A Report on Factors that Affect the Teaching and Learning of English in Ethiopia

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Abstract: A number of studies have shown that our students' English language performance needs improvement. Classroom researches documents about the present status of English language education in our country at secondary and tertiary levels revels that most student' English language competence is low; it is shows that students English language competence is becoming an obstacle to their learning of other subject at academic schools. However, while English has a decisive role in determining the quality of education, its role in defining the country's future development is not well articulated at the national level nor its value is disregarded by stakeholder. This report reveals the assessment of teaching and learning of English in Ethiopia. It also discusses about the factors that affect ELT, theoretical perspectives, tool and method for data collection, coding and analyze are highlighted. Finally, conclusions, implications and some recommendations are made regarding the factors that affect the teaching and learning of English in Ethiopia.

I. INTRODUCTION

In bringing the goal of the millennium development and renaissance to reality, it is unquestionable that quality and high level education and educated human resource are among the important factors needed. And the expansion of education at schools level and higher education in general in the country is becoming the issue urgency. As it has been the case over the past few years the number of schools and universities in different fields of studies are remarkably increasing in order to meet the millennium development goal. But parallel to the expansion, there is no attention that is given to the provision of quality of education. One of the areas where quality required is the English language. The fact is English language is a medium of instruction at secondary and tertiary levels and that it is used as a trade and diplomacy language in our country, and vital international language. However, the factors that affect English in the country's wider educational system is not critically researched. It is on the basis of this reason that the factors that positively as well as negatively affect the teaching and learning of English was studied after taking as an individual assignment.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. The factors that influence second language Learning
There are different crucial factors that influence the success of learners. These factors can be broadly categorized as internal and external. It is their complex interplay that determines the speed and facility with which the new language is learned.

2.1.1. *Internal factors*
Internal factors are those that the individual language learner brings with him or her to the particular learning situation.

Personality: Introverted or anxious learners usually make slower progress, particularly in the development of oral skills. They are less likely to take advantage of opportunities to speak, or to seek out such opportunities. More outgoing students will not worry about the inevitability of making mistakes. They will take risks, and thus will give themselves much more practice.

Motivation: Intrinsic motivation has been found to correlate strongly with educational achievement. Clearly, students who enjoy language learning and take pride in their progress will do better than those who don't.

Exposures: Learners who have acquired general knowledge and exposures are in a stronger position to develop a new language than those who haven't. The student, for example, who has already lived in native speaking countries or visited two different countries (an immersion program for instances) and has been exposed to various languages and cultures has a stronger base for learning a further language than the student who hasn't had such experiences.

Cognition: In general, it seems that students with greater cognitive abilities (intelligence) will make the faster progress. Some linguists believe that there is a specific, innate language learning ability that is stronger in some students than in others.

Native language: Students who are learning a second language which is from the same language family as their first language have, in general, a much easier task than those who aren't. So, for example, a Dutch child will learn English more quickly than a Japanese child.

2.1.2. *External factors*

External factors are those that characterize the particular language learning situation.

Curriculum: For ESL students in particular it is important that the totality of their educational experience is appropriate for their needs. Language learning is less likely to place if students are fully submersed into the mainstream program without any extra assistance or, conversely, not allowed to be part of the mainstream until they have reached a certain level of language proficiency.

Instruction: Clearly, some language teachers are better than others at providing appropriate and effective learning experiences for the students in their classrooms. These students will make faster progress. The same applies to mainstream teachers in second language situations. The science teacher, for example, who is aware that she too is responsible for the students' English language development, and makes certain accommodations, will contribute to their linguistic development.

Culture and status: There is some evidence that students in situations where their own culture has a lower status than that of the culture in which they are learning the language make slower progress.

Motivation (extrinsic): Students who are given continuing, appropriate encouragement to learn by their teachers and parents will generally fare better than those who aren't. For example, students from families that place little importance on language learning are likely to progress less quickly.

Access to native speakers: The opportunity to interact with native speakers both within and outside of the classroom is a significant advantage. Native speakers are linguistic models and can provide appropriate feedback. Clearly, second-language learners who have no extensive access to native speakers are likely to make slower progress, particularly in the oral/aural aspects of language acquisition.

III. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE, TOOL AND METHOD FOR DATA ANALYSIS

3.1. *Theoretical Perspectives*

According to Crottey (1998) theoretical perspectives of a research relates to the underlying philosophical assumption about the researcher's view of human world and the social life within that world. The theoretical perspective underlying this mini study is therefore aligns itself to the interpretive approach (phenomenology) under the specific school of reconstruction epistemology. It is based on the interpretive paradigm that as much information as possible was gathered through Key Informant Interview questions. The methodological approach selected in this study was thus describing and interpreting the verbal speech of interviewees who had long years of teaching experience of English at higher education. Three of them have also been specialist in ELT. In addition to this, the interviewer as one of the practitioner enriched the report from his own long years experience (nine years of teaching English at higher education). However, the interviewer is still interested to explore the existing situation by going into the natural environment (such as into the classrooms etc) and identify how the teaching and learning is behaved throughout the country.

3.2. *Research Methods and tools:*

3.2.1. *Methodology*

Silverman (2000) states that interpretivist/constructivist paradigm generally operates using predominantly qualitative methods. Qualitative methodologies are the best options when the researcher deals with words and especially when conducting research in foreign language classroom. It is based on this notion that the interviewer agreed and used qualitative methodology in this study.

3.2.1. *Key Informant Interviews*

In this study, semi-structured interview was designed and used. The semi-structured interview is recommended by many scholars to the study where researchers are familiar with the context of the research. As a result, the interview questions for this study were utilized to collect data. The questions to this interview, however, were used based on the idea that was generated by course instructor for course fulfillment purpose at times when he allocated tasks in the classroom. It was on the basis of such notion that interview questions were developed and later was modified for use in their order.

3.2.2. Sample Selection

With regard to sampling, purposeful sampling was used: the researchers collect data using purposeful sampling, which involves 'selecting information-rich cases purposefully' (Patton, 2002, p. 243); that it was this same kind of sampling that was used in this study. Therefore, the researcher identified "special" individuals who could provide pertinent to the questions of the Key Informant Interview and were selected accordingly; all of the samples were specialists in ELT and had strong knowledge and perspectives on ELT and methodology.

3.2.3. Rational to use Interview

As a research tool, interviewers conduct interviews have several advantages over other research tools. Interviews have a better response rate (Oppenheim, 1992; Bell, 2005; Dörnyei, 2007) and provide data where other tools such as questionnaires for example would be difficult to get. Interview is also adaptable and the interviewer can use it for accessing tone of voice, facial expressions and body language and probe deeper into issues as these come up (Bell, 2005).

3.2.4. Procedure of the Interview

The Key Informant Interview was conducted on one-to-one basis in classrooms mainly to avoid any kind of distraction by others that nobody was allowed to interfere during the interviews. It was conducted with three long year experienced instructors who have worked at higher education, and who are currently attending their PhD at Addis Abeba University. During the interview three of them were given a code from 001 up to 003. The three instructors' name was identified as Resp 1, Resp 2 and Resp 3, and all them are MA graduate in TEFL. The interviews were recorded on digital mobile recorder. Probe questions were used at the discretion of the interviewer. Complete information about the time, place and date of the interviews along with general profile of the interviewees were collected during the beginning of the interview. The interviews were then recorded, transcribed and coded to develop the themes from the speeches.

3.2.5. Transcription of Recorded Interview and its process

After conducting all the interviews and recording of the speeches, the very painstaking and tiring process of transcription was completed. According to Eisner (1991) "…audio–recording is crucial tool in conducting any qualitative research because it provides the researcher with reminders, quotations, and details for both descriptions and interpretations". The researcher found that at times, the recorded voice was totally inaudible. This was resulted due to lack of digital recorder. To resolve this problem, however, the audio recorded material was intensively listened by the researcher and attempt was made to catch the exact words of the respondents. Moreover, during Resp 1 interviewing, a machine noise coming from outside and the voices of the students coming from other lecture halls intervened and affected the quality of the recording. However, this and other difficulties (which appeared later, such as vague or incomprehensible statements) were solved by intensive listening mechanism. As a result an attempt was made to get proper transcription (see the list of transcriptions on transcript page)

3.2.6. Methods of Interviews Analysis

During the semi-structured interviews, the interviewees were given freedom to answer all questions. Consequently, the long year experienced instructors responded each question with freedom. They also expressed their opinions and beliefs. The digitally recorded interviews were transcribed, coded, and categorized were. These categories helped out the researcher to produce themes for the variables which later helped him to analyze data. Finally conclusions and recommendations were inferred on the basis of these developed themes; with that he at last tried to address the research questions of the study. During interview the interviewer found himself at better position to observe the behaviors of the interviewees, their reaction towards each question, their non verbal aspect of communication and used them as a means to enrich data apart from probing questions used. I also have used more of elaboration probes. This probe was designed to encourage the interviewee to tell me more. I indicated my desire to know more by such things as gently nodding my head as the person talks, softly voicing 'ehh-ehhh' every so often. (See the transcription data page).

