

*English Language Use in Ethiopia: Challenges and Directions*

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## **Abstract**

*This paper explored current challenges of English language use in the Ethiopian context and future directions. The research utilised semi-structured interviews to elicit qualitative data from five purposefully chosen EFL teachers. The participants shared their perspectives on current challenges of English language use and forwarded suggested solutions for improvement of ELT in the country. The findings highlighted the following major problems challenging English language use: low level of language awareness and language socialization, the language learning mindset, the socio-cultural context and problems in the English language education. Based on the identified problems, directions were given in the study.*

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## 1. Introduction

English language was introduced to Ethiopia along with the emergence of modern education and it has a long history in Ethiopia than in most African countries that are now using it as an official language. It is largely recognized as the language of education in the country since it has very limited applications outside the educational setting. Michael Daniel Ambachew (2003, p.33) points out that though English has been used in Ethiopia as much as it has been used in Nigeria and Ghana, what is recognized as an Ethiopian variety or "*Ethiopian English*" doesn't exist. Ambachew indicates that the only observable account in Ethiopian English language use is a performance variety that results from mother tongue interference. This can be taken as one of the indications for the fact that the Ethiopian society has not yet fully recognized the 'lingua franca' status of the English language.

In the past few years, some studies have tried to address linguistic issues and the multifaceted problems challenging the teaching and use of English language in Ethiopia. For instance, Cohen (2007) claims that students' poor English language use in Ethiopia is inherited from teachers. Cohen implies that improving teachers' English language use has a direct bearing on students' English language learning. Bogale (2007) states that the low level of English proficiency is a manifestation of the socio-economic conditions in the country sustained through corrupt local policy practices of state agents and international donors. A similar assertion has also been made by Birbirso (2014). He observed the crises in EFL proficiency and teacher development in the context of international donor states. Another study was that of Heugh (2010). Heugh observes that in the Ethiopian case, the goal of linguistic diversity has been obscured by the allure of English and there has been a 'washback effect' of this through the system. More recently, some studies were undertaken that look into the causes of poor command of English language and its impact on the academic achievements (Diriba and Davidson, 2017), public schools and private schools in light of their contribution for quality education (Teshome, 2017) and school leadership and English language teachers' approaches in teaching English language (Eshetu et al., 2016).

In the present study, the challenges of English language use in Ethiopia are explored and solutions are suggested.

## 2. Statements of the Problem

The overall state of English language use in Ethiopia displays a mixed picture of complexities and confusing paradoxes. It is used, along with Amharic, in

government, commerce (*i.e. air transport, banking, international hotels, telecommunication services, and tourism*), entertainment and various forms of media outlets. Yet, it is not common to see people using English for interpersonal communication. English language is being taught as a subject starting from grade one. It is also the medium of instruction at secondary level and higher education. However, the majority of students fail to attain adequate English language skills for basic communication. For Ethiopians, English does not bring negative memories associated with colonial expansion and influence. So, negative attitude towards the expansion of English (*as a form of post-colonial reaction to 'linguistic imperialism'*) explains very little about Ethiopians' indifference to English.

The purpose of this paper is to substantiate data on the challenges of English language use in Ethiopia and suggest ways of improving the status of the language in the country. The study employed a substantive theory analysis based on data obtained from interviews with English language professionals. Perspectives gained from the interview combined with a synthesis of other theoretical constructs provided answers to the following fundamental research questions.

1. What are the current challenges of English language use in Ethiopia?
2. What measures should be taken to improve English language use in Ethiopia?

### **3. Objectives**

#### **3.1 General Objective**

The principal objective of this study is to substantiate data on factors currently challenging the use of English language in Ethiopia.

#### **3.2 Specific Objectives**

Specifically, the study has the following specific objectives:

- Explore challenges of English language use in Ethiopia
- Suggest solutions to improve ELT and English language use in Ethiopia.

### **4. Methodology**

In this section the research design, participants, and sampling techniques, data collection methods and methods of data analyses are specified.

## **4.1 Research Design**

The research design employed in this study was an exploratory qualitative case study design. The study follows a substantive theory approach to generate a range of theories that explain the low level of English language use in Ethiopia. Within this methodology, a constructivist-interpretive perspective has been considered for this assignment. This methodological choice was taken for two reasons. First, the researcher was convinced that nature and depth of the issue at hand is best examined through a research paradigm that recognizes the existence of multiple realities that are constructed and interpreted by participants and the researcher. Second, the ideas given by informants include views and opinions that are always subjected to their personal interpretations.

## **4.2 Data Collection and Participants**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three English language teachers who have 5 to 15 years of experience in teaching English language and two English language journalists who worked in different organizations. Accordingly, three English language instructors and two journalists were selected purposively. The interviews were undertaken with the help of a guide prepared by the interviewer. The guide outlines issues and questions related to the use of English language in academic and non-academic contexts and each informant responded to somewhat different questions.

## **4.3 Data Analysis**

Data analysis was undertaken in line with the analysis procedures specified in constructivist grounded theory method. The analysis involved performing different tasks in separate stages: initial coding, selective coding, theoretical coding and theoretical sampling.

