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Instructors' Perception towards Proficiency and Interaction in English Language and the Challenges they face: Some Selected Ethiopian Universities in Focus

Mulu Geta Gencha[1]

Abstract

The objective of this study was to examine instructors' perceived proficiency, interaction in English language, and the challenges they face in using the English language as a medium of instruction. The study used a descriptive survey design and mixed study approach. It took place in six Ethiopian universities. The sample size for the survey study is 295 instructors and 24 (18 deans and 6 department heads) for the qualitative study, and they were from the 2018/19 academic years. A questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and classroom observation were used as research tools. T-tests and ANOVA were employed while Chi-square tests were used to test dependence between language choices as an instructional medium. Instead of analyzing independently, the qualitative data were used to supplement or explain the quantitative finding. The results indicated that instructors perceived that they were proficient in the Basic English language to a high or very high level. To the same extent, university instructors were aware that using English as a medium of instruction in college classrooms was effective. Moreover, significant majorities of instructors choose either English or English and Amharic to be the media of instruction. While qualification differences affected instructors' English proficiency, gender differences did not. The widely accepted truth in this regard is that English triggers some problems not being the native language of the learners. The paper finally recommends some directions to cope with the challenges.

Keywords: /Challenges of English Language/Ethnic languages/Medium of instruction/Mother tongue/Multi-cultural context/

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[1]Hawassa University, College of Social Science and Humanity, Department of English Language and Literature. P.O.Box:05

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Justification

English is used as a Lingua Franca in most countries of the world as a first language, a second language or a foreign language. It is a trans-world dominant language in spheres of life of the people such as in socio-political activities, economic sectors and scientific discoveries, and it also becomes the major language of technological advancement. Globally, English language has also established itself as a master key to open every closed door of knowledge and taken a driving seat of information transmission. It has become the language of worldwide communication in media, science and technology, business, academia, politics, and so on. This calls for the need to produce citizens who can competitively and easily avail themselves to the world arena (Mason, 2007; Mohamed, 2013).

Therefore, in many countries, including Ethiopia, English language is taught to facilitate the official works of different sectors. Especially in the education sector, this target language has played significant role. Due to this, countries have allotted large amount of their budget for pedagogical purpose. Ethiopia, in this regard, is a multicultural society including people who have different customs, traditions, languages and beliefs though this diversity has been interwoven by long standing fabrics of similar values and relations among cultures. In turn, the traditional education of Ethiopia did not address this diversity, and the existing governments accepted western education as modern education and attempted to implement in the country. To practically apply this western education in the education sector of the country, English language is used as a medium of instruction in schools and universities by law.

As has been clearly stated above, English is used in Ethiopia as a medium of instruction (EMI) at secondary and tertiary levels. This is to say that in the secondary schools, colleges, and universities, almost all subjects are taught in English. Consequently, teachers and instructors' proficiency in this language requires due consideration. With regard to this, instructors' proficiency in the language, the actual interaction between instructors and students in the classroom, and the challenges they face when teaching all language through English demand deep scrutiny.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The major issue of the study was to investigate the use of English as a medium of instruction; to investigate to what extent university instructors deliver various subjects through English language learning. The study variables are the instructors' proficiency of English language, their interaction in the language in actual classroom, and the challenges they encounter when implementing the target language as a medium of instruction. Especially, challenges of using English could be raised from instructors' perception, their preference (choices) of languages for interaction in the classroom, their students' capacity of using the target language, and other related factors.

Language has an immense role in the course of providing quality education. However, this could be possible only if teachers and students are proficient enough in the instructional language or else language may impede the teaching learning process and can make it so hard for teachers to communicate properly with their learners.

"Literacy education in Africa often suffers from serious communication problems between teachers and pupils. In classes with a foreign medium of instruction teachers often face language difficulties and pupils do not have the language competence to understand what the teacher says. Due to these uncertainties, according to Powers (2010, p.4),"oral and written communicative exchange is reduced to safe talk (rote learning, repetition etc.) and no longer is active learning possible". Similarly put by UNESCO experts, teachers whose command of the foreign language is weak employ teaching methods which depend heavily on rote learning and the use of notes; where a pupil's power of expression is limited by his [/her] knowledge of foreign medium,

the teacher must necessarily employ methods which do not call for the full release of the pupils' activity (Seyoum, 2009, p. 14; Shohamy, 2012).

As experiences show that in most Ethiopian schools children's learning problem is linguistic as they learn with a language that is hardly used in their immediate environments and in a language which neither the learners nor the teachers understands and uses well enough.

In Ethiopia, where English is being taught as a foreign language and being used as a medium of instruction, the low capability to communicate and effectively learn in English is a serious problem for the great majority of students. Studies show that students' performance in English language skills is generally less than adequate to meet the demands that their classroom level requires of them (Mesfin, 2016). Diagnostic assessment figures show that after more than 12 years of instruction, the majority of students do not reach a basic level of performance (Tamene, 2000; Teshome, 2004; Hargewoin, 2008; Solomon, 2015).

The challenges of using English language as a medium of instruction are problems of students and instructors. The low level of students' instructional language proficiency together with the instructors' inefficiency of the target language obstruct the teaching learning processes. Students, for whom English language is foreign, often encounter difficulties in transferring ideas from their native language into the target language, English. This is a serious challenge that needs timely response to maintain the quality of education in Ethiopian universities, according to the researcher's experience.

Furthermore, English is more of a foreign language than a second language in Ethiopia. This is mainly because English is hardly used in daily life of students outside the classroom, and they do not have the opportunity to acquire the language informally (Vinke et al., 1998; Mulu & Menna, 2016). Students who join colleges and universities are unable to express themselves in English well; graduates who join the world of work fail to appropriately write even their own CV and application letters for a job. Unlimited number of instructors in primary and secondary schools and even in colleges and universities lack the proficiency to teach well in English (Italo, 1990; Hargewoin, 2008; Manh, 2012).

