

An Investigation on Students' Attitude towards Using Mother Tongue as a Medium of Instruction and their Awareness about its Benefits: Sidaamu Afoo in Focus

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Abstract: The purpose of this research was to investigate students' attitude towards using mother tongue as a medium of instruction and their awareness about its benefits, Sidaamu Afoo in focus. In order to achieve the objective of the study, a descriptive research design was used. To this end, a total of 720 students were randomly selected (by drawing lots) from 36 first cycle primary schools that are found in Sidama Zone of South Nation, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State of Ethiopia. The students were made to fill in a close-ended questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview was held with 24 students who were randomly selected (by drawing lots) from those who had already filled in the questionnaire. Data gathered by the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively by using frequency and percentage, whereas data obtained by the interview were analyzed qualitatively and discussed by quoting some utmost concepts directly. The results of the questionnaire and that of the interview were triangulated. Thus, this research employed a mixed-methods approach. The findings revealed that nearly all the students had a positive attitude towards learning in mother tongue, and they were aware of the benefits of using mother tongue as a medium of instruction.

Key terms: attitude, awareness, mother tongue, medium of instruction, Sidaamu Afoo

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since the introduction of modern education to Ethiopia around 20th C, the language policy of the country has been changed many times on account of external influences and political interests of the leaders (McNab, 1989). For example, French was the medium of instruction while English, Arabic, Italian, Ge'ez, and Amharic were taught as subjects at Emperor Menelik II (the first government modern school) opened in October 1908 (McNab, *ibid*; Bowen, 1976). The Derge regime's (1974-1991) language policy in education gave charade status to the nationality languages (Bowen & Horn, 1976). In 1976, the Derge state (military government) declared the realization of equality of all nationalities to develop and promote their own languages, but practically only Amharic became the medium of instruction in primary schools in such a large multilingual nation (Gordan, 2005 cited in Teshome, 2007; McNab, *ibid*).

With the downfall of the Derge regime in 1991, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) ensured rights of nations and nationalities to fully utilize and promote their own languages (FDRE, 1995, Article 39.2). Based on this, Education and Training Policy (ETP) was formulated in which the use and status of mother tongue in education has been addressed in detail in Article 3.5: 1-8 (Ministry of Education, 1994). The article states the pedagogical advantage of learning in mother tongue to the child and the rights of nationalities to promote the uses of their languages in primary education. Thus, currently, a good number of Ethiopian languages are used as medium of instruction in primary schools. Sidaamu Afoo is one of the languages being used as a medium of instruction at primary schools in Sidama Zone of South Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State of Ethiopia. The Sidama ethnic group is one among the various ethnic groups in the region and its language is called Sidaamu Afoo. It is a highland east Cushitic language family which belongs to the Afro-Asiatic language phylum (so called since Greenberg 1966) (also called the "Hamito-Semitic phylum" in Europe), together with Omotic, Semitic, Berber, Chadic, and ancient Egyptian.

As many scholars state, using mother tongue as a medium of instruction has various benefits: pedagogical, cognitive and psychological (Ball, 2010; Benson, 2004; UNESCO, 1990; Gfeller, 1998; Water & Dekker, 2011). When children learn in their mother tongue, their ability to identify, specify, and talk about new

and abstract concepts and detailed subject information grows (Gfeller, 1998). Becoming literate and fluent in one's own first language is also important for his/her overall language and cognitive development as well as academic achievement (Ball, *ibid*).

Using mother tongue as a medium of instruction also helps children learn to read faster as they already have a repository of vocabulary, knowledge of the grammar, and the ability to pronounce the sounds of the language. This prior knowledge facilitates learning to read and comprehend texts and thus this facilitates learning (Walter & Dekker, *ibid*). Moreover, children who understand the language of instruction actively attend classes and are less likely to drop out (Smits et al., 2008). Furthermore, using mother tongue as a medium of instruction boosts children's self-confidence and improves the quality of education by tapping into the existing knowledge base of both teachers and learners. Generally, the early years of learning are very crucial in a child's overall development as teaching in a language that is familiar to the child makes learning comfortable, effective and meaningful (UNESCO, 2013).

