

Navigating English Medium Instruction: Insights Into Classroom Practices and Challenges in Middle-Level Schools of Wolaita Zone, South Ethiopia

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Abstract—This study aims to explore teachers' pedagogical practices in using English as a Medium of Instruction, to distinguish challenges confronted by teachers while using the English medium, and to discover the coping strategies employed in dealing with these challenges at the middle-school level within Wolaita Zone, South Ethiopia Regional State. The study employed a convergent mixed methods design. The study included 240 teachers from 30 middle-level schools. The researchers collected the data through a questionnaire, focused group discussions, and classroom observations. They applied quantitative analysis, employing statistical measures like mean values and standard deviations to the data collected through a questionnaire with five Likert scales. Simultaneously, the researchers conducted a meticulous theme-based content analysis for the qualitative data. The results of this investigation revealed a dominant trend among teachers in English-medium classrooms using their mother tongue rather than the English language. The study also indicated that this tendency stems from a deficiency in teachers' competence in English language instruction. Furthermore, the study showed that while teachers employ different coping strategies to address instructional language challenges in their classrooms, most of these strategies are misapplied.

Index Terms—English medium instruction, practices, challenges, coping strategies, mother tongue

I. INTRODUCTION

English has become a universally recognized medium for global communication (Smokotin et al., 2014). This is because of its immense contribution to countries' education, the economy, science, diplomacy, health, the press and social media, e-learning, technological advancement, and others (Zeng & Yang, 2024; Aldawsari, 2022). As globalization advances, it becomes critical to communicate with countries and individuals globally, facilitating international business, travel, study, employment, and other activities. Consequently, most people are drawn to the English language everywhere, particularly in nations where it is not the primary language (Aldawsari, 2022).

The English language plays an important role in the educational sector in Ethiopia. Although French and Italian were used as mediums of instruction before the Italian occupation (1900–1935) and during the Italian occupation (1935–1941), respectively, English was officially designated as the sole language of instruction in public schools right after Ethiopia's liberation from the Italian occupation in 1974 (Gerencheal, 2019). Since then, although the grade levels might have varied, the English language has consistently remained the medium of instruction in educational settings. According to Leyew (2012; as cited in Gerencheal, 2019), English has been more popular among foreign languages (FLs) since then.

The use of English to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries where the majority of the population does not speak English as their first language is known as English Medium Instruction (EMI), according to Macaro (2018, p. 19) in Rose et al. (2021). It has become a common, fast-expanding phenomenon in the 21st-century education sector worldwide (Macaro, 2018; Dearden, 2014; Subandowo & S árdi, 2023; Siegel, 2022; Pun & Thomas, 2020; Rose et al., 2022). Higher education institutions' use of EMI is one element contributing to this trend (Galloway et al., 2017).

The Ministry of Education (2009) asserts that for Ethiopia to enhance its development in modern industry within the realm of science and technology, English must be integrated into the educational system. Due to its inherent advantages

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in various fields, the Ministry of Education applied English as an instructional language at both secondary and higher education levels.

According to the General Education Curriculum Framework (2020), English is required to be learned as a subject, and teaching it from grades nine through twelve is obligatory. Teachers also offer English as a general subject in grades eleven and twelve. In the South Ethiopia Regional State, Wolaita Zone, EM instruction began in the fifth grade in the old curriculum. However, the new curriculum introduces a 6-2-4 system—six years of elementary education, two years of middle-level education, and four years of high school education. English is introduced as a subject from grade one to grade 6; and from grade 7 onward, it serves as the MI.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent of teachers' classroom use of EMI, challenges, and coping strategies in selected middle-level schools in the newly formed South Ethiopia Regional State, Wolaita Zone. According to the General Education Curriculum Framework (2020), similar to elementary and secondary levels, middle-level education is considered an independent stage in the new curriculum. It comprises the seventh and eighth grades.

The current study contributes by exploring teachers' classroom practices and challenges in using EMI, informing the design of tailored professional development (PD) programs and training for teachers. It offers insights for policymakers to craft effective language education policies, leading to improved student outcomes, and proficient teachers in the language. Additionally, the study provides valuable insights into factors influencing language instruction, enriching the existing literature on EMI in middle-level schools. Finally, the study will enhance the overall quality of education by utilizing EMI as expected in the curriculum.