Consequently, the status of oral and written English language of students at macro academic level has also been a subject of discussion. The situation has given rise to dissatisfaction on the instructors and this is reflected in different scholars. "Most secondary school instructors in our country (Ethiopia), however, are often heard complaining that most students are incapable of producing reasonable and efficient written work"; as a result of the inability of students to function through English, the quality of teaching and learning in schools has been very adversely affected (Teshome, 2004; Hargewoin, 2008; Mulatu et al, 2013).

The students' inadequate understanding of the concepts of contents in English language is also affecting quality of education negatively. The stakeholders argue that the quality of education is deteriorating owing to students' poor English proficiencies, which is the medium of instruction from lower grades upwards. If students are poor at the medium of instruction, they could not understand the concepts of the subjects they learn effectively. Many students who join universities and colleges can hardly express themselves in English.

It is unfortunate to hear that many primary and secondary school instructors and even some instructors in higher institutions of learning do not have the required level of proficiency in English. Many writers including Tekeste (in Berhanu, 2009) agree that there was a sharp decline in the standard of English of students and instructors. In almost the same way Stoddart quoted by Seidel (2007, p.70) underlined that Ethiopian students also do not possess sufficient English and this creates a huge obstacle in the teaching learning process. He even argues in such situation it is not appropriate to call English as a medium of instruction rather it is a medium of obstruction. Besides, a research conducted by Fasika (2014) on secondary school students and instructors on the same issue found that a majority of respondents rated the effectiveness level of English as a medium of instruction in secondary schools as medium.

However, this study is different from the above global and local studies in the following ways: It assesses (1) instructors' proficiency and interaction in English Language, (2) the challenges instructors face in using English language as medium of instruction, and (3) the extent to which university instructors deliver various subjects through English language learning in first, second, and third generation of Ethiopian

universities. To this end, the ultimate goal of this study is, thus, to examine instructors' perceived proficiency, interaction in English language, and the challenges they face in using English language as a medium of instruction in Ethiopian universities. The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do instructors perceive they are proficient in English and vernacular language skills given varied contents and the multicultural context in which they interact?
2. What are instructors' proficiency as well as their effectiveness in using English language in the classroom?
3. To what extent do instructors and students interact in English language in the classroom?
4. To what extent gender, qualification, and experience differences influence instructors' English proficiency and interaction?
5. What are the challenges that instructors in Ethiopian universities encounter in using EMI in their delivery of the lesson?
6. What possible strategies do instructors use to alleviate the challenges they encounter in using EMI?

2. Research Methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey research design involving quantitative and qualitative data. The major purpose of descriptive research is to describe the state of affairs as it exists at present. The main characteristic of this design is that the researcher has no control over the variables and only report what has happened or what is happening using large sample data.

2.1 Participants of the Study

The target population of this study was full-time university instructors and academic leaders who were active in academic year 2019/ 2020 in the six selected public Ethiopian universities. Two hundred ninety five (N= 295) instructors, 18 deans and 6 department heads of selected colleges were participants of the study.

2.2 Samples and Sampling Techniques

The first two generation universities of selected regions were stratified into two categories in each regional state as first and second-generation universities. From 22 first and second-generation universities, six were selected by stratified random sampling technique to be included in the sample. Accordingly, the universities selected for this investigation were: Bahir Dar and Gondar Universities from the Amhara region, Haromaya University from Oromiya region, Hawassa, Dilla and WolaitaSodo Universities from SNNPR, and Dire Dawa University from Dire Dawa City Administration.

There were three target groups in the study, namely instructors, department heads, and deans in the sample universities. In each selected university 2 colleges, 4 departments of each selected college, all batches instructors were considered for the study.

Totally 295 instructors from six universities were selected from sampled departments of selected colleges using cluster random sampling techniques, the clustering variables being college and department. The sample size of instructors was determined depending on the population proportion of the college, department or batch in each selected university. Twenty four participants (18 deans and 6 department heads) involved in the interview.

2.3 Instruments

Questionnaire: The major data collection instruments were questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. When the researcher decided to make questionnaire as a main data gathering tool, he slightly adapted it from Mohanty (2007) and constructed from related literature sources. Each of these instruments is described hereunder: In this study, structured (close-ended) and unstructured (open-ended) forms of questions were used, because the former is simple to administer and relatively inexpensive to analyze and the latter gives the respondents freedom to write or tell what they think. The question sequence was made to move from general to more specific opinions or facts and from simple memories to more difficult responses.

There are five parts to the teacher questionnaire: Demographic information section, teacher-student interaction items, instructors' English proficiency, challenges instructors face related to the medium of instruction, and instructors' coping mechanisms. Items in each part are constructed based on basic standards and concepts gained from literature review and researchers' practical experiences in teaching.

Observations: Several direct and systematically planned, recorded, non-participant and non-disguised observations of classroom interactions were paid due attention. The observation method is good in such studies because it reduces subjectivities in response and depicts what is currently happening. It is not complicated by either the past behavior or future intentions or attitudes. To make an effective observation, 12 units of observation were carefully defined in a checklist. Twelve instructors (two from each sample university) were observed two times each with a co-observer (totally six co-observers).

Interview: Direct personal interviews (having few open-ended questions) were carried out with academic deans and department heads. Some in-depth questions were asked for further insights on some important issues with a certain degree of freedom for interviewers. Major issues on the interviews included, but were not limited to, aspects such as perceptions of instructors towards using EMI, ability and readiness of instructors to use English. Suggestions, comments and strategies to cope with the challenges were recorded in English language.

