

School Leadership and English Language Teachers' Approaches in Teaching English Language: *The Case of Selected Schools in Sidama Zone, Southern Ethiopia*

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Abstract The study was conducted to assess the strategies and approaches used by school leadership and English language teachers in handling English language teaching in primary and secondary schools of Sidama administrative zone, Southern Ethiopia. The study was a descriptive survey which comprised a total of 40 English language teachers, 6 English language department heads, 4 School principals and 257 students drawn from randomly selected 11 primary and secondary school students. The data were collected through questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. The results disclosed that all the schools didn't have functional English Language Improvement Centers (ELIC) and School Based English Language Mentors (SBELM). Moreover, the school leadership allocated only limited resources for English language improvement activities. The findings also revealed that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers act poorly as role models in using English and in letting the students use English language in different contexts. Therefore, it is recommended that school leadership should be committed not only to establish but also to follow up English Language improvement Centers (ELICs) and School Based English Language Mentors (SBELM) providing the basic facilities to the practical activities. In addition, they should encourage EFL teachers to carry out their responsibility in helping students improve their English language ability which is the ideal activity to ensure quality education in the Ethiopian EFL context.

Keywords: Educational leadership; performance; English Language Improvement; English Language Mentors

Introduction

At present, 'English' is an international language which is used for communication with many people in different nations across the worldwide. In the education sector in particular, students in various universities use English to search for information and gain knowledge. The teaching and learning of the English language is also closely associate social and political roles around the world (Ronald & David, 2001). Evidently, most universities throughout the world need to include English language as one of their educational tool requirements (Khader & Mohammad, 2010). Likewise, the widespread of the English language has rapidly increased the need to attain better communication English throughout the world. Thus, the aptitude to use English is very much needed for further studies, journeys in other countries as well as for social and professional global contacts (Susanna, 2007)

Obviously, people's demand towards English language in many countries in the world is making it a global language that spreads rapidly (Carlo, 2012). Ethiopia is a country where English language has been taught as a second or foreign language starting from primary schools up to higher educational institutions all over the country. The government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has been attributing a top primacy and increasingly allocating huge capital for the expansion of equitable, relevant and quality education at all levels and quantitative progress has been made in this respect (MoE, 2008). Over the last two decades, the country has made significant progress in providing access to education at all levels of the education system. This has led to a sharp increase in the demand of teaching facilities (MoE, 2010). However, the achievements in the access of education have not been facilitated with adequate enhancements in quality aspect. Recognizing this fact, the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia launched the 'General Education Quality Improvement Package (GEQIP)' (MoE, 2008) which consists of different programs among which the 'English Language Improvement Program (ELIP)' is one (MOE, 2010). ELIP aims at improving the quality of education and competencies of teachers and students in primary and secondary schools all over the nation. The program has focused on providing in-service training for English language teachers in primary and secondary schools for relatively longer period of time. Besides, the 1994 education and training policy stated that English will be taught as an independent subject starting from early grade (grade one) and it will also be used as a medium of instruction in secondary and higher levels. Mother tongue based teaching in primary education is highly promoted by the educational policy. And then English language will be introduced as a subject in grade 1 and as the medium of instruction in secondary level. English is also a medium of instruction starting from grade 5 and this extends up to higher educational levels.

Statement of the problem

As English is the medium of instruction in Ethiopian context, students learn the language to know how uses different forms, and develop ability to understand when people are using the expressions in different contexts including the

academic world (VCE, 2015). One of the major areas of interventions made to improve the quality of education in Ethiopia has been to provide English language; skill based training for EFL and other subject teachers, and set school-based English mentors who will assist all teachers that use English as a tool for classroom teaching and learning (MoE, 2010). The initiative also aims at strengthening English Language Quality Improvement Program (ELQIP) all over the country, through continued improvement of quality teaching and learning (MoE, 2010). But, the concern is that the management of the training and the extent of classroom application haven't been studied well. In line with this, Eshetu (2016) stated that the school level management of English language instruction is not uniform across the schools.

When we focus at the regional context, a study conducted on the learning achievement of schools in the Region (Southern, Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional state, SNNPRS) indicated deterioration of the students' achievement in English language proficiency and overall performance at each level. The study which was conducted on English language proficiency of Grade 4 and Grade 8 students drawn from 213 schools showed that only 23.1% of the students from grade 8, and 16.4% from grade 4 passed the examination (SNNPR Education Bureau, 2014).

