

The Problems and Possibilities of Multilingual Classrooms in Ethiopia

Fuad Ali^{1, *}, Desalegn Motbaynor², Yared Mulat²

¹Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Debre Berhan University, Debre Berhan, Ethiopia

²Department of Educational Planning and Management, Debre Berhan University, Debre Berhan, Ethiopia

Email address:

thefuadali@yahoo.com (F. Ali)

*Corresponding author

To cite this article:

Fuad Ali, Desalegn Motbaynor, Yared Mulat. The Problems and Possibilities of Multilingual Classrooms in Ethiopia. *International Journal of Secondary Education*. Vol. 7, No. 2, 2019, pp. 51-60. doi: 10.11648/j.ijsedu.20190702.15

Received: May 13, 2019; **Accepted:** June 29, 2019; **Published:** July 13, 2019

Abstract: Choosing language of instruction in education is one such concern and often is not free of critics from different perspectives. While students in primary schools come from different language background, it is noted that schools are employing a single language of instruction in classrooms which seems problematic to the students and require investigation. The situation is more worthy in countries like Ethiopia where people live heterogeneously. Hence, the purpose of this study was to assess the problems and possibilities of multilingual classrooms in North and East Shoa zones of Ethiopia. To conduct this research, mixed research method and descriptive survey design was employed. The primary sources of data were 260 teachers, who responded to the questionnaire, 10 teachers and 2 primary school directors who participated in FGD. In addition, various literatures and policy documents were the secondary data sources of the study. Purposive, stratified and simple random sampling techniques were employed to select sampled primary school teachers and directors. Questionnaires were the main data gathering instruments while Focus Group Discussion was employed to enrich the data gathered through questionnaires. Moreover, the collected data were analysed quantitatively by using simple descriptive statistics and qualitatively using descriptive narration. The finding of the study indicates various opportunities and problems of multilingual classrooms. Further, although multilingual classrooms provide an opportunity to get to know each other's culture, if not properly handled it may also results the promotion of dominant group culture and language, which in turn may result in the extinction of minorities cultural elements. Although the issue of multilingual classroom has its own uniqueness that shall be treated differently, still, it is not given due consideration as expected. Finally, policy related as well as short and long term recommendations related to teacher's attitude, recruitment and deployment were forwarded as to improve the challenges of multilingual classrooms.

Keywords: Multilingual Classrooms, Problems, Possibilities

1. Introduction

Education in many countries of the world takes place in multilingual contexts. Most multilingual societies have developed an ethos which balances and respects the use of different languages in daily life. From the perspective of these societies and of the language communities themselves, multilingualism is more a way of life than a problem to be solved. The challenge is for education systems to adapt to these complex realities and provide a quality education which takes into consideration learners' needs, whereas balancing

these at the same time with social, cultural and political demands [11].

Ethiopia as a country of many nations and nationalities along with complex demographic composition of the people, the system of education required adapting and need to go with these complex realities and provide quality education. In all monarchical regimes Amharic was dominantly the language of the royal family and the rest of the people were also obliged to practice Amharic. So, promotion of a monolingual language policy, namely the promotion of Amharic, continued covering a very wide area of the country. Since, Dergue regime for the first time

attempt has been made in implementing such a language policy in education which recognized other Ethiopian languages, by introducing fifteen Ethiopian languages including Amharic.

The newly introduced federal system administration and the ratification of the 1994 constitution changed the history of the country with regard to language policy. Aware of the pedagogical advantage of the child in learning in mother tongue and the rights of nations to promote the use of their languages, primary education is provided using regional languages [7]. Though, the nationality languages has been respected and promotion of mother tongue in primary education is there, still Educational policy makers have difficult decisions to make with regard to classroom languages, schooling and the curriculum in which the technical and the political problems often overlap.