2.4 Procedures of Data Collection

Permission to have access to colleges, departments, and classrooms was obtained from the university authorities based on connecting and supporting letters from the researcher's department. Then, the researcher collected the necessary data from each selected university nearly during the same time of the semester according to the research plan. At each sample university, deans of the selected colleges communicated to the selected department heads so that they coordinate the distribution, administration, and collection of instructors' questionnaires after completion. Researchers monitored this process and also conducted interviews with heads of departments. The observations of randomly selected classrooms were conducted using observation checklists.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using digital audio-recorder. Before the discussion, participants were informed that they were being recorded. They were also informed about the purpose of the recording so that the discussion could be referred in the time of report writing. For the interview, the principal researcher used interview protocols, pre designed forms having few open-ended questions and ample space among the questions. The spaces allowed the researcher to record some responses of the participants. To minimize losing eye-contact with the discussants, the researcher was able to memorize the questions.

2.5 Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data depending on their relevance to the research questions. Frequencies and percentages were examined to characterize the backgrounds of the participants. Means and standard deviations were used to show the prevalence of English proficiency, EMI, challenges, and strategies as perceived by instructors. To determine group differences in

some study variables among gender, qualification and experience, T-test and ANOVA were employed while Chi-square tests were used to test dependence between language choice as an instructional medium in college classrooms and mother tongue and teaching experience. T-test assumptions were maintained. Instead of analyzing the qualitative data independently, it was used to supplement or explain the quantitative data.

3. Results

In this chapter, qualitative and quantitative data gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and observations from university instructors and academic leaders of six public universities have been analyzed. The quantitative and qualitative data have been triangulated where appropriate. Participants' demographics, English proficiency, perception towards the effectiveness of using EMI, how this perception may vary across some demographic variables have been analyzed. Perceived challenges instructors faced as well as their suggestions to cope with the challenges have been pinpointed out in the qualitative data being triangulated with the survey data.

3.1 Participants' Background

Table 1 presents participants' background.

Table 1: Participants' background

Institution	Frequency	Percent (%)
Bahir Dar University	41	13.9
Dire Dawa University	36	12.2
University of Gondar	51	17.3
Haromaya University	55	18.6
Hawassa University	78	26.4
WolaitaSodo University	34	11.5
Total	**295**	**100**
College		
Institute of Technology	51	17.3
College of Science	74	25.1
College of Social Science and Humanities	57	19.3
Faculty of Business and Economics	15	5.1
College of Health Sciences and Medicine	37	12.5
Agriculture	54	18.3
Education	7	2.4
Total	**295**	**100**
Gender		
Male	251	85.1
Female	44	14.9
Total	**295**	**100**
Qualification		
PhD	55	18.6
MA/MSc/Med	192	65.1
BA/BSc/Bed	48	16.3
Total	**295**	**100**
Teaching Experience		
1-5 years	127	43.1
6-10 years	93	31.5
11-15 years	41	13.9
16 years and above	34	11.5
Total	**295**	**100**

The frequency and percentage distribution of secured samples of instructors are presented by institution, college, gender, qualification, and teaching experience as shown in Table 1. The response rate was excellent for Hawassa University and low for WolaitaSodo University. Female participants were 44 (14.9%) which reflects the low representation of female instructors in higher education institutions in general.

Data fairly represented the existing mix of the three qualifications, with PhD 55 (18.6%), MA/MSc/Med/MDV 192 (65.1%), and BA/BSc/Bed 48 (16.3%). The obvious challenge this mix shows is that the majority of teaching staff are new graduates of accelerated Masters' Programs designed by the MOE to address the critical shortage of instructors in the HEIs. Regarding teaching experience three-quarters of the teaching staff has less than 10 years of teaching service, 43.1% have 5 or fewer years, and 31.5% six to ten years of experience. This shows that the universities are staffed with inexperienced instructors with first and second-degree qualifications. The study also analyses the language proficiency of instructors as shown below.

3.2 Instructors' Self-reported Language Proficiency

The first research question the study intended to answer is "To what extent do instructors perceive they are proficient in English and vernacular language skills given varied contents and the multicultural context in which they interact?" Answering this question is necessary because as most instructors are not native-speakers of English language, their lack of proficiency, if they lack, may contribute to the ineffectiveness of EMI in the multi-cultural classrooms. Table 2 summarizes the data.

Table 2: Instructors' self-reported language proficiency

Statistics	Amharic Proficiency	English Proficiency	Afaan Oromo Proficiency
Mean	3.57	3.15	1.73
Median	4.00	3.00	1.00
Mode	4	3	1
Std. Deviation	.696	.738	1.143
Minimum	1	1	1
Maximum	4	4	4

Table 2 presents instructors' self-reported language proficiency. Accordingly, average proficiency is just above very good for English and about excellent for Amharic. Among instructors, 279 (94.6%) reported that they are excellent or very good in Amharic ($\bar{x}$=3.57; SD =0.69). Whereas, 259 (87.80%) said that they are excellent or very good in English ($\bar{x}$=3.15; SD=0 .74). Afaan Oromo proficiency among instructors is low ($\bar{x}$=1.73 out of 4, SD=1.14) with 224 (75.93%) reporting that they are at most good. Instructors were also asked to rate their level (degree) of language proficiency as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Degree (level) of self-reported language proficiency in Amharic, Afaan Oromo, and English languages

Amharic Proficiency	Frequency	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Not specified	1	.3	.3
Poor	7	2.4	2.7
Good	8	2.7	5.4
Very Good	86	29.2	34.6
Excellent	193	65.4	100.0
Total	**295**	**100.0**	
Afaan Oromo Proficiency			
Poor	196	66.4	66.4
Good	28	9.5	75.9
Very Good	25	8.5	84.4
Excellent	46	15.6	100.0
Total	**295**	**100.0**	
English Proficiency			
Not specified	1	.3	.3
Poor	10	3.4	3.7
Good	25	8.5	12.2
Very Good	166	56.3	68.5
Excellent	93	31.5	100.0
Total	**295**	**100.0**	

A survey was conducted in six selected public universities' instructors to rate their language proficiency, especially English proficiency using a rating scale: 1-poor, 2-good, 3-very good, and 4-excellent. The languages included in the study were Amharic (the official language), Afaan Oromo (language spoken by a large population in Ethiopia), and English (currently medium of college and high school instruction). Descriptive results were displayed in Tables 3. According to the data, respondents who speak excellently Amharic, English, and Afaan Oromo are (65.4%, n=193), (31.5%, n=93), (15.6%, n=46) in that order. However, a considerable number of respondents reported other languages as their mother tongue or did not report their mother tongue at all. This may explain why the reported proficiency in Affan Oromo was low among the respondents.

