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## Higher Education Students' Experience in the Use of English Language as Medium of Instruction: First and Second Generation Ethiopian Universities in Focus

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges students experience while learning the English language as a medium of instruction (EMOI). Randomly selected first and second-generation universities were used as the settings. Regular program students, enrolled in the 2018/19 academic year, were used as the target population. Six hundred students were selected using a stratified random sampling technique. Questionnaires and classroom observations were the instruments of the study. Descriptive analysis were used for statistical purpose. As the result shows, majorities of students chose English and Amharic to be the media of instruction. Students experienced difficulties in four categories: Student-related, instructor-related, language-related, and resource-related problems. Especially, transferring ideas from native language into English language was one of the main problems the student experienced in using English as a medium of instruction. The student-instructor interaction in English language was full of tenses. Besides, some of the instructors could not communicate with their students in good English. The study showed that the English language is a great challenge to be used as a medium of instruction (EMOI). Students used some effective strategies to cope with the challenges of using EMOI: Using Amharic in group or pair works, using their mother tongue for negotiating meanings, asking helpm from the teacher, and giving attention to the subject matter. Finally, the researcher suggested instructors must meet at least two requirements: English language proficiency and subject.

**Keyword:** /Challenges of English Language/ Coping strategies/Ethnic languages/Medium of instruction/Mother tongue/

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## 1.Introduction

The low level of teachers' and students' proficiency in the English language of instruction obstruct the teaching-learning processes. Students, to whom the English language is foreign, often experience difficulties in transferring ideas from their native language into the target language, English. This is a serious challenge that needs a timely response to maintain the quality of education in the universities (Mijena, 2013; Fasika, 2014). Experiences also show that most students in Ethiopia have very limited access to the English language. There is very little opportunity for students to exercise an acceptable form of English language outside of the classroom. Homes, streets, and workplaces are not supportive enough for young citizens to learn the English language. Besides, students have difficulty in reaching acceptable standards of grammatical correctness in their writing (FDRE, 2004).

Besides, though the communicative language instruction was 'introduced' in Ethiopia more than a quarter of a century, no sustainable change has been noticed in the English language writing skills of students in general and grammatical accuracy in particular (Fasika, 2014). The study also points out that students are incapable of expressing their ideas adequately in oral and written English, and this is a serious impediment to the mastery of quality English language. It was stated that one of the biggest problems in teaching writing is that students are unable to express their ideas in grammatically correct sentences (Haregewoin, 2008; Fasika, 2014).

As experiences indicate, many of university students, sometimes up to two-thirds, are performing below proficient standards. Rigorous class tests can be difficult for students to pass as well. It is customary that students spend most of their class time copying down notes that the instructor has written on the board. They do not possess sufficient proficiency in English language even to understand what they hear from their teachers or read in their textbooks, let alone to participate actively through their speaking and writing (Linn & Miller, 2005; Fasika, 2014; Mulu, 2021).

At best, Wilkinson (2005) showed in his study that mere rote learning often prevails, with no critical and interactive participation of students, and little enough of even simple comprehension by students of what they are being told. And at worst, it means that possibly many students whose English is not sufficient even for rote-learning spend most of their class hours copying down notes that the teacher has written on the blackboard, and transforming them in the process into complete situations.

In the context of Ethiopia, the majority of Ethiopians speak Amharic as first and second language, a federal working language. The language is also being used as one of the strategies at higher institutions to ease the English language. Amharic, as a medium of instruction, is preferred in urban areas due to the multi-ethnic characters of many towns (Amlaku, 2013; Mulatu *et al.*, 2013; Yonatan, 2014; Mesfin, 2016). It is, therefore, reasonable enough to use relevant learning and teaching strategies in general to translate English language into Amharic. This may in particular make the English language easy and comprehensible for the students.

Scholars in their research findings showed that students are advised to follow different styles of learnings to cope with different academic problems. The strategies proposed, according to the literature, were metacognitive strategies: Planning for learning, thinking about the learning process, monitoring one's production or compensation, and evaluation. Next, Cognitive strategies are mentioned as repetition, resourcing, translation, grouping, notetaking, deduction, recombination, imagery, auditory repetition, keyword contextualization, elaboration of personal experiences, and finding problems are some of them (Alemu & Tekleselassie, 2011; Mulu, 2021).

Berhanu (2009) has summarized the process that teachers and the students' attitudes towards the use of the English language as a medium of instruction have been extremely negative. The English medium has functioned as a barrier between students and their instructors. In such a situation, it is no longer appropriate to call English a medium of instruction; rather, it has become a medium of obstruction to instructions. In a previous study, Mulu (2021), the researcher tried to make his study to examine the instructors' perceived

proficiency, interaction in English language, and the challenges they face in using English language as a medium of instruction in Ethiopian universities. However, this study tried to fill the gap of identifying what sort of coping strategies students employ to deal with the challenges of using English language as a medium of instruction in some selected first and second generation Ethiopian universities.