Selecting language of instruction in education should require considering two basic positions, in the one hand in the context of formal educational settings, children are going to be most effectively taught when both children and teachers speak well the language of instruction on the other hand questions of identity, nationhood and power are closely linked to the use of specific languages in the classroom. In countries like Ethiopia where people live heterogeneously and where you find more than 80 nations who speaks different languages, the issue requires more attention. Language is not everything in education but without language everything is nothing in education [1].

In Ethiopia the current language policy, which has been in place since 1994, accords high practical status to the mother tongue as medium of instruction, particularly at the primary level; transition to English at Grades 5, 7, or 9 depending on the region; and the learning of Amharic as a subject by speakers of languages other than Amharic [7]. The policy for most students, therefore, is trilingual (also known as multilingual) considering mother tongue as language of instruction, Amharic as a national language, and English as an international language. The findings of contemporary research support extended educational use of the mother tongue, and other languages through bi-or trilingual policies. From this perspective Ethiopian language policy was categorized broadly within the parameters of “best policy” in terms of multilingual developing countries. However, as is the case in many other countries, implementation is not always aligned with actual policy. There are always special circumstances, attitudes and other impediments which need to be identified and dealt with in order for policy to work efficiently and get the best return on investment. However, the undeniable truth in multilingual societies is that, dominant language group are advantageous. In most multilingual countries, speakers of the dominant language are immediately placed at an advantage in both accessing and benefiting from the civic culture and state services [10].

Different writer clearly indicates that multilingual

students were benefited a lot than monolingual students. The problem is that monolingual students may miss critical thinking development opportunities. Research has shown that bilingual students outperformed monolingual students on specific judgment task, experiments as well as metalinguistic intuitive tasks [3]. Multilingual student's outperformed bilingual students in similar experiments [4]. On the other side, bilingual students may face educational difficulties when their mother tongue language is excluded. Bilingual students may miss opportunities because teachers are not acknowledging first languages of students, nor communicating high expectations of minority learners [9].

In Ethiopia regarding the use of mother tongue language as medium of instruction and related issue researches' has been conducted. However, these researches are out-dated, and sometimes unavailable. Many of the language policy researches undertaken by Ethiopians who live abroad as well as by foreigners are not available in the country [6]. Further, they were not based on classroom situation where students from different language background exist. Rather it was in line with policy implementation where by the intention of this research was investigating the challenges and possibilities of being in multilingual classroom for students. The residents in North Shoa of Amhara region and East Shoa of Oromia region are diverse in terms of language. Even though as issued in the educational policy primary education is through first language, students in these areas come with different language background. As a result they are expected to face learning problems while they are taught in their secondary languages.

On the basis of the above intention, the study tried to answer the following basic research questions.

1. What does teacher's awareness look like regarding multilingual classrooms?
2. What possible learning opportunities do students experienced as a result of being in multilingual classroom?
3. What possible learning challenges students have been faced as a result of learning with their second language rather than their mother tongue?
4. What should be done in order to reduce learning challenges that students from different language background faced in classroom?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Design

Study method combined both quantitative and qualitative designs at all stages of data collection and analysis. With regard to the study design the researchers employed descriptive survey research design. While descriptive survey method was employed as a whole study design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation was guided by a Concurrent Embedded Strategy, one of the six strategies of mixed methods [5].

2.2. The Study Area and Period

The study was carried out in two major regional states (Oromia and Amhara) and their surrounding Zonal and Woreda towns. Data collection was conducted from December to March 2015/2016.

2.3. Sample Size

Regarding sample size, 260 teachers who were selected from four different Woredas and from 10 different primary schools to respond to the questionnaire were involved. Since the number of teachers in these schools is manageable, 26 teachers from each school were responded to the questionnaire properly. On the other side, 2 directors and 10 teachers were participated in FGD, which makes the total sample size of the study 272 participant.

2.4. Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was employed to select sample Woredas and Primary Schools existed in the towns. Simple random sampling was used to select sample teachers after identification was made through stratified sampling. Further, FGD participants were selected through purposive sampling.

