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University of Turku

ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

Benefits and Challenges as Viewed By Founders of
International Schools in Ethiopia

Heidi Karvonen

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Department of Teacher Education

Faculty of Education

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This research explores the benefits and challenges of using English as opposed to a local language as a medium of instruction as viewed by founders of two private international schools in Ethiopia. While mother tongue-based learning is strongly advocated, specifically in the African context, and the educational policies of Ethiopia in this regard are recognized as the most progressive on the continent, there are several gaps between policies and implementation. One such gap that remains unaddressed and under-researched is English as a choice of the medium of instruction in a widely esteemed growing number of private international schools. This study gives a preliminary impetus for doing further research and addressing this gap, which can easily be overlooked due to the relatively greater academic success of international private school students. These students are in the minority, and are not primarily the concern of the government, but rather of the private school owners. The choice of medium of instruction in these schools certainly influences their students learning, but also the wider community.

The data for this research was collected through an open questionnaire from four founders of two different private international schools where the medium of instruction is English, but where more than 90 per cent of the students are Amharic-speaking Ethiopians. The results showed that the main benefits of using English as a medium of instruction as identified by the founders were: better accessibility of English materials as well as the existence of better curricula, better job and career development opportunities, a positive influence on the wider community and wider chances for communication. The main challenges of using English as a medium of instruction as identified by the founders were: teachers' lack of proficiency both in the English language and in teaching in English, lack of parental involvement, loss of mother tongue or culture and lack of support from the government.

The benefits identified can be achieved even if English is taught as a second language as long as better materials and curricula are developed in the local language and culture. Most importantly, according to earlier research the challenges identified could largely be overcome by using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction. This area should definitely be researched further and more widely to identify the underlying factors regarding the choice of the medium of instruction in private international schools and ultimately to re-examine the choice itself.

Keywords: English medium of instruction, mother tongue medium of instruction, private international schools

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1 INTRODUCTION

Language, communication and the underlying culture are without doubt the very basis of learning, due to which they must be given primary attention throughout a child's schooling, specifically during the first years. The importance of focusing on becoming fluent in one's first language is a consensus supported by numerous studies (Wilmot 2003; Mwinsheikhe 2003; Alidou, Aliou, Brock-Utne, Diallo, Heugh 2006; Shin, Sailors, McClung, Pearson, Hoffman, Chilimanjira 2015; Debreli & Oyman 2016). The benefits of learning a second language at a young age are likewise widely researched and confirmed (Barac & Bialystok 2011; Nicolay & Poncelet 2013).

The importance of both first and second language learning is unquestionable. Comparing international languages of wider communication to local ones, however, would not be justified, for they are complementary and have distinct values. They are both essential for the harmonious and full development of both individuals and society at large. (UNESCO 2010, 6) Therefore, without creating false dichotomies between the languages, the questions that need to be separately explored are what the importance of learning each of these languages is and how they should be emphasised in harmony with each other. These question is approached in this thesis from the perspective of the choice of medium of instruction, in other words the language used for learning and teaching, in a specific school context.

For more than half a century, UNESCO has encouraged mother tongue-based education in early childhood and primary education (UNESCO 1953), and a plethora of research, policies and documents support this. However, monolingualism in official or international languages still dominates around the world (Wolff & Ekkehard 2000; Arnold, Barlett, Gowani, Merali 2006). More specifically, most African countries continue to use a former colonial language as the primary language of instruction and governance (UNESCO 2010, 6).

In the context of Ethiopia, a country so rich in languages and cultures, the attention which should be paid to the choice of medium of instruction cannot be stressed enough. Ethiopia is a country with 89 different languages and cultures (UNICEF 2016, 32). Needless to say, to adequately support the learning of the native speakers of all these languages, special attention is needed from educational developers and the larger community, from parents and private investors, in the choice and support of the medium of instruction. While the question of medium of instruction has been widely researched, and the implementation of national mother tongue-based educational policies scrutinized (Heugh, Benson, Bogale, Yohannes 2007; Nekatibeb 2007; Ramachandran 2012), in the present study the formerly unexplored specific focus is on the perceptions of private investors, in this case the founders of two private international schools where the medium of instruction is English, but where the vast majority of children speak Amharic at home.

This research was inspired by the author's stay in both of these schools, half a year in each. Having seen the challenges of using a foreign language as a medium of instruction in practice, there was a strong urge to dig deeper for the reasons behind these challenges and the choices involved. An evident gap between national policies and their implementation in private schools called for further research, specifically because international private schools are generally highly esteemed among the public and are increasing in number.

This thesis proceeds from laying out the Ethiopian language policy context to examining the wider theory behind mother tongue-based language policies, ultimately narrowing the focus to the international private school context and the choice of medium of instruction. It will explore the benefits and challenges of English as a medium of instruction as well as the importance of mother tongue learning from the perspective of the founders of these two international schools.

2 ETHIOPIAN LANGUAGE POLICY

Language policies in Africa have been strongly influenced by the colonial history of the continent. Even to this day, most African children are learning using a colonial language instead of their own mother tongue, due to a persisting idea that the only means for upward economic mobility is through the international languages of wider communication, such as Arabic, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish (UNESCO 2010, 4). There are many negative consequences of such language policies, which will be discussed in this and the following chapter. Research findings indicate that these policies are causing low-quality education and the further marginalisation of the continent, resulting in the “creeping amnesia of collective memory” (Prah 2003, 16). Not surprisingly, the continent is almost completely excluded from knowledge creation and production worldwide, contributing only 0.4 per cent of its international gross expenditure to research and development, of which South Africa alone covers up to 90 per cent (UNESCO 2010, 5). Although language policies are only part of the equation, there is much indication to the significance of their impact.

2.1 Language policy then and now

In regards to the colonial influence on language policies, Ethiopia is quite exceptional. Apart from being occupied by Italy for a brief period between 1936 and 1941, Ethiopia did not experience colonial rule like the rest of the region, enabling the country to take a very different approach in its language policies. However, according to the Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education (EFMoE 2002, 11), the system of education was not designed with the concrete conditions of Ethiopia in mind, but rather, it was influenced by whichever country happened to be close to the government at any given time.

According to Ambatchew (2010), in the 19th century the traditional system of

education used the Ge'ez and Amharic languages. In the beginning of the 20th century, modern schools also began to teach French and Arabic. During the short period of Italian colonial occupation, vernaculars were used as media of instruction with the aim of disuniting the country. Following this period, Emperor Haile Selassie changed the medium of instruction to Amharic in the government schools in the 1940s in order to reunite the country (Ambatchew 2010, 199-200). As a result of modernization, English was also used as a medium of instruction. The socialist government from 1974 to 1991 encouraged the use of local languages in literacy, but not so much as media of instruction. The problems resulting from using English as a medium of instruction were noticed as early as 1983, mainly due to the lack of proficiency in English among Ethiopian teachers (Negash 2006, 31). After the fall of the socialist regime, the government allowed instruction in different languages, and finally in 1994 adopted the language policy still prevalent today (Ambatchew 2010, 199-200).