Thus, the general objective of this research was to identify the coping strategies students employ to deal with the challenges of using ELMOI in Ethiopian higher education institutions. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- find major challenges students face while using English Language as medium of instruction;
- identify coping strategies that students employ to deal with English language challenges;
- explore students' language choice as instructional medium in college classrooms.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Research Design

This study used a descriptive survey research design. The major purpose of descriptive research is the description of the state of affairs as it exists at present. The main characteristic of this method is that the researcher has no control over the variables and only reports what has happened or what is happening using large sample data (Kothari, 2004; Cook, 2010).

### 2.2 Samples and Sampling Techniques

Ethiopian universities, in this study, were stratified into two categories, first-generation and second-generation universities. From 22 first and second-generation universities, six were selected by stratified random sampling to be included in the sample. Accordingly, the universities selected for this investigation were Bahir Dar University and University of Gondar from the Amhara region, Haramaya University from the Oromiya region, Hawassa and Wolaita Soddo Universities from SNNPR, and Dire Dawa University from Dire Dawa City Administration.

From the total enrollment of 1285 students of 2018/19 academic year, 600 students were selected from six Ethiopian universities using stratified random sampling. In each selected university, 2 colleges, 3 departments of each selected college, all batches and study levels were considered for the study. In each university, 100 students were selected from chosen departments of rated colleges using stratified random sampling; the stratifying variables were college, department, batch (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> year). The sample sizes of students were determined depending on the population proportion of the college, department or batch in each selected university.

Table 1. Public Universities by Generation

No	First Generation Uni.	Second Generation Uni.
1	Addis Ababa Mekele	WolaitaSoddo* Adama Dire Dawa*
2	Bahir Dar* Gondar*	Wollega Ambo MadaWolabo
3	Hawassa*	Dilla* Wolkite Jigjiga
4	Haramaya*	Arbaminch Wollo Samara
5	Jimma	DebreMarkos Aksum

\* Sample universities

## 2.3 Instruments

The major data collection instruments the researcher used in this study were a questionnaire and classroom observations.

**Questionnaire.** A questionnaire consists of a number of questions in a definite set of forms. The merits of adopting this data collection method are low cost even for a large and geographically widely spread target population, low degree of bias by researchers, adequate time for response, convenient distribution, and suitability for large samples (Cook, 2010; Linn, & Miller, 2005).

Question sequence of the questionnaire was made to move from general to more specific opinions or facts and from simple memories to more difficult responses with each item formulated in clear, unbiased, simple, and concrete wordings conveying only one thought at a time. In relation to this, the student questionnaire has three parts containing 45 items: 14 teachers' English proficiency as perceived by students, 22 challenges students face related to the medium of instruction, and 9 students' coping mechanisms. Face and content validity of the questionnaire were checked through peer review of the items and their assembling; whereas, the reliability was checked with the pilot test data. The pilot survey, which acts as the replica and rehearsal of the main survey conducted by experts, was conducted with the intention to bring to light the weaknesses (if any) of the questionnaire and also of the survey techniques. Finally, the internal consistency of the items was determined by calculating the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient from the results of the pilot study. So, it was found to be reliable with Alpha for perception 0.79 for the questionnaire.

**Observation.** The check lists were prepared containing 9 items. Direct and systematically planned, recorded, non-participant and non-disguised observations of classroom interactions, group work discussions and students' reports and lecture notes were observed in limited number of selected departments. The observation checklist was adapted to gather further information and to substantiate it with the data collected from questionnaire of students which was tabulated in the close ended form (Kothari, 2004; Wairimu, 2016). The checklists were marked by the researcher himself in 'Yes' or 'No' form basis which was indicated on Table 3 Student and teaching material related factors.

## 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 in order that they coordinate the distribution, administration, and collection of student questionnaires after completion. After securing verbal consent from the students, questionnaires were distributed. After that, each section was observed for 60 minute, for two periods consecutively. The items found in the checklist helped to assess students' English language proficiency, and it was used to get a realistic data about the practice of teaching English language. The item found in the checklist helped to assess how teachers taught English language in the classroom, and it was used to get a realistic data about the practice of teaching English language.

## 2.3 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the quantitative data depending on their relevance to the research questions. Frequencies and percentages were deployed to analyse the data. Means and standard deviations were used to determine the prevalence of English proficiency, English effectiveness as a medium of instruction, challenges, and strategies as perceived by teachers and students.