2.5. Instruments

Self-prepared and pre-tested likert-scale questionnaire which was developed by the researchers was employed to the case. The questionnaire that addresses characteristics of respondents and their view regarding multilingual classrooms was used. In addition, FGD guiding questions were also prepared and used for the study.

2.6. Data Collection Procedures

After preparation and testing the instruments was

completed, data collection was carried out by the research team side by side by going to sample schools directly and collecting data using both instruments.

2.7. Data Processing and Analysis

The collected data was edited, coded and exported to SPSS version 20 for analysis. Data analysis combined quantitative and qualitative methods; presentation of facts were analysed qualitatively through descriptive statements and statistical results represented with numbers were analysed quantitatively by applying different descriptive statistical tools such as, frequency, percentages, weighted mean score, and standard error. The qualitative data's collected through FGD were embedded and discussed as a supplement to quantitative data gathered through close ended questionnaires. Mean score description was used to describe quantitative results [12].

Table 1. Mean Score Description.

Mean Score	Description
< 3.39	Low
3.40 -3.79	Moderate
>3.80	High

Source: Zaidatol & Bagheri (2009).

2.8. Ethical Consideration

The research was undertaken after clearance has been obtained from the University. Confidentiality and Consent to participate in the study was obtained from each participant before data collection.

3. Results

The results of the study were presented as follows:

Table 2. Characteristics of Respondents.

Variables	Characteristics	Instructors	
		freq.	%
Sex	Male	124	48
	Female	136	52
	Total	260	100
Years of service in teaching	≤5 years	28	11
	6-10 years	60	23
	11-15 years	72	28
	≥16 years	100	38
	Total	260	100
Language preference	Amharic	140	54
	Afaan Oromo	80	31
	Others	40	15
	Total	260	100

Regarding respondents sex, 136 (52%) of teachers were Females, whereas 124 (48%) of teachers were Males. In relation to respondents' years of service in teaching, about 28 (11%) of respondents teaching experience is 5 years and below. Others about 60 (23%) of respondents were have a teaching experience of 6 to 10 years. While 72 (28%) of respondents were having 11 to 15 years teaching experience,

a majority about 100 (38%) others were have an experience of 16 years and above. With regard to respondents language preference at work place and home a majority of respondents about 140 (54%) were preferred Amharic, while 80 (31%) of respondents preferred Afaan Oromo. Others about 40 (15%) of respondents language preference was, Amharic and Afaan Oromo, Tigrigna, and Guragigna.

Table 3. Respondents Awareness Regarding Multilingual Classrooms.

I'm familiar with the concept of multilingual classrooms		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	12	4.6	4.6	4.6
	Disagree	11	4.2	4.2	8.8
	Undecided	28	10.8	10.8	19.6
	Agree	112	43.1	43.1	62.7
	Strongly Agree	97	37.3	37.3	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	100.0	

Respondents awareness with the concepts of multilingual classrooms displays the strong mean score (mean=4.04; SE=0.064). This suggests that the respondents are in favour of understanding what it means by multi-lingual classrooms. Given

that the majority of respondents 112 (43%) Agree and 97 (37%) Strongly agree to the variable, it can be concluded that both scores reflect more positive than negative knowhow of respondents towards the concepts of multi-lingual classrooms.

Table 4. Respondents view regarding advantage teaching students in first tongue.

Teaching the course in student's first tongue is appropriate		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	13	5.0	5.0	5.0
	Disagree	20	7.7	7.7	12.7
	Undecided	15	5.8	5.8	18.5
	Agree	82	31.5	31.5	50.0
	Strongly Agree	130	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	100.0	
A child who can read and write in his/her first language will be able to learn other language faster and easier					
Valid	Disagree	9	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Undecided	18	6.9	6.9	10.4
	Agree	130	50.0	50.0	60.4
	Strongly Agree	103	39.6	39.6	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	100.0	

As indicated in the table 4 above, the sample means for *the variables* were 4.14 (SE=0.071) and 4.26 (SE=0.046) respectively. Further, of the respondents 82 (31%) were Agree and 130 (50%) Strongly Agree to the first variable

while 130 (50%) Disagree and 103 (39%) Agree to the second variable. Therefore, it can be concluded that both scores reflect positive than negative bond on students learning achievement through their first tongue.

