

Students' Perception and Practices of L1 Amharic/Afan Oromo in English Classroom at Goro and Denbela Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate grade nine students' perception and practice of L1 (Amharic and Afan Oromo) in English classroom. It also examines the extent of the practice, and the relationship between the practice and perception. A descriptive case study design was employed, which mainly used quantitative research approach. To participate on this study, 180 students were selected from Goro and Denbela secondary schools by using simple random sampling technique. These participants were meant to participate on filling the questionnaire and taking part on observation. After quantitatively analyzing the data, the following results were received. To this effect, students have positive perception towards L1 (Amharic and Afan Oromo) use in English classroom. Students' questionnaire result indicated that majority of them agreed, with average mean score of (4, agree), to the statements supporting L1 (Amharic and Afan Oromo) use in English classroom. Comparatively, low average mean score (2.7, between disagreement and neutral) was registered for statements opposing the practice of L1 (Amharic and Afan Oromo) in English classroom. Students' self-reported classroom practice result pointed at average mean score of (2.23, sometimes). However, the result from observation, showing the actual classroom practice, revealed that disproportionate amounts of L1 (Amharic and Afan Oromo) use in English classroom was observed, covered (47%) of class time, surpassing desirable amount of L1 suggested by scholars to be appropriate. Students' incompetence in English language was mentioned as main factor for excessive use of L1. As regards to the relationship between perception and practice, there is no statistically significant difference between students' positive perception and self-reported practice at [p< .05 level (Pearson coefficient= .362**, p= .000)]. But there is negative correlation (not strongly significant) between students' negative perception and their self-reported classroom practice at [p< .05 level (Pearson coefficient= -.167*, p= .025)].

Keywords: First language, Perception, Practice, Target language, Ethiopian Schools

Introduction

There is considerable amount of argument about the use of the target language (TL) and first language (L1) in the foreign language classroom. How much target language will make the most of language development? When should first language be used and how often? These kinds of questions were being asked by language researchers showed that this appears to be a research area that needs to be considered. There are two ongoing argument regarding should L1 be used or not in English classroom. One side of the argument sees little or no pedagogical or communicative value of L1 for English language acquisition, which promote for exclusive target language use.

Drawing on this notion, (Krashen, 1985) comprehensible input hypothesis argue that exposing learners to extensive periods of comprehensible TL input will ensure mastery of the TL. Furthermore, (MacDonald, 1993 and Wong-Fillmore, 1985) asserted that target language use will result in increased motivation as students realize the immediate usefulness of TL (English). Such support for exclusive target language use has led language professionals and teachers to accept TL use as best practice in learning and teaching of second or foreign language.

MacDonald (1993) argued that the TL should be used at all times to motivate students into seeing that the TL language is not only immediately useful, but also that they are able to start using it immediately. Students will feel success and enjoyment at seeing that they are able to understand and use the TL which will assist in their language acquisition. (Thompson, 2006) also suggested that those students who are accustomed to hearing their instructors use the L1 in the classroom have the tendency not to pay attention when they use the TL and thus do not benefit as much from the input that they do receive.

Challenges to this position of exclusive use of TL have emerged in the research community that questions this perspective. Accordingly, (Macaro, 2000) indicated in his research finding that the majority of second and foreign language teachers and students believe that switching between one or more languages in the context of a single conversation is often necessary. Switching code between first and target language can be an effective teaching or learning strategy when it is used deliberately to further the students' TL proficiency by using L1 as a reference point and to help construct knowledge in the TL. This was also shown in (Cook's, 2001, p. 418) view as L1 is recommended when target language is difficult to understand, and when it assists students' understanding of particular concepts.

Although the exposure to the target language can help learners achieve success, this exposure may not always work effectively in every context as (Richards and Rodgers, 2001) said, there are still lots of factors affecting the learning success. They listed the following factors that could happen when English only classroom is practiced, it would lead to frustration and

anxiety, because the learners cannot get enough and proper comprehensible input. Based on the above arguments, code-switching could be a strategy used by teachers to help learners. Various positive functions of code-switching, such as explaining new vocabulary, grammar, and new concepts, and relaxing learners would improve the learners' comprehensible input during the learning process.