Table 4: Institution by mother tongue Cross-tabulation

Institution	Mother Tongue								Total
	Amharic	Oromifaa	Tigrigna	Guragigna	Wolaytigna	Sidamigna	Other	Not specified	
BDU	21	5	9	3	0	0	3	0	41
DDU	11	13	6	2	0	1	1	2	36
GU	23	19	7	1	0	0	0	1	51
HU	18	15	7	0	1	1	4	9	55
HwU	21	13	5	2	1	4	9	23	78
WSU	11	5	4	0	12	0	1	1	34
Total	105	70	38	8	14	6	18	36	295

BDU- Bahir Dar University, **DDU**- Dire Dawa University; **GU**- University of Gondar; **HU**- Haromaya University; **HwU**-Hawassa University; **WSU**- Wolaita Sodo University

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As what is observed from Table 4, the majority of instructors (n=105) in the sampled six universities speak Amharic as their vernacular, the local language. On the other hand, Afaan Oromo is the second language that large number of instructors (n= 70) speak as their vernacular. Nevertheless, an extensive figure of participants in the study reported other languages as their vernacular/L1 or did not report their first language at all. This may explain why the reported proficiency in Affan Oromo was low among the respondents.

Culture is something that fits us together as a society; language, on the other hand, is a way in which we practice and produce culture. Pedagogy, similarly, is embedded in and shaped by our culture. It is, hence, important for instructors to be aware of this inter-relationship in their pedagogical practices. Any teaching and learning context is always a very dynamic and complex environment with many variables and forces at work. The multi-cultural context is even more dynamic and complex as different norms and structures interact. A multi-cultural context can be exciting, dynamic, creative and productive, but it can also be stressful, confusing, frustrating and nonproductive if instructors, learners, contents and contexts, are not integrated properly in the language with which all parties communicate and comprehend each other and one another easily.

3.3 Teachers' Perceptions towards English Effectiveness

The second research question the study intended to answer is "To what extent do instructors think that English is effective as a medium of instruction in a college classroom?" And its answer is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Teachers' perceptions towards English effectiveness

Rate	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	One-Sample t-test			
				Test value =3			
				Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	t(df)	P
1	7	2.4	2.4	3.71	1.06	11.44(294)	.000
2	27	9.2	11.5				
3	90	30.5	42.0				
4	89	30.2	72.2				
5	82	27.8	100.0				
Total	295	100.0					

As shown in Table 5, 82 (27.8%) of the respondents reported that using EMI in college classrooms was either highly or very highly effective; whereas, only seven (2.4%) said its effectiveness was low or very low. The remaining 90 (30.5%) thought that English effectiveness was at medium level. The one-sample t-test ($\bar{x}$=3.71, t=11.44, df =294, $p<$.05), on the other hand, showed that the observed mean of teacher participants was significantly above the population average 3. It can be inferred that the perception of instructors towards the effectiveness of using English as a medium of instruction seems to be improved at the college level. A similar study conducted by Fasika (2014) on secondary school students and instructors found that 12 (32.4%) of instructors and 35 (43.8%) of students, a majority, rated the effectiveness of English as a medium of instruction in secondary schools medium.

Data from the interview gives the reasons why the respondents thought the effectiveness of using English as high or very high as well as low or very low. Their thought might have an impact on English effectiveness as a medium of instruction in college classrooms:

- o English is the standard and international language for information and enables graduates to be nationally and globally competent.
- o Most subject matter resources and technologies are available in English, and English is common to most students' background in school. Hence concepts and procedures can easily be taught in English.
- o It is fair to minimize negative perceptions a student can have towards other ethnic languages by using English as the medium of instruction which is at present acceptable by law and relatively

common to all students' backgrounds in school. English is thus the best choice in the Ethiopian context.

Those who rated English effectiveness as low or very low reported reasons that include the following:

- Lack of English proficiency in students and instructors has led to most of the communications in class or school being in Amharic or other languages and hence most students do not understand English. So using English does not make instruction effective.
- Poor modules and poor English language use of instructors added to their using of other languages as well, especially Amharic, not only English, and this has led instructors to be less confident in teaching. So using English, which is our second [foreign] language for instruction, is groundless.
- Some instructors think that students do not understand English due to the ineffective implementation of the English language at school grades and they are not proficient in it.
- Students are not ready to use English at college, neither are instructors. This resulted in ineffective use of English in class since we teach in Amharic or mother tongue thinking that students do not follow English.
- Instructors pay less attention to using English as a medium of instruction, with some intentions to teach in their mother tongue. It may be associated with the low proficiency of some instructors.

The survey data also examined instructors' English macro skills' (Reading, Listening, Writing, and speaking) proficiency and their perception towards English effectiveness as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Instructors' English proficiency (N=295)

Descriptive statistics

	x̄	SD.
Reading		
Your reading and understanding of the contents of the subject matter you teach	4.59	.668
Your reading and understanding of the problems or questions in the subject matter you teach	4.62	.577
Your understanding of the meaning of new concepts in the context of the subject matter you teach	4.47	.653
Listening		
Your listening and understanding of the contents of the subject matter were raised by students.	4.48	.659
Your listening and understanding of the questions students raise on the subject matter you teach	4.50	.664
Writing		
Preparing written learning activities or handouts for the subject matter you teach.	4.37	.730
Your writing of board notes or class activities for the subject matter you teach.	4.35	.692
Your writing of instructions on assignments or examinations.	4.47	.632
Your writing of examination questions.	4.46	.673
Your writing of comments or suggestions on students' paper.	4.20	.764
Speaking		
Expressing your ideas clearly while speaking to a class or a student	4.25	.733
Orally responding to questions students ask you.	4.34	.738
Communicating to students vital academic information	4.28	.777
Valid N (list-wise)		

To further explore instructors' English proficiency based on a quantitative self-reported questionnaire, instructors were asked to rate their English proficiency relying on what they exhibit in English usage in class. The rating scale was: 5= Very high, 4= High, 3= Medium, 2= Low, and 1= Very low. The descriptive statistics

resulting from this survey showed that instructors perceive that their English proficiency is high or very high (with low mean=4.20 in writing, and high mean=4.62 in reading) and small standard deviations (Table 6).