Table 5. Teachers language proficiency than medium of instruction.

I Do speak other languages than my mother tongue language and am using to help my students		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	76	29.2	29.2	29.2
	Disagree	76	29.2	29.2	58.5
	Undecided	26	10.0	10.0	68.5
	Agree	56	21.5	21.5	90.0
	Strongly Agree	26	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	100.0	

Respondents' opinion regarding the above variable was more likely unfortunate; most teachers do not know or speak other languages than their own mother tongue. As indicated in table 5 above about 76 (29%) of respondents were Strongly Disagree while the same number of respondents

were Disagree. This is by implication they can't prepare the lesson accordingly. Therefore, with the mean score of 2.52 (SE=0.085), respondents displayed they do not speak other languages than their mother tongue language.

Table 6. Teachers view regarding their concern to students who could not speak medium of instruction.

I take special consideration to my students who could not speak medium of instruction		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	117	45.0	45.0	45.0
	Disagree	119	45.8	45.8	90.8
	Undecided	13	5.0	5.0	95.8
	Agree	10	3.8	3.8	99.6
	Strongly Agree	1	.4	.4	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	100.0	
I always try to notice a difference in the achievement of students based on medium of instruction					
Valid	Strongly Disagree	16	6.2	6.2	6.2
	Disagree	14	5.4	5.4	11.5

I take special consideration to my students who could not speak medium of instruction				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Undecided	16	6.2	6.2	17.7
Agree	121	46.5	46.5	64.2
Strongly Agree	93	35.8	35.8	100.0
Total	260	100.0	100.0	

As indicated in table 6 above, 117 (45%) of respondents were Strongly Disagree while 119 (46%) Disagree regarding their special concern to the students who could not speak medium of instruction. On the other hand, about 121 (46%) Agree and about 93 (35%) Strongly agree on noticing a difference on students achievement based on medium of instruction. The sample means for the above variables were 1.69 (SE=0.048) and 4.00 (SE=0.046) respectively.

Therefore, it is concluded that although respondents try to notice the existence of difference in students achievement because of their ability to medium of instruction there is no such special consideration and support for those students who couldn't speak medium of instruction, which is may be resulted from teacher's inability to speak other language than medium of instruction.

Table 7. Teachers view regarding their lesson and methodology preparation.

I clearly understand students in my classroom are multilingual and I prepare my lesson & methodology accordingly				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	51	19.6	19.6
	Disagree	91	35.0	54.6
	Undecided	27	10.4	65.0
	Agree	48	18.5	83.5
	Strongly Agree	43	16.5	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	

Table 7 above shows, 51 (19%) of respondents strongly disagree and 91 (35%) disagree regarding their lesson preparation by considering different language speakers in classroom. The sample mean for the above variable is 2.77 (SE=0.086). Therefore, considering the empirical evidence of

the variable it is easy to understand that most of respondent teachers are not in a position to prepare their lesson and methodology of teaching in a way it assist second language learners.

Table 8. Teachers view regarding communication in multilingual classrooms.

I can easily communicate with all of my students in classroom, even though my students are multilingual				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	39	15.0	15.0
	Disagree	96	36.9	51.9
	Undecided	13	5.0	56.9
	Agree	58	22.3	79.2
	Strongly Agree	54	20.8	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	3.1	3.1
	Disagree	26	10.0	13.1
	Undecided	11	4.2	17.3
	Agree	108	41.5	58.8
	Strongly Agree	107	41.2	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	

It's often difficult to communicate with students who speak different languages in a classroom.