The research area differs from most other contexts where English serves as a first or second language. Unlike other contexts, the study area does not utilize English outside of the classroom setting. The major reason for this is that Ethiopia has never been a colony of any European country. The EM is emerging as an instructional level in the country in comparison to other parts of the world. The setting is specific to a low economic status, meaning it is underdeveloped and has very limited resources. EMI is poorly researched, especially at the middle school level, particularly in the southern part of the country and countrywide.

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, studies are scarce at the middle-school level in Ethiopia that focus on employing English as a language of instruction. The majority of current studies concentrate mostly on the primary or secondary education context. With the recent curriculum change, this needs to be addressed.

Middle schools will place a specific emphasis on the teaching and study of English due to the ongoing challenges that teachers and students have when using it as a medium of instruction and, therefore, as a tool for learning various subjects (*General Education Curriculum Framework*, 2020). EMI is, therefore, an intricate phenomenon, its lingua franca character is still little understood and frequently overlooked (Jenkins, 2018). Kahsay's (2016) study highlights a significant compromise in English language proficiency. Negash (2006) also stresses that the students face challenges in learning English, and the teachers also encounter difficulties in instructing in English.

Kassa and Abebe (2023) noted that most teachers opted for a combination of English and their mother tongue during instruction. Despite the increasing demand for English proficiency, which is more rewarding than ever, there are problems with implementing EMI (Oraif & Alrashed, 2022).

Nyoni et al. (2023) also state in their findings that despite the rapid pace of EMI implementation worldwide, experts are concerned that there are several implementation-related problems. Teachers in the study area may have encountered unidentified challenges, which could be the cause of these issues. Consequently, the researchers decided to investigate why this deviation from the expected use of EMI had become a widespread habit among teachers.

Failure to address the EMI utilization issue could result in students having insufficient exposure to the target language (TL). This deficiency may hinder their academic performance at higher grade levels, where advanced English command is required for adequate comprehension and expression. Additionally, it could challenge educational policies promoting EMI as a tool to enhance language skills and overall education quality. Furthermore, teachers may miss professional development and growth opportunities if they do not actively incorporate EMI into their teaching practices.

Teachers' concerns about using EMI at middle-school levels have a significant impact on students' educational progress, hindering their preparation for advanced language use and high school education. This EMI implementation deficiency not only obstructs academic achievement, but also limits access to resources, disrupts learning continuity, and undermines readiness for future opportunities. Insufficient exposure to English due to teachers' negligence with EMI expectations impedes students' language acquisition and challenges teachers' proficiency in English, thereby questioning the achievement of language policy and curriculum objectives.

This problem is particularly prevalent in government middle schools within the newly established South Ethiopia Regional State, Wolaita Zone. The EMI problem affects both general subject teachers and English language teachers. The failure to adhere to instructional language standards impacts various stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, schools, policymakers, and society as a whole.

This issue has persisted over time, with most teachers consistently neglecting to utilize EMI in their classrooms for unknown reasons. Instead, they predominantly use their MTL, failing to encourage students to engage with the TL during lessons. This issue is widespread among both general subjects and English language teachers, highlighting a systemic challenge in language instruction. The goal of this study is to address the following research questions:

1. To what degree are middle school teachers using EMI?

2. What obstacles do teachers face when employing EMI at the middle school level?
3. What are the coping strategies employed by teachers to address instructional language challenges?

As a result, the study's objectives are: 1) to evaluate the extent to which teachers use English as a medium of instruction. 2) to identify challenges that teachers face when utilizing EMI at the middle school level and 3) to assess the coping strategies teachers employ to deal with these instructional language challenges.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study used a convergent mixed-methods design. It is a single-phase design that involves the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The purpose of this design is to compare the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data to see whether they support or contradict each other (*Lib Guides: Qualitative Research: Mixed Methods Research*, n.d.).