The negativity surrounding the use of L1 in English classroom can be attributed to the major emphasis on optimal target language input in order for learners to become competent target language users. It is believed that the inclusion of the learner's L1 will compromise the quantity and quality of target language input that they receive in the target language classroom (Crawford, 2004).

Literature Review

Theories providing evidence of a facilitative effect of the first language come from three sources. The first of these is cognitive processing theory (Ellis, 2005) which predicts that the way that language is perceived, processed and stored is done essentially in the same way as other types of information and that working memory and long term memory interact in order to allow these processes. Most importantly, this theory claims that the first language and the second language are not contained in separate conceptual stores and that the mental lexicon is best represented by an increasing number of connections (and therefore potential activations) which are not language specific until they are required to be so by the processing function needed (Ibid)

The second theory supporting a first language facilitative effect is socio-cultural theory. This theory would suggest that inner voice and private speech are essential contributors to the way we think and act, and that they are almost always performed in the first language (Brooks & Donato, 1994). The third theory supporting facilitative effect of the first language is that of switching code in naturalistic environments (language alternation which occurs in non-formal, non-instructional contexts). Naturalistic code-switching is similar to teacher code-switching in broadly communicative classrooms where the primary objective is the promotion of FL or SL proficiency.

As stated above, L1 has different facilitative role to acquire the target language. Thus, systematic and effective use of first language in English classroom is reflected through optimal position that helps to make a reasonable and appropriate use of L1 in English classroom. Especially, in Ethiopian context, the researcher strongly believes that the optimal use L1 in EFL classroom is under question mark in which excessive use of L1 is observed in different grade levels.

However, there are different arguments which promote maximum target language use in English classroom. This is the most common argument against the use of L1 in the L2 classroom (Tang 2002). One common belief held among the opponents of L1 use is that L2 learners often have little or no exposure to the target language outside the classroom. It follows therefore that teachers should not spend this valuable classroom time using L1.

The desirability of classroom communication in the target language as much as possible is the view that most teachers and theorists agree upon (Harbord 1992: 351). However, this does not and should not imply that L1 ought not to be used at any cost (Cook, 2000 & Turnbull, 2001). According to Cook and Turnbull, teachers can maximize the use of the target language without overlooking the students' first language. "A principle that promotes maximum teachers' use of the target language acknowledges that L1 and L2 can exist simultaneously" (Turnbull 2001: 535).

The researcher believes the idea that teachers should fill the classroom with as much of L2 as possible is obviously acceptable. However, an exclusive target language use may not ensure students' comprehension of the meanings of certain L2 language elements. Therefore, if one assumes that the basic tenets of the true communication should be 'comprehensible input' (Krashen's 1985), using the students' language may at times be necessary. The principle thus should be "Use English where possible and L1 where necessary" (Weschler 1997: 5).

The question of how much TL the teacher and students use and when is very much linked to a variety of related classroom practices. (Macaro, 2005) suggests that L1 use in English classroom contexts should operate on the principle of 'optimality in L1 use' (p. 81). In other words, ELT practitioners should make informed decisions about when and how this can be best used to enhance the language learning experience and achieve the pedagogic aims of the classroom. Optimal L1 use is necessary to avoid the negative implications of L1 overuse.

There is no universal standard to measure how much L1 is proportional in EFL classroom. However, (Stern, 1992) believes that it would be advisable to allocate some time in which L1 is used in order that questions can be asked, meanings can be verified, uncertainties can be clear and explanations can be given which may not be possible to the students through the use of L2. According to some scholars it should not be overused which will gradually affect the foreign language meant to be learnt. Excessive use of L1 is likely to result in some or all of the following (Atkinson, 1987).