2.2 Language policy implementation

The current language policy allows any language in the country to be used as a medium of instruction, and all Ethiopian languages enjoy equal state recognition, although the official language of the country is Amharic. Each federal member state of Ethiopia can determine their own official language or languages (FDRE 1994, 23; Nekatibeb 2007, 51; Ambatchew 2010, 200). The policy further states that primary education, which goes on up to grade eight, should be given in nationality languages, assuming that the nationality language of the region is the mother tongue of most of the children within the region (FDRE 1994, 23; Alemu & Abebayehu 2011, 403). The goal of this policy is to improve literacy rates and academic achievement, as well as advance appreciation of local languages and cultures (Wolff 2011, 97).

English becomes the medium of instruction at secondary school and at university level, and therefore is taught as a foreign language starting from the first year of primary schooling (FDRE 1994, Dearden 2014, 26). Learning Amharic, on the other

hand, starts from grade three or five depending on the region (Heugh et al. 2007, 5). It is taught as a language of countrywide communication (FDRE 1994). In total, currently more than 30 languages are being used as a medium of instruction or taught as a subject in primary schools in Ethiopia (Derash, 2013). The percentage of children learning in their own mother tongue ranges from 71.5 per cent (in the region of Benishangul-Gumuz) to 97.8 per cent (in the Sidama zone), with the majority of regions exceeding a relatively high percentage of 85 (Piper 2010, ES2).

While the Ethiopian language policy supporting mother tongue learning is being widely recognized as the most progressive in Africa (UNICEF 2016, 32), as these relatively high percentages may indicate, practice is not always aligned with policy. For example, in practice English is still allowed as a medium of instruction in all sectors and all levels of the national educational system, even if the policy does not support this (Dearden 2014, 10). Furthermore, Ambatchew (2010, 204-205) observes that despite the supportive mother tongue policy, many political elite continue to send their own children to schools where the medium of instruction is English or French, and that many families decide to migrate within the country to areas where the medium of instruction is Amharic as opposed to their own mother tongue. In general, there is considerable public pressure put on education authorities to use English as a medium of instruction. One of the reasons for this may be that the many languages used as media of instruction are not equally adequate for use in education (Cohen 2007, 64). Additionally, the policy could possibly be ethnically divisive and cause regional nationalism (Cohen 2007, 64).

There is also an ongoing struggle with financial resources to meet the current educational goals, which can explain part of the mismatch of language policy and implementation. Additional resources are being found from two directions, namely through foreign aid money or investors and local investors. Negash (2016, 9-10) argues that the foreign aid money allocated to education in Ethiopia serves as an instrument for political power. To use the money, foreign approval is needed, due to which certain power relationships continue to exist in the postcolonial world.

As far as local investors are concerned, post-millennium education policies encouraged private investors to open educational institutions nationwide from kindergarten to institutions of higher education (EFMoE 2002, 67). The government even provided incentives such as free land for the investors (EFMoE 2002, 67). There was a rapid increase in the number of private schools, many of which had an international orientation, such as the two schools examined in this study. English, or another lingua franca is still commonly used as the medium of instruction in such schools to attract upper income families as customers. Such schools continue to grow in number and size, as well as influence (Hayden & Thompson 2008, 12).

Questioning the medium of instruction of international schools may sound controversial, since part of the very purpose of an international school is to offer education in a language of wider communication, an international language. However, it is important to look at what goal the establishment of an international school is actually serving, in other words, what makes it international.

In the past, international schools have been mainly connected to the processes of international migration, expatriates and diplomats hoping to offer their children education compatible to the education they receive in their home countries. Such schools serve a purpose today, but the need for them is not significantly growing. A newer increasing trend is the establishment of international schools due to a certain dissatisfaction with the quality of education in the country, originating from a desire to foster a global outlook that is not tied to a particular educational system or culture and a need to prepare students to live and work in an increasingly globalizing world (Hayden & Thompson 2008, 9).

Unfortunately no accurate data was available, but according to a Google search and the web pages found for various international schools, there are more than 20 international schools in Addis Ababa alone. While it is difficult to determine which of the two trends each of these international schools are following, the school policies as well as the backgrounds and overall diversity of the students may give some indication. For example, the International Community School of Addis Ababa

is known for being one of the main schools where the children of diplomats are studying. Their student body consists of more than 65 different nationalities (ICS, 2017). According to the school policy, the overall percentage of spaces for children from the international community should be no less than 90% schoolwide, and in early childhood and elementary levels the percentage should be a minimum of 95% of the children (ICS, 2017).

Indeed, those students who attend private schools are known to be considerably better in English and other subjects (Negash 2006, 40). It is yet unknown, however, how much of this is due to the education the private schools provide and how much to the fact that students attending private schools are from well-resourced families and have far stronger exposure to the English language. It has been noted that most students around the country have access to school reading books, but very little, if any, to other reading materials, which correlates with their poor reading levels (Piper 2010, 48). Perhaps it is then safe to assume that students attending private schools do better in English and other subjects at least partially because of better exposure to the language and material availability. This phenomenon may wrongfully increase the already esteemed status of private schools and English as a medium of instruction in the eyes of the public and attenuate the importance of mother tongue instruction in learning.

Due to all these multidimensional challenges in implementing mother tongue-based language policies, the strengthening of the policies and their thorough implementation on the regional and local levels is becoming one of the primary items on the agenda of education developers in Ethiopia. Education Sector Development Programme IV for the years 2010 to 2015 almost completely disregarded such development goals (EFMoE 2010), focusing mainly on other educational development matters. However, now huge efforts have already begun in the development of a national mother tongue curriculum in the seven main languages, namely Afaan Oromo, Af-Somali, Amharic, Hadiyyisa, Sidaamu Afoo, Tigrinya and Wolayttatto. Additionally, emphasis is being put on the training of teachers to deliver this curriculum and the development, production and distribution of related teaching

and learning materials (EFMoE 2015, 17). Particular attention is given to early grade acquisition of foundation skills in mother tongue languages. To support this, the training of primary school teachers in mother tongue instruction, which began during the implementation of ESDP IV, will continue (EFMoE 2015, 55-58).

Despite the many challenges in narrowing the gap between policy and implementation, Ethiopia's national policy of mother tongue medium schooling is still one of the best on the continent, as mentioned earlier. It adheres to global guidelines and promotes sound educational practice (Heugh et al. 2007, 7). The following chapters explain the theory behind such mother tongue-based language guidelines and policies.