B. Sample Size of the Study

This study's participants were teachers who were involved in teaching middle-level schools in Wolaita Zone, South Ethiopia Regional State. The researchers selected nine of the 23 woredas purposively. The woredas were selected based on being in town, semi-town, or rural areas. These are Kindo Didaye, Damot Pulasa, Sodo Zuria, Sodo Town, Humbo Woreda, Bodditti Town, Damot Gale, Tebela Town, and Hobicha Woreda. The researchers identified thirty middle-level schools in nine woredas. They included English and all other subject teachers, except local language teachers. During data clearing, out of 270 teacher respondents, 240 teachers returned the questionnaire with a response rate of 88.89%. Thirty teachers did not return the questionnaire.

C. Sampling Technique

The study used a stratified sampling technique to choose the participating teachers. Researchers often use it due to its many advantages, including increased efficiency, simplified administration, accurate sample representation, and precise subdivision calculation (Arnab, 2017). The researchers categorized teachers into two strata: those who use EMI and those who do not (local language teachers). Therefore, all teachers who use EMI in their classrooms were included.

D. Data Collection Tools

The researchers used three data collection tools: a questionnaire, classroom observation, and focus group discussion (FGD). These tools were employed to assess teachers' classroom practices, identify challenges in using EMI, and find coping strategies teachers have been using to overcome the challenges at medium-level schools.

The questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data. The items were 37 in number and consisted of questions about teachers' classroom practices of using EMI, challenges, and coping strategies used in the schools. It was adapted from a questionnaire used by Tung, Raymond, and Tsang (1997). The FGD consisted of 8 questions and had the same themes in line with the study's objectives. It was formulated to gather qualitative data regarding EMI classroom practices, challenges teachers encounter when using EMI in their classrooms, and coping strategies they use in the classrooms. Classroom observation was used to observe and collect live data on teaching practices and the use of EMI. The researchers produced an observation checklist to record the classroom setting, including the use of EMI at different parts of the lessons, to identify challenges, and coping strategies.

III. RESULTS

A. Teachers' Classroom Practices of Using English as a Medium of Instruction

TABLE 1
EMI PRACTICES IN LESSON INTRODUCTION, PRESENTATION, AND SUMMARY

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I use EM to greet students in the actual classroom	240	1	5	3.86	.856
I use EM to introduce my daily lesson objectives.	240	1	5	2.27	.997
I present my daily lesson through EM	240	1	5	2.38	.952
I use students' mother tongue to explain if students don't understand	240	2	5	4.30	.850
I use English to revise my lessons in the classroom	240	1	5	2.91	.851
I summarize my lesson in English medium	240	1	5	2.15	.931
I use the English medium to make final greetings at class end.	240	1	5	3.00	.896
Valid N (list wise)	240				

According to the obtained data, a significant portion of participants assert that they consistently employ English to greet students in the classrooms. The mean value of 3.86 indicates a high average agreement with this, favoring the use of EMI for greeting students in the classroom. In addition to a positive stance on this matter, this practice is consistent with findings from classroom observations and FGD, which affirm that most teachers often use English to greet their students in the classroom.

Teachers rarely introduce their daily lesson objectives through EMI (see item 2). The mean value of 2.27 indicates that, on average, respondents rarely use EMI for lesson objective introduction. Most teachers think that introducing the daily lesson objectives is a very important element of their lesson, so they use their MT rather than English so that the students can understand easily according to the FGD.

Teachers expressed a negative response to the presentation of daily lessons through EMI. The mean value of 2.38 indicates teachers rarely present their daily lessons through EMI (see item 3). As evidenced by the classroom observation and FGD, teachers mainly present, explain, give examples, and do most of the routines in MTL. According to one of the focus group discussants, *“Most teachers are not confident about using the English language in their classrooms; they think they will make mistakes, so they focus on using MT.”* He also added that *“most teachers focus on reading from the student text and copying the notes on the board for most of their class time. Since the student’s textbook is prepared in English, teachers get the central idea of the lesson by reading the book. Then, they conduct the primary explanations and presentations in their mother tongue.”* According to the FGD, the main reasons why teachers present their daily lessons in their MTL are teachers’ poor command of English next to the students’ poor comprehension ability of the TL. As this grade level is the turning point from MT to English, teachers assume that using only the TL would not help students understand the subject matter being taught. As a result, they use translation and explanation in their MT.