1. The teacher and/or the students begin to feel that they have not 'really' understood any item of lesson until it has been translated.
2. The teacher and/or the students fail to observe the distinctions between equivalence of forms and meanings and, as a result, oversimplify to the point of using crude and inaccurate translation.

3. Students speak to the teacher in the MT even when they are quite capable of expressing what they mean in the TL.
4. Students fail to realize that during many activities in the classroom, it is essential that they use only English (p. 246).

Consequently, the amount of L1 in EFL classroom should not exceed its limit to be appropriate for foreign language learning. On the other hand, the notions of moderate and judicious use of L1 in the classroom may theoretically sound applicable, but are not so easy to apply in classroom practice, especially in the EFL classroom, where, in many cases, the teacher can speak the students' native language (Turnbull and Arnett, 2002).

What exactly constitutes the appropriate mixture of L1 and L2 has not been well investigated (Stern 1992; Turnbull 2001). They further recommend that more explorations need to be done to address this issue. Atkinson (1987) suggests, "At early levels a ratio of about 5% native language to about 95% target language may be more profitable." Again, (Turnbull, 2000) believes that EFL teachers who use the L1 more than 75% of their time using actual classroom discourse risk depriving the learners of useful language input. Therefore, he called for maximum target language use by the teachers and students.

In general, though it is very difficult to quantify the possible amount of first language required for effective second or foreign language learning, it seems that it would be at least important to be aware of the fact that L1 can be used systematically with varying intensities for learners ranging from early levels to the more advanced ones. With regard to the level of students, (Atkinson, 1987 and Stern, 1992) suggest that first language has a variety of roles at all levels. But as Stern (1992) noted it may be more important to use L1 judiciously and gradually reduce that quantity of L1 as the students become more and more proficient in the target language.

In Ethiopian context, since the 1950s, English has been used as the medium of instruction in Ethiopian schools at least starting from junior high school onwards (Tekeste, 2006). However, different governments in Ethiopia amended the policy realizing the role played by the mother tongue in teaching and learning. According to the 1994 policy, indigenous languages such as Amharic, Afan Oromo, Tigrigna, Somali, Afar and Guragigna were to be used as media for instruction up to grade eight in areas where they are commonly spoken and understood.

Consequently, students with mother tongue background as a medium of instruction may face the new challenge of using English as a medium of instruction at high schools. This shift from MTE to EMI can adversely affect their education in general and English in particular. For instance, (Tekeste, 2006, p. 32) noted that the quality of education in Ethiopia is under question because students' knowledge of English is limited as they use their MT in their primary education and that of their teachers' is not better as such. He further commented:

“The nature of the decline in the quality of education that prevails at secondary schools mainly concerns the capacity of the students to follow their lessons in English. The education policy of 1994 and the subsequent growth of the use of vernaculars [local languages] for instruction further weakened the position and status of English among teachers and students (p. 32)”

The researcher has noticed excessive L1 use in EFL classroom with deficits in systematic use of mother tongue and it seems that teachers and students have no clear understanding of the pedagogical values and guideline on how L1 can be used in English classes. Hence, it is may be that an overuse of the MT in EMI classes in the Ethiopian secondary schools contributing for students’ English language incompetence. The Ethiopian language policy declares English as the only medium of instruction in high school and it calls teachers for using only English in the classroom. However, the actual classroom reality may show different practices, which involve switching between the target language and first language.

From the researchers experience, using L1 in English classroom, the alternation between learners’ L1 (Amharic and Afan Oromo) and learners’ TL (English) is common practice in different grade level. Particularly, this practice is occurred in grade nine where a transition is made from mother tongue instruction to English instruction. However, little information is known about the switch from TL to L1 in the Ethiopian EFL context. A clear understanding of what students perceive it and to what extent they practice it, has not yet been given sufficient consideration in research domain. Accordingly, this study tried to investigate what perception students have about L1 use in English classroom, to what extent they practice it, and what relationship exists between their perception and practice.

