CHAPTER II

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This chapter elaborates the context of the study focusing on describing the site of the study, giving an overview on the historical background of the teaching of English language and its current status in Ethiopia. This is believed to introduce the role of English language in Ethiopian education and how it could be taught. The syllabus of English language in the second cycle is also presented as a point of reference for analyzing the practice of inclusive teaching to students with visual impairments. The chapter also gives the national scenario of special needs education and inclusive education to give initial and background information for the study.

2.1. The Study Area

Ethiopia, originally called Abyisinia, is oldest sub-Saharan African state with the total population 77.1 million (2007 World Population Data Sheet). It is bordered on the west by the North and South Sudan, the east by Somalia and Djibouti, the south by Kenya, and the north east by Eritrea. Ethiopia is administratively sub-divided into nine regional states and two city administrations, namely Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambela, Harari, Oromia, Somali, Southern Nations and Nationalities and People’s Region, Tigray, Addis Ababa* and Dire Dawa* ( * Chartered cities).

Amhara National Regional State, which is the site of this research, is located in the northern part of the country and has a total land area of 161,828.40 sq. km. with a population of 17,221,976 according to 2007 census. Amhara National Regional State is
also divided into eleven administrative zones; each is further divided into ‘Woreda’ (administrative district).

Education administration in Ethiopia is generally controlled by the Ministry of Education at the federal level and Education Bureau at the regional levels. According to the structure of Ethiopian education, the Amhara National Education Bureau, by and large is responsible to adopt and implement policies and guidelines considering the objective realities of the region without major departure from the overall policy.

Following Education Bureau there exists a network of management structure involving Zonal Educational Departments and ‘Woreda’ (district) Education Offices. District (Woreda) Education Office is the smallest educational authority responsible for all educational institutions (schools) in the respective territory.

2.2. The Teaching of the English Language in Ethiopia

2.2.1. Historical Overview of English Language Teaching in Ethiopia

The introduction of English language in the education system of Ethiopia came along with the history of modern (western) schooling which dates back to 1908. The beginning of modern education in Ethiopia was characterized mainly by teaching foreign languages such as French, English and Italian. It took place with the belief that “These languages would be important to keep the country sovereign by providing the country with elites which could negotiate the interests of the country through the international tongues” (Negash, 1990) as cited in Heugh et al. (2006: 42-43).
There was severe competition among these three foreign languages which reflected the then political sphere of influence of each country on Ethiopia. Following the defeat of Italy during World War II, the Italian language was eliminated from the competition. This made French and English languages compete in schools as a language of instruction.

According to Engidaye (1998:47) initially the mission schools were the pioneers in the teaching of English and French, in which “While the Roman Catholic missions were vehicles for the French language, the protestant missions (English, American, German, Swiss and Swedish) were vehicles for the English language.”

The period between 1920 and mid 1930 was the important period for English to gain ground in Ethiopian Education. The main contributory factor for the triumph of English over French was closely related with Ethiopia’s struggle to regain its independence from the Italian occupation (1935-1941).

The main reasons for the reintroduction of English in the Ethiopian education system may be summarized as follows:

1. The assistance the country received from the British government in forcing out the Italian army. During the war the British had made a remarkable sacrifice to help Ethiopia fight against the occupying army (Heugh et al., 2006).

2. The administrative and financial assistance received from the British government. There was a continual effort by the British Council in the 1930’s which contributed to the acceptance of English for official purposes( Brown et al,1976) cited in Yigzaw (2005).
3. The fact that most of the higher officials, in the Ministry of Education, such as Dr. Workineh Gebeyehu and Tefera Work who had English educational backgrounds in cooperation with the eighteen Indian teachers played prominent role and paved the way for displacement of French by English. (Yigzaw, 2005)

There were also other factors which necessitated using English as a language of instruction. These were:

1. Students’ interest in the English language. They learned English to get jobs, to improve their living standards and to get promotions because a greater facility in English promised paying jobs and higher posts in administration (Daniel 1998 cited in Yigzaw (2005).

2. English language was also a means for access to education: Most instructors during that time were expatriates (Indians and British), and being literate in English was mandatory in order to learn from these people.

3. Scarcity of teaching and learning materials: Ethiopian schools had scarcity of learning and teaching materials, they were obliged to import and use foreign-developed English curriculum and materials, especially for high schools.

4. The assistance the country received from the British government in forcing out the Italian army: During the war the British had made a remarkable sacrifice to help Ethiopia fight against the occupying army.

5. The administrative and financial assistance received from the British government: There was a continual effort by the British Council in the 1930’s which
contributed to the acceptance of English for official purposes (Brown et al., 1976) cited in Yigzaw (2005: 50).

2.2.2. The Current Status of the English Language Teaching in Ethiopia

English is more of a foreign language in Ethiopia. It is treated as a subject for study rather than as a living language to be spoken in daily conversation. Therefore, the EFL classroom context is very different from a natural ESL learning environment.