Almost all respondents agree that when students fail to understand EM, they use their MT to explain. The mean value of 4.30 indicates that MTL is frequently used in the class. The FGD and classroom observations also corroborate this. One of the focus group discussants pointed out that *“mostly, students do not understand what their teachers say in the TL when they are teaching. Thus, teachers cannot skip without ensuring the students understand the point. This leads them to use their MTL to elaborate on what they said in the TL, a practice that is particularly common among general subject teachers, according to classroom observations”*.

The data shows that teachers use English to some extent to revise lessons in the classroom. The mean value of 2.91 suggests that, on average, teachers moderately utilize the English language for revising lessons in the classroom. The classroom observation results further substantiate that especially English language teachers try to revise lessons in the TL at the end of their class.

Concerning lesson summarization, a mean score of 2.15 suggests that teachers infrequently summarize lessons in English after teaching their daily lessons. This indicates that teachers rely more on their MTL for summarization (see item 6). The classroom observation also showed a rare use of the TL for summarizing the daily lessons.

Finally, the sample respondents indicated that they occasionally use the English language to make final greetings at the end of class. Of course, the classroom observation and FGD also pointed out that most teachers, especially the English language teachers, sometimes use the TL to say farewell. However, students have little access to those various expressions because teachers do not use them consistently (see item 7).

TABLE 2
EMI PRACTICES IN STUDENT EVALUATION AND INSTRUCTION PROVISION

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I use English medium to ask a variety of classroom questions	240	1	5	2.72	1.007
I use EM to give feedback and comments on students’ activities	240	1	5	2.29	1.111
I use EM to give instructions for tests and quizzes	240	1	5	2.05	1.015
I use EM to evaluate my students at the end of daily lessons.	240	1	5	2.16	.951
Valid N (listwise)	240				

Regarding teachers’ responses to EM practices in student evaluation and instruction provisions, the mean value of 2.72 shows that teachers’ use of EM to ask a variety of classroom questions is low. The classroom observation sessions also support this finding that most teachers used EM to ask questions that were already in the activity part of the student textbooks; they read or write questions on the board as they appear in the student textbook. Apart from this, when teachers wanted to ask questions of their own, they mostly formed questions in their MT rather than the TL. It was not easy for most teachers to formulate their questions instantly in the English language as they were presenting their daily lessons.

Regarding the use of EM to give feedback and comments on students’ activities, most teachers rarely use EM to provide feedback on students’ activities. The mean value of 2.29 indicates that the respondents, on average, perceive EMI’s feedback or comments as low though there is dispersion of the responses according to the value of the standard deviation. It suggests that the English feedback appears to fall short of the intended standards or expectations. Despite the interactive nature of classrooms, where teachers typically offer feedback after student participation, many teachers, as observed, preferred using their MTL for explanations, especially when students struggled to comprehend questions. Whether responding to questions, assessing student group work, or addressing misunderstandings, teachers consistently leaned towards their MTL.

The respondents rarely used EM to give instructions to students on tests and quizzes, according to the data. The mean value of 2.05 shows that teachers rarely use EM to provide instructions during tests and quizzes. However, the standard deviation value indicates diversity in responses. Teachers explain the instructions for tests and quizzes using students’ MTL. This was confirmed by classroom observations and FGD results. The majority of teachers expressed a preference

for instructions in MT. In the same way, for the last item, the mean value of 2.16 indicates teachers' low-frequency level in using EMI to evaluate their students at the end of their daily lessons. The data obtained through classroom observation and the FGD also indicated that most teachers rarely use the TL for evaluation purposes at the end of their class.