3 THE EFFECTS OF MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

There is solid ground for the direction Ethiopia has taken in its language policies. The benefits of having the mother tongue as a medium of instruction are many, as are the challenges brought by using a second language to learn curricular content. Mother tongue-based policy has been recommended by UNESCO since 1953 (UNESCO 1953), and special attention has been given to African countries (UNESCO 2010; UNICEF 2016).

In Ethiopia, most children are learning three or more languages, using one at home, having another nationality language as the regional medium of instruction, having to learn Amharic as the language of countrywide communication as well as English as the language of secondary and higher education (FDRE 1994, 23-24). Multilingual education is, therefore, a topic crucial to the context of Ethiopia, and worth mentioning in this thesis. There is vast research on the topic, and it has many practical applications (Garcia, Lin & May 2017; Cenoz & Gorter 2011) that should be re-examined in the light of the Ethiopian multilingual context and applied adequately. However, this thesis focuses on the topic of medium of instruction, and due to this cannot engage in the much wider discussion of multilingual education. While recognizing and stressing the importance of multilingual education, in the following paragraphs the topics discussed are the mother tongue as a medium of instruction and English as a medium of instruction.

3.1 The mother tongue as a medium of instruction

Earlier research confirms that first language learning creates a foundation for all learning, and that everything is better assimilated if delivered and processed in the mother tongue of the students (Wilmot 2003; Mwinsheikhe 2003; Alidou et al. 2006; Shin et al. 2015; Debreli & Oyman 2016). Children are not only more likely to

succeed, but also to enrol in school in the first place, if offered mother tongue-based education (Kosonen 2005).

In the context of Ethiopia, a comparative study of the learning achievements of 8th grade students across Ethiopia showed that according to the vast majority of educators, students with stronger mother tongue education performed better in all subjects, surprisingly even in English (Heugh et al. 2007, 6.). A concurrent study found that the scores of 8th grade students learning with the mother tongue as the medium of instruction were up to 11 per cent higher in the subjects of biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics and English than the scores of those who studied in a second language (Nekatibeb 2007, 59). Another study conducted in the context of Ethiopia showed that across the nine regions and two municipal administrative area of Ethiopia mother tongue instruction has had a positive effect at all levels of schooling, even leading to an increase of 12 per cent in the number of students completing six years or more of schooling (Ramachandran 2012, 17). The data of these studies were drawn from community and government schools, therefore possibly explaining the apparent controversy of these studies in relation to private school students doing better in national exams regardless of them learning with a medium of English (Negash 2006, 40). These studies nevertheless strongly support the pedagogical effectiveness of mother tongue-based policies in Ethiopia.

Similar comparisons have been done in several other African countries, with several different languages, and the results have likewise been in favour of mother tongue-based education. For example, in a study conducted in Botswana by Alidou et al. (2006, 108), a list of science concepts was taught to two groups, one group in their mother tongue, Setswana, and the other in their medium of instruction, English. The results were that the students taught in Setswana had a significantly better understanding of the concepts. A similar study was carried out in Tanzania by Mwinsheikhe (2003), in which secondary school students who were taught science concepts in their mother tongue, Kiswahili, did far better than those who were taught in English.

There are many other side benefits of mother tongue-based education that support aspects of students' overall schooling, ranging from stronger identity and motivation to processes of learning. For example, the parents of such students are more likely to communicate with teachers and participate in their children's learning if the medium of instruction is the student's mother tongue (Benson 2002). Enabling the cooperation of parents with teachers and the school is essential, as it significantly improves the learning outcomes of students (Henderson & Mapp 2002; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, Closson 2005; Wanat 2010). Most importantly, communication between the teacher and the students is more fluent, which helps in developing a more open relationship where both parties are being understood (UNESCO 2010, 28).

Using the local language as a medium of instruction not only supports the overall learning process and related communication, but also more holistically enhances the cultural identities of the students and increases appreciation to the many languages and cultures tied to them (UNESCO 2011b, 6; Wolff 2011, 97). Fluency and literacy in the mother tongue also create a cognitive and linguistic foundation for learning other languages, whether local or international (August & Shanahan 2006; UNESCO 2011b, 6; Debreli & Oyman, 2016).

Although mother tongue-based education is advantageous for all children, disadvantaged groups are specifically known to benefit from it, including children from rural communities (Hovens 2002), children with learning difficulties (Ortiz 2007) and girls (UNESCO 2005; World Bank 2000). Moreover, there is vast evidence to support its positive impact, not only on the individual level, but also on the social and economic life of the wider community and nation at large (UNESCO 2010).

Because of the number of languages involved, it is often argued that the implementation of mother tongue-based education is too costly. However, while there are additional costs to implementing a mother tongue-based system of education, there are also areas of saving in costs and a significantly better return to

the economy of the wider community. To put preconceptions aside, the costs are not dependent so much on the policy itself, but rather on the cost reduction strategies and implementation (Heugh 2006, 138; UNESCO 2011a, 40-42). In the case of Ethiopia, in the six years following the implementation of the mother tongue-based educational language policy, the recurrent education expenditure per student declined by around 20 per cent (Ramachandran 2012, 8).

3.2 English as a medium of instruction

The English language is one of the most geographically widely spoken languages in the world and serves multiple purposes in a rapidly globalizing world. Its wide use extends from politics and economy to technology, science, media and communication. Its mastery opens doors to more information than the mastery of any other language (Crystal, 2003). The importance of English language learning and its usage as a medium of instruction divides opinions. While some prefer using English as a medium of instruction as opposed to the mother tongue, others are suspicious of English language learning from an early age.

Contrary to some misconceptions in regards to language learning, children are indeed capable of acquiring two or even several languages at an early childhood, as multiple languages do not compete for “mental space” or confuse children (Lightbown 2008, 8; Crystal 2003, 17). Given an adequate environment for interaction, the developmental path of multiple language acquisition is in fact much like that observed in the acquisition of a single language, with some additional cognitive advantages (Lightbown 2008, 8; Barac & Bialystok 2011; Nicolay & Poncelet 2013). This is, however, conditional to sufficient motivation, exposure, periods of formal study and opportunities for practice (UNESCO 2011b, 18).

According to international research students are quick to learn simple conversational skills in a new language. It takes from one to two years for them to master good basic communication skills. However, even in well-resourced learning environments, it

takes at least six years to learn the abstract academic language skills needed to assimilate age-appropriate curricular content (Alidou et al. 2006, 7; Cummins 2000). While second language learning is a time consuming process for anyone, it can be further complicated or slowed down by other factors, such as family socioeconomic status, ethnic or gender discrimination, psychological conditions, individual or motivational differences (UNESCO 2011b, 18).

If children are forced to change their language of schooling too early or abruptly to a second language, their first language acquisition may even be attenuated or even lost, and their self-confidence as learners may weaken, leading to lack of motivation, school failure, and early school leaving (UNESCO 2011b, 6). This, of course, does not mean that a second language cannot be introduced at an early age, as noted earlier. In the Ethiopian context, where the language of instruction changes to English in secondary and university levels, early English language learning and its mastery before the change to secondary level of schooling is undisputed.

