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# **Language of Instruction and Its Influence on Educational Outcomes and Cultural Inclusion in Ethiopia: A Systematic Review**

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# Presentation Outlines

- Introduction
- Methodology
- Findings and discussion
- Conclusions and suggestions

# 1. Introduction

Language and Linguistic Rights = Human Rights (Varennes, 2020).

Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Article 19: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including:

- seek, receive, and share information across borders (Morgan, 2017).
- Thus, mother Tongue as an Instructional Medium:
  - Upholds children's human and linguistic rights.
  - Prevents the extinction of languages.
- Using the mother tongue for at least the first six years of primary education improves learning outcomes (Faridy & Syaodih, 2017).

# Intr...

## Importance of Native Language in Education

- Boosts Academic Performance
  - Enhances literacy and fluency in both native and official languages.
  - Enhances comprehension and academic performance.
  - Equity & Inclusion (UNESCO, Qian Tang, 2010–2018, UNESCO, 2017)

## Cost-Effectiveness

- Reduces dropout and grade repetition rates.

## Strengthens Community Engagement

- Encourages active involvement of families and communities in education.
- Supports broader educational quality.

Supports Sustainable Educational Development (Vujcich, 2013).

## Intr...

Medium of Instruction has been a central issue in the education of multilingual African states, and a highly contested decision.

- Key Influencing Factors
  - Feasibility of implementation.
  - Popular aspirations and public opinion.
  - Cultural identity and preservation.
  - Impact of globalization.
  - National development goals (McIlwraith, 2013).
- Influenced more by political, economic, and ideological concerns than purely educational ones.

# Intr...

## Ethiopia:

- Home to 91 linguistic groups and 80+ spoken languages (Opare-Kumi, 2024).
- Introduced and implemented various educational policies concerning the use of language in education.
- First official education policy 1944;

Amharic mandated as the general medium of instruction (Vujcich, 2013).

# Intr...

- 1991: Political Shift and Educational Reform:
  - EPRDF comes to power and restructures Ethiopia as a federal state based on ethnicity (Woldemariam, 2007).
- The 1995 Constitution: Declares equal recognition for all Ethiopian languages (FDRE, 1995).
- 1994 Education and Training Policy: Promotes mother-tongue instruction for primary education.
  - ✓ Recognizes both the pedagogical benefits and the language rights of nationalities.



# Intr...

Policy implementation issues:

- Lack of inclusivity and accountability from responsible bodies.
- In practice, only 33 or fewer ethnic languages have been used in instruction over the past 30 years (Gelagay, 2023).
- ❖ The primary objective of this study is to appraise the efficacy and identify obstacles associated with educational policies on the language of instruction in Ethiopia.



# Intr...

- This review qualitatively analyzes the trends and experiences in native language instruction in Ethiopia by investigating its impact on:
  - Language proficiency and academic achievement,
  - The role of educational policies in promoting cultural identity and inclusion, and
  - The efficacy of multilingual education models in enhancing student learning outcomes.

## 2. Methodology

- To ensure a rigorous, repeatable, and updateable process (Mallett et al., 2012; McIlwraith, 2013; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020), a Systematic Review was used.
- Guided by PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses).
  - Reviewed and analyzed research articles focused on trends in native language instruction.

# Data Collection and Search Strategy

## Search terms

- Mother tongue
- Medium of instruction
- Language policy
- Ethiopia

## Databases Searched

- Scopus
- ScienceDirect
- Springer Link

- Additional Sources:

- The FDRE Ministry of Education website (<https://www.moe.gov.et/>) was reviewed for official reports and policies.

## Table 1. Search Terms and Number of Research Articles from Each Database

Data bases	Searching Terms	Register	Filtered by Pubyear, Content Type, and Discipline	Legible	Not legible
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (((mother AND tongue OR first AND language OR vernacular) AND (instruction OR teaching) AND (language AND policy) AND (Ethiopia))) AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND PUBYEAR < 2025	11	7	6	1
ScienceDirect	Mother Tongue Instruction AND Language Policy AND Ethiopia  2015-2024; Research Articles; Social Sciences; Open accesses	93	23	2	21
Springer link	"Mother tongue" OR "First Language" OR "Native Language" AND Instruction OR teaching AND "Language Policy" AND Ethiopia" within Education, general Article 2015 - 2024	7114	45	3	42
Total		7218	75	11	64

# Method...

## Inclusion criteria for study selection

- Written in English or Amharic
- Published between 2015 and 2024
- Peer-reviewed articles, official educational policies, and programs relevant to Ethiopia.
- Focused on native language instruction

## Method...

Exclusion criteria to refine the selection further:

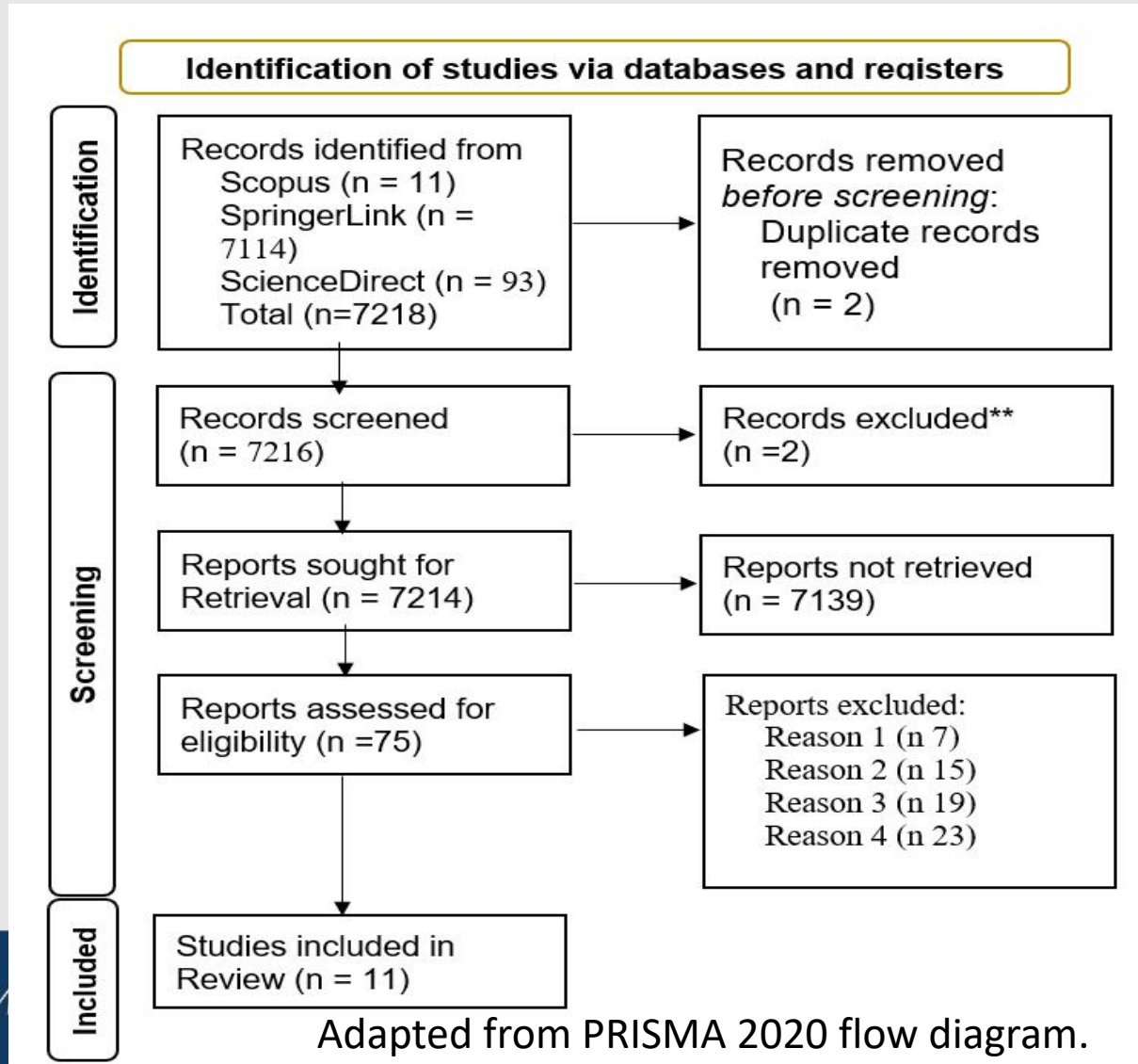
1. Articles, policies, and proclamations that cannot be reclaimed;
2. Articles that focus on the language of instruction other than the mother tongue;
3. Studies not focused on Ethiopia

## Method...

- Study Selection and Data Analysis
  - 11 articles were selected.
  - Thematic analysis was used to classify and identify key themes
  - Each article's content was examined according to the identified themes.
- Studies were coded (E1-E11) to enhance readability and facilitate practical analysis.
- Researchers repeatedly reviewed studies to ensure validity and reliability.



**Figure 1.** Flow diagram for the database search, screening, retrieval, and review



## Reasons for exclusion

1. Other than mother tongue instruction 7
2. Other than Ethiopia 15
3. Other than the language of instruction 19
4. Other than Ethiopia, and the language of instruction 23

### 3. Findings and discussion

Table 3: *Focus of Selected Studies*

Basic Themes	Studies	Frequency
Language Proficiency and Academic Performance	E1, E2, E3, E6, E7, E9	6
Cultural Identity and Inclusion	E3, E4, E10	3
Multilingual Education Models	E1, E4, E6	3
Policy and implementation	E2, E3, E5, E7, E8, E10, E11	7

## 3.1 proficiency and academic performance

6 out of 11 studies focused on this theme (E1, E2, E3, E6, E7, E9).