TABLE 3
EMI PRACTICES IN CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I use EM to maintain classroom discipline	240	1	5	2.78	.767
I use EM to grab students' attention	240	1	5	2.93	.917
I use EM to appreciate/admire learners in the classroom	240	1	5	3.43	1.032
I consider using EM for spontaneous situations in the classroom.	240	1	5	1.86	1.048
Valid N (listwise)	240				

The data indicates that teachers are not using EM as expected to maintain classroom discipline. The mean value of 2.78 suggests that teachers use EM occasionally. Thus, most of the time, they rely on students' MTL to discipline various student behaviors in the classroom. Classroom observations and FGD further support this finding, indicating that most teachers primarily use MTL for disciplining their students. Again, teachers occasionally use the EL to capture students' attention during their daily lessons (see item 2). As the students are not yet adults, it is understandable that there are varied behaviors in the classroom. When students lose their attention during lesson delivery, teachers frequently use various L1 expressions like "Hayzza" and "Co"u ga" meaning "Silence and keep quiet" to get their attention.

The data shows that teachers use EMI to praise students in their classrooms (see item 3). Though the standard deviation of 1.032 indicates varied responses, the mean value of 3.43 indicates a strong use of EM in terms of appreciation. According to classroom observations, most non-English teachers prefer using the MT for appreciation, whereas English teachers commonly use it in English. In the last item, the data shows that teachers never consider using EMI for spontaneous situations in the classroom. They switch to MTL rather than responding in the TL. Teachers do not think that they are indirectly teaching the TL when they use it and students model it. This was observed even among English-language teachers.

B. Challenges of Using English as a Medium of Instruction

TABLE 4
CHALLENGES RELATED TO TEACHERS' PROFICIENCY IN EMI

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Having a low level of English for teaching in English Language medium	240	1	5	3.65	1.099
Lack of sufficient vocabulary knowledge	240	1	5	3.41	.878
Difficulty in presenting the content of the lesson in EMI	240	1	5	3.35	.897
Difficulty of providing elaborate responses to students' questions	240	1	5	2.89	.989
Valid N (listwise)	240				

The problem of not using the EMI mainly originates from various challenges teachers experience or encounter. Among the challenges that have a high influence, having a low level of English proficiency for teaching in EMI is the major one. The mean value of 3.65 indicates that most teachers are positive towards the statement, and the effect of this challenge is highly reflected in their teaching, so they are not comfortable and find it hard to use the TL in their classrooms. This concern was frequently observed during classroom observation sessions.

Another challenge teachers encounter, which affects their use of the EMI at middle-level schools, is the lack of sufficient vocabulary knowledge. This means that having insufficient vocabulary knowledge is among the factors that prevent teachers from using the TL in their teaching process (see item no. 2).

The data shows that the difficulty of presenting the content of the lesson in EMI has a medium level of influence on teachers' use of EMI in their classrooms. The mean value of 3.41 indicates that it has a moderate level of hindering teachers' use of EMI. Though the data collected through the questionnaire confirms this, the classroom observation indicates that most of the teachers have difficulty making their continued speech and presentation in EMI. According to observations, the impact of difficulty in presenting the lesson content in English may range from moderate to high. This is said based on observation of what the teachers were saying and how they were saying it when teaching their lessons. Some teachers found presenting in TL very challenging, whereas others mixed a couple of English words as they presented their lesson in the MT.

Sample teachers reported that the difficulty of providing elaborate responses to students' questions poses a moderate level of challenge when using EMI (see item 4). Similarly, during classroom observation sessions, the majority of the teachers were observed struggling with responding in the TL to students' questions. Initially, students use their MT to ask whatever questions they have. Subsequently, nearly all teachers were observed elaborating and providing examples using the MTL rather than the TL.

TABLE 5
CHALLENGES RELATED TO LACK OF TRAINING, INTEREST, EMI INTEGRATION, AND EXCESSIVE USE OF MTL

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lack of training in English proficiency	240	1	5	3.72	.943
Lack of training in classroom English	240	1	5	4.20	1.083
Lack of English medium training	240	1	5	4.01	1.217
Excessive use of mother tongue language in the EMI classroom	240	1	5	4.34	.972
Lack of interest in using EMI	240	1	5	2.89	.871
The difficulty of integrating classroom language with real-life situations	240	1	5	3.07	.919
Valid N (listwise)	240				