## **4.4 Ethical Considerations**

The researcher carefully considered all available ethical issues in collecting and analyzing data obtained from participants and in seeking their consent.

## **5. Findings and Discussions**

The purpose of this study was to substantiate data on the challenges of English language use in Ethiopia and to suggest directions for improvement. The data collected was coded and the codes were grouped and refined into categories. The conceptual categories are presented and discussed based on the research questions introduced in chapter one.

## **5.1. Current Challenges of English Language Use in Ethiopia**

### **5.1.1 Low Level of Language Awareness**

One of the conceptual categories emerged from the coded data was the absence of language awareness. Participants' interview response constitutes a clear statement indicating the need to incorporate language awareness component in Ethiopian language teaching context. One of the participants shared his perspective in this way:

*English is now the tool for interacting with the globalized world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We need it to keep ourselves abreast of the latest happenings around the world and access the global knowledge. It is like a requirement (participant 4).*

A similar idea was also given by this participant.

*In our case, the main obstacle to enjoy this kind of bilingual advantage is lack of curiosity to learn a second or foreign language and lack of awareness about the value of using English (participant 4)*

Language awareness is defined as “explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use” (ALA, 2012). It is an individual's sensitivity to a conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life (Donmall, 1985: 7).

### **5.1.2 Lack of English Language Socialization**

One area of limitation in learning and using English language in the Ethiopian context is lack of interaction and communication with others in school and outside of school. This conceptual category emerged from the data more frequently than any other concept. Many of the participants indicated that English language learners in Ethiopia tend to interact less in English both in classrooms and outside classrooms. One of the participants clearly points out:

*Moreover, I observe that people in Ethiopia interact less frequently with each other in order to use English or using English. Very few people regularly communicate in English on internet with regular penpals or email contacts from around the world. Communications on social media through English is also limited. (participant 5).*

With respect to socialization, interviewees have also indicated that English language learners experience anxieties of using the language in public. One of such anxieties is related to society's stigma towards those who try to speak English. For

example, participant 1 expressed his observations on using English in public in this way:

*For instance, you don't feel free to speak English in public and if you do people may assume either you are boasting or trying to appear superior to them. They may even assume you are plotting something. So, you don't dare to speak English in public even if you want to.*

The first thing that that came to my mind when the first interviewee spoke about the role of English language in Ethiopia is how it is perceived. It is considered as a language with almost no role outside the classroom. That is why people regard it as a 'Foreign Language'. In a recent blog post, an English woman named Debi described her experience during her voyage into Benishangul Gumuz region of Ethiopia. She wrote that in the region she visited English is found nowhere outside of the classroom. It is unlikely to find people who use it in everyday life. She noticed how speaking English on the street or in public is socially condemned and is considered as an act of appearing showing a sense of superiority to people. She points out that this is one of the reasons people don't speak it or practice it and then vehemently testify the difficulty of forcing students to succeed learning it to the level of mastery.

### **5.1.3 A Fixed Mind-Set for Learning and Using English**

This conceptual category emerged from the coded data as participants' frequently made references to practices and beliefs of Ethiopians about their English language learning ability. Participants have mentioned beliefs inherent in the group of people they observe in relation to English language learning. One interviewee particularly described an example of the beliefs and actions of people in his village in this way:

*Well, I can recall one instance. In my village, I commonly observe people avoiding anything that requires dealing with the English language because they are repelled by the effort it requires to figure out meaning. The more they avoid English, the stranger it gets. So, they continue to use avoidance as a strategy (participant 5).*

One typical characteristic of individuals with a fixed language learning mindset is the avoidance of challenges related to the learning and use of a language. This type of incident is observed on students at all levels of education across the country. High school students for instance, largely avoid reading for fear of dealing with the English in textbooks and reference guides. They are easily discouraged by the difficulties of figuring out the meaning of texts, so avoidance becomes the option instead of struggling with it.

In general terms, mindset' refers to individuals' beliefs about their academic ability. Molden and Dweck (2006, p. 201) define mindset as a concept representing a set of core beliefs about the nature of ability and its role in the formation of "a larger system of allied beliefs and goals". In the context of foreign or second language learning, mindset refers to beliefs that learners hold about their language learning ability and overall effectiveness. Researchers propose that a particular learner belongs to one of the two types of language learning mindsets: fixed language learning mindset and a growth language learning mindset. A growth mindset situates the learner as an agent of his or her own learning. It is likely to produce effective language learners in classroom settings given that they are likely to welcome feedback, be willing to learn from mistakes and persistent in the face of difficulties (Ryan and Mercer, 2011). On the other hand, fixed language learning mindset is constructed around a view of language learning in which success is largely determined by one's innate talent for languages (Mercer and Ryan, 2010). This dimension of mindset is likely to lead to largely maladaptive learning behaviour, such as avoiding challenges, giving up easily and being discouraged by mistakes.