One of the major problems in using English as a medium of instruction in the African context is that, regardless of academic qualifications, teachers lack the adequate language proficiency and competence to teach the language (Dearden 2014, 27). In Ethiopia, this problem was recognized as early as 1983 (Negash 2006, 31), but it is still today very present in the schools where English is used as a medium of instruction. Also, the education systems in Africa, and more specifically in Ethiopia, predominantly use subject content teachers to teach specific subjects. While their priority is to teach their own subjects, they are also all language teachers, increasingly so when the medium of instruction is not the mother tongue of the students. Although many subject content teachers may acknowledge their responsibility for the teaching of language skills in the subject content classroom, they lack the training and competence to carry out this duty (Uys, van der Walt, van den Berg, Botha 2007; EFMoE 2015, 58). This lack of language proficiency and competence in language teaching, combined with the challenges students face when learning in a language unfamiliar to them, causes both teachers and students in African classrooms to face serious communication and learning problems on a daily

basis (UNESCO 2010, 28).

When the language of communication is foreign to either or both the teacher and the students, many important issues become misunderstood or even unrecognized. For example, teachers can often misinterpret a lack of adequate proficiency in the language of instruction with lack of intelligence, laziness or an uncooperative attitude on the part of the students. This can seriously inhibit students, cause anxiety and further hinder learning. Student may become even more unwilling to participate, trying to avoid embarrassment in front of their classmates. This attitude is specifically common among girls in Africa. Girls often take a quiet role during lessons to avoid speaking in a foreign language of instruction (Alidou et al. 2006, 87, World Bank 2000). Girls tend to have less exposure to an official language and tend to stay in school longer as it is, and if taught in a second language, they are even more likely to become low achievers and repeat grades (UNESCO 2005).

The communication gap between teachers and students can also cause the misrecognition of special needs. In the case of academic difficulties, studies conclude that teachers find it challenging to distinguish whether such difficulties are in fact language-related or whether there are actual learning difficulties or disability involved, and report not having the adequate tools for special needs identification (McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, Cutting, Leos, D'Emilio 2005, 2; Ortiz 2007, 281). In the African context and in Ethiopia more specifically, special needs recognition and the failure in providing adequate support to all children is already a major concern. To illustrate the extent of the problem in Ethiopia, in 2015, for example, it was estimated that only 4 per cent of the children with special needs are enrolled in primary education (EFMoE 2015). Needless to say, the fact that such problems overlap with the challenges brought on by a foreign medium of instruction makes the required solutions more complex and multidimensional.

Although predominantly the biggest challenges in using English as a medium of instruction relate to the lack of adequate language skills of both the teacher and the students and the communication gap this causes, there are also problems regarding

the availability of support that teachers and students are getting. As mentioned earlier when discussing the benefits of mother tongue-based education, parent involvement can slacken and become more difficult if the language of instruction is foreign, which in turn negatively affects the student's learning outcomes (Benson 2002; Henderson & Mapp 2002; Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2005; Wanat 2010). Also, suitable learning materials for learning subject content, particularly in a second language as well as the language itself as a foreign language, are scarce. When the medium of instruction is English, curricula and learning materials are often adopted from other language and cultural settings, which can make them both inadequate regarding the language level of the students as well as culturally irrelevant for the local students (Negash 2006, 33). Additional reading materials, appropriate to the reading level, that support the student's learning in and of English are also scarce both in the classrooms, wider community and the student's family (Negash 2006, 34; Piper 2010, 50).

The poor language and teachings skills of the teachers combined with the lack of adequate resources can cause educational developers to seize fast but unsuitable corrective measures. As an example, due to the increase in the number of students, this happened in Ethiopia when the government introduced televised teaching as a fast solution in 2004 (Negash 2006, 32). The negative impacts of distance education can be many. To name but a few, Negash mentions that the pace of the lecture may be too fast for the students to follow and write notes when the students' proficiency level in English is fairly low. The lectures are transmitted once and are often not repeatable, due to which students missing class can easily fall behind. They are also dependent on the uninterrupted flow of electric power, which creates problems due to the frequent power cuts throughout the country. The lectures are often read by people who are not themselves subject teachers, making it harder to convey the learning content. A typical distance education teaching room has little ventilation and contains approximately 90 students, making the learning environment highly discouraging (Negash 2006, 32-33).

Not only educational developers, but more practically the teachers themselves may

also rely on to poor measures in order to give maximum exposure to the English language. For example, the commonly used only-English policy during classes and recess has been criticized and should be re-examined in light of the recognized benefits of mother tongue use in all learning (Debreli & Oyman 2016, 148-149).

When the language of instruction is not the mother tongue of the students, there is so much additional support needed, not only in learning with a foreign language, but also in order to retain their mother tongue. According to UNESCO (2011b, 6), they must have ongoing formal instruction in reading and writing in their first language, ongoing interaction with their family and wider community in their mother tongue on increasingly complex topics beyond day-to-day matters, as well as exposure to positive parental attitudes to maintaining their first language as a marker of cultural identity and for functional purposes, for example in relation to local economy and trade.

5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary purpose of this research is to explore the views of founders of international schools in Ethiopia about the benefits and challenges of using English as a medium of instruction as well as the importance of mother tongue learning. It also explores the educational aims behind establishing an international school in the first place and further developing it.

The research questions are:

1. What are the benefits of having English as a medium of instruction?
2. What are the challenges of having English as a medium of instruction?
3. What is the importance of mother tongue learning?
4. What are the educational aims behind establishing and developing an international school?

From a larger perspective, this research aims to give a preliminary background and an impetus for further research addressing the gap between the increase in international private schools where the medium of instruction is one other than the mother tongue of the majority of the students, and the concern of using a non-mother tongue-based system that does not comply with national policies (FDRE 1994) and international recommendations (UNESCO 1953; UNESCO 2010; UNICEF 2016). Although the concerns regarding the choices of medium of instruction are widely addressed through policy reforms, and the practical challenges in implementation are being increasingly recognized, the particular gap addressed in this study has been studied very little if at all. Perhaps the reasons are that the students attending private schools are in the minority, and that statistically they seem to be achieving better in comparison to public and community schools (Negash 2006, 40). In other words, they are currently not the primary concern of educational developers in the country. They are, however, the concern of the founders of these schools, and therefore it is important to study the grounds on which these founders chose to establish international schools with English as a medium of instruction in the first place, and

what their views are on the benefits and challenges of this choice and the importance of the mother tongue.

Because of the high esteem given to private international schools by the public and their increase in number, size and influence, the choices made by these schools with regard to the medium of instruction affect an increasing number of students as well as the attitudes of the wider community (Hayden & Thompson 2008). This underlines the importance of researching this area and possibly embarking in preventive measures.