The respondents revealed that a lack of English proficiency training had a significant impact on their use of EMI. This means a lack of supplemental EL training on capacitating the teachers poses a challenge to using EMI (see item 1). According to the obtained data, other challenges that highly impede teachers' use of EMI are lack of training in classroom English, English medium, and the excessive use of MTL in the EMI classrooms (see items 2, 3, and 4). Based on the mean value of 4.34, excessive use of MTL is the greatest challenge that hinders teachers' use of the TL. According to the FGD results, almost all teachers are teaching without receiving any supportive training to teach in EMI. It further revealed that there are no opportunities for teachers to get refreshment training to enhance the use and quality of EMI.

The respondents indicated that they do not have an interest in using EMI and do have difficulty connecting classroom language with real-life situations. These are the two problems that make it somewhat hard for them to use EMI (see items 5 and 6). While lack of interest is subjective and is not readily observable, teachers self-report that their lack of enthusiasm for teaching through the TL is one of the hurdles. When teachers start using their mother tongue even for simple instructions like saying "Dendda" instead of "stand up" to communicate with students, it could suggest a decreased interest in using EMI.

In terms of the challenge of integrating classroom language with real-life situations, teachers find it difficult to synchronize their teaching content with everyday contexts. They have disclosed that this difficulty has a direct impact on their use of EMI.

C. Coping Strategies Teachers Use to Deal With Instructional Language Challenges

TABLE 6
TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO CONTEXTUALIZED COPING STRATEGIES

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communicating teaching goals and objectives of lessons	240	1	5	3.84	.937
Using their mother tongue when students fail to understand	240	2	5	4.48	.743
Translating into mother tongue	240	2	5	4.42	.798
Relating ideas to students' backgrounds	240	1	5	3.49	.877
Using signs, gestures, or facial expressions	240	2	5	3.84	.868
Valid N (listwise)	240				

Concerning the contextualized coping strategies, the data shows that the respondents claim that they usually communicate the teaching goals and objectives of their lessons as a strategy to cope with challenges they encounter while teaching in the EMI. The mean value of 3.84 indicates that this strategy is frequently used. This is also supported by the classroom observation, though there is some variation in use. Similarly, the data indicates that teachers heavily rely on their MT when students struggle with comprehension. Classroom observations and FGD validate this finding, revealing it as the most frequently used strategy. The mean value of 4.48 proves that, on average, the majority of the sample teachers indicated a high level of agreement with using the MT when students fail to understand the EL. Additionally, translating into the MTL is among the strategies teachers usually use to cope with language challenges. According to the data, this is the second most frequently utilized strategy (see item 3). It can be beneficial for students to translate concepts into their language while being taught in an EMI, as it can help them understand better and retain the information being presented. However, it needs to be balanced. The data from classroom observation suggests that this strategy extends beyond its boundaries.

According to the data, the strategies of relating ideas with students' backgrounds and using signs, gestures, or facial expressions are also the strategies teachers sometimes use to address instructional language challenges (see items 4 and 5). Relating ideas to students' backgrounds in teaching through EMI is a good strategy for effective teaching and learning. When teachers link new information to students' prior knowledge and experiences, it can help students understand better and remember the information being taught. Moreover, teachers expressed that they use signs, gestures, or facial expressions as a strategy to cope with the challenges they encounter while teaching through the EM (see item 5). The mean value of 3.84 indicates teachers' regular use of this strategy.

TABLE 7
COPING STRATEGIES REQUIRING RESOURCE UTILIZATION

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading from student textbooks	240	1	5	3.83	1.008
Using the Internet	240	1	5	2.32	.989
Using visual aids (graphs, charts, diagrams, pictures ...)	240	1	5	2.13	.983
Using dictionaries	240	1	5	3.57	1.061
Providing worksheets	240	1	5	1.79	1.063
Using YouTube or online videos in the classroom	240	1	4	1.52	.760
Providing sufficient board notes to clarify the content of the subject matter	240	2	5	4.43	.794
Valid N (listwise)	240				

The respondents indicated that they typically employ the strategy of reading from student textbooks to address challenges encountered while teaching through EMI, according to the collected data. The higher mean value of 3.83 indicates teachers' positive agreement with the strategy's usage (see item 1). The FGD and classroom observations revealed that nearly all teachers in the sample schools heavily utilize this strategy. It aids students in becoming familiar with the language and promotes reading aloud from the textbook, assisting teachers in becoming more comfortable with the English language.