### 3. Results

As indicated in the earlier chapter, the main objective of this study was to examine students' experience in the use of English Language as a medium of instruction. In other expressions, it was aimed to disclose the challenges that students face in using English language as a medium of instruction in Ethiopian universities.

Table 2: Students' English language proficiency (N=451)

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>	Min	Mx	Mean	SD
<b>Listening</b>				
Listening and understanding of contents in subject	1	5	3.52	0.91
Listening and understanding teachers' questions	1	5	3.43	0.91
<b>Speaking</b>				
Expression of ideas while speaking in class	1	5	3.20	0.91
Oral responses to questions you are asked in class	1	5	3.22	0.85
Asking vital academic information from individual level	1	5	3.05	1.01
Asking questions in class	1	5	3.16	1.01
<b>Reading</b>				
Reading and understanding the contents of subject	1	5	3.76	0.88
Reading and understanding the problems	1	5	3.58	0.89
Reading and understanding the meaning of concepts	1	5	3.48	0.90
<b>Writing</b>				
Taking notes during lectures	1	5	3.61	1.02
Writing and reporting activities given as homework	1	5	3.64	0.92
Understanding of instructions in examinations	1	5	3.69	0.94
Writing project reports	1	5	3.62	0.97
Writing answers to exam questions	1	5	3.63	1.14

To answer the student responses to the questionnaire, measuring challenges in relation to Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing in EMOI classes were analysed. The mean scores of the student responses for each item are presented in Table 2, with higher mean indicating that students experienced greater difficulty.

To assess students' English proficiency based on a quantitative self-reported questionnaire, students were asked to rate their English proficiency on four basic skills relying on what they actually 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 obtained from the survey indicated that students perceive that their English proficiency is medium or just over the medium level (with low Mean=3.05 and high mean=3.76) and small Standard Deviations. Thus, the relatively lower proficiency of students seems to stand as a reason for their low perception of English effectiveness. It is common for language abilities across the four skills to be interrelated. However, such relationships are not strong enough to allow the measurement of one language skill to substitute for another.

For this analysis, for each macro skill, the average of the items has been considered. For example, for listening skill, 3.48, the average of 3.52 and 3.43 is taken, and likewise for the others. All items which got mean scores above the scale midpoint of '3' indicating that students, on average, reported significant linguistic challenges with respect to all of the items. Accordingly, based on the total mean scores of each item, participants indicated that writing ( $M = 3.64$ ) and reading ( $M = 3.61$ ) were the most challenging areas, and they found listening ( $M = 3.48$ ) and speaking ( $M = 3.16$ ) to be the least challenging areas in their EMI courses. These descriptive results suggest that students experience greater difficulty with respect to writing and reading skills than speaking and listening skills, and they face challenges with using English as the medium of instruction in general and engaging in class discussions in particular.

### 3.2 Classroom Observation

**Student and teaching material related factors.** To answer the question student and teaching material related factors, the researcher collected data through classroom observations. The data gathered were presented hereunder.

		Responses	
<b>Student related Factors</b>		Yes	No
1	Students' participation in the classroom	17%	83%
2	Students' listening and understanding abilities of the lesson	20%	80%
3	Students' understanding capacity of instructions in the exams	26%	74%
4	The ability of doing exams and replying questions	28%	72%
5	Level of English language skills	33%	69%
6	Participations in group or pair works	24%	76%
7	Level of giving oral responses to questions in class	17%	83%
8	Ability in reading and understanding the contents	25%	75%
9	Ability in writing assignments, and group works	29%	71%
10	Level of expressing thoughts and ideas clearly in English	22%	78%
<b>Resource Related Factors</b>			
11	Adequacy of supporting English resource materials	32%	68%
12	Technology supported academic system in classroom	13%	87%

Class observations were carried out to see how the teaching and learning processes took place in the classroom as instructors were conducting their teaching using English language as medium of instruction. The study was aimed to see what sort of problems they had in language classes in relation to students teacher interaction. Accordingly, student related and teaching material related factors are the most common ones in the classes observed.

As shown in Table 3, many students (83%) were seen inactive and demotivated in the classroom when only English was being used as a medium of instruction (Item 1). They needed the teacher to translate the classroom lesson in their mother tongue or the national language, Amharic. Whenever the instructor interrogated 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 (17%) were seen communicating with instructors using the target language, English, even though the interrogations were based on lower order of thinking questions, what, who, when, where, why, which, and other knowledge based question types.

As data analysis from the questionnaires showed, students were less participants in group and pair tasks. Moreover, they were so silent when they were expected to speak in English language. Thus, the majority of the students reverted to their mother tongue to express themselves. On top of this, as the respondents indicated, students felt at ease when teachers let them interact in their mother tongue. This problem was confirmed by the classroom observation too.