The Research Questions

1. What is students’ perception of L1 (Amharic/Afan Oromo) use in English classroom?
2. To what extent students practice L1 (Amharic/Afan Oromo) in English classroom?
3. What relationship exists between students’ perception and practice?

Material and Methods

Research Design

A descriptive case study was used as a research design. (Gall & Borg, 2003) describe case study design as the in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context, and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon (p. 436). A descriptive case study design is a design of inquiry found in many fields in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, a program, an event, activity, process, or individuals, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Yin, 2009).

In this study, the quantitative research method was used, which primarily concerned with gathering and working with data that is structured and can be represented numerically and collects information that can be statistically analyzed (Mathews & Ross, 2010, p. 141). To strength the above ideas, (Dornyei, 2007) added that quantitative approach involves data collecting procedures that result primarily in numerical data which is then analyzed primarily by statistical methods.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in Denbela and Goro Secondary Schools found in Adama town of Oromia region. The participants were grade nine students, who were using English as a medium of instruction. The rationale behind conducting a research in this setting was that the researcher experienced the practice of L1 (Amharic/Afan Oromo) in English classroom of this particular setting while working as a teacher.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

One hundred eighty (180) students were selected based on simple random sampling technique. The rationale behind using simple random sampling is that as (Maree, 2007, p. 79) says random sampling is the process used to select a portion of the population for the study, which used to determine the type and number of respondents who will be included in the study.

Instrument of Data Collection

Questionnaire and observation were used to collect the required data. Questionnaires were used to assess students' perception of Amharic/Afan Oromo use in English classroom, and observation was used to examine students' actual classroom practice of Amharic/Afan Oromo. Non-participant observation was applied because the observer observes as a detached representative without any attempt on his part to experience through participation what others feel. In this case, the observer is observing in such a manner that his presence may be unknown to the people he is observing. The observation was also supported by audio-recording that helps to record every practice practices which may not being observed by researcher.

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative way of data analysis was applied for information gathered through questionnaire and observation. The questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively by using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and average. The transcript of the observed and recorded data is also shown numerically after changed to numbers.

Presentation of the Result

Students' questionnaire was meant to assess their perception of L1 (Amharic/Afan Oromo) use in English classroom, and their self-reported practice. First, students' positive and negative perception of L1 use in English classroom was presented in the following table consequently. Then, students' perception on their self-reported L1 practice was followed before a correlation was made between the two variables. This has been mentioned in the first research

question as “What is students’ perception of L1 (Amharic/Afan Oromo) use in English classroom?”

Table 1: Students’ positive perception towards the practice of L1 in English classroom

Students’ positive perception	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
I prefer English teacher who allows us to use Amharic or Afan Oromo in English classroom	180	1	5	3.93	1.194
I understand the lesson better when the teacher helps me through my mother tongue	180	1	5	4.40	.850
It is appropriate to use mother tongue in English class when students’ English ability is low	180	1	5	3.86	1.295
The use of Amharic or Afan Oromo by the teacher makes me feel more confident and motivated in learning English	180	1	5	4.01	1.065
In English class, I prefer to have a teacher who can understand Amharic or Afan Oromo	180	1	5	4.28	.916
I prefer my teachers to use Amharic or Afan Oromo to explain difficult concepts	180	1	5	4.48	.930
I prefer to use Amharic or Afan Oromo during group discussion in English class	180	1	5	3.74	1.251
I can’t avoid using Amharic or Afan Oromo language even if English teachers prevent me	180	1	5	3.62	1.265
English teachers’ use of Amharic or Afan Oromo Language helps me a lot to learn English	180	1	5	4.30	.997
Using Amharic or Afan Oromo helps me to feel satisfied with my learning	180	1	5	4.27	.995
Average	180	1	5	4	1

The above data revealed that the average mean result for the given questionnaire was (4, agreement) with the standard deviation of (1). The data also showed the minimum and maximum result of the response as 1 and 5 respectively. This result implies that students support the practice of L1 in English classroom by showing their agreement towards items eliciting if students positively perceived their L1 use in English classroom. Students’ response towards questionnaire items asking if they have negative perception of using L1 in English classroom was presented in the following table.