As indicated in table 8 above, 39 (15%) and 96 (36%) of respondents were Strongly Disagree and Disagree respectively, regarding easy communication in multilingual classrooms. Further, regarding difficulty of communication in such a class 108 (41%) Agree while 107 (41%) of respondents Strongly Agree. The sample means for the above variables depict low mean scores of 2.97 (SE=0.088) and high mean score of 4.08 (SE=0.066) respectively. Thus, from

the above two empirical result, it can be conclude that communication is difficult for both teachers and students in multi- languages classrooms. This is may be due to the fact that teachers are incapable of speaking many languages at a time to communicate especially with those students who do not speak medium of instruction, which may create difficulty in creating conducive teaching learning environment.

Table 9. Teachers view regarding disciplinary problem in multilingual classrooms.

Disciplinary problem is not such a big deal in multilingual classrooms				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	67	25.8	25.8

Disciplinary problem is not such a big deal in multilingual classrooms				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Disagree	106	40.8	40.8	66.5
Undecided	22	8.5	8.5	75.0
Agree	41	15.8	15.8	90.8
Strongly Agree	24	9.2	9.2	100.0
Total	260	100.0	100.0	

As indicated in table 9 above, about 67 (25%) and 106 (40%) of respondents were Strongly Disagree and Disagree respectively regarding the easiness of disciplinary problem in multilingual classroom. The sample means for the variable depict low mean score of 2.42 (SE=0.079). Therefore,

Disciplinary problem in a multilingual classrooms is relatively seems high where students may reveal different behavioural problem and the classroom management could be difficult for teachers.

Table 10. Teachers view regarding cultural dominance in multilingual classrooms.

Multilingual classrooms promote the culture of dominant groups in the class				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	10	3.8	3.8
	Disagree	15	5.8	9.6
	Undecided	19	7.3	16.9
	Agree	111	42.7	59.6
	Strongly Agree	105	40.4	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	
Multilingual classrooms creates more opportunities to get to know another culture				
Valid	Strongly Disagree	17	6.5	6.5
	Disagree	16	6.2	12.7
	Undecided	14	5.4	18.1
	Agree	113	43.5	61.5
	Strongly Agree	100	38.5	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	

As indicated in table 10 above, about 111 (42%) and 105 (40%) of respondents Agree and Strongly Agree respectively regarding the promotion of dominant culture in multilingual classrooms. Further, Multilingual classrooms creates more opportunities to get to know another culture as about 113 (43%) and 100 (38%) of respondents were Agree and Strongly Agree. The sample means for *both variable* depict high mean scores of 4.10 (SE=0.063) and 4.01 (SE=0.070) respectively. Hence, this might be explained by the fact that respondents are in favour of multilingual classrooms are

useful to promote culture plus enable student to adapt second language though cultural domination of a few group will be there. As a matter of fact, it is concluded that multilingual classrooms are supportive in such a way that it helps pupils to get to know each other's culture and develop the skills of developing second language which may develop the essence of multicultural school, although the promotion of dominance groups culture was there, which on the other side lead to ignorance and even elimination of minorities culture and language.

Table 11. Teachers view regarding usage of only regional language in multilingual classrooms.

Using only regional language in the classroom will have a negative effect on the students learning styles				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	31	11.9	11.9
	Disagree	37	14.2	26.2
	Undecided	96	36.9	63.1
	Agree	44	16.9	80.0
	Strongly Agree	52	20.0	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	
Multilingual students are more capable in academic achievement than mono lingual students				
Valid	Strongly Disagree	30	11.5	11.5
	Disagree	30	11.5	23.1
	Undecided	89	34.2	57.3
	Agree	65	25.0	82.3
	Strongly Agree	46	17.7	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	

As indicated in table 11 above, respondent's response show a moderate response toward the variables. Further, a mean score of the variables 3.19 (SE=0.077) and 3.26 (SE=0.075) respectively, displayed moderate levels of agreement. Therefore,

it is concluded that using only regional language in classroom does not have negative effect on students learning styles although it has its own influence on learning achievement of those students who do not speak regional languages.

Table 12. Teachers view regarding multilingual classroom challenges.