Though using mother tongue as a medium of instruction plays an imperative role as discussed above, people reflect mixed opinions regarding our students' attitude towards learning in mother tongue. That is to say, at academic conferences and workshops held at different times, the researchers of this study have come across a good number of people who reflect that they sense that students are not as such motivated to learn by their mother tongue. It is also sometimes heard in informal discussions that some people including teachers share the aforesaid feelings. This shows that different people have different attitude, i.e. feeling, or the way you think or understand about something (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). This issue, therefore, needs to be verified by scientific study; otherwise, it goes personal opinion of the minority which cannot show the reality on the ground; students' attitude towards using mother tongue as a medium of instruction needs to be researched so that appropriate recommendations would be made accordingly.

The literature widely discusses that students' attitude towards issues related to teaching-learning, including using mother tongue as a medium of instruction, has an impact on teaching-learning in general and on their academic success in particular (Lerra, et al., 2013; Brock-Utne & Mercer, 2014; Le Mottee, 2008). Students' attitude towards using mother tongue as a medium of instruction emanates from their awareness about its benefits; that is, students who are well aware of the benefits of learning in mother tongue are more likely to have a positive attitude towards using it as a medium of instruction.

In turn, when students have positive attitude towards leaning in mother tongue, they will be inspired to know more about the benefits of learning in it and this in turn makes them build a strong positive attitude towards the same (Pule, 2017). Furthermore, Mebratu (2016) states that the positive outcomes or successes of a mother tongue instruction policy depend on people's (students' in our case) attitudes towards it. This means that students' attitude towards something and their knowledge about that are so interlocked. This is, therefore, to say that besides studying students' attitude towards learning in mother tongue, their awareness about its benefits should be investigated for the reasons discussed above. The researchers of this study, however, have not got any study conducted on this matter.

Hence, this research was intended to investigate students' attitude towards using mother tongue as a medium of instruction and their awareness about its benefits with reference to Sidaamu Afoo. To be specific, the study was meant to investigate students':

- I. Attitude towards using mother tongue as a medium of instruction
- II. Awareness about the benefits of using mother tongue as a medium of instruction.

To this end, the following research questions were set:

- What is the attitude of students towards using mother tongue as a medium of instruction?
- Are students aware of the benefits of using mother tongue as a medium of instruction?

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Site

This research included 6 woredas (districts), namely Boricha, Dalle, Hawassa, Hawassa Zuria, Hulla and Wondogenet in Sidama Zone of South Nation, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State of Ethiopia. The location of Sidama land is between Lake Hawassa in the north, Dilla Town in the south, Lake Abbaya in the southwest, River Bilate in the west, and some zones of Oromia Regional State in the east and southeast. The astronomical location of the Sidama land is between 5° 45' and 6°45' north and 38° and 39° east encompassing a land area of 7672 square kilometers (Sidama Zone Planning and Economic Development Department, 1996). It is estimated that the total population of the Sidama Zone is about 3.4 million (Sidama Zone Planning and Economic Development Department, 2011).

Study Subjects and Sampling Techniques

The subjects of this research were students. To this end, the researchers had a list of 6 first cycle primary schools from each of the 6 woredas (districts) and then randomly selected (by drawing lots) 20

students from each school to give a total of 720 participant-students. A simple random sampling technique was chosen since it gives equal chance of being selected. The woredas were purposively selected for their being Hawassa University's technology village woredas and due to their nearness to the working place of the researchers, and thus this would minimize the social, financial and time constraints that might hamper the findings of the study. Lower primary classes were also purposefully selected.

Study Design and Research Approach

A descriptive research design was used to achieve the objectives of this study. The main purpose of descriptive research is description of the state of affairs as it exists at present where the researcher has no control over the variables; he/she can only report what has happened (Kothari, 2004). The study also employed a mixed-methods research approach where quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed accordingly.

Instrumentation

The researchers prepared a close-ended questionnaire by taking ideas from the related literature and based on the objectives of this research. It was prepared in English and translated into Sidaamu Afoo. It had two parts: items meant to gather data on the students' attitude towards using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction and items intended to collect data on their awareness about the benefits of leaning in Sidaamu Afoo. The first part had 3-point scale where each item had 3 possible responses: false, undecided and true, while the second part had 5-point scale where each item had 5 possible responses: strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree. The reliability of the items of the questionnaire was checked by Cronbach's alpha; to achieve validity, the researchers' most senior colleagues were requested to comment on the questionnaire and the suggestions were taken into consideration and thus modifications were made accordingly.