Although the students started doing the speaking activities in English language, they were observed using their mother tongue after a while. Thus, it seems that the students' preference for using their mother tongue in doing speaking activities takes their practice time to speak in English language. As the result, the students were seen as less competent in using English language as Medium of instruction.

In item 2, it was observed that 80% of the students could not comprehend what the instructor discussed in the classroom about the subject matters. They were unable to listen critically to their instructor and they were busy asking their closeby classmates what was being discussed in the class. Only few students (20%) could understand what the instructor said in the classroom. The students' general listening and understanding abilities during the lesson in class were so poor and below the standard.

Students were observed that they could not understand the English language due to the nature of the instruction of English language being conducted without using their L1. Moreover, it was understood that the students were found in difficulties to use the target language at college, and these conditions make the instructors to be found in problems to teach their students as easy as possible. This also resulted in making instructors more use (of Amharic language) thinking that students could not follow English language in the classroom.

It was experienced that in item 3, 74% of students could not understand the instruction of the given examinations. During the observation sessions, the instructors conversed that their students score fewer marks on their class tests and even on their final examinations. Continuous observations witnessed that during examinations, students were seen cheating from their peers. The surprise was that only 26% of students comprehended the instruction and the content written on the book and blackboard and got passing marks.

During English language class, it was observed that students could not understand the instructor; they could not respond when s/he asked some questions. Students were also silent and could not explain even the difficulty level of the subject matter. Most of the students (72%) were unable to express opinions easily; hence, the observers understood that it was a great challenge for the students to understand and communicate effectively using English as the medium of instruction with their instructor. It was observed that students were unable to understand the English language due to the poor implementation of the English language at school levels. They were not ready to use the English language at college and scored the least mark in examinations too (Item 4).

With regard to level of English language skills (Item 5), content was given due attention during observations and according to the data collected, 69% of the students were very poor in their basic skills of English language. This was confirmed in the instructors' examination roster where the students scored the least mark in communicative English language skills (This course was coded EnLa.110, which contains Basic English language skills, Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing). The subject is given to all freshman students as a common course across the Ethiopian universities, and students in sampled universities' classrooms were observed that they scored below the average result. This resulted in ineffective use of English language in classroom since the instructors were seen teaching in Amharic or their mother tongue thinking that students could not follow English language classes. On the other hand, instructors hardly pay attention to using English as medium of instruction (MOI), with some intentions to teach in Amharic language. In such a situation, it is no longer appropriate to call English a MOI; rather it has become a 'medium of obstruction'.

Item 6 is about participations in group or pair works. Accordingly, the observations showed that 76% of students had low level of oral responses to questions in class. Whereas, 24% of students could participate in group work and other related classroom activities. Besides, in item 7, 8, 9 and 10, the observations data showed that the students' abilities in reading and understanding, writing assignments and group works, and expressing thoughts and opinions clearly in English were (No vs. Yes): 75% & 25%, 83% & 17%, 71% & 29%, and 78% & 22%, respectively. This showed that majority of students couldn't understand their instructor when some new terms were introduced. Students were also silent and couldn't 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 effectively using English as a medium of instruction with their instructors.

Coming to item number 11, as it was observed, 68% was recorded to show the inadequacy of supporting English resource materials. In the academic institutions where the teaching and learning materials are inaccessible, the pedagogic process could be hampered without any hesitation. It is mandatory for the students to be supported by supplementary materials to be competent and effective enough in education in general and English language skills in particular. As observations made in the sampled Ethiopian universities, 32% of classrooms were observed to be equipped with supplementary materials.

With regard to item 12, observations were made in sample universities that the classrooms were not supported by ICT. According to the observations made in classrooms, the universities were not equipped (or connected) with internet resources and instructors and students could not be the beneficiaries of technology-born materials. This entails that a total of 87% of the class is without internet connections. However, as the observation showed, 13% of the classrooms had been equipped with wireless resources which were networked and the classrooms were facilitated with electronic materials, LCD, to maintain smart classroom.

### 3.3 Challenges Students Face while Learning EMI

Table 4. Challenges as perceived by students (N=451).