#### **5.1.4 The Socio-Cultural Context**

Points referring to the socio-cultural context of Ethiopia have also been mentioned by participants interviewed. One of the interviewee uniquely identifies child rearing culture among the Ethiopian society as having a detrimental effect on children's introversion.

*One critical issue I would like to stress is the way children are brought up in our community. That is one cause for their lack of confidence in speaking. Children are strictly prohibited to openly express their feelings to their parents or to strangers. Let alone speaking in a foreign language, they do not develop a confidence to speak in their mother tongue (participant 5).*

The empirical evidence around the world indicates that the socio cultural context in which English language education occurs plays a significant role in the learning and use of the English language. The social variables such as religious, culture, identity, ethnic, economic power, and social status greatly influence the society's view of education in general and English language education in particular. Lightbown and Spada (2011) say that it is expected that societal factors and social context affect language learning and its processes.

Participants indicated that ethnocentric view of mother tongue is also one of the impeding factor for the development of English language education in Ethiopia. They stressed that nowadays, excessive focus on mother tongue has undermined the importance of English language education.

In recent years, the proliferation of mother-tongue education has caused more harm than good to the end users (students) because mother tongues took the driver's seat and English went on the backseat depriving the learners of learning and mastering English to an optimal level (Jha, 2013: March).

### **5.1.5 Problems in English Language Education**

Participants indicated a number of problems in the English language education itself. Ineffective teacher recruitment, training and treatment has been indicated by all participants as the underlining cause for poor English language education. Unreasonably excessive focus on mother tongue education has also been mentioned as a cause for a declining interest for English.

Many of the problems that respondents indicated are consistent with the findings of existing researches undertaken in the country. For example, an expatriate English language teacher Sanjay Kumar Jha conducted studies in eastern Ethiopia in order to know why English in Ethiopia is learnt to the level of mastery. His findings indicate that a combination of linguistic and non-linguistic impediments responsible for the situation. According to Jha (2013), linguistic impediments that are hindering students mastery of English include: faulty methodological approaches, a sloppy curriculum with less authentic and less interactive grammar and vocabulary activities, frequently changing of textbooks that breaks the natural sequence of course components, perception of English as a medium of obstruction rather than as a language of instruction, absence of audio-Visual teaching, teachers' lack communicative and pedagogic competence, exam anxiety and lack of performance based assessment, lack of exposure to English outside the classroom, teaching English as a subject rather than a language and mother tongue obsession. The non-linguistic impediments Jha (2013) identified include problems related to time-place-manpower constraints, poor treatment and reward causing teachers' reluctance to teach, ego war among teachers, disrespect towards the teaching profession, alien control of EFL classroom and lack of motivation and professional vision of teachers.

## **5.2 Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **5.2.1 Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to substantiate a qualitative data on the challenges of English language use in Ethiopia. The study used data generated from five semi-structured interviews undertaken with English language professionals. Through a grounded theory approach, the data was coded, grouped and categorized to yield conceptual models. Based on the results it was concluded that the major challenges

of using English language for various purposes are: a) the low level of English language awareness, b) lack of socialization to use and using English, c) the prevalence of a fixed mindset for English language learning, d) the socio-cultural context of Ethiopia, and e) problems inherent in the English language education within the general education system. The study has made suggestions and recommendations for the improvement of the status of English language use in Ethiopia.

### **5.2.2 Recommendations**

Based on the solutions suggested by participants' and the results of the data analysis, the following recommendations were forwarded as directions in the effort to improve English language use in the country.

- Much of the problems in the English language education and the poor state of English language use in the country are the manifestations of critical problems in the educational system. Therefore, addressing these problems and linguistic related issues require immediate attention in the current educational context. Part of this recommendation focuses on a reexamining the curriculum, the teaching practices, the methods of ELT, teacher training programs and strengthening supportive programs and initiatives such as ELIC, KELTA
- English language teaching in Ethiopian schools and universities need to work on setting programs aimed at raising students' awareness and understanding of the value and purpose of learning and using the English language. Educational institutions need to encourage students to practice and use English widely regardless of setting. Moreover, schools, universities and other stakeholders must collaborate to promote the improvement of English and to make the public view English from the perspective of national, regional and international strategic advantages rather than considering it as a threat to the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country.
- Beyond trusting students and letting them go with a heavy emphasis on communicative language teaching and student centered methods, which appear to be risky in the context of Ethiopia, teachers' classroom practice need to consider language awareness approach deliberate attention to language usage to foster students' sensitivity and curiosity to English and how it works.

- Using English as a medium of instruction needs an informed decision and the regional variation in the use of English as a MOI need to be avoided. Hence, English must be introduced to children from the Early Stages

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## Appendix A

### Coded Interview Transcripts

#### Interviewee 1

*I: Apart from its role in education, English is not widely used in Ethiopia.*

R: The primary problem is the role of English. English is perceived as a foreign language and it is used by students and teachers only in the classroom. Out of the classroom, English has no this much significance. So because of this it can't be accessed sufficiently. Next, the current government policy has its own effect. It has given more emphasis to local languages so, citizens are interested in using their local language than practising English. English is used only for the purpose of education and examination purposes.