The researchers prepared a semi-structured interview. The interview items were prepared in English language and translated into Sidaamu Afoo. The interview had two parts discussed above in the case of the questionnaire and was intended to obtain data which could not be revealed through the questionnaire items as the questionnaire items were close-ended which cannot reveal further details. To achieve validity, the researchers' most senior colleagues were requested to comment on the interview items, and their comments were duly considered.

Data Collection Procedures

The researchers obtained ethical clearance and letter of cooperation from their university and presented it to school principals to get permission and cooperation. Then, one teacher was selected at each school on the principal's recommendations to coordinate the data collection. Next, a discussion was held with the selected teachers on how to coordinate the data collection. Then, the teachers were requested to distribute the questionnaire to the selected students at their respective schools. Careful attempts were made to find conducive environment to fill in the questionnaire and to make the non-returnable rate of the questionnaire zero.

Following that, the researchers requested their assistant who is a Sidaamu Afoo speaker to conduct interview with 24 students randomly selected (by drawing lots) from those who had already filled in the questionnaire. Careful attempts were also made to find conducive environment for the interview. The researchers also reminded the interviewer to take care of his pronunciation and pace while conducting the interview. Furthermore, the interview sessions were interactive and tape-recorded. The selected teacher at each school coordinated the interview sessions too.

Methods of Data Analysis

Data gathered by the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively by using frequency count and percentage, whereas data obtained by the interview were analyzed qualitatively by categorizing similar responses together in themes and then discussed by quoting some utmost concepts directly.

III. DISCUSSIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE RESULTS

Discussions and Interpretations of the Results of Questionnaire

The results obtained by the questionnaire on students' attitude towards using mother tongue as a medium of instruction and their awareness about its benefits (Sidaamu Afoo in this case) are discussed.

Table 1: Students' attitude towards using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction

No	Items	F & %	Responses				
			SD	D	U	A	SA
1	The scholastic level of school will fall if Sidaamu Afoo is used as a medium of instruction.	F	717	-	-	3	-
		%	99.6	-	-	0.4	-

2	Attempts to avoid Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction can be psychologically damaging to the students of the native speakers.	F	-	8	-	2	710
		%	-	1.1	-	0.3	98.6
3	Using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction would accomplish nothing worthwhile for the society.	F	702	4	2	12	-
		%	97.5	0.6	0.3	1.7	-
4	Sidaamu Afoo can be used as efficient instructional language as other languages.	F	-	7	3	4	706
		%	-	0.9	0.4	0.6	98.1
5	Sidaamu Afoo should be discouraged from being used as a medium of instruction.	F	711	2	1	6	-
		%	98.8	0.3	0.1	0.8	-
6	Sidaamu Afoo is clear, thoughtful, and expressive.	F	-	3	1	-	716
		%	-	0.4	0.1	-	99.5
7	Widespread acceptance of using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction is absolutely necessary.	F	-	3	1	6	710
		%	-	0.4	0.1	0.8	98.6
8	Using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction should be accepted socially.	F	-	1	1	3	715
		%	-	0.1	0.1	0.4	99.4
9	Sidaamu Afoo is as effective for communication as are other languages.	F	-	-	1	4	715
		%	-	-	0.1	0.6	99.4
10	I believe that using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction is capable of handling modern sciences.	F	-	-	2	2	716
		%	-	-	0.3	0.3	99.4
11	I believe that studying a second/foreign language helps me get a better job than studying in Sidaamu Afoo.	F	4	713	1	2	-
		%	0.6	99	0.1	0.3	-
12	It is unsuccessful to use Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction since the students already know it.	F	-	1	2	3	714
		%	-	0.1	0.3	0.4	99.2
13	To teach in Sidaamu Afoo will make it more difficult for students to learn a second/foreign language.	F	-	707	3	10	-
		%	-	98.2	0.4	1.4	-
14	Using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction would impede national unity.	F	708	3	2	7	-
		%	98.3	0.4	0.3	1	-
15	It is unsuccessful to use Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction because of lack of textbooks and other instructional materials in this language.	F	-	18	1	698	3
		%	-	2.5	0.1	97	0.4
16	It is unsuccessful to use Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction due to lack of general reading materials in it.	F	2	17	1	700	-
		%	0.3	2.4	0.1	97.2	-
17	It is unsuccessful to use Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction due to shortage of trained teachers.	F	2	17	1	1	700
		%	0.3	2.4	0.1	0.1	97.2
18	It is unsuccessful to use Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction because of inadequacy of vocabulary.	F	680	16	1	21	2
		%	94.4	2.2	0.1	2.9	0.3
19	The use of Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction is best for students psychologically and pedagogically.	F	-	-	2	4	714
		%	-	-	0.3	0.6	99.1
20	In my opinion, it is desirable to use Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction because it helps to get a job.	F	2	17	581	72	48
		%	0.3	2.4	80.7	10	6.6