Students 'dropout is highly related with language problem					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	6	2.3	2.3	2.3
	Disagree	26	10.0	10.0	12.3
	Undecided	12	4.6	4.6	16.9
	Agree	126	48.5	48.5	65.4
	Strongly Agree	90	34.6	34.6	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	100.0	
Students who learn in their second language can feel inferiority towards their culture; as a result it has its own negative effect on their learning					
Valid	Strongly Disagree	7	2.7	2.7	2.7
	Disagree	21	8.1	8.1	10.8
	Undecided	19	7.3	7.3	18.1
	Agree	120	46.2	46.2	64.2
	Strongly Agree	93	35.8	35.8	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	100.0	
Students who learn in their second language are afraid of expressing their ideas in classroom than mother tongue students					
Valid	Strongly Disagree	5	1.9	1.9	1.9
	Disagree	25	9.6	9.6	11.5
	Undecided	17	6.5	6.5	18.1
	Agree	117	45.0	45.0	63.1
	Strongly Agree	96	36.9	36.9	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	100.0	

Regarding language related dropout problem about 126 (48%) and 90 (34%) of the respondents were Agree and Strongly Agree respectively. Further, regarding inferiority feeling among students who learn in their second language about 120 (46%) and 93 (35%) of respondents Agree and Strongly Agree respectively. Additionally, about 117 (45%) and 96 (37%) of respondents Agree and Strongly Agree respectively claiming that, students who learn in their second language are afraid of

expressing their ideas. The sample mean scores for the variables were high mean score of 4.03 (SE=0.062), 4.04 (SE=0.062) and 4.05 (SE= 0.062) respectively. Therefore, it is concluded that multilingual classrooms are exposed to different learning difficulties, such as high dropout, feeling of inferiority towards reflecting their culture, and being afraid of expressing their ideas in front of their peers, for those students who are unable to speak medium of instruction.

Table 13. Teachers view regarding students homework accomplishment in multilingual classrooms.

Students learning in their mother tongue language always do their homework properly than non-mother tongue students					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	3.1	3.1	3.1
	Disagree	26	10.0	10.0	13.1
	Undecided	14	5.4	5.4	18.5
	Agree	104	40.0	40.0	58.5
	Strongly Agree	108	41.5	41.5	100.0
	Total	260	100.0	100.0	

As it is shown in table 13 above, Students learning in their mother tongue language always do their homework properly than non-mother tongue students. About 104 (40%) of the respondents Agree while about 108 (41%) of the respondents Strongly Agree regarding the variable. The variable also shows high mean score of 4.07 (SE=0.066). This implies that

the respondents understand the advantage of teaching students with their mother tongue in relation to students learning achievement. Therefore, it is concluded that students who attend instruction using their mother tongue are over perform in doing their homework properly than students who do not attend instruction with their second language.

Table 14. Teachers view regarding language policy.

The language policy of the country properly address the issue of multilingual classroom					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	57	21.9	21.9	21.9
	Disagree	87	33.5	33.5	55.4
	Undecided	18	6.9	6.9	62.3
	Agree	55	21.2	21.2	83.5

The language policy of the country properly address the issue of multilingual classroom				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	43	16.5	16.5	100.0
Total	260	100.0	100.0	

Regarding the language policy of the country about 57 (22%) and 87 (33%) of respondents, claim that the policy did not properly address the issue of multilingual classrooms. The variable also depicts low mean score of 2.77 (SE= 0.079). Therefore, it is concluded that the Education and Training Policy did not properly address the issue of multilingual classrooms, although it provides the opportunity to attained instruction using regional language, since the classrooms are composed of students with different language backgrounds.