However, teachers claim that they rarely use the Internet and visual aids (graphs, charts, diagrams, pictures, etc.) as strategies to cope with the instructional language challenges they encounter while teaching in the TL. The mean value of both items indicates that most teachers showed a negative attitude toward using them (see items 2 and 3). The Internet is a mobile library full of teaching resources, activities, and other things. The data from FGD suggests that the Internet can serve as a tool for professional development and diverse language use purposes. However, teachers, particularly in the sample schools, do not have access to it. Teachers can gain some access when they visit private facilities in town that provide this service for a fee. Additionally, according to the FGD data, teachers do not utilize visual aids due to a lack of access to resources.

The majority of sample teachers frequently employ dictionaries as an effective coping strategy, with a mean value of 3.57 indicating positive responses, although there is variability in the responses. According to FGD, teachers primarily utilize dictionaries for understanding the meanings, spellings, pronunciations, synonyms, and antonyms of unfamiliar words, especially when introducing new vocabulary to students.

Teachers displayed negative reactions towards certain strategies, such as utilizing worksheets and incorporating YouTube or online videos in addressing language challenges (items 5 and 6). Mean values of 1.78 and 1.52 indicate minimal utilization of these strategies. The shortage of stationery, including paper and printing equipment, as well as the absence of internet access and necessary materials like computers, contribute to this issue, as highlighted in classroom observations and FGDs. This shortage poses a significant challenge in middle-level schools, where teachers rely on blackboards and students are required to provide their papers from exercise books for assessments.

Most schools widely adopt the practice of offering adequate board notes to address challenges when teaching through EMI. Classroom observations and FGDs indicate the prevalence of this approach among teachers (see item 7). However, some teachers were unable to effectively implement this strategy. Simply copying content from student textbooks onto the board without adaptation does not serve as a proper board note provision. Continuous writing on the board throughout the entire class period is not conducive to the student's learning process, as it creates a passive learning environment.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the study revealed a notably low level of EMI implementation within middle-level schools of Wolaita zone. Ekoç (2018) found that poor language skills and insufficient classroom implementation were among the challenges faced by instructors and students, impeding the progress of EMI. Despite English being the designated medium of instruction, most teachers rely heavily on their MTL. After grasping the main concepts from the reading materials, they consistently conveyed all the details in their MTL. Teachers use English for simple routines, such as greeting students and offering farewells; however, they do not present their daily lessons in the TL; instead, they use students' MT for most of their instructional time in their classrooms. This aligns with the findings of Erliana's (2018) study, indicating a lack of strict enforcement of the EMI, leading to a more bilingual classroom environment. Teachers' excessive use of students' MT in EMI classrooms has a negative influence on TL learning. A study by Ngoc and Yen (2018) notes that instructors viewed using MT as a beneficial strategy in the educational setting. However, excessive use of MT is not supported, as students need extensive exposure to English. Similarly, Mwakira and Mwangi (2021) and Mwangi (2009) cited in their study that engaging in conversations in English positively boosts English performance, while utilizing the MT in conversations has a detrimental negative impact on English performance.

The findings also indicated that teachers encounter various challenges when teaching through EMI in their classrooms. Most teachers rely heavily on their MT because they have low English proficiency. In support of this, Bachore (2015) and Han (2023) state in their study findings that teachers' limited command of English is among the main challenges to the implementation of EMI. As a result, most teachers find it hard to express their thoughts as

effectively in English compared to their native language. The study showed a significant impact of teachers' low English proficiency levels on their ability to teach effectively in an English-language medium. In their study, Kassa and Abebe (2023) state that it is particularly disheartening that even English teachers at the primary and secondary levels find it difficult to use English as a language of instruction effectively. Studies by Negash (2006), Heugh et al. (2007), and the Ethiopian Academy of Science (2012) stated in Birbirso (2014) that the English proficiency of both EFL teachers and students, ranging from elementary to high school and up to university levels, remains inadequate and highly unsatisfactory.