Key: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, U = Undecided = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

As Table 1 depicts, the majority of the respondents had a positive attitude towards using mother tongue (Sidaamu Afoo) as a medium of instruction. The evidence for this is that for example, even for negatively

worded items (1, 3, 5 & 14) indicating Sidaamu Afoo has negative effect on their learning, a great majority of the respondents (99.6%, 97.5%, 98.8% & 98.3% respectively) responded strongly disagree. This shows that almost all the respondents agreed that because of using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction scholastic level would not fall, worthwhile for the society, and would not impede national unity. Here, it is possible to conclude that the use of Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction should be encouraged as 98.8% of the respondents replied strongly disagree for the negatively worded item: "Sidaamu Afoo should be discouraged from being used as a medium of instruction."

The table also shows that 710 (98.6%) respondents out of 720 participants strongly agree that not using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction has negative psychological effect on native speakers' learning. It is also an efficient and clear language, thoughtful and expressive and effective for communication as other languages as 706 (98.1%), 716 (99.5%), and 715 (99.4%) of them responded strongly agree to items 4, 6 and 9 respectively. Moreover, using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction is necessary and should be accepted socially as a great majority (710, 98.6% and 715, 99.4%) of them responded strongly agree to items 7 and 8 respectively.

As the table shows, the respondents also believe that using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction is helpful to handle even modern sciences as 716 (99.4%) of them responded strongly agree. Based on the responses to items 12 and 19, there were two contradictory ideas. This is to mean that 714 (99.2%) of the study participants responded strongly agree to item: It is unsuccessful to use Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction since the students already know it; however, the same number of them (714, 99.2%) replied strongly agree to item 'the use of Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction is best for students psychologically and pedagogically'.

As Table 1 also depicts, many respondents (581, 80.7%) who were uncertain whether or not learning in Sidaamu Afoo helps them to get better job in the future replied undecided. On the other hand, almost all of them (713, 99%) believed that learning in second/foreign language would help them get better job in the future. With regard to the effect of using mother tongue as a medium of instruction on the learning of second/foreign language, a great majority (707, 98.2%) of them had a belief that it would not cause difficulty in the learning of second/foreign language.

As can be seen from Table 1, the student-participants were also asked about the success of using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction. That is, the majority (698, 97%) of them responded agree to the item: It is unsuccessful to use Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction because of lack of textbooks and other instructional materials in this language. Still other majority (700, 97.2%) of them replied agree to the item 'it is unsuccessful to use Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction due to lack of general reading materials in this language'. Finally, 680 (94.4%) of the study participants responded strongly disagree to the item 'it is unsuccessful to use Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction because of inadequacy of vocabulary'. Thus, it can be said that using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction would be unsuccessful because of lack of textbooks and general reading materials. But, as the data in the table shows, inadequacy of vocabulary is not a determinant factor for the success or failure of using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction.

The results discussed above show that nearly all the students have a positive attitude towards using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction. This finding correlates to Lerra, et al's (2013) finding which states that those students who had positive attitude were more than those who had negative attitude towards Wolaita language as a medium of instruction. The finding of the current study also correlates with the finding of Mebratu (2016) which puts that the majority of student-respondents have positive attitude towards mother tongue as a medium of instruction at primary and secondary levels of education.