6 RESEARCH METHOD

This research aims to explore whether the founders of the international schools in Addis Ababa are aware of and concerned about the challenges brought by the medium of instruction used in their schools and the fact that it contradicts national policies and international recommendations. It also explores the aims behind establishing international schools, indicating their possible relation to the needs of the surrounding international community or a certain dissatisfaction towards the current educational system.

The method chosen for this qualitative research was thematic analysis, a method for systematically identifying and organising patterns of meaning, in other words themes, across a dataset, as well as offering insight into them. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and easy use in cases such as this, where the data may be small but contain meaningful commonalities (Braun & Clarke 2012, 2). Mainly inductive, but also deductive approaches to data coding and analysis were used, inductive meaning that the themes are derived from the commonalities found in the content of the data itself, and deductive meaning that the themes or codes used for interpreting the data are introduced by the researcher (Braun & Clarke 2012, 3), in this case from earlier background experience and research on the topics presented in chapters 1 to 4.

6.1 The participants in the study and the collection of data

Four founders of two international schools in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia were included in this research. These two schools were chosen because both of them use English as their medium of instruction, while more than 90 percent of their student's mother tongue is Amharic. Amharic and French are also taught in both schools. These schools have been running and evolving for more than 10 years.

The founders of these two schools are all in middle adulthood and have notable educational backgrounds in higher education, however, not in the field of educational leadership, management or development, or education in general. They all have also substantial work experience either in their respective fields or business. All the participants speak and write fluent or good English, due to which the data was collected completely in English language.

To gain an understanding of the views of the founders on the benefits and challenges of using English as a medium of instruction and the importance of mother tongue learning, an open questionnaire was a clear choice. While interviewing would have been another option for data collection, its practical implementation would have been challenging due to the distance between the researcher and the participants in the study, possible technical problems, as well as lack of clarity, which leaves more room for misinterpretations. Additionally, an open questionnaire through e-mail correspondence allowed the participants to have more time to reflect on the questions and their answers.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire used for the data collection was self-designed due to there being no recorded earlier research on the specific topic and context. A questionnaire (Appendix 1) was prepared based on the research questions and relevant background information. It was sent in three parts through e-mail correspondence with the four participants in the study. All parts consisted of open-ended questions. As regards answering the questions individually, the participants were asked not to consult with each other, other persons or to search for information or inspiration from other external sources either before or when answering the questions.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of questions inquiring about the background of the study participants. The participants' background details have been kept confidential out of respect for their privacy. The first part of the questionnaire

also inquired about the year their school was established, how many of their students are Ethiopian or speak Amharic and the medium of instruction and other languages used in the school, as shown in Appendix 1.

The second part of the questionnaire served as a basis for understanding the initial aspirations and aims of the participants for establishing an international school and for the education they provide. The questions asked were:

- Why did you decide to establish an international school in the first place?
- What has been your aim in regards to the education you provide? Have your aims changed since you established the school? Why and how?
- How do students learn best in your opinion? What are the things that need to be taken into consideration in order to provide adequate education for your students?
- What are the main things that you hope to further develop in your school?

The third, and the main part of the questionnaire inquired about the apparent benefits and challenges of having English as a medium of instruction. This was done in the form of a blank table to be filled in, with benefits and challenges in the columns and individual student, teacher, school and the wider community on the rows (Appendix 1) to assure the breadth of the perspective of the answers. This question was designed to explore whether the benefits of using English as a medium of instruction as seen by the founders are in fact such benefits that are obtained simply by early English language learning, and whether the challenges of using English as a medium of instruction as seen by the founders can be overcome by switching to mother tongue learning or by other measures.

The following questions also were asked:

- What is the importance of mother tongue learning for the individual student?
- What is your understanding about the national guidelines regarding the medium of instruction, first, second or third language learning?
- Would you change anything in regards to language learning in your school? What and why?

The correspondence involved a few corrective questions by the author due to missing information. One of the four participants answered only a few questions and was then out of reach. These answers have been included in the data, but it is important to note that the majority of the data is from only three participants. The data was collected during a period of one and a half months.

6.2 Data analysis

According to the six-phase approach to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2012, 5), in order to familiarize oneself with the data (Phase 1), the first phase of thematic analysis, the collected data was first read through a few times, the answers of one participant at a time, and then categorized under each question of the questionnaire to compare and generate initial codes (Phase 2) in order to thematise the answers of all three to four participants. Themes were searched for (Phase 3) based on finding similarities between the answers of the participants, while reflecting them against earlier research and background information. Several sub-themes were identified from the written data, after which some essential themes could be drawn from these sub-themes. Once these were identified and the respective comments highlighted, the answers were reorganized under the identified themes and revised for validity (Phases 4 and 5). The process of thematising is further explained in Figure 1. The figure gives an example of how sub-themes were identified from and further connected to a main theme.

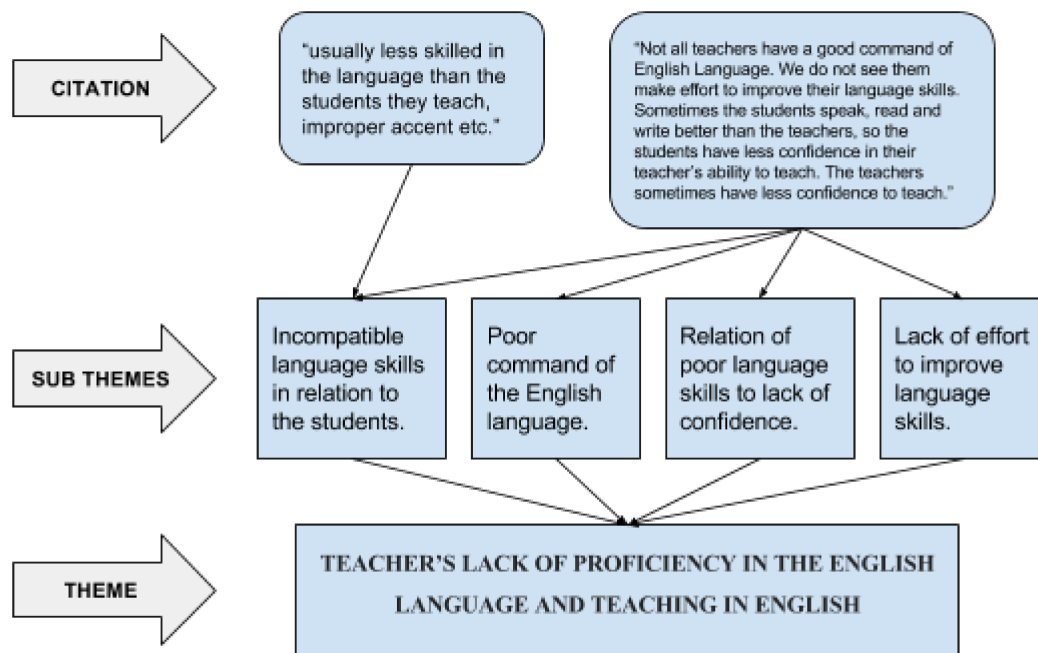


Figure 1. Analysing process. Challenges brought by English as a medium of instruction - teacher's perspective.