4. Discussion

The result of both survey questionnaire and focus group discussion revealed teachers are aware of the issue of multilingual classroom, although it is not as expected level since they are not in position to handle the problem. Multilingual classrooms have both Learning challenges and Learning opportunities to students. As learning opportunity, a multilingual classroom creates more opportunities to get to know a new culture and adopting languages of others. Learning multiple languages on the other hand, should improve communication as well as contribute to enhancing the environment of multicultural schools. In multilingual classroom, tolerance of difference should be facilitated. Understanding toward minorities and learning the dominant language should be improved, as students who speak the dominant language as a mother tongue struggle to improve their second language skills. Further, Multilingual classrooms creates conducive environment for both mother tongue and second language students to develop the skills of second language. However, the result of both survey questionnaire and focus group discussion revealed that the importance of teaching students with their mother tongue and gradually transition to second language which is clearly supported by the Education and Training Policy of the country. When children receive formal instruction in their first language throughout primary school and then gradually transition to academic learning in the second language, they learn the second language quickly. If they continue to have opportunities to develop their first language skills in secondary school, they emerge as fully bilingual (or multilingual) learners [2].

On the other hand, although teachers have knowhow of the concept of multilingual classrooms and their student's achievement difference, findings of the study indicates they do not give special consideration to the students who could not speak medium of instruction which is challenging for their learning. This can be manifested by respondent teachers who are aware of their classrooms are multilingual, but though did not prepare their lesson and methodology accordingly which may create learning

difficulty in particular to the students who could not speak medium of instruction. This may lead students who attend education with their second language for being afraid of expressing their own ideas in classroom and develop inferiority feeling towards expressing their culture. Further, they lack interest in their education which may lead towards poor school performance when compared with students who attend their education in their first tongue. If children are forced to switch abruptly or transition too soon from learning in their mother tongue to schooling in a second language, their first language acquisition may be attenuated or even lost. Even more importantly, their self-confidence as learners and their interest in what they are learning may decline, leading to lack of motivation, school failure, and early school leaving [2]. Additionally, the educational problem faced by many children from ethno-linguistic communities is twofold. In the first place, some have no access to education at all. Those who do have access to school but do not speak the official language, when they enter the education system find that, their knowledge, experience and language rather than serving as a foundation for learning are treated as a disadvantage. Their language skills do not serve them because their language has no place in the classroom. Instead, textbooks and teaching are in a language they neither speak nor understand. Their learning and problem-solving experiences and their knowledge of "how things work" in their own culture and social setting do not serve them because the culture of the classroom, the teachers, and the textbooks is that of the dominant society [8].

5. Conclusion

Regarding respondents awareness towards multilingual classrooms it is concluded that teachers are aware of the issue, although it is not as expected level since they are not in position to handle the problem or not even try to minimize the problem by developing their own strategy. Lack of giving special consideration to students who could not speak medium of instruction, lack of preparing lesson and methodology accordingly, lack of effective communication, difficulty of classroom management are some of the elements identified from teachers side which manifests the absence giving special consideration to the issue. In relation to teachers training system it is concluded that the system did not give due attention to multilingual classrooms. This can be manifested by the fact that, most of the teachers did not speak other language than medium of instruction and they did nothing, in order to help those students who attend the instruction with their second language. The fact that teachers did not handle such problem is the indicator that, they are not well equipped

with a mechanism to handle such problem during their training which indicates the absence of due attention to multilingual classrooms in teacher training system.

In relation to the opportunity of multilingual classrooms it is concluded that, multilingual classrooms has its own advantage so; the opportunities need to be exploited in a proper manner. The opportunity to know a new culture, adopting languages of others, opportunity to improve communication, enhancing the environment of multicultural schools, tolerance of differences, struggle to improve second language skills are some of the advantage of being multilingual and of multilingual classrooms if properly managed.