On the other hand, even though instructors perceive that their English proficiency is high or very high, classroom observations show that not only students are weak in English language performance, but also some of the instructors hardly communicated with their students with good command of the English language. They do have not the required language competence and performance when the realities come to the floor. Nevertheless, the data collected using observations and the researcher's academic and life experiences witnessed that a substantial number of senior academics who were with very good command of the English language have become out of academic work due to age and different reasons. Consequently, young lecturers with better English skills have not developed high levels of expertise. This situation limits the availability of experienced instructors to lecture for the EMI program.

3.4 The Influence of Different Variables on English Proficiency.

The study also attempted to examine whether instructors' English proficiency can be affected by gender, qualification, and experience differences, and the finding is summarized in Table 7.

Table 7: Gender difference in English proficiency

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Equal variances assumed	1.938	293	.054	.233

To address whether instructors' perceived English proficiency varies among levels of gender, T-test and ANOVA were conducted (Table 7). The result of the gender difference test showed absence of statistically significant difference in the means of English proficiency among male and female instructors (t=1.938, df=293, p>.05). Though the number of female instructors in colleges is much less as compared to the number of their male counterparts, their perceived English proficiency is quite similar. In addition to gender, it was assumed that qualification difference affects instructors' English proficiency as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Qualification difference in English proficiency

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.490	2	1.745	3.253	.040
Within Groups	156.646	292	.536		
Total	160.136	294			

To address whether instructors' perceived English proficiency varies among levels of qualification and teaching experience of participant instructors or not, T-test and ANOVA were conducted (Table 8). Accordingly, Homogeneity of variances assumed by Levene's Test: (F=3.253, p<.05; PhD $\bar{x}$=3.33, Masters' $\bar{x}$=3.15, Bachelors' $\bar{x}$=2.96) was carried out. The result of the qualification difference test showed presence of statistically significant difference in the means of perceived English proficiency among levels of qualification. It was indicated in section 4.1 above that the majority of the teaching staff were new graduates of accelerated Master's Programs designed by the MOE to address the critical shortage of instructors due to the ever-increasing expansion of HEIs. The more important issue here is how this might have contributed to the fact that the cumulative 42% of participants in the study perceived that using English is effective from medium

to a very low level. The study also assumed that English proficiency of instructors can be influenced by the year of service difference, and this is addressed in Table 9.

Table 9: Years of service difference in English proficiency

ANOVA
English Proficiency

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.796	3	.265	.485	.693
Within Groups	159.339	291	.548		
Total	**160.136**	**294**			

Homogeneity of variances assumed by Levene's Test (years <5, $\bar{x}$ =3.10, between 6 and 10, $\bar{x}$=3.17, between 11 and 15, $\bar{x}$=3.17, 16 years or above $\bar{x}$=3.26) was carried out to examine whether instructors' service years influences their English proficiency (Table 9). The analysis shows that Years of service of instructors did not contribute significantly to their English proficiency as shown in the ANOVA results (F=.485, p>.05). The finding is in line with Abenezer et al. (2015) who said*:* "The results of the study showed that even though the quality of teachers was high in terms of their academic and professional qualifications, it did not reflect much in the performance of the students." (P.1)   Next, we will see the language the respondents choose as a medium of instruction.

Table 10: Language choice as a medium of instruction

Language Choice	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
English	156	52.9	52.9
Amharic	13	4.4	57.3
Mother Tongue	25	8.5	65.8
English and Amharic	101	34.2	100.0
Total	295	100.0	

Instructors were also asked: "Which language do you think is a better medium of instruction in a college classroom?" The given language choices were English, Amharic, Mother tongue, and English, and Amharic supplementing English (Table 10). Among the respondents, 52.9% chose English as a medium of instruction in college classrooms, and the next largest percentage, 34.2%, chose English and Amharic as a joint medium of instruction. Language choice factors are varied in nature as the data from the interview shows; those who chose EMI argue that:

- Students can communicate with world communities in the English language.
- Students can be competent in world communities.
- More references and materials are written in the English language that no other choice can equate and substitute the English language.
- When the medium is English, the subject matter can be transformed properly and accurately to the students without any distortion because of the use of developed terms and relations to science and technology.

On the other hand, those who chose English and Amharic as a joint medium of instruction argue that:

- Students can understand the meaning of the English language first in our [their] national language; they can have a thought in the target language.
- It is better if we use Amharic as a national language that has to be used in academia as an alternative and English as a Medium of Instruction for International Communication,
- Since many materials are available in English our students can try to understand the language. However, the medium of instruction in the English language should be a scaffold in Amharic, the local language.
- At least we can minimize the loss if students are scaffold using Amharic language as strategic means to alleviate the problem.
- Students can understand the content better if they learn by integrating target and local languages.
- Every country pays due attention to its language and if our students are taught in Amharic that could speed up their communicative competence and comprehension abilities.
- Since the students are not good enough to have well-developed integrated language skills, instead of using merely the English language, using the Amharic language as well may reduce the communication barriers thus enhancing learning.
- Since Amharic is our national language, it may help students who are poor in the English language.

3.5 The Nature of Student-teacher Interaction in the Classrooms

The analysis below attempts to give answers to a research question: "To what extent do instructors and students interact in English language in the classroom?" Using the observation checklist, class observations were carried out not only to see how the teaching-learning processes took place in the classroom while instructors conducted EMI, but also to see what sort of problems they had in classes about student-teacher interaction. Accordingly, instructor related factors, student related factors, and teaching material and English language related factors were the most common ones in the classes observed.