### Implementation of mother tongue instruction

- 📄 **Improves literacy scores** significantly (e.g., bilingual education raised literacy by 0.41 SD in instruction language, 0.75 SD in mother tongue — Leighton, 2022).
- 📄 **Increased reading ability.** Oromifa instruction increased reading ability by 40%, enhancing knowledge acquisition (Ramachandran, 2017).
- 📄 **Deepens understanding:** Use of native language for religious education deepens understanding (Konso Bible teaching example — Trudell & Cheffy, 2017).

# ***Proficiency...***

## **Challenges & Criticisms**

- ? limited literacy improvement due to new scripts introduced in the 1990s (Chicoine, 2019).
- ? Curriculum emphasizes content knowledge over practical teaching skills, impacting preschool language proficiency and academic outcomes.
- ? Teachers trained in English but teaching in their mother tongue struggle with language proficiency, affecting students (Abraha & Sisay, 2022).
- ? Transition from mother tongue to English in secondary school causes comprehension difficulties, lowering academic performance (Fufa et al., 2024).

## ***3.2 Cultural identity and inclusion***

- 3 of the 11 selected studies focused on this theme: E3, E4, and E10.
- Instructional Language can promote or devalue cultural identities in society.
- ILs incorporate diverse cultural identities into the education system.
- E.g., translanguaging practices (e.g., borrowing from Amharic and English) in Gamo textbooks help integrate cultural and linguistic elements (Gelagay, 2023).

# *Cultural...*

## **Criticisms**

- Instructional language used as a tool for cultural dominance in Western Tigray.
- The Amhara regional government enforced the Amharic language and culture (Welesilassie & Gerencheal, 2025)
- The curriculum lacks inclusivity in addressing Ethiopia's full cultural diversity.

### 3.3 Multilingual education models

3 selected studies (E1, E4, E6) reviewed.

- 🔍 Gamo case study: uses Gamo, Amharic, and English in schools (Gelagay, 2023).
- 🔍 In Konso, storybooks and the Bible in Konsita serve as literacy bridges for early readers (Leighton, 2022).

Policy documents were also analyzed.

- 📖 The 1994 and 2023 Education and Training Policies:
  - Adopted a multilingual model and recognized the right to mother tongue education (*FDRE Ministry of Education, 2023*)



# ***Multilingual...***

## **Challenges:**

- Preschool teacher education curriculum lacks training for multicultural and multilingual classrooms (Abraha & Sisay, 2022).
- Teachers trained in English but expected to teach in their native languages, reducing the effectiveness of knowledge transfer.
- Insufficient attention to the Sabeen and Latin scripts complicates instruction and learning.

### ***3.4 Policy and implementation***

7 64% of 11 studies (E2, E3, E5, E7, E8, E10, E11)

- Historical Shifts in Language Policy in Ethiopia
  - ⇒1908–1935: French
  - ⇒1936–1941: Mix of Italian, Amharic, Afan Oromo, and Tigrigna.
  - ⇒1941–1974: primary (1-6) Amharic and Secondary and higher education English
  - ⇒1974–1994: 15 national languages introduced
  - ⇒1994 up to date :
    - All nationalities are granted the right to use their mother tongue in education. (Abbagidi & Tsegai, 2024).

# ***Policy...***

Policy Impacts of the current Education policy

## **➤ Positive impacts:**

- ✓ Improved reading, comprehension, and enthusiasm
- ✓ Integration of diverse cultures into the curriculum
- ✓ Promotes multilingual competence
- ✓ Consider the Pedagogical Benefits of Mother Tongue Instruction
- ✓ The policies reaffirm the right to mother-tongue education (Ramachandran, 2017).

# Policy...

## ➤ Cultural and Political Challenges:

- Cultural and linguistic assimilation; the case of Western Tigray,
- The government uses mother-tongue education for political purposes, favoring larger ethnic groups (Zemaryam, 2022).
- Implementation often lacks needs analysis, disadvantaging minority languages.
- Despite guarantees in the 1994 and 2023 education policies, only 33 of 85 languages are used in schools (Gelagay, 2023; Zemaryam, 2022).

## 4. Conclusions and suggestions

- Language of Instruction is Crucial for effective teaching and learning.
- Comprehensible instruction ensures better knowledge transfer.
- The mother tongue, spoken at home, provides familiarity and comfort for learners.
- Language policy must account for linguistic familiarity, cultural diversity, and multilingual realities.
- Despite 100+ years of modern education, native language inclusion remains limited.
- The 1994 and 2023 policies recognized diversity and pedagogical benefits but have had limited success in practice.

# Recommendations and future directions

- The majority of reviewed studies (64%) used qualitative methods with broad contexts but lacked specificity.
- Quantitative studies lacked contextual depth.
- ❖ Thus, Mixed Methods Research (MMR) is recommended for future studies to combine the strengths and reduce the limitations of both approaches.
- Current studies emphasize policy and implementation over pedagogy.
  - There is a need for more pedagogical and practical studies to improve teaching and learning.
- Language policies should be inclusive of all ethnic groups, regardless of population size or geography.
- Teacher training programs should be strengthened to include native languages and national languages for better teaching effectiveness

# Thank you!