#### Descriptive Statistics

Language related	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Mother tongue interference & peer interactions	1.00	5.00	3.70	1.90
English is used only in classroom	1.00	5.00	3.11	1.05
<b>Teacher related</b>				
Unfamiliar terms teachers use	1.00	5.00	<b>3.11</b>	1.05
Lack of Teachers' lang. proficiency	1.00	5.00	3.02	1.04
Lack of teachers' lesson preparation	1.00	5.00	3.04	1.06
Teachers' inability to explain subject matter	1.00	5.00	<b>3.10</b>	1.08
Teachers' inability to motivate students	1.00	5.00	3.06	1.08
Lack of training on course delivery skills	1.00	5.00	3.04	1.02
Lack of training on instructional skills	1.00	5.00	<b>3.35</b>	1.03
<b>Student related</b>				
Students' poor reading habits	1.00	5.00	<b>3.40</b>	0.98
Lack of students' participation in class	1.00	5.00	3.18	0.95
Lack of listening and understanding lessons	1.00	5.00	3.02	1.09
Difficulty in understanding instructions in exams	1.00	5.00	<b>3.16</b>	0.98
Difficulty in doing exams and replying questions	1.00	5.00	3.14	0.99
Low level of English skills	1.00	5.00	<b>3.21</b>	0.97
Inadequate participation in group or idle	1.00	5.00	3.02	1.08
Difficulty in giving oral responses to questions	1.00	5.00	2.99	1.09
Difficulty in reading and understanding	1.00	5.00	3.11	1.04
Difficulty in writing assignments in group works	1.00	5.00	<b>3.24</b>	1.08
Difficulty in writing ones thoughts and ideas	1.00	5.00	3.05	1.17
<b>Resource related</b>				
Inadequacy of supporting resource materials	1.00	5.00	3.25	1.08
Poor quality textbooks	1.00	5.00	3.05	1.17

A similar set of perceived challenges were presented to students for rating. The results as levels of prevalence expressed in terms of mean values were reported in Table 4. The top four challenges in relation to , students, teachers, English language, and resources were mentioned in their degree of seriousness. These perceived challenges by students are presented below.

**Student related factors.** All items received the mean scores above the scale midpoint of '3' indicating that students, on average, reported significant linguistic challenges with respect to most of the items (Table 4). Some of the serious challenges, at descending order, are students' poor reading habits ( $M=3.40$ ,  $Sd= 0.98$ ), difficulty in writing assignments in group works ( $M=3.24$ ,  $Sd= 1.08$ ), low level of English skills ( $M=3.21$ ,  $Sd= 0.97$ ), and difficulty in understanding instructions ( $M=3.16$ ,  $Sd= 0.98$ ). These challenges emanate from students' low motivation and minimal class participation, probably, due to English being a foreign language.

**Teacher related factors.** The other significant challenges students experienced, as mentioned in Table 4, were teacher related. Lack of training on instructional skills ( $M=3.35$ ,  $Sd= 1.03$ ), Unfamiliar terms teachers use ( $M=3.11$ ,  $Sd= 1.05$ ), Teachers' inability to explain subject matter ( $M=3.10$ ,  $Sd= 1.08$ ) are a few examples among others.



Furthermore, in **language-related aspects**, Mother tongue interference and peer interactions ( $M= 3.70$ ,  $Sd= 1.90$ ) and using English only in classroom ( $M=3.11$ ,  $Sd= 1.05$ ) were reported by the study participants as challenges that hamper students participation in EMI. With regard to **resource related factors**, it was reported that inadequacy of supporting resource materials ( $M=3.25$ ,  $Sd= 1.08$ ) and poor quality textbooks ( $M=3.05$ ,  $Sd=1.17$ ) weakened learners participation in EMI.

### 3.4 Strategies Perceived by Students to Cope up with the Challenge

Table 5. Strategies as suggested by students (N=451)

#### Descriptive Statistics

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Using mother tongue for negotiation and constructing knowledge	1.00	5.00	3.60	1.13
Using Amharic for negotiation	1.00	5.00	3.47	1.17
Using Amharic in group or pair works	1.00	5.00	<b>3.65</b>	1.13
Asking teachers for clarity	1.00	5.00	3.47	1.06
Studying hard the subject matter	1.00	5.00	3.80	1.09
Using mother tongues in group or pair	1.00	5.00	<b>3.60</b>	1.19
Asking for supports	1.00	5.00	3.26	1.90
Pre-reading lesson materials	1.00	5.00	3.80	1.07
Concentrating on lessons in classroom	1.00	5.00	3.50	0.97
Valid N (list wise)				

Students were asked 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 would rate the degree of effectiveness of the strategies (5= very high, 4= high, 3=medium, 2=low, and 1=very low).

In this study, the respondents have experienced a number of effective strategies to cope with the challenges of using English as a medium of instruction. Among these strategies, four with better mean values are presented. The first is related to **using mother tongue and Amharic**. These are: Using Amharic in group or pair works ( $M=3.65$ ,  $Sd=1.13$ ), Using mother tongues in group or pair work ( $M=3.60$ ,  $Sd=1.19$ ), and Using Amharic for negotiation ( $M=3.47$ ,  $Sd=1.17$ ), at descending order.

The second one is related to **asking help from the teacher**. Here two strategies are rated by the study participants: Asking teachers for clarity ( $M=3.47$ ,  $Sd=1.06$ ) and Asking for supports ( $M=3.26$ ,  $Sd=1.90$ ).