Table 11: Instructor related factors

No.	Instructor related factors	Responses Yes	No
1	Instructor uses familiar words	33%	67%
2	Instructors' English language proficiency	37%	63%
3	Instructors' lesson preparation	42%	58%
4	Instructors' ability to explain subject matter	30%	70%
5	Instructors' ability to motivate students in the subject matter	42%	58%
6	Instructors' professional development on course delivery skills	28%	72%
7	The instructors' use of different innovative techniques to develop students' performance	40%	60%

Table 11 shows that 67% and 33% of instructors were observed using unfamiliar and familiar words respectively in the classroom. This situation has a potential challenge that makes a barrier between the instructor and students. During English language class, it was observed that students could not understand some of the observed instructor when they introduced some new terms; students were also silent and could not explain even the difficulty level of the subject matter. They were unable to express opinions easily; hence the observers understood that it was a great challenge for the students to understand and communicate in using English as a medium of instruction with their instructor.

On the second issue, 37% of instructors were observed that they were proficient enough in the English language for the subject they teach, whereas 63% percent of the instructors were observed not proficient in the target language. In relation to this, as what has been experienced from the finding of questionnaire

(Table 9), years of service of instructors did not contribute significantly to their English proficiency as shown in the ANOVA results ($F=.485$, $p>.05$).

Regarding item 3, Instructors' lesson preparation, 42% of instructors were observed that they were with their lesson plan and tried their level best to use their lesson plan properly and effectively. On the other hand, 58 % of instructors were observed that they were out of their lesson plan and in lack of preparation to instruct their students in using EMI.

Further, the ability of instructors on the issue of explaining the subject matter in the English language was observed (Item 4). Accordingly, 70% of them were below the standard and their students were less satisfied in the approaches they made in subject delivery. As finding from the questionnaire showed, lack of English proficiency in students and instructors has led to most of the communications in class or school being in Amharic or other languages and hence most students do not use or understand English language. So using English seems does not make instruction effective. Instructors also pay less attention to using English as a medium of instruction, with some intentions to teach in their mother tongue. However, 30% of instructors tried their level best to teach their subjects in the target language, English. However, this does not mean that this amount of instructors being in university with this meager approach to prepare our students efficiently and effectively for the job market.

In the same table, item 5 of the observation checklist showed that 58 % of the observed instructors were not able ability to motivate students in the subject matter though 42% could do. This showed that, though the instructor's attempt to motivate the students is appreciable, the capacity of instructors and activities teachers provided in the observed classes were not encouraging students to participate in the given tasks. In the observed classes, it was noticed that the tasks provided in the class were real oral tasks, but the tasks were difficult and culturally unrelated to encourage students' participation, because they were difficult to talk on it. In addition, it was also noticed that the tasks were difficult to complete within a given time and oral skill activities that the teacher provided were not related to students' real-life situations. Furthermore, the observers noticed that oral skill activities were not adequately provided with clear directions.

On the other hand, it was observed that in the speaking class the teachers dominated the class situation and talked more than the students. In addition, the observers also observed that for oral skill activities teachers did not create a pleasant and encouraging classroom environment. Finally, it was also noticed that teachers did not use different innovative techniques to develop students' performance in oral skill activities.

In the regard to items 6 and 7, instructors' professional development on course delivery skills and instructors' use of different innovative techniques to develop student's performance, classrooms were observed continuously.

The instructors' professional development on course delivery skills was seen below the standard and poor. It is important for a teacher to ask the right questions and to maintain students' curiosity all the time, and not doing a reading task straight away but to prepare the students to want to do it. Among the instructors the researchers observed, those who managed to develop their course delivery skills were 28%. The observed instructors who accounted for this quality were very low. Nevertheless, the instructors' use of different innovative techniques to develop students' performance observed was very low, 40% and 60%, Yes and No respectively.

As the observations data revealed, lecturers were challenged by their language abilities, students' language competence and learning styles, pedagogical issues, and resource availability. First, instructors were reported to experience linguistic difficulties. While teaching, instructors were seen using the English language of course. If they thought the student did not understand the concept, they would use translation strategy to transmit the content ideas in Amharic. The question is how many of the students understand Amharic? It cannot be said that instructors could not know this, but they were compelled to do.

The poor quality of education meant that students cannot understand the English language when it is used as a medium of instruction in the classroom and even instructors hardly use English as a medium of communication. The data from classroom observation justifies this premise. In the classrooms, when only the

English language is being used as a medium of instruction, many students were seen inactive and demotivated. They need the teacher to translate the classroom lesson in their mother tongue or the national language, Amharic. Whenever the instructor interrogates them, they tried to comprehend the contents, but lacked English language vocabulary to respond in the English language. The students directly responded in their mother tongue, and some of them preferred to be silent; very few students, were seen communicating with instructors using the target language, in English even though the interrogations were based on a lower order of thinking questions, what, who, when, where, why, which, and other knowledge-based question types.

Due to the communication barrier, students became passive and the level of classroom participation among the student population was low. In the absence of a means of communication, students could not share information and the process of learning could not be enhanced. Next, we will see the major challenges that students and instructors face while the English Language is used as a medium of instruction.

3.6 Challenges as Perceived by Instructors

The second to last research question this study attempts to answer is: "What are the challenges that instructors in Ethiopian universities encounter in using EMI in their delivery of the lesson?" To answer this question, instructors were presented with some list of potential challenges so that they rate the degree of seriousness of the challenges (5= very high, 4= high, 3=medium, 2=low, and 1=very low).