Table 2: Students' negative perception towards the practice of L1 in English classroom

Students' negative perception	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
Using Amharic or Afan Oromo in English classes should not be allowed	180	1	5	2.29	1.199
Using only English in the classroom is the best way to enhance my English proficiency	180	1	5	2.99	1.230
Avoiding mother tongue from English language classroom helps students to learn English better	180	1	5	3.14	1.333
Students should use English all the time in the English language classroom	180	1	5	2.69	1.326
Students who speak Amharic or Afan Oromo inside the classroom have a low English proficiency	180	1	5	2.60	1.290
A good teacher only uses English inside the English language classroom	180	1	5	2.69	1.403
Using Amharic or Afan Oromo in English classroom hinders students' English language development	180	1	5	2.65	1.275
It is confusing when the teacher switches from one language to another during class	180	1	5	2.50	1.331
I like English teacher who teaches English only through English medium	180	1	5	2.56	1.274
I don't feel comfortable with a teacher who always uses Amharic or Afan Oromo in the classroom	180	1	5	2.89	1.280
Average	180	1	5	2.7	1.294

The average mean score indicating at (2.7) with the standard deviation of (1.294) was shown in the above table. The data also revealed the minimum and maximum result of the response as 1 and 5, respectively. This result implies that majority of students oppose or be neutral to the idea of restricting students from using L1 in English classroom. The following table discusses students' response to self-reported use of Amharic/ Afan Oromo in English classroom.

Table 3: Students' self-reported L1 (Amharic/Afan Oromo) use in English classroom

Extent of code-switching practice	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
How often do you think Amharic or Afan Oromo should be used in the classroom?	180	1	3	2.13	.453
How often do you actually use Amharic or Afan Oromo in the classroom?	180	1	3	2.28	.560
How often do you think teachers should use Amharic or Afan Oromo in the classroom that is most helpful to students in learning English?	180	1	3	2.24	.522

How often do students use Amharic or Afan Oromo in the classroom?	180	1	3	2.22	.555
How often do you think that students should use Amharic or Afan Oromo in the classroom?	180	1	3	2.30	.579
Average	180	1	3	2.23	.533

Table 3 showed a descriptive statistic of the extent of students' L1 (Amharic/Afan Oromo) use in English classroom. It describes the minimum, maximum, mean, standard deviation and average of the given items. The questionnaire used a scale ranging from 1-3, where (3= Always, 2 =Sometimes, 1= Never). The average mean result of the questionnaire was (2.23) with standard deviation of (.533). The result also showed the maximum and minimum of their response as 1 and 3 respectively. The result implies that majority of the respondents said they (sometimes) use L1 (Amharic/Afan Oromo) in English classroom. The following table noted the relationship between their perception and self-reported practice.

Table 4: Relationship between Students' perception and self-reported practice
Correlations

Pearson Correlation		Positive perception	Negative perception	Code-switching practice
Positive perception	Pearson Correlation	1	-.353**	.362**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	180	180	180
Negative perception	Pearson Correlation	-.353**	1	-.167*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.025
	N	180	180	180
Code-switching practice	Pearson Correlation	.362**	-.167*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.025	
	N	180	180	180

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation coefficient showed the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables: perception and self-reported practice. Hence, the result indicated that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between students' positive perception and self-reported practice at [p< .05 level (Pearson coefficient= .362**, p= .000)]. On the other hand, there is negative correlation between students' negative perception and their self-reported classroom practice at [p< .05 level (Pearson coefficient= -.167*, p= .025)]. But, the negative relationship between students' negative perception and self-reported classroom practice is not strongly significant. This result implies that except minor differences, students' perception and self-reported practice of L1 use in English classroom has (positive or direct) relationship.