The third category deals with **giving attention to the subject matter**. To cope with the challenges students use the strategies of Pre-reading lesson materials ( $M=3.80$ ,  $Sd=1.07$ ), Studying hard the subject matter ( $M=3.80$ ,  $Sd=1.09$ ), and Concentrating on lessons in classroom ( $M=3.50$ ,  $Sd=0.97$ ). Overall, according to the data collected from the students on different strategy use in this study, their experiences revolve around different strategic principles: Meta-cognitive strategies, Cognitive strategies, and Socio-affective strategies. These approaches of coping the academic problems are different from students to students; especially, those who use planning for learning, thinking about the learning process, monitoring ones production or compensation and evaluation are Meta-cognitive strategy users. Those who follow the style of learning repetition, resourcing, translation, grouping, note taking, deduction, recombination, imagery, auditory repetition, key word contextualization, elaboration of personal experiences and finding problems are cognitive strategists. The third ones, students who are strict in following cooperative learning, asking for help, trying to enjoy, and avoiding embarrassment are Socio-affective strategists.

### 3.6 Discussion

As literature reveals, the mother tongue influence in the English language class is unavoidable in a multilingual country, like Ethiopia. Even most of the students in English language classes need to communicate in their L1. They were observed that the majority of learners choose English and Amharic as a medium of instruction (O'Malley, 1985a ; Brown, 2000; Fasika, 2014). Beyond the issue of code-switching, lecturers were observed struggling to find effective teaching strategies. Most instructors felt that little pedagogical support was available to them and that they had mainly learned from experience. Some students and instructors were observed using coping strategies employed to deal with English language instructional challenges. In EMOI situations, it was understood that pedagogical challenges intertwined with language challenges which exacerbated the classroom teaching situation.

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

As classroom observations revealed, not only students are weak in English language performance, but also some of the instructors hardly communicate with their students in a good command of the English language, nor do they have language competence and performance. In addition to the shortage of qualified teaching staff and inadequate supplies of reference materials, teaching equipment, internet access, and electricity cause further obstacles for the lecturers. Furthermore, instructors hardly pay attention to using EMOI with some intentions of teaching in mother tongue. In such a situation, it is no longer appropriate to call English language as a medium of instruction; rather it has become a medium of obstruction.

During the classroom observation, a few of the instructors informally expressed their worry about the poor background knowledge in the English proficiency of the students and teachers. This shows that neither the instructors nor the students are good enough, nor are the facilities. For example, in some other African countries, their international standard programs utilize lots of ICT applications such as online libraries, online submission, and online assignments. Those things are as such inaccessible and inadequately applicable in Ethiopian situation. Even the access to reference materials is limited. The previous studies also support these short comes (Seidel, 2007; Hargewoin, 2008; Mohamed, N. 2013; Barnard & McLellan, 2013; Mulu and Menna , 2016).

According to the present findings from observations, the first major challenge is the instructors' own English ability. This is in agreement with findings in previous studies (Vinke *et al.*, 1998; Wilkinson, 2005; Kyeyune, 2010; Manh, 2012). Their findings reveal that EMOI did not automatically enable lecturers to teach in English. To become a successful EMOI teacher requires combinations of linguistic, academic, and pedagogical competence, which few lecturers possess (Seidel, 2007; Shohamy, 2012).

In this study, lecturers experienced difficulty in using English language, especially in explaining contents to students using the target language and answering questions to the students. It was understood that the less comprehension of students, while learning the subject matters in the English language, was found to be problem for instructors and the learners. Students' English language abilities and learning styles are also potential challenges for EMOI teachers.

On the one hand, code-switching can offer efficient pedagogical and educational usage (Mohanty, 2007; Cook, 2010; Barnard & McLellan, 2013; Macaro, 2013) when teachers share the first language with their learners. In contrast, the second position maintains that English language can only be learned through English language. Students suffer from language and content loss in EMOI environments (Kyeyune, 2010; Mohamed, 2013). Alternatively, as other studies show, L1 is seen as beneficial when students do not have adequate proficiency. Apart from its wider acceptance as an instructional language, English language is not

usually effective. Its ineffectiveness is highly observed in places where it is not spoken as a first language (Gebremedhin,1993; Fasika, 2014).

The analysis revealed that students found writing and reading to be the most challenging areas in their EMI classes. This does not mean that the students are good at speaking and listening. According to Powers (2010), when we say that someone 'speaks' a language fluently, it usually means that he/she has a high level in all four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. But, as any teacher knows, learners often have strengths or weaknesses in particular skills, and in some cases can achieve high levels in, for example, reading and writing, while not being able to speak or listen at a comparable level.