Table 13. Challenges as perceived by instructors

Challenges	N	Mini	Mx	$\bar{x}$	SD.
Descriptive Statistics					
English Language related					
English is used only in classroom.	295	1	5	4.18	.976
Prevalence of emerging mother tongue overcrowding English use.	295	1	5	4.07	1.082
Teacher related					
Lack of instructors' English language proficiency.	295	1	5	3.42	1.091
Use of unfamiliar terms by instructors.	295	1	5	3.00	1.105
Lack of training on English proficiency for instructors.	295	1	5	3.58	1.166
Lack of training on pedagogical/instructional skills for instructors.	295	1	5	3.33	1.141
Difficulty of elaborating the content of subject matter.	295	1	5	2.93	1.090
Lack of motivating students in the subject matter.	295	1	5	3.09	1.120
Difficulty in providing elaborate response to students' questions.	295	1	5	2.91	1.132
Instructors' lack of lesson preparation.	295	1	5	2.93	1.218
Resource related					
Lack of supporting resource materials.	295	1	5	3.29	1.227
Poor quality textbooks.	295	1	5	3.04	1.219
Student related					
Students' lack of reading habits.	295	1	5	4.21	.997
Lack of students' motivation to learn.	295	1	5	3.98	1.043
Lack of student participation.	295	1	5	4.11	.954
Valid N (listwise)	295				

The levels of prevalence of challenges expressed in terms of mean values were shown in Table 13. Accordingly, students' lack of reading habits ($\bar{x}$=4.21), English is used only in the classroom ($\bar{x}$=4.18), lack of student participation ($\bar{x}$=4.11), prevalence of emerging mother tongue out-crowding English use ($\bar{x}$=4.07), and lack of students' motivation to learn ($\bar{x}$=3.98) were the top five challenges at descending order that instructors

perceive they face in using English as medium of instruction. These challenges emanate from students' low motivation and minimal class participation probably due to English being a foreign language.

The next five include: Lack of training on English proficiency for instructors ($\bar{x}$=3.58), lack of instructors' English language proficiency ($\bar{x}$=3.42), lack of training on pedagogical/instructional skills for instructors ($\bar{x}$=3.33), lack of supporting resource materials ($\bar{x}$=3.29), and lack of motivating students in the subject matter ($\bar{x}$=3.09), all of which are challenges strongly related to instructors.

3.7 Coping Strategies as Perceived by Instructors

"What possible strategies do instructors use to alleviate the challenges they encounter in using EMI?" is the last research question this study answers.

Table 12: Coping strategies as perceived by instructors (N=294)

Descriptive Statistics

	Min	Max	$\bar{x}$	SD
Communicating teaching goals and objectives	1	5	4.15	.864
Using mother tongue for negotiating meaning and constructing knowledge	1	5	3.54	1.146
Using only English in class	1	5	3.60	1.158
Using group and pair works so that students help one another	1	5	3.99	.963
Explaining unfamiliar terms in the contents of the subject matter.	1	5	3.99	.884
Giving sufficient board notes to clarify the contents of the subject matter.	1	5	3.82	.978
Using visual aids (graphs, charts, diagrams pictures, etc.	1	5	4.11	.915
Relating ideas with students' background	1	5	4.08	.890
Relating ideas with realities or real-life experiences	1	5	4.22	.865
Assessing students' needs by asking questions and giving feedback	1	5	4.15	.832
Summarizing the lesson in the end.	1	5	4.20	.823
Providing worksheets	1	5	4.10	.842
Giving pre-reading assignments	1	5	4.07	.851
Preparing class activities that motivate participation	2	5	4.29	.763
Assessing learners language-related knowledge and skills	1	5	4.11	.891

Instructors were asked what strategies they would use to cope with the challenges mentioned above in using English as a medium of instruction. They were presented with a list of strategies so that they rate the degree of effectiveness of the strategies (5= very high, 4= high, 3=medium, 2=low and 1=very low). The results as levels of effectiveness expressed in terms of mean values are shown in Table 12.

Accordingly, there were four categories of strategies instructors suggested. The first category strategies were: Preparing class activities that motivate participation ($\bar{x}$=4.29), providing worksheets ($\bar{x}$= 4.10), and pre-reading assignments ($\bar{x}$=4.07). This has to do with engaging students in learning inside and outside of the classroom. The second category includes: Relating ideas with realities or real-life experiences that emanate from students' backgrounds ($\bar{x}$=4.22). This emerges from instructors' effort to know students' language-related needs.

The third category of teacher strategies focuses on using practical sessions and visual aids ($\bar{x}$=4.11} to augment lectures. Asking students questions and letting them ask questions ($\bar{x}$=4.15) are gateways to knowledge used as effective mechanisms to manage language challenges. The fourth category of teacher mechanisms to alleviate challenges in using English for instruction put forward was: Communicating teaching goals and objectives ($\bar{x}$=4.15) at the beginning of the lesson with some quick review of the last lesson and summarizing the current lesson in the end ($\bar{x}$=4.20).

4. Discussion

As literature reveals the mother tongue influence towards an English language class is unavoidable in a multilingual country, like Ethiopia. Even the current situations show that most students in English language classes need to communicate in their L1 (Tamene, 2000; Alemayehu & Lasser, 2012; Manh, 2012).

Beyond the issue of code switching, instructors were observed struggling to find effective teaching strategies. Most instructors felt that little academic support was available to them and that they had mainly learned from experience. Some students and instructors were observed using coping strategies employing to deal with these instructional language challenges. In English as Medium of Instruction (EMOI) situations, it was understood that pedagogical challenges intertwined with language challenges exacerbated the classroom teaching situation.

On the other hand, also instructors hardly pay attention to using English as MOI, with some intentions to teach in mother tongue. In such a situation, it was no longer appropriate to call English a MOI; rather it has become a medium of obstruction.

To be eligible for being an instructor for the program, instructors must meet at least two requirements: English language and subject expertise. However, a substantial number of senior academics who were with very good command of English language became out of academic works due to age and different matters. Meanwhile, young lecturers with better English skills have not developed high levels of expertise. This situation limits availability of experienced lecturers to lecture for the EMI program.