The Annual Report of SNNPR Education Bureau (2013) also indicated that only 12.9% of the students from Sidama zone and 20.5% from Hawassa city scored 50% and above for English subject, and the performance of grade 8 students in the Regional examination and grade 10 students in the National examination was below average. According to the same report, the degree of failure of students was extremely high in English, Mathematics and Science subjects. Although these studies show the poor achievement of students in English and other subjects, the root causes of the problem and the approaches used by teachers and school leaders in teaching English language are not clearly known. The present study was therefore conducted to assess the strategies and methods used by English language teachers and school leaders in teaching the English language.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the strategies and approaches used in the teaching of English in selected primary and secondary schools in Sidama administrative zone of Southern Ethiopia, and to identify the major pedagogical and organizational problems that affect students' performance in the English language.

The specific objectives of this study were:

- To assess the strategies and approaches used by school leadership in handling English language teaching in primary and secondary schools.
- To identify the kinds of teaching methods/approaches used by teachers when teaching English in the classroom.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The method used in the study was descriptive survey because the study was directed towards people, their opinions, attitude and behaviors. According to Best and Khan (2006), descriptive research attempts to describe scientifically a situation, problem, phenomenon, service or program, or provides information or describes attitudes towards an issue. This method was therefore selected because the nature of the problems needs wider description and detailed analysis of existing phenomenon.

Population of the Study and Sampling Techniques

The target groups of this study were English language teachers and Grade 7-12 students in schools randomly selected from six districts of Sidama administrative zone, SNNPRS. Both purposive and random sampling techniques were used to obtain fair representation of the population. Accordingly, eleven (11) schools were selected randomly from public primary and secondary schools in the districts. In the second stage, the targets were purposefully grouped into four categories and respondents were selected randomly using the proportional sampling method. The groups were School principals, Department heads, English language teachers and students. From each school, a total of 50 English language teachers and department heads were selected through the random sampling technique. Similarly, 257 primary and secondary school students were selected randomly from the eleven schools.

Data Collection Instruments

Data for the study were collected through questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. The data collected through questionnaire were used for the quantitative analysis, while those collected through interviews and document analysis were used to describe the findings.

The Questionnaire

To achieve the objectives of the study, a quantitative methodology involving a close-ended questionnaire was used as the measuring instrument. The questionnaire was used to obtain quantitative information from teachers and students on issues related to English language teaching. A total of 307 questionnaires were distributed to students (257) and teachers (50) drawn from the eleven primary and secondary schools. In order to have fair representation of gender, the respondents (students and teachers) were grouped into males and females, and then a random sample was taken from each group based on their proportions. All of the questionnaires were appropriately filled and returned.

The Interviews

Interviews were conducted to get additional information that will substantiate the information obtained through questionnaires and to get supplementary information. In the interviews, semi-structured interview questions were used to

collect information from 5 randomly selected school principals, 3 English language department heads and 3 English language teachers. The interviews focused on investigating the level of English language proficiency of students.

Document analysis

The researchers also analyzed different documents such as students' profiles, mark lists, students' academic records (rosters), and records of regional and national certificate examination results in order to cross-check the findings with the existing facts on the ground.

Methods of data Analysis

The method of data analysis was based on the nature of the data as there were two kinds of data: quantitative and qualitative. In analyzing the quantitative data, all the structured items of the questionnaires were keyed into a computer and analyzed using the computer program of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0. To analyse the descriptive data. Scores of respondents of all items were entered into SPSS software and descriptive statistics were computed. In this study, single sample t-test was used to compute means, standard deviations, and t-value. Frequency analysis and percentage were also computed to determine the number of respondents who choose each alternative response to each question. Thus, means and percentages were used to report statistical values obtained from the respondents. The statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

The five point Likert scale questionnaire items were analyzed in terms of their mean range. The mean scores from 0.01 to 2.99 indicated a negative response and disagreement of the respondents on the statements forwarded to them; the mean value 3.00 indicates a neutral response of respondents, and the mean value "3.01-5.00" indicates a positive response and agreement of respondents on the issue raised in the items (Johns, 2010). The qualitative data collected through interviews and document analysis were analyzed textually by grouping the information thematically from the responses of the respondents.

Results and Discussion

School leadership roles in handling English language teaching

School Leadership Strategies

The respondents were asked to answer leading questions that relate to strategies applied by the school leadership in improving English language proficiency of students. They were requested to indicate the extent of their agreement. The questions included presence of functional English language improvement Club (ELIC), School-based English Language Mentors (SBELM) and use of Communicative approach of English language teaching strategies in the schools. The responses of students as well as teachers to these questions were negative (Table 1). This indicates that functional English Language Improvement Club (ELIC) in the schools is poor or totally absent. Moreover, there is no School Based English Language Mentors (SBEM) in the schools. This shows that one of the strategies designed by the Ministry of Education in 2010 to improve English

language skills of teachers through in-service training by establishing School Based English Language Mentors has not been implemented. The study also indicated that the schools do not encourage communicative approach of English language teaching strategies.