In this regard, all items received mean scores above the scale midpoint of '3' indicating that students, on average, did report significant linguistic challenges with respect to most of the items. Based on the total mean scores of each item, participants indicated that writing was so difficult to express their ideas in orthographic form. Also, students faced difficulty in listening and speaking: they could not talk or express themselves comfortably; when they could not participate in discussions made in the EMOI course, they would lose their confidence (Kirkgoz, 2005; Oner & Mede, 2015). Some students stated they could not listen to the lecture on the one hand, and take notes on the other. It was observed that there was frequent code-switching due to an inadequate command of English, and this is another difficulty noted. In relation to this, scholars state that learners' development of the four skills can be unbalanced, e.g. a learner could be strong in reading, but weak in listening or writing, or reading. Research findings suggest that the ability to speak is distinct from the ability to read/listen/and write (Italo,1999; Sawaki *et al.*, 2009; Powers, 2010). Therefore, a proficient reader/writer/listener may not necessarily be a proficient speaker.

As the findings show, the students had less interest to use and learn in English language as a medium of instruction. They preferred their mother tongue, and in each session they asked the instructor to translate the idea of the subject to L1. The dilemma that made the problem more complex was that many of the students were seen that they could not understand the national language, Amharic, and the instructor couldn't understand their mothers' tongue too.

The benefit of communicating with students in their mother tongue, especially in Amharic language, was to help the students understand things quickly. If they comprehended it, they would be more motivated. The disadvantage, however, was that when Amharic was used regularly, they would prefer their mother tongues to English. Obviously, they preferred a language that helps them understand better. Then, the ideas were deviating from the goal, i.e. to help students comprehend English language. The nature of student-instructor interaction in the class room using EMOI was full of anxieties.

Challenges perceived by students are debriefed on the following factors: Language related, Teacher related, Student related, and Resource related. These were the top four challenges students encountered. They indicate students' lack of readiness to learn and low class participation which impedes their learning in the subject matter. Similar findings are reported by other studies (Evans & Green, 2007; Chang, 2010; Marie, 2013).

On the other hand, it was experienced that the top five most effective strategies to cope with the challenges in using English as the medium of instruction were: Studying hard the subject matter, pre-reading lesson materials, using Amharic in group or pair works, using the mother tongue for negotiating meaning, and concentrating on lessons in the classroom. Some students were observed using these coping strategies to deal with instructional language challenges. In such situation, students implement strategies which assist their attempt to succeed in their performance and to cope up the challenges they face. Support to this finding comes from other studies (McDonough,1995; Mohanty, 2007; Seyoum , 2009; Marie, 2013).

On the same issues, with this control of the learning process, a learner can self-monitor and reflect meta cognitively upon the effectiveness of the learning strategies being used to overcome barriers in achieving identified learning goals. When the goal is challenging or not easily achieved, the learner then is able to demonstrate persistence by employing a range of strategies and techniques and does not give up when success

does not come immediately. Metacognition also encompasses the individual's perceived ability to adjust strategies successfully. The finding is inline with some other studies (Farrington *et al.*, 2012; National Research Council, 2012; Conley, 2013; Conley & French, 2014).

According to the data collected from the students, their experiences revolve around different strategic principles: Metacognitive strategies, Cognitive strategies, and Socio – affective strategies. These approaches to coping with academic problems are different from student to student (Kırkgoz, 2005; Mohamed, 2013; Oner & Mede, 2015). The last strategy mentioned in the findings is the Socio affective strategies, which include cooperation, asking questions for clarification and interaction with others in learning/ cooperative learning, asking for help, trying to enjoy and avoid embarrassment . This finding confirm the findings of Powers (2010) and Fasika (2014). Scholars in their research findings also showed that students are advised to follow different styles of learnings to cope with the different academic problems. These strategies were also proposed in the literature (Hoffman, 1991; Tamene, 2000).

As literature reveals, the mother tongue influence in the English language class is unavoidable in a multilingual country, like Ethiopia. Even the current situations in Ethiopia show that most students in English language classes need to communicate in their L1. Some other studies also reported similar findings (Hoffman, 1991; Cuttance, 2002; Teshome, 2004; Fasika , 2014; Yonatan, 2014).

Beyond the issue of code switching, lecturers were observed struggling to find effective teaching strategies, which are related with solutions in specific ways, and they are productive in solving the problem for reasons which theorists can articulate. Most instructors felt that little pedagogical support was available to them, and that they had mainly learned from experience. In EMOI situations, it was understood that the way how instructors approach in teaching the language intertwined with the nature of English language challenges exacerbated the classroom teaching situation.