Finally, in producing the report of the results (Phase 6), the frequency of the mentions and how many of the respondents brought up the theme has been considered in the order of presenting the themes, starting from the one with the most mentions. The recognized main themes based on this analysis process are presented in the results under each of the research questions. If there were no compatibilities found for an answer, it was collected under the theme "other", and is presented in the results under each research question before the final conclusive paragraph. Little or no opposing views were found in the answers between the participants or contradictory views within the answers of a respondent.

6.3 Reliability

It is important to remember that the author spent half a year in both of the schools involved in this study and saw the challenges of using a foreign language as a medium of instruction in practice. This was also the initial inspiration for this study.

Although the data collection is somewhat inspired by the empirical experiences of the author in these schools, and the discussion part of this study is certainly influenced by these experiences, they are excluded from the study itself since they have not been recorded concurrently. In terms of the reliability of this study, this personal relationship may have created attitudes and preconceptions that influence the analysis. However, it is also important to note that a deeper understanding of the culture and context is likely to help in understanding the underlying issues and the bigger picture related to this study, thereby contributing positively to its reliability.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind the narrow scope of this study and the conciseness of the data collected. As mentioned earlier, the majority of the data is only from three participants. This allows little depth in the study, but certainly, as intended, a new perspective on the important topic of the choice of medium of instruction, hopefully encouraging future studies of more depth and a wider scope.

7 RESULTS

The results of this research are presented here in the order of the four research questions, starting from the main themes found in relation to the benefits and challenges of using English as a medium of instruction as viewed by the founders, after which the views of the founders with regard to the importance of the mother tongue are discussed. Finally, the results on the educational aims behind establishing and developing the international schools are laid out.

7.1 The benefits of using English as a medium of instruction

When asked about the benefits of English as a medium of instruction, four main themes stood out. One of the themes brought up several times by all of the three participants who answered this part of the questionnaire was **better accessibility of English materials as well as the existence of better curricula**. This theme was considered relevant by the participants from the student's, teacher's and the school's perspective. It was mentioned that both the students and the teachers have better resources or references available in the English language, more specifically, they have access to many books written in English as well as the internet. One of the participants mentioned YouTube as an example of a teaching aid for classes. Furthermore, there are better curricula and better teacher's guides available in English, according to the participants.

Another theme brought up by all three respondents was **better job opportunities and career development** if the language of instruction is English. This was mainly concerning the students. One of the participants, however, described this more broadly, including the teacher's and parent's perspective, saying:

“The teacher can get a good paying job after they leave... (the respective school). They are more confident in their work.”

“More students will join... (the respective school) because parent wish better paying jobs for their children.”

Furthermore, two of the respondents related better job opportunities to global society and the international market.

The third recognized theme was a **positive influence on the wider community**. This was related, for example, to a better workforce and professional materials. One of the participants mentioned that currently most Ethiopian professionals have difficulties in writing professional papers or reports in English. The know-how in English was also related to economic growth, as well as an increase in awareness about the wider world.

The fourth main theme was **wider chances for communication**. The use of English as a medium of instruction was seen to help the students communicate with diverse people and to make interaction with the international community easy.

One other notable benefit of English as a medium of instruction mentioned by one participant was that the school attracts more students. This participant further explained that many parents have more confidence in the school's ability to provide quality education, and the wider community is generally more interested in schools where the medium of instruction is English. Also, the school becomes accessible for international or diaspora students due to the language of instruction. One of the respondents also considered that this language policy of the school demonstrates the ideals of world citizenship.

7.2 The challenges of using English as a medium of instruction

In relation to the challenges brought about by using English as a medium of instruction, the most widely discussed topic among the respondents was **teachers' lack of proficiency both in the English language and in teaching in English**. All three respondents, excluding the one who failed to respond to this part of the questionnaire, mentioned this issue several times. In relation to the teachers' lack of proficiency and skill to teach in English, the respondents also recognized lack of confidence and even lack of effort to improve. The respondents noted a gap between the students and the teachers, saying that sometimes the students end up being more skilled or conversant than the teachers, and that sometimes teachers teach the students with incorrect pronunciation and grammar, passing this on to the students who think their teachers are correct. On the other hand, according to another respondent skilled students sometimes end up having less confidence in their teacher's ability to teach. One of the respondents said that there are not many English native speakers available to teach the language, possibly indicating that this would be preferable.

Another theme brought up by two respondents was a **lack of parental involvement**. One of the respondents notes that some parents may not even speak English. Furthermore, two participants expressed their concern about the **loss of the mother tongue or culture**, not only from the perspective of the student, but also the wider community. They wrote:

“We have found that the student tends to gravitate towards English and begins to prefer English over his/her mother tongue. Some parents have complained that their child is unable to freely converse with grandparents, or that they switch over the English when they want to talk about more complex topics.”

“There is a risk of losing the language and culture over time.”

“Cultural gaps being created due to kids’ inclination to take in other ideas thru the language.”

Some of the respondents mentioned a **lack of support from the government** as a challenge of having English as medium of instruction, due to the country’s policy that promotes local languages in the lower grades. One participant mentioned the lack of useful English resources to teach the language as a challenge of English as a medium of instruction. The participant who mentioned this also mentioned the extent of English literature and materials as a benefit. Perhaps this is an indication that while there are many materials available in the language, there are not many that are developed specifically for the context and use of second language learners.

Other notable comments by the participant in relation to the challenges of English as a medium of instruction were:

“English is not spoken outside the classroom. Not easy to develop the skill.”

“A number of other good teachers who do not have a good command of English, do not get hired”

“Acquiring foreign currency to import the books will be challenging because there is a shortage of US Dollar of currency in the country”

In conclusion, there were four main themes recognized under the benefits and four under the challenges of using English as a medium of instruction as viewed by the founders of the international private schools. These main themes are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The benefits and challenges of using English as a medium of instruction as viewed by the founders of two international schools in Ethiopia.

ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION	
Benefits	Challenges
→ better accessibility of English materials as well as existence of better curricula	→ teacher’s lack of proficiency both in the English language and in teaching in English
→ better job opportunities and career development	→ lack of parental involvement
→ positive influence on the wider community	→ loss of the mother tongue or culture
→ wider chances for communication	→ lack of support from the government

7.3 The importance of the mother tongue

All four respondents recognized the importance of learning the mother tongue as a **basis for all learning** and the **development of identity**. They all also understood and were **aware of the national policy** of mother tongue instruction through primary education. Two of the respondents explained the importance of the mother tongue as follows:

“It is important that the student fully develop language in their mother tongue. Otherwise you could have a situation where the student is not 100% comfortable in his/her mother tongue and not 100% comfortable in English.”