The absence of short-term training and refreshment programs in the use of EMI and classroom English poses challenges to teachers of middle-level grades. The finding agrees with Dearden (2015), who indicated that several teachers lack specific training in EMI, leading to a deficiency in the development of essential linguistic competence and pedagogical skills required to deliver content in English effectively. Bachore (2015) also connects the issues with inadequate capacity-building initiatives. This suggests that schools and other stakeholders are not sufficiently active in addressing the issue of EMI utilization. Consequently, teachers tend to stick to their traditional methods, often neglecting the TL. However, if teachers receive updated training in this area, they can become more attentive to it and better implement EMI in their classrooms.

The findings also demonstrated providing ample board notes as a coping strategy for challenges. While this strategy offers benefits such as serving as a visual aid, aiding in topic focus, serving as a reference for future access, and promoting language exposure, observation sessions revealed some drawbacks. Specifically, certain teachers were observed spending the majority of the class time directly copying from the student textbook onto the board, resulting in passive learning environments. To enhance learning outcomes, board notes must be balanced, clear, and legible. Combining board notes with interactive activities, discussions, and practical exercises can create a more dynamic and effective classroom.

Providing a worksheet strategy was impractical because the schools were struggling with a severe shortage of stationery, hindering even the most basic tasks. Nevertheless, providing students with worksheets can be beneficial for practicing specific topics, serving as additional material. Relying solely on instructing students to do exercises in the student textbook might not be sufficient.

Teachers rarely use the strategy of displaying visual aids. While teaching through EMI, this strategy ensures that all students, regardless of their language proficiency, can understand the content. Visual aids can help teachers make the content more accessible to students who may struggle with the language, as they can convey information through images and diagrams that may be easier to understand than written or spoken language alone. However, most teachers do not implement them due to a lack of access to resources.

The results revealed a serious lack of access to resources that enhance the learning process. Some of these include a shortage of student textbooks, stationery, and other equipment, such as computers. On the other hand, this can result in a negative impact on the quality of education. Teachers should strengthen the use of signs and gestures as a strategy because nonverbal communication often transmits meaning more effectively and subtly than spoken communication. Perhaps a smile, for instance, expresses our feelings far more easily than words (Bambaeroo & Shokrpour, 2017).

Finally, while this study provides valuable insights into EMI practices, challenges, and coping strategies within the context of the study area, it may have limitations regarding the generalizability of the findings. The sample was drawn from economically deprived and developing areas where English is used only in the school context, which may limit the extent to which the results can be extrapolated to broader populations or different contexts. Future research can aim to replicate the findings across diverse samples to enhance the external validity of the findings.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results, the study concludes that the use of EMI among teachers in the middle-level schools of Wolaita zone is very limited and is in a critical situation. The predominant practice was to rely on students' MT to address various situations in the EMI classroom. Despite incorporating English into classroom instruction, it does not function as the primary language of instruction for most of the class time. This limitation can adversely affect learners' prospects, hinder the enhancement of teachers' English proficiency, and impede the delivery of quality education in a broader context.

The findings boldly revealed several challenges impeding the effective use of EMI. These challenges include teachers' excessive reliance on the MT, low proficiency levels in the English language for teaching in an EMI setting, poor student English background, and a lack of training for teachers in crucial areas such as EMI implementation, classroom English, and English proficiency. Additionally, there is a shortage of resources that is exacerbating these difficulties.

Teachers employed diverse coping strategies to address instructional language challenges. Nevertheless, there were misapplications of most key coping strategies. This was particularly evident when teachers resorted to using the MT during instances of student confusion, translations, and excessive note-giving. The unrestricted use of the MT and translations, under the guise of employing effective strategies, can pose an additional challenge. Teachers frequently offered extensive board notes, mainly repeating textbook content on the board, lacking a professional approach.

Additionally, teachers encounter constraints in employing certain strategies due to the unavailability of resources necessary for effective teaching and learning.

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