Regarding the relationship between students' positive perception and negative perception, there is statistically strong negative correlation at [p< .05 level (Pearson coefficient= -.353** ,

p=.000)]. Hence, there is a statistically significant negative correlation between students' positive perception and negative perception. This implies that students' response for questionnaire items supporting L1 (Amharic/Afan Oromo) use in English classroom is significantly different from their response to questionnaire items opposing the practice of L1 (Amharic/Afan Oromo) in English classroom

Presentation of the Lesson Transcript

In the following table, the sum of the total English, Amharic and Afan Oromo words used with the time proportion they took in eight groups of students during was presented. The lesson transcript was made after the observation and audio-recorded data was changed to words and numbers. Then, these words were identified in their respective languages with time proportion they share. Finally, the words with their minutes used were counted into numbers to know their percentage from the total group discussion time.

Table 5: Presentation of students' lesson transcript

Lesson (min)	Students	English words		Amharic words		Afan Oromo words		Total	
		Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
1-2 (17)	SS1	251	59%	180	41%	0	0%	431	100%
1-2 (27)	SS2	615	56%	174	19%	254	26%	1,043	100%
1-2 (18)	SS3	282	50%	114	28%	99	22%	495	100%
1-2 (26)	SS4	745	73%	166	27%	0	0%	911	100%
1-2 (22)	SS5	353	41%	160	27%	172	32%	685	100%
1-2 (25)	SS6	452	40%	272	32%	172	28%	896	100%
1-2 (15)	SS7	195	53%	105	27%	71	20%	371	100%
1-2 (22)	SS8	342	50%	286	41%	40	9%	668	100%
Total		3,235	53%	1,457	30%	808	17%	5,500	100%

Key: SS1- Group one, SS2- Group two, SS3- Group three, SS4- Group four, SS5-Group five, SS6- Group six, SS7-Group seven, SS8-Group eight.

The figure in the table presents the number of words used by the students among three languages: English, Amharic and Afan Oromo. Consequently, the total number of words pronounced by eight groups of students was (5,500), from which they uttered (3,235) English words which hold for (53%) of total discussion time. The report also showed when students switched their code to L1 (Amharic), they spoke (1,457), Amharic words that covered 30% of the total discussion time. And also students were recorded to switch 808 Afan Oromo words which hold (17%) of total discussion time. This has been shown in the following graph for clarification.

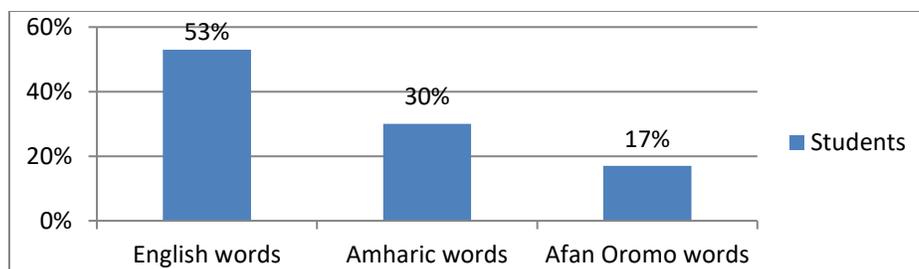


Figure 1: A bar graph showing number of words students used per languages

The finding tells that from the total recorded time, English covers (53%) of class time. The remaining (30%) holds by Amharic, and (17%) Afan Oromo. The figure implies that students use L1 (Amharic/Afan Oromo) excessively in English classroom as per to standards set by scholars, which will be presented in the discussion section later on.

Discussion of the Result

This part provides the discussion of the results in the light of research question. It focuses on the interpretation of the findings, taking into account how the findings answer the research questions. It discusses students' perception of using L1 (Amharic and Afan Oromo) in English classroom.