English as a foreign language in Ethiopia, it is used dominantly for academic purposes. Nowadays not only are secondary schools and higher institutions using English as a medium of instruction but elementary schools have also added the language in their curricula to teach English as a subject starting from grade one up to grade eight in government schools. However, in some private urban based schools children are made to learn English as a school subject and to use it as a medium of instruction for some of the basic school subjects.

As stated in the ‘Education and Training Policy and Its Implementation’ (MoE, 2002), the reasons why English is taught as a subject from the first grade is that the language is not spoken at home and students experience the language only in school. Thus early familiarity with English helps students get enough time to develop basic skills when they advance to secondary school where the medium of instruction is English.

The teaching of English in primary first cycle (grades 1-4) is done by teachers trained at teacher training institutes (TTIs). They are trained for eight months, after completing grade 10, in the methodology of teaching the different subjects. These teachers are
expected to handle self-contained classes in which they teach all subjects to one group of students.

English language teaching in primary 2nd cycle, beginning at grade 5, is conducted by teachers who study English as a major field of study or who major in an Ethiopian language and minor in English. Teachers for grades 7 and 8 are normally expected to have a diploma from a teacher training college (TTC). English for secondary school students is taught by teachers who have a university degree in English.

English is also used as a means of international communication by Ethiopians. Some federal government offices which have transactions with foreigners and foreign offices use English side by side with Amharic for written communication. Most huge business firms, banks, insurance companies, Ethiopian Airlines, and others use English as a working language (Teka, 2009).

In general, the need for international use has made English language essential in Ethiopian education system. Thus, “English as a long established foreign language …has continued to be one of the languages taught. It is also used as a medium of instruction at secondary and tertiary education.” (ENA for UNESCO, 2001:14)

2.3. An Overview of the Syllabus of the English Language in the Second Cycle

As it has been mentioned in the sub-section 2.2.2 on the current status of English language in Ethiopia, English language has been retained in the educational system due to its prominence and wider application in the national and international arenas. The assumption is that nationally it is used as the medium of instruction for secondary and
higher education. It is also important to the economic development of Ethiopia. Globally it is vital to communicate in international relations, science and technology, commerce and trade.

According to the document of the syllabus, ‘English Syllabus Grade 5-8’ was designed “on new curriculum framework for Ethiopian schools and on the needs assessment conducted prior to revision work. The syllabus has also considered international content standards for a similar age and grade level of learners.” (MoE, 2008: v)

The modalities and approach regarding the teaching of English language follow communicative and skills based ones in which “Students learn and practise language which is meaningful to them and which has a real purpose and context.” (Ibid) In this case, the focus is on the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Grammar (structure) and vocabulary items are selected to be appropriate to the learners’ age. They are also integrated into practice of the four skills through designed activities.

The new approach contains a number of aspects that are exhibited in the Minimum Learning Competencies (MLLs), the syllabus and its requirements. With regard to the new approach followed, the syllabus document (p.vi) stated that the following are considered to be crucial aspects in the new approach.

1. Psychological preparation

This includes:

a) Motivating children to learn English by using interesting and enjoyable methods,

b) Learning geared to communicating in English using the language creatively, taking
delight in talk,
c) Developing in young learners sensitivity to foreign languages and cultures, raising their awareness of the mother tongue and English,
d) Developing in them a positive attitude to language learning.

2. Attitude goals

This is meant to bring a change of mind in the children, i.e., avoid the fear of taking risks, or making mistakes; have interest to interact or communicate or build confidence in exploring English.

3. Content Goals

This includes both topic-based and linguistic topics which are intended to build students’ four language skills with other language items chosen on the basis of their function and relevance for children.

4. Lessons and Materials

These include activities and tasks. For example, there is a need to vary the organization of learning, i.e., children working in pairs, groups, and whole class.

5. Organization of the Syllabus

The syllabus of each grade is organized involving 13/14 units. Each unit is divided into a number of periods (5 periods per week) based on a 34-week school year. In all grades, there will also be at least two revision units. These are intended to provide
teachers and students with opportunities to recycle language and skills and assess competencies.

For clarity of focus, each unit of the syllabus is broken up into: speaking and listening (These are put together assuming that they are often inseparable), reading, and writing. With regard to language content, vocabulary and grammar are introduced in the speaking and listening activities which are to provide a realistic context for the new language.

2.4. SNE and Inclusive Education in Ethiopia: National Scenario

There is a strong universally accepted belief that education is a fundamental human right and is one of the main factors that reduces poverty, and improves socio-economic conditions. The government of Ethiopia considers education as a human right for all its citizens and it has introduced this right in the legal framework of inclusion. This is further substantiated by Education and Training Policy (1994) declaring that “Expansion of quality primary education to all citizens is not only a right but also a guarantee for development.” (MOE, 2006:1)

With regard to access to education Davis (2004:10) states that” Children with special educational needs should be offered full access to a broad, balanced and relevant education, including an appropriate curriculum for the Foundation stage and the National Curriculum.”