On the subject of learning difficulties facing those students who attend the instruction with their second language, it is concluded that tremendous challenges were existed which has a negative impact on these students learning achievement. Feeling of inferiority towards their culture, being afraid of expressing their own ideas in classroom, lack of accomplishing provided homework properly, lack of interest in their education, disciplinary problem, poor school performance, lack of effective communication with teachers and their peers, dropout are some the learning challenges faced those students who attend the instruction with their second language.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion drawn the following recommendations were forwarded:

Short Term Recommendations

1. Teachers' attitude and consciousness towards multilingual classrooms and their teaching practices have foremost impact in academic achievement of students in school. Therefore, awareness creation, short term trainings, panel discussions shall be arranged focusing on multilingual classrooms.
2. In teacher training, Priority should be placed on recruiting candidates who are fluent in the local languages in addition to regional language that make them well suited for work with the young children and families. Incentives are also needed to attract and retain these especially qualified individuals.
3. During teachers' deployment, Regional, Zonal and Woreda education offices should consider those teachers who are capable of speaking more than one language and shall assign in areas that students speaks different languages.
4. In self-contained classes of multilingual classrooms where teacher cannot speak other than the media language he/she shall invite guest teachers who speaks languages fits to the students those who do not speak the media language at certain interval.

Long Term Recommendations

One good practice that the research team observed during the study is the presence of different language classrooms in Adama town, (Afaan Oromo and Amharic class) which is elective classrooms for students. As a result, students were

provided with a chance either to join a classroom that uses Afaan Oromo (regional language) or to join a classroom that uses Amharic as a medium of instruction on the basis of their mother tongue. Although, Planning, implementing and sustaining mother tongue based education in multiple language communities is certainly challenging, through carefully planned means expanding such opportunity is recommended.

Limitations

Lack of incorporating data's directly collected from students because of their maturity level was limitation of the study. Further, lack of related recent researches and literatures in the country is a limitation.

Authors' Contributions

FA is a principal Investigator of the study, while DM and YM, are co-investigator of the study. However, the overall process of the research was conducted with the participation of all authors.

Disclosure

All the authors do not have any possible conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgements

The study was conducted with the financial support obtained from Debre Berhan University. The authors are so very grateful to Debre Berhan University for financial support.

References

- [1] Alidou, H., Boly, A., Brock-Utne, B., Diallo, Y., Heugh, K., & Wolff, H. (2006,). Optimizing learning and education in Africa-the language factor: A stock taking research on mother tongue and bilingual education in sub-Saharan Africa. Paper presented at the ADEA 2006 Biennial Meeting, Libreville, Gabon.
- [2] Ball, J. (2010). Educational equity for children from diverse language backgrounds: Mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education in the early years. Presentation to UNESCO International Symposium: Translation and Cultural Mediation, Paris: UNESCO, 22/23 February 2010, on the occasion of the 11th International Mother Language Day.
- [3] Byrnes, H. (2008). Articulating a foreign language sequence through content: A look at the culture standards. *Language Teaching*, 41 (1), 103-118. Hardcopy, AUK Library.
- [4] Cenoz, J. (2009). Towards Multilingual Education. *Basque Educational Research from an International Perspective. Multilingual Matters*.
- [5] Creswell, J. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Approaches*. (3rdEd.). London: Sage Publication Inc.

- [6] Dereje Terefe. (2010). The Implementation of a Multilingual Education Policy in Ethiopia: The Case of Afaan Oromoo in Primary Schools of Oromia Regional State. Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Jyväskylä.
- [7] FDRE. (1994). Educational and Training Policy of Ethiopia: St. George Printing Press. Addis Ababa.
- [8] Malone, S. (2007). Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education: Implications For Education Policy. Presented at the Seminar on Education Policy and the Right to Education: Towards more Equitable Outcomes for South Asia's Children Kathmandu, 17-20 September 2007.
- [9] Schlechty, P. (2005). Creating great schools; Six critical systems at the heart of educational innovation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- [10] Shohamy, E. (2006). Language policy: Hidden agendas and new approaches. New York: Routledge.
- [11] UNESCO (2010). Educational equity for children from diverse backgrounds: Mother tongue based bilingual or multilingual education in the early years: Literature Review. <http://www.unesco.org/en/languages-in-education/publications/>.
- [12] Zaidatol, A. & Bagheri, A. (2009). Entrepreneurship as a center choice: An analysis of entrepreneurial self- efficiency and intention of university student. European Journal of social science, 9 (2): 338-346.