*Overlooking the role  
A Foreign Language  
Classroom language  
Not accessed sufficiently*

*I: What do you think is missing from our English language education that led our citizens to have low proficiency and inadequate use of the language?*

R: First, we have attitudinal challenges. The attitude we have for English is that we neither like it nor dislike it. We need it for some purposes but we do not care about its expansion in Ethiopia. So this is a paradox. Because of this it could not be developed properly. The other challenge is the application of the language in schools. When we teach in schools, there are gaps which we observe from teachers and challenges from students. The problems may be from leadership and school management. Again, we have challenges from resources to access the language.

*Attitude to English  
Mixed attitude to English  
improper application  
Gaps in teaching practice  
leadership and management failures*

*I: Now, English is becoming a global language. Taking this reality into account,*

R: In reality, I don't expect this much danger. It can have some impact on our culture but it has its own advantages. We can earn more if we expand the language because English has significant roles in economy, politics and in social practices. To increase our value globally we have to teach our citizens properly. How can we do that? In schools the approach we have has to be changed and checked. Many of our classroom practices, the contents and methods presented in the materials from elementary to higher institutions, have to be checked. Teachers should be trained properly; teachers' and students' should have a balanced attitude to the language; families should be supportive at home and school administration should be encouraging and supportive.

*Perceiving a lesser impact  
a positive role of English  
belief in political, economic  
and social role of English  
changes in ELT approaches  
a reexamining practices and  
teacher training*

*need for a positive attitude  
the need for strong support of  
stakeholders*

*I: Well, some people comment that our linguistic and cultural diversity is a threat to the expansion and use of English in the country. What is your*

*perspective on this issue?*

R: Yes, I observe a local linguistic competition. This competition is leading towards an ethnocentric view of local languages. So, this ethnocentric tendency can be negotiated by introducing English. We have to have a common language. If we continue with the local competition, we will fight on resources. We have to see the reverse. I don't see English as a threat. English is a solution for the threats and for the linguistic controversy we have. So this is my opinion.

*Local linguistic conflicts*

*Ethnocentric views towards the mother tongue*

*English as a solution*

*I: From your experience and observations, what were the psychological and social ramifications of speaking English in the past?*

R: Frankly speaking, the quality of English language education was relatively better in the past. This can be proved by checking those who had attended their education in the earlier curriculum. We have to compare the products of the current curriculum and the previous one. Those who had attended the past curriculum are much better in their English language competency and subject matter knowledge than the current graduates. So, you can observe a clear gap.

*A decline in the quality of English language education*

*A decline in English language proficiency of graduates*

*I: How do you evaluate the way society perceives speaking English in today's Ethiopia and in the past?*

R: Oh, they used to be respected and valued. Speaking English was considered as a sign of being civilized and educated. But now, very few people care about speaking English. For instance, you don't feel free to speak English in public and if you do people may assume either you are boasting or trying to appear superior to them. They may even assume you are plotting something. So, you don't dare to speak English in public even if you want to. This kind of shyness long exists in the society and in student groups. However, its effect gets worse today as people lack confidence or proficiency.

*inhibitions in using English*

*Stigma attached to speaking English in public*

*Lack of confidence*

*I: What suggestions do you have for an improvement of English language use in Ethiopia?*

R: To improve English language use in Ethiopia, first we have to work on the education system. The system has different challenges. For example, in different regions English starts from different grade levels. We have to have a uniform language

*Addressing the problems of educational system*

*Avoiding regional variations*

teaching system. What does English mean to Ethiopia? It is a language of politics, economic development and above all it is the language of science. When we see it from a political perspective, our country is the seat of African Union. We want to lead Africa and create influence on Africa, but if we reject English, how can we meet the rest of African brothers? So, we have to see the role of English from these perspectives. Again, at global level, English is the language of economic ties; with the help of technology, we can make business at international level using English. Specifically, in the education sector, we have to work to minimize the challenges of teachers, students and leadership. If we work on the challenges I have mentioned so far, I believe we can improve the status of English language in our country.

*in teaching English*

*Viewing English from the perspective of national, and international strategic advantages*

I: Is there anything you would like to add?

R: I don't have much to say, but I hope you will work to improve English in Ethiopia.

I: I will, thank you for your time and for your willingness to take part in this interview.

R: It is my pleasure.

## Interviewee 2

### Original transcript

### Open Codes

*I: What do you think about the status of English language in Ethiopia. Do you think the current key challenges to maintain adequate use of the English language in the country?*

R: Well, I see a lot of challenges with regard to the use of English in Ethiopia. The language itself is not widely used outside the classroom. It is only confined to English classroom alone. Students have very rare opportunities to use the language in their day to day communication. People also do all their social, political and economic interactions in their local languages. Again, the way we teach English to students in schools is not helping them to use the language outside the classroom. They do not use English for different purposes because they do not get those language functions in the classroom. Only few examples are given and these examples will not be enough to facilitate the use of English outside the classroom. Teachers themselves are not efficiently trained to help students to use the language because in many primary schools, English language teachers and other subject teachers are hired from grade 10. These teachers were students

*English is unused outside the classroom*

*Lack of exposure/practice*

*Obsess on local language*

*Inadequate instructional support*

*Insufficient classroom practice*

who failed in the national examination. It is also obvious that we teach English with least paid and least incentivized teachers who are unsuccessful and uninterested in the subject itself.