“When a student learns with a mother tongue, he/she interacts with confidence with the environment and peers. The child also develops

self-confidence and acceptance and have a strong identity. In order to effectively solve local social issues without a mother tongue, it becomes a difficult task. The students always feels as an outsider.”

Only one, however, would change the language policy of the respective school, preferring that the students do not begin learning English until the first or third grade. According to that respondent, this would allow the student to develop a very strong foundation in their mother tongue and thus also become fluent in English. This respondent further stated that it would be good for the students to continue learning one or two subjects in Amharic in addition to learning Amharic as a subject, to further develop their vocabulary for more complex conversations.

One of the participants explained the reasoning behind the school’s language policy by stating that they have students from different nationalities. According to the background information however, these international students make up less than 10 per cent of all the students. Another participant from the same school referred to the supremacy of the English language as an international language of wider communication.

Furthermore, one participant criticized the national policy, stating that the change of medium of instruction is too abrupt after the primary years, and that it would be preferable to have one medium of instruction throughout a child’s schooling. In this light, the respondent preferred the language policy of the international school to that of most of the government schools, where many students are not passing the mandatory national exams in grades 8, 10 and 12. The respondent showed confidence in their school’s language policy by stating:

“...private ones don't follow the instruction and we are teaching both strongly. And we're successful in the National Exams. You won't find failure from the private schools.”

In conclusion, the participants more or less recognized that the mother tongue of the

student serves as a basis for learning and the development of identity. They are also all aware of the national mother tongue-based primary education policy. Nevertheless, only one would change school policy towards a more mother tongue-based one. The reasons why the other founders prefer English medium of instruction cannot be explained by lack of awareness of either national education policies or the importance of the mother tongue.

7.4 The educational aims behind the international schools

All of the respondents mentioned the **need for international education** as the initial inspiration for establishing the schools. One of them further explained the term as follows:

“So when we used the word international, from my perspective, we wanted to bring lessons learned and practices from international experiences to Ethiopia.”

Two respondents, one from each school, mentioned that their **own children** partly motivated the establishment of the school. One of them said:

“...we had difficulties finding affordable high quality-education for our... (number) children. At the same time we sought a school which would balance academic excellence with character education in an international standard education.”

Additionally, two founders of the same school expressed the importance of **fostering the desire in the students to serve humanity**.

When the respondents were asked about understanding of the learning process, with the question “How do students learn best in your opinion?”, the theme of language was not brought up by the participants. However, two participants focused in their

answers on the importance of **well-trained and skilled teachers**, although not specifically in language at this point. It was mentioned that even with poor facilities and almost no materials, educational goals can be achieved with good teachers. The characteristics of good teacher that were identified from the answers were: well-trained, loving, dedicated, concerned, skilled at asking the right questions to lead the students to discover knowledge and skilled at creating an environment where students are allowed to ask questions and make mistakes while learning. One of the respondents considered the training/mentoring of teachers, the establishment of proper systems and monitoring of the quality of education as some of the responsibilities of the school. Additionally, some mentioned that the characteristics of quality education were hands on practice instead of focus on theories alone, proven curriculum, character education, a loving environment and motivation.

When asked about what the respondents want to further develop in their schools, two of them mentioned better systems. More specifically one of them explained, that **better systems** need to be in place to sustain the school in the first place so as not to be financially dependent or dependent on its founders alone. Furthermore, in regard to the quality of education the school provides, it needs systems to monitor the quality of education, and assist and mentor teachers to reach their full potential.

In conclusion, the main aims behind establishing the international schools according to the participants were to provide international quality education, to provide quality education for one's own children and to foster the desire in the students to serve humanity. The main aims in regard to further developing the international schools were to have better trained and skilled teacher as well as to develop better systems.

8 DISCUSSION

This research aimed to explore the views of founders of private international schools in Ethiopia about the benefits and challenges of using English as a medium of instruction, as well as the importance of mother tongue learning, thus shedding light on the choice of their school's language policy and possibly even its international orientation. The main benefits of English as a medium of instruction identified by the founders of the two international private school were the better accessibility of English materials as well as existence of better curricula, a positive influence on the wider community, wider chances for communication, and better job opportunities and career development. Furthermore, the main challenges of English as a medium of instruction mentioned were teachers' lack of proficiency both in the English language and in teaching in English, lack of parental involvement, loss of mother tongue and culture and lack of support by the government.

Interestingly, according to earlier research, most of the challenges of English as a medium of instruction as viewed by the participants of this study could be overcome to a great extent if the medium of instruction was the mother tongue of the students. Teachers would be more comfortable and skilled to teach in their mother tongue as well as able to communicate with the students (Uys et al. 2007; EFMoE 2015, 58; UNESCO 2010, 28), parents would be more involved (Benson 2002; Henderson & Mapp 2002; Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2005; Wanat 2010), and the mother tongue and culture would be preserved and strengthened (UNESCO 2011b, 6; Wolff 2011, 97). This would be in line with the encouragement of the government and its mother tongue-based educational policies.

On the other hand, most of the identified benefits are related to strong second language learning, not necessarily entailing that the second language would be used as the medium of instruction. One point that stands out, however, is that there are better learning materials and curricula available in the English language. However,

many of these materials are both inadequate for the expected reading level of the students, often developed for native speakers, or culturally irrelevant, mostly obtained from other cultural settings (Negash 2006, 33). It could therefore be suggested that one of the main things to achieve in order to strengthen mother tongue-based learning is the development of better and culturally relevant learning materials and curricula in the students' mother tongue.

Teacher proficiency

Another area in addition to better materials and curricula that needs to be addressed is teacher proficiency. The topic most emphasised by the participants was the importance of good teachers and their training, not only from the language perspective, but on a more general level. In this particular language context, however, their lack of proficiency both in English and in teaching it, their lack of confidence and effort to improve, were discussed.

Regardless of whether English is used as a medium of instruction or taught as a second language, very often teachers lack the adequate language proficiency and competence to teach the language (Dearden 2014, 27). International private schools in particular may then rely on native speakers to teach it. As one of the respondents mentioned, they are harder to find. But that may not be the only problem. The question should be raised of whether it is actually preferable to have a native speaker to teach a foreign language or not. In this particular school context, from the author's own experiences both parents and students gave positive comments on the teaching of English by non-native speakers who nevertheless had a good command of English. According to the parents and students, they were practically able to take more into consideration the fact that English is not the students' mother tongue by, for example, speaking more slowly and clearly. The parents and students further complained that natives would speak too fast and use too difficult language for the students to understand. Some of the teachers also complained about the big differences in the style of English taught by an American native speaker versus a British native speaker in one of the schools. It could be said that a native speaker

brings a certain cultural colour to their language teaching, possibly even more than just through the accent or vocabulary they teach, which may be confusing to the students. A native English-speaking teacher may, therefore, be just as in need of training in language education than any other teacher.

