10$, $SD=1.28$) and students ($M=3.63$, $SD=1.18$) showed that the language used in classrooms is not properly translated to the mother tongue language

As indicated in the same Table for item 4, the calculated mean of teachers ($M=3.59$, $SD=1.18$) and students ($M=3.35$, $SD=1.27$) showed that Not using mother-tongue language at home or using mixed language at home affects its usage. As illustrated in Table 2, item 5, respondents were requested, and the calculated mean of teachers ($M=3.46$, $SD=1.40$) and students ($M=3.53$, $SD=1.18$) show that there is a lack of updated syllabus and teachers' guide books supporting mother tongue language.

Table 2, item 6, in this regard, the calculated mean of teachers ($M=2.23$, $SD=1.16$) and students ($M=3.55$, $SD=1.33$) revealed that Teachers' preferences for English/Amharic to mother tongue language in teaching science subjects affect its development. Table 2 items 7, In this concern, the calculated mean of teachers ($M=3.93$, $SD=1.32$) and students ($M=3.28$, $SD=1.32$) indicated that lack of using technologies like plasma and social media for additional gain while mother tongue is used affects the quality of learning.

Table 2, item 8, the calculated mean of teachers ($M=3.50$, $SD=1.22$) and students ($M=3.58$, $SD=1.33$) showed that negative attitude of learners, parents & society about using mother tongue language teaching in classrooms affects the quality of learning.

Table 2, item 9, the calculated mean of teachers ($M=3.58$, $SD=1.21$) and students ($M=3.95$, $SD=1.08$) shows teachers' lack of professional commitment in delivering the content of subject matter using their mother tongue language affects the quality of learning.

Table 2 item 10, the calculated mean of teachers ($M=3.52$, $SD=1.20$) and students ($M=3.57$, $SD=1.05$) identify that lack of short-term training for teachers on how to deliver contents of science using mother tongue language affects the quality of teaching.

The analysis of data obtained from both respondents (teachers and Students) identified the factors that affect the usage of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction.

These are:

- Lack of textbooks written in the mother tongue
- Lack of system that supports mother tongue education
- The negative attitude of teachers and other stakeholders towards mother tongue
- Lack of teachers' professional commitment to mother tongue
- Lack of technologies that support the utilization of mother tongue education

6. Conclusions

Teachers are positive about taking into account students' prior knowledge learned out of school when teaching and they agreed that the mother tongue is relevant in teaching subject matter concepts but they are not practically implementing it. Teachers' perception of the value and potential contribution of using their mother tongue to sustainable development was found to be good.

Teachers' preferences for English/other second languages to mother tongue language in teaching affect student learning. The whole school system does not encourage teaching and learning in the mother tongue language. The language used in the classrooms is not properly translated into the mother tongue language. Not using mother tongue language or using mixed language at home affects its usage in the school setting. Lack of teachers' professional commitment to deliver the content of subject matter using mother tongue language affects the quality of learning. Lack of short-term training for teachers on how to deliver contents of subject matter using mother tongue language also affects the quality of teaching.

7. Recommendations

Teachers and educators need to examine their practices and develop ways to authentically engage and legitimize the use of mother tongue language for teaching and learning. The purely Western models of language usage are not capable of addressing the current socio-economic problems at the micro-level. Hence, there is a need to revitalize the presence of mother tongue ways of knowing, pedagogy, and practices in the educational system if Ethiopians are to redefine and reshape their education within their terms of development.

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