*Insufficient functional language*

*Teachers are poorly recruited and trained*

*Teachers are poorly treated*

*Teachers lack interest*

*I: You have mentioned some of the points related to my next question and I hope you will add some more. Currently, we observe that, even among graduates, the level of English language use is declining. What else do you think is missing from our English language education?*

**R:** I think we are missing authenticity. The materials we use for teaching English are not authentic and related to our context. They are not usually produced by taking into account the need, interest, and level of our students. So this is, I think, one very important thing missing in English language teaching in Ethiopia. Teachers depend only on the textbooks; they like to cover textbooks from the first page to the last. Rushing to finish the material is also something I have observed when I visit schools for practicum work. Practice based language teaching is also missing. Theory based teaching is not helping us. So we need to have a curriculum that encourages practice and use of English.

*Inauthentic, ill designed and decontextualized materials*

*Teachers' dependence on textbook materials*

*Teachers rush to cover the textbooks*

*Theory based teaching*

*I: Relating to your experience as a teacher and as an individual who observes English being used in Ethiopia, what were the psychological and social ramifications of speaking English in Ethiopia in the past and how do you compare it to the present condition?*

**R:** In the past, English was seen as the language of educated people. If you are a speaker of English, you are respected in the society and you are also considered as a knowledgeable person. English was considered a language that gives confidence. Nowadays, things are rolling back. The status of English use at present, compared to the past, is very low, though there may be several reasons for this. We have students who cannot write or read in English after completing grade 10 or 12. People are lacking confidence to use English for fear of being ridiculed by their peers and thinking that English is not significant in their life. Very few people consider English as an important language in their life. Even in Addis Ababa, I came across many people with this belief. They tell me that Chinese is becoming the language of business

*parental and societal pressures*

*A decline in the quality of English language education*

*A decline in graduate English proficiency*

*Lack of confidence*

and people are shifting their focus to Mandarin. I think English is having a competitor and people are to some extent shifting to Chinese language. Another concern is that people are focusing on developing and using their local language as a result of the language policy of the state. They feel that their local language sufficiently promotes their culture and identity. I think that is why different regions adopt English as a medium of instruction from different grade levels.

*Lack of awareness about the value of English language*

*a competing language*

*Emphasis to local languages*

*Absence of uniformity in English as a MOI*

*I: What challenges do you think local cultures and identities impose on the process of adopting English as a functional language in the country?*

**R:** The impact of local culture and identity on the use of English is very strong. As I said earlier, the education policy and language policy itself gives priority to local language development. Regional governments produce teaching materials in their own local language and they do not consider English; their educational objective is to develop their languages and identities.

*impact of local culture and identity*

*I: Finally, what remedial actions do you suggest to improve English language use in Ethiopia?*

**R:** I personally believe that English language in Ethiopia could be improved if the curriculum is revised; the curriculum does not consider students' language need and it does not give opportunities for the students to practice the language they need for communication. Another, the idea of free promotion should be avoided and should be excluded from the policy. It is allowing students to be promoted from a particular grade level to the next grade level without attaining the expected competency profile. Another suggestion is that English language competency should be used as a requirement in all government offices. Institutions can be the means by which English language use is encouraged. Governments' emphasis is not enough. Parents and teachers should also give emphasis to the effective use of the language. Students should have a positive attitude to English. Job opportunities that can promote the use of English should be created for Ethiopian graduates.

*Curriculum revision is needed*

*A lenient assessment practice (i.e. free promotion)*

*absence of standardized measurement of competency English language proficiency should be the basis of hiring*

*collaborative effort of stakeholders*

*I: Thank you very much for your time and for your willingness to take this interview.*

**R:** Thank you.

### Interviewee 3

#### Original transcript

#### Open Codes

*I:Currently, English is not being widely used for various purposes in Ethiopia. What do you think are the major causes for this inadequate use of the language?*

*R:*There are a number of challenges to successfully implementing English language education in our country. One of the challenges for the poor quality of English language use, I think, is the poor quality of teachers. In Ethiopia, teachers are poorly trained. Let alone students, teachers do not use the language effectively and fluently for the intended purposes. Another challenge is the negative attitude of learners towards English language. Nowadays, we are in a time of ethnocentrism. Most students in the country incline to learn and use their mother tongue instead of showing interest in learning and using English. That has its own detrimental effect on their success in learning and using English. In addition to this, there is no adequate access of resources for efficient learning of the language. Both teachers and students are under resourced.

*Inefficiency of teachers and teacher training*

*Negative attitude of learners to English*

*Inadequacy of resources*

*I:I think we have more resources now. We have now a better access to books and internet materials for instance. How can we experience a decline in English proficiency while we have a better access to such resources?*

*R:* That is a very interesting question. Nowadays, the enrolment rate in Ethiopia is sharply inclining. The need for English language learning and provision of materials is also increasing. Still there is a shortage of materials and quality teaching.