In support of this study's finding, Anushya (2013) also states that the perception of students of different schools is almost favorable to mother tongue as a medium instruction for effective learning. As Anushya further explains, the participant-students' positive response is above 80% towards mother tongue as a medium of instruction. The finding of this study is further supported by the study conducted in the same setting by Mebratu (2014) which revealed that learners, teachers and parents had positive attitudes and perceptions on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. Generally speaking, in agreement with the current finding, other educators encourage the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction for different pedagogical and psychological benefits.

Table 2: Students' responses on their awareness about the benefits of using Sidaamu Afoo as medium of instruction

No.	Items	Responses					
		False		Undecided		True	
		F	%	F	%	F	%

1	Students will learn more quickly if they are taught in Sidaamu Afoo than in a second/foreign language.	651	90.4	67	9.3	2	0.3
2	Students will be confident in learning when they are taught in Sidaamu Afoo.	-	-	20	2.8	700	97.2
3	Students will develop a great mental activity when they are taught in Sidaamu Afoo.	-	-	20	2.8	700	97.2
4	Students will have greater participation in class when they are taught in Sidaamu Afoo.	-	-	-	-	720	100
5	Using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction will increase parental interest in the education of their children.	-	-	21	2.9	699	97.1
6	Using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction enables students to become rooted in their own culture & shapes their identity.	-	-	21	2.9	699	97.1
7	Using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction increases a greater capacity of adaptation, i.e., lessens difficulty of adjustment to the school environment.	-	-	-	-	720	100
8	Using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction makes students increase more tolerant attitude towards lessons.	-	-	8	1.1	712	98.9
9	Using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction makes students more likely to enter school at age-appropriate times.	-	-	13	1.8	707	98.2
10	Using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction makes students more likely to attend school regularly than those who are taught in a second/foreign language.	-	-	10	1.4	710	98.6
11	Using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction makes students less likely to drop out than those who are taught in a second/foreign language.	675	93.8	44	6.1	1	0.1
12	Learning to listen, speak, read and write in Sidaamu Afoo facilitates students' learning of these skills in a second/foreign language.	1	0.1	9	1.3	710	98.6
13	Using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction validates and reinforces students' home culture and traditional knowledge.	-	-	-	-	720	100
14	Students who learn in Sidaamu Afoo will achieve better in life than students who are forced to learn in a second/foreign language.	2	0.3	680	94.4	38	5.3
15	Using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction promotes better communication among peers and wider community.	-	-	-	-	720	100
16	Using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction makes learning more interesting and lively.	6	0.8	-	-	714	99.2
17	Using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction has psychological value to students; it serves very important role in shaping students' early perception.	2	0.3	1	0.1	717	99.6
18	Using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of	23	3.2	-	-	697	96.8

	instruction increases students' creativity.						
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As Table 2 shows, the majority (651, 90.4%) of the respondent-students did not understand that learning in mother tongue helps them to learn something more quickly than learning in other languages. However, according to the responses shown in the table, the majority (> 96 %) of the student-respondents had understanding about the benefits of using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction, but Item 11 as the majority (675, 93.8%) of them did not believe that using mother tongue as a medium of instruction won't decrease students' drop out.

From the data in Table 1, one can understand that there were some students who did not understand whether or not using mother tongue as a medium of instruction is important as they responded undecided to some items. Especially, they did not notice whether or not learning in mother tongue helps students achieve better in life as a great majority (680, 94.4%) of them responded undecided to Item 14. Surprisingly, all (720, 100%) of the participant-students believed that using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction helps students improve participation in class, have less difficulty in adapting school environment, get their home culture and traditional knowledge validated and reinforced, and develop communication skills easily. On the whole, these results reveal that a great majority of the students are aware of almost all the benefits of using mother tongue (Sidaamu Afoo in this case) as a medium of instruction in primary level.

The finding of this study matches with the findings of some other studies. For instance, it correlates with Mebratu's (2016) study finding which says that participant-students had awareness about the significance of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. According to him, the students in the focus group discussion audaciously explained that using mother tongue as a medium of instruction has variety of advantages (promotes clarity of instruction, mutual understanding between teachers and students, development of students' self-confidence, problem solving skills and creativity, and lessens test anxiety, boosts development of self-identity, increases classroom participation, and makes learning enjoyable). This study's finding is also supported by Anushya (2013) which clearly states that students have awareness about the advantage of mother tongue for learning as the participant-students have shown 80.45% of willingness towards the statement 'the purpose of education for life is fulfilled only through using mother tongue'.