The advantage of using the students' first language in the EMI program was to help the students comprehend the learning of English as medium of instruction quickly. If they understood it, they would be more motivated to use the targate language. The disadvantage was that when Amharic was used regularly, they would prefer their mother tongues to English. Obviously, they preferred a language that helps them understand better (Tamene, 2000; Heugh, *et al.*, 2006; Solomon, 2015; Fekede & Tynjälä, 2015).

According to the present research finding, the instructors' own English abilities is one of the first major challenges what the situations host. The instructors own experiences of studying through EMOI did not automatically enable lecturers to teach in English. To become a successful instructor in teaching EMOI, instructors require combinations of linguistic, academic, and pedagogical competence, which few lecturers possess (Aduwa-Ogiegbaen, 2006; Shohamy, 2012). In this study, several sample universities' content lecturers experienced difficulty in using English, especially in “explaining things” and “answering questions”. Similar findings have been reported by oversee studies (Vinke *et al.*, 1998; Wilkinson, 2005; Kyeyune, 2010; Manh, 2012).

On top of these, instructors could not be strict enough in using the English language as a means of communication with students in teaching-learning processes, with some intention to teach in the mother tongue. In such a situation, it was no longer appropriate to refer to the English language as a medium of instruction; rather it has become a medium of obstruction (Teshome, 2004; Marie, 2013).

## 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 4.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn. Students in this study were of the opinion that English is so difficult to comprhend the content due to less knowledge in the target language. Specially, the four challenges perceived by students are: language related, teacher related, student related, and resource related. Besides, students' lack of reading habits, using English as merely in the classroom, lack of student

participation, the prevalence of emerging mother tongue, out-crowding English use, and lack of students' motivation to learn were other challenges students reported they face in using EMI. These challenges emanate from students' low motivation and minimal class participation, probably, due to English being a foreign language.

Students also explained that English as a foreign language is at least moderately effective as a medium of instruction. The significant majority of students, in addition, choose either English or English and Amharic as a medium of instruction. Besides, the top six challenges related to teachers and students' characteristics impede learning in the subject matter. In EMOI situations, it was understood that pedagogical challenges intertwined with language challenges exacerbated the classroom teaching situation.

It was also understood that students were observed to be unable to understand the English language due to the poor implementation of the language at school levels. They were not ready to use the English language at college. Moreover, they scored the least mark in examinations. In language-related aspects, the finding showed that students found writing and reading the most challenging areas in their EMOI. They also faced difficulty in listening and speaking, even they could not talk or express themselves comfortably. Furthermore, using the English language only in the classroom, lack of student participation, students' poor reading habits, inadequate responsibility for learning, lack of teachers' lesson preparation, and inadequacy of supporting resource materials have made using EMI the major problem as the finding have showed.

The finding also showed that effective strategies were used to cope with the challenges of using English as the medium of instruction. These strategies were Metacognitive strategies, Cognitive strategies, and Socio – effective strategies. Students, on their part, suggested the following mechanisms to alleviate their English language use as a medium of instruction: Using Amharic in group or pair works, using their mother tongue for negotiating meanings, asking help from the teacher, and giving attention to the subject matter.

It is clear that if the English language has to continue as a medium of instruction in Ethiopian universities, its status needs to be improved. This study, therefore, tried to look into the practice and challenges of using English as a medium of instruction in selected Ethiopian Universities.

The study, therefore, has come up with findings on the realities in the practice of English as a medium of instruction. Such realities include on the level of English proficiency of the teachers and students, the effectiveness of English as a medium of instruction, and the challenges as perceived by students and teachers. The results of the study inspired suggestions of practical strategies to deal with the problems. Apparently, teachers, students, and policy makers may benefit from the results of this study.

## 4.2 Recommendation

Although the challenges that EMOI students face and what they need are apparent enough, the problems were given less attention. Based on the major findings of the present study, the researcher proposes a number of implications:

- ✚ Students should be collaborated with their peers and instructors to cope with their challenges in understanding the concepts of subject matter in English;
- ✚ Students should pay due attentions as much reading, writing, listening assignments, and speech practices so that they can learn from peers, TV programs, movies, books, etc., that is, connecting what they learn with reality;
- ✚ Universities should plan and deliver tailored on-job training to instructors on English language and pedagogical skills as professional development effort. The program should also focus on the problems of English as a medium of instruction. Thus, they can enhance instructors' basic English language skills as related to language proficiency and subject expertise;
- ✚ Uninterrupted action research should be conducted by scholars in the field of study and other concerned bodies to identify the root causes of students' and teachers' poor English language proficiency and come up with practical solutions.

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#### Authors' contributions:

1. Dr. Mulu Geta: Collected data, developed the proposal, interpreted the data and wrote the manuscript.

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#### Competing of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

#### Consent for publication

I have agreed to submit to the Journal of Social Sciences and Language Studies and approved the manuscript for submission. Author's

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