Regardless of the choice of medium of instruction, there are nearly always students who do not share their peer's mother tongue. When the medium of instruction is not the mother tongue of the student, there are many additional challenges that the teachers need training to overcome. The challenges are greater the more students there are whose language of instruction differs from the language they use at home. For example, it is highly important that teachers are able to adequately strengthen and support the mother tongue and culture of the students (UNESCO 2011b, 6) as well as recognize and address the individual needs of the students caused by possible communication barriers (McCardle et. al 2005, 2; Ortiz 2007, 281). These are just some of the areas where teachers need training.

It is clearly established that if the medium of instruction is English, there is a greater load of responsibility on the teachers to improve their language and teaching skills. According to this study, sometimes the students speak, read and write better than the teachers themselves. This seems to affect both the students' lack of confidence in their teacher's ability to teach as well as the teacher's own level of confidence. This confidence and its effect on teaching, teacher credibility and teacher proficiency is a theme worth exploring separately in future studies.

Parents' resistance

According to both earlier research (Ambatchew 2010, 204-205) as well as the results of this study, parents seem to favour private international education. The availability of better learning materials and curricula may be part of the reason for this, but there is likely more to it. According to Cohen (2007, 64), some of the reasons can also be inequality of the many languages in their adequacy for use in education and possible ethnic and regional division. Could it also be that there is some kind of culturally

prevalent elitism and a chase after status influencing the choice of English as a medium of instruction? This is a somewhat visible trait in many areas of society, and could be related to the educational sector as well. As an example, during the author's stay in one of the schools, one of the founders imparted that some time ago the school opened its doors to children with lower socioeconomic status through a scholarship program. The parents with high socioeconomic status were appalled. In order to keep the customers and the private school running, the founders had no choice but to cancel the experiment and focus on the paying parents.

Furthermore, it is possible that the parents lack knowledge or have false preconceptions about language learning in general, the importance of the mother tongue, as well as about English language learning. While the school benefits and thrives by attracting families with high socioeconomic status, it is possible that this attraction may be based on false premises. These would be areas worth examining. In general, there are more studies about teachers' perspectives on language learning and medium of instruction, but the studies about the parents' perspective are few in number and more narrow in scope, and no such broader studies have been recorded in the Ethiopian context.

Re-examining the aims of the international schools

Furthermore, the question of the aims of establishing an international school in the first place need to be re-examined. As Hayden and Thompson (2008) describe, there are roughly two trends, one addressing the needs of the children of the surrounding international community, and another expressing a certain dissatisfaction with the quality of education in the country. There are indications that the schools in this study are following the latter trend. Such indications are the low percentage of international students in these schools as well as the results in regard to the main aims behind establishing the international schools, which were to provide international quality education, to provide quality education for one's own children and to foster the desire in the students to serve humanity.

Further considerations

Both previous studies and the results of this study support the idea that those students who attend private schools are indeed better in English and other subjects (Negash 2006, 40) and do better in national exams. This can be another reason why parents may prefer sending their children to private international schools. What is unknown, however, are the reasons behind this success. It is unlikely that the reason would be related to the medium of instruction, since a plethora of research strongly supports the relationship of mother tongue-based learning to relative academic excellence. One of the indicators that could be further examined is the socioeconomic status of the parents (UNESCO 2011b, 18), which may relate to the students' increased exposure to language and knowledge, and even the parents having more time and resources to support their children's schooling. In addition, there may be other contributing factors such as the better resources of private schools, targeted training for national exams and better pay for the teachers, to name a few. These are again areas that need further research for a thorough understanding of the relevant factors.

Certainly, in this regard as well as more generally, researching the students' perspective is as relevant as studying that of the teachers and parents, if not more relevant. Although the topics in this study are interconnected, the student perspective was not really emphasised in the answers of the founders specifically. The focus was certainly more on the teachers and the school. The students' personal experiences should not only be explored through research, but also included in decision making processes within the school. The students should be given a voice on their own schooling.

Furthermore, comparative studies are encouraged. Regardless of the narrow scope of this study, there were possible indications that the backgrounds of the respondents may have influenced the results. If a wider study is to be executed, comparing the results to the background information of the respondents is strongly suggested. In addition, it would be useful to compare international private schools to public as well

as community schools.

While the results of this study cannot be generalized due to its scope, they nevertheless highlight an area that can easily be neglected in the wider discussion of medium of instruction and related developments, and they raise several important questions to be answered in future studies. The results of this study give due cause to include the private school perspective and to re-examine the choice of medium of instruction in private international schools.

Concluding remarks

There is considerable evidence from within the Ethiopian education system that focusing on investing in teaching and assessing students through the use of English as a medium of instruction has a very low rate of return to the system (Heugh et al. 2007, 8). While this study, former research and policy give strong evidence in favour of mother tongue-based learning, it is important to note that there is no consensus about exactly when and how a second language should be introduced to the students. There are several ways to implement dual language policy in a school setting, but the ways should neither be inconsistent or too rigid, and should be carefully chosen to equally meet the needs of all children in the school (Baker 2011, 225-228), including those whose mother tongue is neither. In the case of an international school, therefore, there is nothing against putting a strong emphasis on English language learning as long as the mother tongue and culture of the students are given their respective priority, and as long as that they serve as the basis for all learning and are continually strengthened. To conclude, the due significance of the importance of the choice of medium of instruction in education is encapsulated in the following quotation: “Language is not everything in education but without language everything is nothing in education” (Wolff 2011, 55).

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APPENDIX

Background information:

How old are you?

What is your educational background?

What kind of work experience do you have?

When was your school established?

How many of the students (%) are Ethiopian/Amharic speakers?

What is the medium of instruction? What other languages are taught in your school? In which grade and for how many hours is each language taught?

Part 1.

Why did you decide to establish an international school in the first place? What has been your aim in regards to the education you provide? Have your aims changed since you established the school? Why and how?

How do students learn best in your opinion? What are the things that need to be taken into consideration in order to provide adequate education for your students?

What are the main things that you hope to further develop in your school? Why?

Part 2.

Please fill in the following chart. What are the benefits and challenges of having English as a medium of instruction? Consider this from the perspectives of the individual student, teacher, school and the wider community.

	Benefits	Challenges
Individual student		
Teacher		
School		
Wider community		

What is the importance of mother tongue learning for the individual student?

What is your understanding about the national guidelines regarding the medium of instruction, first, second or third language learning?

Would you change anything in regards to language learning in your school? What and why?