As class room observations show that not only students are weak in English language performance, but also some of the instructors could hardly communicate with their students with good command of English language. They do not have the required language competence and performance.

Besides the shortage of qualified teaching staff and inadequate supplies of reference materials, teaching equipment, Internet access, and electricity cause further obstacles for the lecturers. Some of the instructors informally expresses their worry about the poor background knowledge of the English proficiency of our students. This shows that neither instructors nor students are good enough. Neither are the facilities. For example, in some other African countries, their international standard programs utilize lots of ICT applications, such as an online library, online submission, and online assignments. Those things are as not as such accessible and inadequately applicable in the study settings. Even access to reference materials is limited.

According to the present observation finding, the first major challenge, instructors' own English abilities, is in line with findings in previous studies (Vinke et al., 1998; Wilkinson, 2005; Kyeyune, 2010; Manh, 2012). Their own experiences of studying through the English language as a medium of instruction (EMOI) did not automatically enable lecturers to teach in English. Becoming a successful EMOI instructor requires combinations of linguistic, academic, and pedagogical competence, which few lecturers possess (Amlaku, 2010; Powers, 2010; Shohamy, 2012; Yonatan, 2014).

In this study, several sample universities' content lecturers experienced difficulty in using English, especially in "explaining things" and "answering questions". Students' English abilities and learning styles are also potential challenges for EMOI instructors. In this study, instructors believed that it was difficult to improve students' language skills to equip them for EMOI within the short time available. Meanwhile, students' diverse language abilities required more effort and resources from content instructors who had to spend time adapting teaching materials and activities.

On the one hand, code-switching can offer efficient pedagogical and educational usage when instructors share the first language with their learners (Cook, 2010; Barnard & McLellan, 2013; Macaro, 2013). Alternatively, L1 is seen as beneficial when students do not have adequate proficiency (Cuttance, 2002; Shohamy, 2012; Mohamed, 2013; Solomon, 2015). In contrast, the second position maintains that English can only be learned through English. Students suffer from language and content loss in EMI environments (Kyeyune, 2010; Mohamed, 2013).

In general, the results indicated that instructors perceived that they were proficient in the Basic English language to a high or very high level. To the same extent, university instructors were aware that using English as a Medium of Instruction in college classrooms was effective.

This study, therefore, tried to look into the practice and challenges of using English as a medium of instruction in selected Ethiopian Universities. It is expected to come up with findings on the realities in the practice of English as a medium of instruction, regarding the level of English proficiency of instructors and students, the effectiveness of English as a medium of instruction, and challenges as perceived by the students and instructors. The results may suggest practical strategies to deal with the problems. Instructors, students, and policymakers alike may benefit from the results of this study. From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that if the English language has to continue as a medium of instruction in Ethiopian universities, then its status needs to be assessed and improved accordingly. Students should grasp the required level of proficiency, and the medium of instruction should not be a barrier to effective learning by any means.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

- ❖ University instructors perceive that they were proficient in the Basic English skills to a high or very high level.
- ❖ To the same extent, university instructors recognize that using the English language as a medium of instruction in college classrooms was effective.
- ❖ Significant majorities of instructors choose either English or both English and Amharic to be medium of instruction.
- ❖ There was no significant difference between male and female instructors in their perceived English effectiveness as a medium of instruction as well as in their perceived English proficiency
- ❖ The three qualification groups, PhD, Masters, and Bachelors' degrees, significantly differ in English proficiency statistically. However, this was not true in the case of instructors' attitudes towards EMI effectiveness. The three qualification groups did not significantly differ in perception of EMI effectiveness.
- ❖ The teaching experience of university instructors did not significantly contribute to their English proficiency, neither to their perception of EMI effectiveness.
- ❖ Top six challenges related to instructors' characteristics impede learning in the subject matter.
- ❖ Instructors' efforts to engage students in learning inside and outside of the classroom and their methods of teaching connecting ideas with realities or real life experiences are the two top strategies instructors can use to mitigate the challenges.

5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations were drawn from the study. Without any variation across gender, qualification, or teaching experience, university instructors recognize that they can use English as a medium instruction to effectively teach subject area courses in college classrooms. They are therefore critical stakeholders jointly working together to help students cope with their challenges in understanding science concepts in English. This takes combining hearts and minds of university instructors in working out suitable strategies to engage students in learning English. This may include:

❖ Giving students as much reading, writing and listening assignments and speech practices so that students learn from peers, TV programs, movies, books, etc., that is, connecting what we teach with reality;

❖ Making English official language and incorporating it as a basic requirement for different competition and employment requiring students and instructors to sit and pass English proficiency tests, local or international;

❖ Making English communicative skill courses to continue until graduation, communicating with students in English in class and outside of class;

❖ Motivating all people to seriously think about their English and improve it through promoting English speaking day at least once a month if possible during which everybody on campus speaks in English only and starting debates in English on varied topics;

❖ Minimize using local languages in class, engaging students in continuous assessments requiring speaking, reading, listening, and writing and giving feedback in class.

❖ Considering curriculum of English teaching (by the Federal Ministry of Education) at primary and secondary school levels to strengthen the basis of students' English skills as they proceed to university education.

❖ Enhancing instructors' basic skills of English as related to teaching may improve instructors' effective use of EMI; as has been shown in this study, English proficiency relates to instructors' perceived EMI effectiveness.

❖ Planning and delivering (by universities) tailored on-job training to instructors on English and pedagogical skills as a professional development effort. The ongoing Continuous Professional Development program should focus on the problems of English as a medium of instruction.

Acknowledgements

Author details:
[1]Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Hawassa University, Ethiopia; gmulu33@gmail.com
Competing interest: The author declared there is no conflict of interest.
Consent for publication: I have agreed to submit for Journal of Social Sciences and Language Studies and

approved the manuscript for submission. Corresponding author's electronic signature: Mulu Geta
Publisher's Note: Jimma University is neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published material and affiliations.

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