3.2.7. Modification of Interview Questions

Since it was key informant interview, I used flexible questionnaires than rigid ones. Because during the interview I needed to understand motivation, behaviour, and perspectives of respondents towards the question, based on which questions were later modified sequentially.

However, while I was administering the interview, I tried to use the Interview Guide as basis of reference to ask questions. This means, the order of my questions were maintained as per of the sequence put on the Interview Guide. But, there was case in which I have been too flexible towards these order. For example, because of conditional urge, I replaced question No. 4 in the place of question No. 3 (and vise-versal) and asked

them accordingly. Such reshuffling of order was happened during the interview session while observing the respondent's speech coming out in sequence of ideas that soon decided and the order was reshuffled and the consistency of ideas were maintained. To make this clear, for example, when I asked respondents to explain about their general belief of the teaching and learning of English during the opening session of the interview, two respondents begun their discussion with negative impression; as a result, what I have brought following to question No. 1 (and some probing questions as well) was the question which asked the factors that negatively affected the teaching and learning of English to maintain idea consistency. This helped me to probe further information about teaching and learning of English. (See the transcript page)

3.2.8. Transcription Conventions during Coding

The interviewer has tried to use a few transcription conventions after observing a system as used by Van Lier (1988). The purpose of using these transcription conventions was to avoid certain confusion of the transcriptions and elaborate them more clearly of what actually was stated by respondents about positive and negative factors of English language teaching and learning. The researcher also used abbreviation from his own side to identify respondents. The list of the transcription conventions used is given below:

❖ Resp 1 identifies the first respondent using numbers.
❖ Resp 2 identifies the second respondent using numbers.
❖ Resp 3 identifies the third respondent using numbers.
❖ INTRVR identifies the Interviewer.
❖ [words/statements] closed bracket surrounding a word or statement indicates an utterance incomprehensible to the researcher (or uncertain about the transcript statement) and that needed third contact with the interviewee for further elaboration, but due to time constraints left open.
❖ (word/statement) enclosed parentheses indicates an idea/statement of the original utterance that has not clearly been articulated by respondent, but due to context meaning and/or face to face contact with the interviewee during the interview that it has been clear for interviewer, and based on which that has been elaborated.

IV. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDING

4.1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that positively as well as negatively affect the teaching and learning of English. This study as a whole was focused on identifying the real problems and suggests the possible means to improve the teaching and learning of English. As a result, the Key Interval Interview questions sought to answer based on respondents' experiences particularly bringing the experience of their institutions (i.e., taking the teaching and learning practice of English in their institution) and their own experiences vis- a- vis to stakeholders such as MoE, donors, parents etc.)

4.2. Interpretation

The three interviews in this study reflected the respondents' verbal responses about the factors that positively and negatively affected teaching and learning of English. And an attempt was made to answer each questions based on the interview data.

To begin with the first question which asks, "From your long year experience of English language teaching, how do you explain the current situation of English teaching and learning?", the summary result shows that the general situation of teaching and learning of English is deteriorating from time to time in quality (according to Resp 2 and Resp 3 responses). In addition to this, the situation of teaching and learning of English was also reported to be different from context to context in terms of learners' English ability (according to Resp 1).

To give further elaboration about each respondent's reaction to question one, let me begin from Resp 1 idea who stated about the situation of English language teaching and learning is context dependent. He said that the language fluency of students is determined by 'how they use language in a certain real life communication'. And it is varying from situation to situation and place to place in Ethiopia. The following quotation is an example taken from Resp 1 interview that verifies the discussion:

If you look at certain special environment, students who learnt and came from rural areas, they do not have good command of English let alone fluency. If you come to urban area particularly students who attended or who came from urban private schools, they do have some sort of good command of English language.

Moreover, with regard Resp. 2 and Resp. 3 responses towards question No 1, both presented their critical statements about the general situation of English language teaching and learning. According to Resp. 2 who began his statement with positive outlook towards the existing situation, praised the policy for its address the mass people with the chance of education. He then criticized it for its provision of poor quality of English

education. Similarly, Resp. 3 who opened his discussion with negative impression about the existing situation, criticized the education for its failure in quality, as the following two quotations demonstrate respectively:

The quality of English language is deteriorating because of only policy gives high attention for access; how much people are learning the English instead of what students are benefiting from learning in English. So this is a very great danger for me because only you are counting the number of learning is a great danger for me. Resp 2

Currently English language teaching is deteriorating from time to time because of different things. First the policy, I think the policy from the very beginning gives emphasis for mother tongues. I believe that had it given from the grass root level [or English], for example from grade 4 as medium of instruction, through time students can boost their communicative skills. Resp 2.