Furthermore, the finding of current study is supported by Edgar (2017) that reveals that students and teachers responded that they are knowledgeable about significance of mother tongue-based instruction. This finding agrees with UNESCO's (2007) report as cited in the study of Ball (2011). Furthermore, the finding of this study is supported by Mebratu (2016) as it is stated in his study that in general the majority of the participant-students reported that when mother tongue as a medium of instruction is used, environment of learning becomes resourceful.

Discussions and Interpretations of the Results of Interview

The discussions and interpretations of the results of the interview held with the selected students who had already filled in the questionnaire are briefly presented in this section. The results of the interview are categorized into two themes: students' attitude towards using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction and their awareness about its benefits.

To begin with, the students were asked whether or not they thought that making them learn in Sidaamu Afoo is correct. Most of the respondents replied 'Yes' and gave different reasons for their responses as follows:

Yes because it's my identity so that I always feel free (Int. 1). I think yes. Primarily I get good knowledge by learning in my language (Int. 4). It's correct because learning by mother tongue is good to develop identity and to grasp knowledge well (Int. 6). Yes, I am learning freely. There is no problem to understand important concept (Int. 8). Yes because I could get basic knowledge of learning (Int. 10).

These responses show that the study participants had positive attitude towards using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction as that of the questionnaire responses show.

The interviewees were also asked another question: How do you discuss your attitude towards Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction? Why? Almost all the respondents had the same idea and expression (I like learning by Sidaamu Afoo in this level because it is useful to understand easily and communicate and react freely; I feel language is identity for anybody). This shows that the respondent-students had positive attitude due to their awareness about its significance.

Some questions were also posed to the interviewees in order to investigate their awareness about the benefits of using Sidaamu Afoo as a medium of instruction. The responses of the interviewees also showed that the respondents had awareness about significance of using mother tongue, Sidaamu Afoo in this case. For example, nearly all (21 out of 24) of the interviewees responded 'yes' to the question "Do you prefer Sidaamu Afoo or Amharic/English as a medium of instruction? Why?" As they explained, the reasons for their response was that it [Sidaamu Afoo] helps them learn other subjects and understand concepts easily, makes them clever

in the school, helps them communicate with their teachers freely; other languages (e.g. Amharic and English) are difficult, and still some said that it is their identity.

The interviewees were also asked the following question regarding their awareness about the benefits of learning in their mother tongue: Do you think learning in Sidaamu Afoo has more benefits than learning in Amharic/English? If so, how? Almost all of the respondents replied 'yes' to this question. However, there were some respondents who didn't give any explanation; many of them gave different reasons for their responses as follows:

Because I can learn by understanding more concepts easily and I am proud of it (Int. 3). I feel freedom when I learn to ask, communicate well, investigate and reflect all my idea this language (Int. 4). I think so because I do and practice freely what I learnt and understand (Int. 5). There are benefits like having freedom to explain ideas freely and to understand concepts easily. Even learning in Sidaamu-afoo helps me to understand concepts I am learning in other languages (Int. 6). Because I am reacting my teachers freely (Int. 9). Because you understand easily and you explain your ideas freely (Int. 12). Because it is base to transfer knowledge (Int. 17). Because students are discussing freely each other (Int. 21). It is possible to communicate our teachers confidently (Int. 23).

The students' responses to the above question show that they prefer learning in Sidaamu Afoo to other (Amharic and English) languages due to different reasons (as benefits of leaning in the language) they gave. However, very few (5 out of 24) responded that they did not have any awareness about the significance of using mother tongue (Sidaamu Afoo) as a medium of instruction. Among the 5, two of them strongly argued that English language should be used as a medium of instruction as it is an international language.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that the vast majority of the participant-students had a positive attitude towards using mother tongue, Sidaamu Afoo in this case, as a medium of instruction. The students could have the aforesaid attitude since they were well aware of the benefits of using mother tongue as a medium of instruction. Generally speaking, this study investigated that the students were aware of the benefits of learning in their own language.

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