Students' questionnaire result indicated that students have positive perception of using L1 (Amharic/Afan Oromo) in English classroom. It was seen from their response that student agreed to the statements supporting the use of Amharic/Afan Oromo in English classroom, and disagree with statements opposing the use of Amharic/Afan Oromo in English classroom. Accordingly, for items asking if students have positive perceptions, (4, agree) average mean score was registered, which showed agreement in the Likert scale value. For items opposing L1 Amharic/Afan Oromo use in English classroom, (2.7, disagree-neutral) mean score was registered, which pointed between disagree and neutral in the Likert scale. From this figure, it understood that majority of students have positive perception towards using L1 (Amharic/Afan Oromo) in English classroom.

On their response, students claim one of the main reason to use L1 (Amharic/Afan Oromo) in English classroom is because they are not able to understand all lessons in English. Different research works also proves that students are happy with their mother tongue because they feel difficult to understand words, concepts and terms. For instance, Schweers (1999) reported that a majority of students agreed that they feel comfortable with their and their teacher's L1 use, because they feel difficult to understand words, concepts and terms of L2. The majority of the student switch their code from English to mother tongue made them feels more comfortable and confident and helped to learn English better (Ibid).

In addition to that, (Khati, 2011) found that first language use in English medium classes helped the students improve both their language acquisition and their comprehension of

other subjects and not only English. The researcher said that students should use their first language when they need to, as this could be a facilitator to learning rather than a hindrance. In supporting this study, (Sharma, 2006) found out that students used Nepali more than the teachers did for various reasons, especially to explain new vocabulary and grammar rules.

The use of students' L1 during the lessons that are instructed through a target language may negatively influence the development of students' language proficiency in that target language. Accordingly (Bailey's, 2011) report students who have high proficiency in a target language find using L1 in English classroom to be a hindrance from developing their English language further. Thus, the higher the proficiency is, and the more students are concerned about target language proficiency, the more often the value of switching to L1 is rejected.

As stated previously, the reason for students' positive perception towards code-switching might be students' low English competency. In Ethiopian context, students start using English as a medium of instruction at grade nine, where the practice of switching between target language and first language come as a way out from English challenge. Especially, this practice could play supporting role for students with low English ability, which in turn might influence them to have such positive perception.

Regarding students' practice of L1 in English classroom, it was primarily through three ways that students observed using Amharic and Afan Oromo: group work, asking or answering questions and speaking to their teachers. Most of students' L1 use was during group discussion, which appears to be major classroom context where students excessively use Amharic/Afan Oromo. Students' interpersonal communication with their teachers and peers was another platform where L1 was used. In group or pair work, the researcher can hear Amharic and Afan Oromo being used clearly in each group. Most of the teachers encouraged them to use English, but still students continued to discuss in Amharic or Afan Oromo. As classroom observation indicated, students employ their L1 for different purposes such as explaining difficult aspects of language tasks, feeling they are unable to speak in English fluently.

The data from students' classroom observation revealed that students switch their code from English to Amharic (30%) and to Afan Oromo (17%) of class time, which stands together for (47%) of L1 (Amharic/Afan Oromo) use in English classroom. The data also figure out that (53%) of students' discussion time consumed by English. This result tells that students were involving in excessive use of their first language in English classes. In this case, the amount of time used for first language in English classroom appeared to be beyond the limit considered to be desirable for English language learning.

The amount of L1 usage differs for different reasons such as the level proficiency of students, students' motivation, classroom policy... etc. Despite the limited time given for students' talk time; Neil (1997) reported that about the average (80%) of the amount of time in

pair work was in TL (English). Furthermore, (DiCamilla and Anton, 2012) found an average (75%) of the counted words in mother tongue of beginners' interaction in a collaborative task; however, only 3% of advanced students' mother tongue was recorded in their pair work. Hence, whether teachers like it or not, it is inevitable that students will often use their native language or mother tongue when they are asked to work in groups; even though a number of studies show a limited usage for L1 when students work collaboratively.