*Inclining enrolment rate*

*Increasing need for ELL*

*Inadequate teaching support*

*I:So, do you mean that the need for English language is increasing but the teaching support is declining or becoming inadequate to the existing need?*

*R:* Yes,the amount and quality of materials as well as the teaching support provided on those materials are not adequate to the number of learners and the level of their need. Another problem is that even though there are alternative means such as the use of technologies, these opportunities are not equally provided for all locations and all sections of our society. For example, students in

*Inadequacy of resources and teaching support*

urban areas have better internet and media access, a relatively better quality of teaching and access to books and reference materials whereas students in rural areas have quite limited or no access to those opportunities. The effect of this gap is certainly reflected in the overall English language proficiency.

*Inequality in the provision of quality teaching and technology*

*I: What else do you think is missing in our English language education? As far as we know, English language education is mainly a factor for the use of English in Ethiopia. We believe that if something is missing in the English language education, then it is likely that there will be inadequacy in the use of the language?*

*R:* I strongly believe that stakeholders are not actively involved in supporting English language education. These stakeholders need to recognize the contribution of English to the overall development of the country and show commitment in supporting and improving English language teaching. English language education needs budget, yet it is running in low budget in Ethiopia. So, government should provide different nationwide initiatives and programs that train teachers and students and render extra support for effective English language use that extends to outside school environment.

*Low level of stakeholder involvement in ELT*

*Inadequate initiatives and programs supporting ELT*

*I: English is now becoming a global language gaining dominance across countries. Taking this reality into the Ethiopian context, what challenges do you think English faces as a result of its dominance?*

*R:* Learning English has both opportunities and negative effects. For example, learning English is an important tool to have diplomatic relationships and business ties with other countries. On the other hand, there is a threat that comes from adopting English. The expansion of English can endanger the development of local languages. In addition to this, in many African nations, English is considered as the language of imperialism. This perception has an effect on the acceptance and spread of the language in the continent.

*Fear of English's threat to indigenous languages*

*I: Relating to your own experience and observations, what were the implications of speaking English in Ethiopian society in the past?*

*R:* In the past, English was considered to be the language of elite as it was used by educated people mainly in the academic circle. Nowadays, it is needed in different areas for various purposes, yet no special attention is given to its efficient use. If you carefully read what people write on social media or SMS messages, you can clearly see that very few people worry about the clarity and accuracy of their English. Such complacencies were not common in

*Prestige attached to speaking English*

*A fading prestige*

the past.

*A declining passion for English*

*I: What did people think about a person speaking English in the past and how do the present generation perceive speaking English?*

*R:* Well, in the past speaking English was considered a glory and a sign of dignity. It was a mark of an intellectual person. But these days, only few people owe respect to a person's English language skills. Most people including the educated ones, do not want to listen to people speaking English. They do not care about English. They also complain that it is a foreign language and accepting it means approving the supremacy of western culture and ideology.

*The place of English in the society is vanishing*

*I: What is your view on the impact of local cultures and identities on the prospect of adopting English as a functional language in Ethiopia?*

*R:* It is debatable. Some scholars argue that English has a more unifying power than local languages. On the other hand, there are scholars who argue that English plays a dividing role in Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular. It divides the elite from the common people. They also believe that the dominance of English will have a negative impact on indigenous languages.

*Controversy of elites on the role of English in the country*

*I: Does it mean that the widespread of English can pollute local cultures and threatens local identities?*

*R:* In fact, when we come to the reality, language is value laden. The ideology, and belief of a particular people is attached with their language. So, learning a foreign language implies allowing the imposition of foreign ideologies directly or indirectly. It is important to realize that language is a weapon which gives you the power to influence others. That is why English speaking nations are working so hard to spread the language over the world and thereby extend their spheres of influence. It is all about ideological competition and nothing else.

*Learning English as an imposition of western culture and ideologies.*

*I: Thank you very much for your time and for your willingness to take this interview.*

#### **Interviewee 4:**

**Original transcript**

**Open codes**

*I: You have been taking part in linguistic surveys in many parts of SNNP*

*regional state. What were the aims of these surveys?*

**R:** One of the aims of the surveys is the protection of local languages and identities. Language is an identity for a given community. If we don't preserve the language the future generation of that community will lose its identity and culture. That is why we have been surveying local languages as part of our duty in the Culture and Tourism Bureau. Part of the aims is also to document and preserve local languages so that they might survive and develop to be used in the education of the community. There is a clearly specified government policy that outlines the necessity of implementing the policy to promote local languages, cultures and identities.