Table 1: Strategies used by schools leadership to facilitate English language teaching

No	Leadership Strategies	Respondents' views					
		Students (N=257, Df.= 256)			Teachers (N= 50, Df.= 49)		
		Mean	Std. Dv.	Sig.2- tailed)	Mean	Std. Dv	Sig.2- tailed)
1	Presence of functional English language improvement club (ELIC) in the school	2.28	1.44	.001	1.42	0.75	0.00
2	Presence of well- organized School Based English Language Mentors (SBELM) program.	1.56	0.70	.000	1.61	0.71	0.00
3	Functionality of School based English language mentors (SBEM).	1.48	0.61	.000	1.62	0.71	0.00
4	Use of communicative approach of English language teaching strategies in the school	2.10	0.86	.000	1.69	0.79	0.00

N.B (α = 0.05 at 95% confidence interval of the difference).

The results on Leadership strategies show that the school leaderships do not properly implement the approaches and strategies that are believed to improve English language proficiency of students.

Allocation of resources to improve English language teaching

The respondents were asked to rate their schools in terms of the provision of supplementary materials to students to help them to improve their English language proficiency. Accordingly, the mean scores rated by both students and teachers were 2.24 and 2.17, respectively (Table 2) indicating poor performance in provision of supplementary resources that help improve English language proficiency of students. The value of sign.2 tailed test in both groups confirms that there were no variations between the teachers' and students' responses as the values is less than 0.05 in both groups. Moreover, from the interviews conducted with the school principals and English language teachers, it was found out that the provision of supplementary materials to students was inadequate.

Table 2. Availability of Resources and Training

No	Resources to improve English language teaching in the schools	Respondent's view on Availability of Resources					
		Students (N= 257, Df.= 256)			Teachers (N= 50, Df.= 49)		
		Mean	Std. d	Sig.2-tailed)	Mean	Std. d	Sig.2-tailed)
1.	Adequacy of supplementary materials to students to help them improve English language skill.	2.24	1.28	.000	2.17	1.30	0.00
2.	Suitability of the classrooms to implement student centered teaching approach.	2.20	0.98	.000	2.02	1.36	0.00
3.	Allocation of adequate financial resources to support ELIC.	1.72	1.10	.000	1.84	0.73	0.00
4.	Provision of different training programs for teachers in the areas of teaching methods.	1.84	0.93	.000	1.74	1.07	0.00

The respondents were asked to evaluate the suitability of their classrooms to implement a student centered teaching-learning approach, as per the standards set for each level of schooling. The responses to this question had average mean value of 2.20 and 2.02 for students and teachers, respectively, implying that the size of classroom was not suitable to implement student centered teaching-learning approach. Besides this, interviews conducted with school principals, and English language teachers indicated that the number of students in the class exceeds the standard class size recommended for English language teaching. According to them, this resulted from shortage of qualified English language teachers, and/or lack of finance to construct additional classrooms.

Regarding the schools' allocation of financial resources to support English language improvement program and provision of different training programs for teachers in the areas of teaching methods, the mean scores showed the schools neither allocate finance to support English language clubs nor provide capacity building training for English language teachers to improve their teaching methods (Table 2). Likewise, the interviews conducted with school principals and English language teachers indicated that the schools' allocation of finance to ELIC clubs and provision of capacity building training for English language teachers were poor. For example One English teacher said, "I'm interested to strengthen the ELIC club, but the school administration doesn't provide any resource to the center." Likewise, Alemu (2016) disclosed that English Language Improvement Centers are not working properly in school level due to various factors related to teachers' motivation, resource limitations and poor follow up and support activities.

Teaching approaches used by English Language Teachers

The respondents were requested to rate English language teachers' commitment as reflective practitioners who are dedicated to improve English language proficiency of students. The average score of students to the question was 2.90 while that of teachers' was 2.35 (Table 3). This result indicated that the commitment and activities of teachers to raise interest of their students to improve their English language proficiency was not satisfactory. This was supported by the interview conducted with school principals who revealed that the teachers' commitment to help students in the schools was generally low. This could have resulted from inadequacy of supervision and follow-up by the school management, and other factors related to job satisfaction and living conditions of the teachers.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents about the strategies used

No	English Language Teachers' motivation and teaching approaches	Responses towards teaching techniques					
		Students (N= 257, Df.= 256)			Teachers (N= 50, Df.= 49)		
		Mean	Std. d	Sig.2-tailed)	Mean	Std. d	Sig.2-tailed)
1	English language teachers are reflective practitioner, and they influence interest of their students.	2.90	1.09	.521	2.35	1.48	0.00
2	English language teachers in my school use student centered teaching methods.	2.74	1.06	.091	3.11	1.30	0.16
3	English language teachers in my school are well equipped with required skills of English language.	3.28	0.78	.000	3.11	1.35	0.17
4	English language teacher uses other language (mother tongue, Amharic) when teaching in the class.	4.12	0.91	.000	3.76	1.39	0.00
5	English language teachers motivate their students to apply task based interactive activities in classroom.	2.10	1.05	.500	2.31	1.36	0.00

N.B ($\alpha = 0.05$ at 95% confidence interval of the difference).