Further reflection of the respondents on question No. 1 is found on the transcript page and in the summary form on the open code page.

Similarly, the summary of the interview findings of question No. 2 and 3 that sought respondents' view about the factors that positively and negatively affect the teaching and learning of English showed that external factors such as educational policy, the access of instructional materials and different stakeholders' perception towards English language (from policy makers up to societies) played the major factor that affect the teaching and learning of English. But above all forwarded, the educational policy was found to be the major factor that affects the teaching and learning of English; and thus it was recommended that the policy should be revised (Look at the open code page which contains this information in detail). This page entails content of the interviewee being labeled in to coded category. What in this page also available is the last labeled code table which indicates axial code and selective code, which was made based on frequency of variables as well as thematic base. The last thematized variable was at last selected on the basis of each type of information labeled and regarded at last as a core factor. The most prominent variables selected from the findings of the data code are summarized below:

A. *Positive Factors*   **B. *Negative Factors***

1. Methodology (Individual F.)   *1. Wrong perception of society towards English (External F.)*

2. Access to Recourse (External F.)   *2. Lack of communication skills (External F.)*

3. Motivation (Individual F.)   *3. Unsupportive Learning environment (External F.)*

4. Policy makers wrong perception towards quality (External F.)   *4. Instructional Material (External Factors)*

5. Digital Technology (External F.)   *5. Traditional Method of teaching (Individual F.)*

6. Communication skills (Individual F.)   *6. Stakeholders' distorted perception towards curriculum (External F.)*

7. Digital technology (External F.)   *7. Economy status of the country (External F.)*

8. Training packages (External F.)   *8. Educational Policy (External F.)*

     9. Learning Environment (External F.)

     10. Abuse technology by students (Individual F.)

With regard to question No. 4 that sought respondents' view about what should be done to improve the teaching and learning of English, the respondents gave the following recommendations:

❖ Research to be done by language experts.
❖ Policy maker should invite language professionals in curriculum design.
❖ Learners should attempt their own effort to develop vocabulary fluency.
❖ Policy makers should do their best to bring quality of English language.
❖ Since the solution is come from the policy makers, they should develop incentive packages and salary increment for English teachers.
❖ Immersion program should be organized at abroad for PhD and MA English student.

V. STUDY IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
5.1. Implications

'Language is not everything in education but without language everything is nothing in education' (Wolff 2006). This quote indicates that language is decisive factor that determine the existence of education.

The current government has made it clear in its educational policy that it works towards the development of all the Ethiopian languages for various purposes: for cultural, for political, social and individual purposes etc. As a result, the government strongly argues that people should learn in their own mother tongue because language is the basis for identity, for pedagogic advantage and for psychological satisfaction and helps develop positive self esteem of the people. While this is true and have worked in some Asian and

developed countries like Australia and Canada, when we see this in our context where there is poor educational infra structure, poor economy to support the education system, unsupportive learning environment, resistant stakeholder, and where there is a practice of mal-governance in the educational institution are jeopardizing the provision of quality teaching and learning of English. As a result, this study has forwarded the following policy implication.

❖ Policies should be designed to ensure that effort is made to promote quality of education in every direction. At the expense of great emphasis given towards one direction, the other direction by no means should be worst. This means that in an effort to working towards mass centered education in the one direction as it was discussed in this study, it advertently or inadvertently had affected the quality of education at another direction.

5.2. Conclusions

It was unfortunate to hear from the respondents that students and even some teachers in higher education do not have the required level of proficiency in English (Rep 1). In many cases teachers at schools and higher education level do not have reading text of English for classroom learning that left all the effort of MoE working over quality of the English language teaching worthless. In general, the summary of the interview discussion shows that there are different factors affect the teaching and learning of English in our country. In general, the external factors such as educational policy, access of instructional facilities and stakeholders' perception towards the teaching and learning of English were considered to be the major factors that affect the teaching and learning of English in order.

5.3. Recommendations

The study also put its recommendation that
❖ that language experts should conduct further researches in the area;
❖ policy maker should invite language professionals in curriculum design;
❖ since the solution is come from the policy makers, they should develop incentive packages and salary increment for English teachers; and
❖ Immersion program programs should be organized at abroad for PhD and MA English student.

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