*prioritizing the protection of local languages and identities*

*I: Some experts nowadays claim that mother tongue education and multi-lingual education are becoming threats to the development of English language in Ethiopia. As a language professional, what is your perspective on this issue?*

**R:** I don't really think the promotion of local language will be a threat to English. It does not mean that the emphasis we have given to local languages is to undermine the importance of English language. English has to be taught along with the local languages. The use of local languages in primary education is believed to greatly enhance children's understanding of concepts they are taught. It also helps them to develop a sense of their own identity and culture. At the same time policy makers, teachers and local political leaders need to create awareness about the significance of learning English and they cannot ignore English at the expense of their mother tongue. Children need to be informed from an early age that the dominance of English is inevitable and universal knowledge is mainly accessed in English, so that acquiring the language is the only option to step forward.

*practicing an informed use of English as a MOI*

*I: How can we manage to use English effectively while maintaining our own linguistic and cultural identity?*

**R:** As I have already mentioned, we have to give emphasis to our local languages. Today, there is a fear that, in the near future, many of the indigenous languages will be engulfed by major languages such as English and French. That is why we need to give attention to our local languages. This is a big concern that we have to take seriously. Ethiopian citizens need to be aware that their native language is no inferior to any other language and they should use and develop it. They have to use it in education, in the media and in the literature. I am saying this because there is a tendency to perceive English as a superior language. But I am not saying that English should be undermined. We also need to understand how our poor proficiency

*Fear of the linguistic power of English*

*Desire to preserve native language*

of English dragged us behind from the progress of the rest of the world.

*Balancing attitude to English*

*I: So, if English is necessary to survive and compete with the rest of the world, can we say that English language ability is a mandatory skill that Ethiopians should acquire?*

*R: Yes, above all, what matters is the awareness that not knowing English can negatively affect us. Of course, people do not need English in order to live their life in Ethiopia. However, they need to realize that a real extra benefit can be gained from acquiring English. English is now the tool for interacting with the globalized world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We need it to keep ourselves abreast of the latest happenings around the world and access the global knowledge. It is like a requirement. If you take for example European countries, most people in Europe learn English as their second language and they are proficient in it. Someone from Spain speaks Spanish and English. Similarly, someone from France speaks French and English. In our case, the main obstacle to enjoy this kind of bilingual advantage is lack of curiosity to learn a second or foreign language and lack of awareness about the value of using English. We need to create the awareness that we cannot avoid English if we want the benefits and I am positive that we want the benefits.*

*raising the level of awareness about English*

*understanding the value of English*

*low level of language awareness*

*I: Currently, there is a widely held allegation among some experts and the public that the English language is being as an obstruction to learning. What is your position on this argument?*

*R: To some extent it is true for me. Unless we teach the language to our children right from KG, it is difficult to imagine that it would become an effective medium of instruction. As a result of their limited proficiency, Ethiopian students are confronted with two burdens. First, they struggle to understand the language used of teachers and textbooks. Second, they struggle to grasp the concepts in their teachers' talk and in their textbooks. Therefore, I share that statement.*

*ELT is not child centered*

*lack of language input*

*difficulty in content learning*

*I: Your training background is English language and literature and you are now a social media reporter in the public relations department of Addis Ababa Transport Agency. Do you think that there is a need to write in English to get your message across? I mean do you believe that there is a target audience that is addressed through*

*the English language?*

R: My response to this question is almost no. We identify our target audiences as Amharic speakers and we often post our news, announcements, and messages in Amharic. However, we can post in English when we feel that the information can be useful to foreigners using the traffic of our city. But in most cases, the need is almost non-existent. More than 99% of the posts we make on the agency's official page are written in Amharic. Of course, there is a position reserved for an English journalist in the agency's employment structure and we (*two reporters working here*) are directed to work in Amharic so far.

*English is overlooked at the expense of target audience*

*Limited need*

*Limitations in professional application*

*I: Thank you! I had a great time talking to you.*

R: It is my pleasure to have this interview and you are welcome!

### **Interviewee 5:**

#### **Original transcript**

#### **Open codes**

*I: English language assumes a key role in the country's education system and other government offices. Yet, the level and quality of its use remained inadequate. In your opinion, what factors contribute to this low proficiency and low level of use?*

R: Ok, I think there are many factors. One of the reasons is that many Ethiopians do not get sufficient English language education. In schools, non-native teachers are employed for a foreign language teaching. In most cases, these teachers lack competency to teach the language. Students are exposed to the accents and pronunciations of these non-native teachers and their English language experience is shaped in an unintelligible way. So, they will have difficulty to understand real life spoken language in movies, televisions and radios. It is obvious that competent teachers not only help their students to succeed but also inspire them as role models. Now, the fact on the ground is that the majority of English teachers do not possess, at least, the basic characteristics of an effective English language teacher. They make no serious effort to develop their own teaching skills even for the sake of helping and encouraging their students. As a result, students adopt inefficient language learning strategies like 'rote learning' and excessive reliance on dictionaries. I think the time spent studying English in schools and the overall learning experience gained outside school have considerable effect. They have a very limited English language exposure, so it is quite insufficient for communication. On top of that many Ethiopians perceive English as a very difficult language. This perception weakens their motivation to make extra effort to learn it. Thereby, they hold a low level of expectation about their success. At times, I meet people who believe that effectively learning foreign languages such as English requires talent and giftedness.