Regarding using student centered teaching methods by English language teachers, the opinions of students and teachers were different: The students' rating was negative (mean score 2.74) while that of teachers' was positive (mean score 3.11). The students' responded that their teachers do not apply student-centered teaching methods, while the teachers claim to apply student-centered teaching methods in the class. However, two of the three interviewees (teachers) confirmed that they don't apply the method due to various challenges. This shows that a student centered teaching method is not practical in EFL classes in the Ethiopian context.

The respondents were asked to point out whether the English language teachers are well equipped with the required skills of English language. The average mean score given by students was 3.28 while that of teachers was 3.11. The average mean score of both groups indicate that the English language teachers are moderately equipped with the required skills of English language, but not sufficient.

In response to the question of whether the English language teachers use other languages such as the mother tongue, or the working language (Amharic) when teaching English in the classroom, the average score by students and teachers were 4.12 and 3.76 respectively. This result showed wider use of mother tongue and Amharic by teachers when teaching in the class. Furthermore, interviews conducted with English language teachers disclosed that they widely use other languages, claiming that the students do not understand what the teacher teaches. Obviously, the use of other languages by English language teachers to compensate for poor understanding of subjects by the students, further contributes towards deterioration of English language skills. In line with this, Sambo (2015) underscores the dominance of mother tongue in English classroom contributed more to the poor performance of students in English language.

The respondents were asked to rate their English language teachers' in terms of their performances to motivate the students to apply task based interactive activities in classroom. The average mean score of both groups of respondents was 2.10 and 2.31 for students and teachers respectively (Table 3). Both groups of respondents confirmed that English language teachers do not influence and motivate their students to apply task-based interactive activities in the classroom. Similarly, the interviews conducted with school principals indicated that English language teachers do not adequately motivate their students to perform and apply any task-based interactive activities in the classroom, such as English language clubs, or social media of the school, to motivate the students to improve their English language skills. This agrees with the result of Belamo (2015) which confirmed that students are not provided with interactive activities though the text book encourages doing so.

Conclusions

English is the medium of instruction in secondary and tertiary education systems in Ethiopia, and it is a vital key to understand all other subjects taught in English. However, recent studies indicate that the proficiency of students in the English language is generally low. This study was, therefore, conducted to assess the ways in which English language teaching is handled in Primary and Secondary schools in Sidama administrative zone in Southern Ethiopia. In particular, the study attempted to evaluate the methods applied and the resources used in English language teaching.

As regards to the teaching methods used in teaching English, the study revealed that, a) English language teachers in the schools do not generally apply student-centered teaching methods, b) English language teachers do not motivate their students to apply task based interactive activities in the classroom, c) The majority of English language teachers use other languages (mother tongue

and/or Amharic) when teaching English, and they hardly communicate to each other in English, and d) English language teachers were not reflective practitioners, and as professional teachers, they do not influence their students to improve their English language proficiency

Regarding the resources and facilities used in the teaching of English, the study revealed that: a) there were no well-organized school-based English language mentors, b) the supplementary materials like audio and visual aids provided by the schools were not satisfactory, c) English language improvement clubs (ELIC) are either non-functional or poorly performing, d) the schools never provided training opportunities for teachers on English language teaching methods, and e) the school management did not encourage communicative approach of English language teaching strategies in the schools.

The following recommendations are drawn based on the findings:

- School principals should play front-line leadership roles in establishing English language improvement clubs (ELIC) with target groups of English language teachers,
- ELIC's should be supplied with the necessary resources such as computers, internet access, different audio-visual materials, supplementary books, magazines, newsletters etc. that support the overall activities of the club,
- School principals should establish school-based English language mentors (SBEM) from experienced English language teachers who will provide and organize training for teachers of English and support all teachers using English as a medium of instruction,
- School principals should provide different supplementary materials to students to help them to improve their English language proficiency. Also, budget should be allocated to provide the necessary materials,
- School leaders should also inspire teachers to apply a more communicative approach of English language teaching. They should also conduct constant supervision through continuous and formal classroom observations and visits.
- English language teachers should act as role models to their students by communicating in English with their students when teaching in the class, and also communicate with each other by using English,
- English language teachers should also motivate their students to apply task based interactive activities in classrooms, etc. so as to inspire students to use their potential to use English in and outside the class.

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