The government is also committed to providing universal primary education by 2015 taking the motto “Education for All”. But this goal can be achieved when due attention is paid to include those who are devoid of their rights because of segregation and lack of
opportunities. In this case “successful inclusive educational practice cannot be possible without policies to produce clear guidelines and a commitment to the principle of inclusion” (Harvey, 1998) cited in Agbenyega (2007: 54).

Realizing this prominent requirement, ‘Special Needs Education Program Strategy’ (SNEPS) at national level has been designed for implementation in the education system. Through this strategy MOE aims at:

an education system that is to be open to all learners, regardless of poverty, gender, ethnic backgrounds, language, learning difficulties and impairments. The principle behind this policy is that all children and students are included. Recognizing the exclusion and barriers to active learning and participation, the MOE has designed a strategy for special needs education (MOE, 2006:1).

The strategic priorities of this program are:

1. inclusion of SNE in national and regional education sector planning and reporting systems,
2. development of guidelines and provision of technical assistance to regions, and
3. strengthening the capacity of the education system(MOE, 2006:14).

To actualize the Education and Training Policy elements, the strategy was planned to train teachers of special needs education (SNE) in the existing Teacher Education Institutions/Colleges.

This document also elaborates the division of duties and responsibilities of government bodies at various levels in the education system. The concerned bodies, which are
assumed to play crucial roles in promoting and implementing SNE in the country, are: Ministry of Education (MOE), Regional Education Bureau (REB), ‘Woreda’/ sub-city education offices, schools, Teacher Education Institutes (TEIs), parents and the community, and beneficiaries and their advocates.

As far as the progress of SNE and inclusive education is concerned, as presented in Regional Seminar “Poverty Alleviation, HIV and AIDS, Education and Inclusive Education: Priority Issues for Inclusive Quality Education in Eastern and Western Sub-Saharan Africa” the following changes were reported as a remarkable event that fosters all round development(UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2007):

1. The new ongoing curriculum framework development is considering learners diversity.
2. Text books are transcribed in Braille to ensure access to learning for blind children.
3. Sign language is taken as medium of instruction to ensure access to learning for deaf children.
4. All issues of inclusive education is included in both pr -service and in-service teachers’ and educational leaders’ training and education programs at all levels.
5. Nowadays, inclusion is one of the serving teachers’ big issues of discussion in their continuous professional development programs at cluster centers.
6. Issues of inclusion are becoming one of the main factors in teachers’ professional competencies.
The Education and Training Policy (MOE, 2006:5) also shows the commitment of Ministry of Education which made a turning point in the development of special education with a focus of inclusive education. This policy:

1. In line with the constitution directs implementation and development towards inclusive education, ‘Education For All’.
2. Advocates expansion of quality primary education to all citizens.
3. States that education is not only a right but also a guarantee for development.
4. Requires universalizing primary education, and expansion of secondary and higher education.
5. Assures that disadvantaged groups will receive special support in education.

Irrespective of these, there are a lot of constraints which impede the progress of SNE and inclusion practices in the country. The most prominent ones could be education sector policies in relation to disability, special needs education and inclusive education, limited guidance as to how disabled people fit into the wider ‘marginalized’ or ‘special needs’ groups. (Lewis, 2009)

Although attempts have been made to meet the special needs of children by providing the necessary educational backup support and making available necessary instructional resources, the special schools and classes as well as inclusive schools whose financing is dependent on the government are in a serious problem of financial constraints. Currently the review of policy and project documentation reveals that Ethiopia is moving forward with a mixture of segregated and inclusive education for disabled learners.
With regard to the status of support of inclusive education in the country, the SNE Program Strategy provides a list of 31 organizations that promote inclusive education and support disabled students (MOE, 2006: 43-44). Among these the following four organizations are directly involved in supporting visually impaired students.

Table 1. Organizations involved in supporting VISs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of organization</th>
<th>Activities in the area of IE and support to students with visual impairments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Adoptive Technology Center for the Blind</td>
<td>• Promoting access to ICT and knowledge, application and training for the blind</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Computerized Braille material production and publishing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Empowering of blind women</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Supporting education of blind children</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 ChristoffelBlinden Mission(CBM)</td>
<td>• Supporting education of blind and visually impaired</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Ethiopian National Association of the Blind</td>
<td>• Advocating rights to education and encouraging equal participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Producing Braille materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Providing technical assistance and training for teachers and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Managing special schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 German Church School</td>
<td>• Education and integration of VISs</td>
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Other organizations could also have a role in promoting inclusive education with respect to the needs of visually impaired students. In spite of these, as a matter of fact there is a pressing need to widen the means of support required to meet the needs of VISs as compared to the number of students with visual impairments in the country and make this sustainable.

In this chapter the role of English language in Ethiopia particularly in the education system was discussed by citing historical and current practices. The site and contexts of the study were also elaborated including the establishment of SNE and IE in Ethiopia. In the next chapter, the theoretical frame work for the study and associated empirical studies are reviewed.
REFERENCES


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