*Insufficient instruction*

*teachers lack competency*

*language experience is shaped in an unintelligible way*

*teachers are not role models*

*teachers are not committed*

*inefficient language learning strategies*

*Limited language learning experience*

*Low intrinsic motivation*

*Low level of expectation*

*Regarding talent as a factor*

I: *Can you some more contexts in which you observe such tendencies?*

R: Well, I can recall one instance. In my village, I commonly observe people avoiding anything that requires dealing with the English

*Avoiding challenges*

language because they are inhibited by the effort it requires to figure out meaning. The more they avoid English, the stranger it gets. So, they continue to use avoidance as a strategy. For example, they don't read English newspapers or watch English TV channels and movies. Children learn English at school and when they come home, they watch Indian movies or action movies dubbed in Amharic. I am intrigued by how some children translate Indian movies and still unable to do the same for English movies. I guess this is the result of exposure to Indian movies. If these children were that much exposed to English movies, they would similarly develop the ability to translate English movies.

*Being easily discouraged by difficulties*

*untargeted media preference*

*untargeted media exposure*

*I: What connection do you observe between the sociocultural reality of Ethiopia and the level of English language use?*

One critical issue I would like to stress is the way children are brought up in our community. That is one cause for their lack of confidence in speaking. Children are strictly prohibited to openly express their feelings to their parents or to strangers. Let alone speaking in a foreign language, they do not develop a confidence to speak in their mother tongue. Moreover, I observe that people in Ethiopia interact less frequently with each other in order to use English or using English. Very few people regularly communicate in English on internet with regular penpals or email contacts from around the world. Communications on social media through English is also limited. The internet now recognizes scripts of many local languages and as a result, people do not have to use English on social media.

*child raising culture*

*introversion*

*low level of language socialization*

*low level of online communication and socialization*

*diasporic communication on internet*

*I: How do you see the role of English language in the media organizations in Ethiopia?*

R: Currently, I observe that English has a minor coverage in the country's media outlets. Even if universities train many English language journalists every year, very few professionals are hired and

*limitations in media coverage*

limited air time is required for the English sections. So, job vacancies in these sections are very rare. The majority of English graduates work in different public relations departments that are using the official languages of regions.

I: *Your training background is English language and literature. To what extent do you use English in your profession?*

R: It is true; I was trained for the English language profession. However, I have never got a chance to work in English so far. In fact, on my current job, I work against the use of English. I host a TV program for children. What I do is take children's stories, and animated movies produced in English and present a translated Amharic version. It will be good to present the original version of the program for the sake of children's English language exposure. But, to do that will be against the will of the audience and against the policy of the organization.

*Limitations in professional application*

*considering target audience*

I: *Thank you very much for the interesting talk today.*

## Appendix B

### Interview Guide

No	Time	Purpose	Issues/Topics	Further questions/probes
	30 Sec.	To make introductions, explanation on the focus of the interview and a lead to the interview.	Thank you for taking your time to have this interview. My name is Hussen Kediro and I am conducting this interview to gather information that will be used in my study on the status of English language use in Ethiopia.	Would you like to introduce yourself and say a few words about your educational and professional background?
	10 Sec.	To ask for permission to record	Interviewees willingness to be tape recorded during interview	Will you be comfortable if I record our conversation?
	2 Min.	To identify current challenges in using English for various purposes	Current challenges to maintain adequate use of English language for various purposes in Ethiopia	What challenges are there to use English outside schools?

4 Min.	To identify gaps in the educational system that contributed to inadequate use of English language	Existing gaps in the educational system in general and in English language education in particular as factors for inadequate use of English language.	What is missing in our English language education that led to a low level of English language use?
2 Min.	To explore negative perceptions that are limiting the level of English language use in Ethiopia	The perceived negative effects of the dominance of English as a contributing factor for low level of English language use among Ethiopians.	What do people feel about the gradual dominance of English language in the country?
3 Min.	To trace back the value accorded to speaking English in past Ethiopian society and to assess the present scenario through a comparison	The psychological and social ramifications of speaking English in the past and the present Ethiopian society.	What was the implications of speaking English in the past?  What do people now think about speaking English and their English skills?
3 Min.	To gain insights into the effects of policies related to local cultures and identities on the adoption of English as a functional language in Ethiopia	The impact of state policies aimed at preserving local cultures and identities on the process of adopting English as a fully functional language in Ethiopia.	Do you think Ethiopians disregard the use of English at the expense of the pride in their ethnic and national identities?  Is government's language policy a threat to the growth of English in Ethiopia?
2 Min.	To suggest ways of improving English language use in Ethiopia	Suggested measures or changes that help to raise the level English language use in Ethiopia	What do you suggest to improve the level of English language use in Ethiopia?
1 Min.	To add relevant ideas to the data	Additional ideas or issues to be addressed	Is there anything you would like to add?
20 Sec.	Closing the interview	I'll analyze the information you and others gave me. I'll send you a copy of my report if you are interested. May I contact you later in case I have additional questions?	Thank you for your time and responses. Have a great day!