Moreover, according to (Turnbull, 2000), the appropriate usage of L1 in EFL classroom context should be less than 25%. This is because, if the optimal use of L1 in English classroom is not maintained, learners' target language acquisition may not be achieved. To strengthen this idea, (Macaro, 2005) explains what optimal use of L1 is. He says that optimal use of L1 involves a judgment to be made about the possible positive and negative effects of code-switching. It should also utilize techniques to use it in the way to help learners acquire the target language successfully.

To tackle the problem of overusing L1 in a group work, we need to identify the objective of group work. For some tasks using L1 should not be an issue according to Cook (2001). It is natural for students to resort to their native language in situations like working together in a task as pair or group work. Moreover motivation of the students and their ability are reasons to use L1 in group work (Macaro, 1997). Therefore, pair work could be a solution if using TL is the objective as it could be controlled in such situations, while group work is often carried out with L1 as they are more than two and the group could be out of control (ibid.).

Not only that, teachers should also consider balancing the group/pair when forming them, mix high and low level students carefully, and monitor them throughout the group/pair work to make sure that they employ their native language to help in carrying out a task, clarifying ambiguity or discussing the objective of an activity in the TL if needed. Since students share the same MT, it is normal for them to resort to their native language in situation like working together in a task as pair or group work (Cook, 2001).

Students employ L1 for different purposes such as explaining difficult aspects of language in an L2 task, feeling they are unable to speak in L2 fluently. The objective of the task, however, could determine whether students could use their MT or not, if they are required to do the task successfully or to learn some aspect of language. In Kharma and Hajjaj's (1989) study, the top function of using L1 in students-teacher interaction, in their study, was asking for explanation as a majority of teachers reported. They found that 81% of students found it helpful to use the MT if they could not express themselves in the TL (ibid). In addition to factors such as motivation and avoiding anxiety; other benefits are suggested in this situation.

Therefore, students use first language as a communicative resource to help them cope with the communicative barriers that may arise due to limited competence in English. More specifically, it assists students to handle the challenge of different classroom activities stated

previously. In supporting this, teachers also said in their interview regarding students' code-switching practice that students' code-switching practice predominantly related with their difficulty to understand the lesson.

Analyzing the relationship between students' perception and practice of L1 use in English classroom, some sort of consistency was observed. In their response to questionnaire, most students perceive Amharic/Afan Oromo use in English classroom as positive classroom phenomena, and using it excessively as a result, which proved to have a direct relationship between their perception and practice. Negative relationship was observed between their negative perception and self-reported practice though the correlation is not strongly significant.

Macaro's (2001) finding supported this notion of perception have profound impact on practice. Accordingly, the respondents' personal perceptions influenced their practice of L1 use, which may have stemmed from the respondents' own language learning experiences. The relationship between perception and practice has also been evident in other studies. For example, Johnson (1992) suggests that students' and teachers' awareness of their beliefs encourages them to reflect on how these beliefs influence their classroom practices.

Conclusion

Students' perception can be concluded as they have positive perception about their L1 use in English classroom. It is perceived by students as a valuable learning resource in the classrooms to facilitate the learning process and increase their understanding of the lesson. Most of them believed that using L1 (Amharic or Afan Oromo) help them to understand the lesson better, and they also want their teacher to use Amharic and Afan Oromo in English classroom.

It was also learned from their observation that students' use L1 to overcome the difficulty of understanding the lesson and in response to the communicative barrier in TL due to their low English ability resulted from poor background. Students use switching between languages as strategy for students who have limited competence in English, which helps them to overcome the difficulties of expressing themselves in English. Students engage in such activity when interacting with their peers, particularly during group discussions, and with their teachers as well. Students' lesson transcript result revealed that from the total class time recorded, (53%) of it used for TL (English) and the remaining (47%) of class time was devoted for L1 (Amharic or Afan Oromo). The figure revealed excessive use of Amharic/Afan Oromo in English classroom. This figure is beyond the limit of the standard recommended by scholars to be appropriate in English language learning.

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The Perception and Practice of L1 in English Classroom

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