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# Exploring the Perception of Students' Towards the use of English by English Medium Teachers in Subject Classes

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**Abstract-** In all higher institutions where English is the medium of instruction, students are expected to have minimum English competence to understand their subject matter during their study. In order to help students to have the expected English language competence, English medium teachers play a pivotal role. If English medium teachers use appropriate English expressions throughout their lessons, students may benefit a lot. The main objective of this study was to investigate the perception of second and third year university students towards their English medium teachers English language usage while delivering their classes. 172 second and third year Dilla University students were selected using simple random sampling technique to participate in this study. Questionnaire, interview and classroom observation were employed to collect data. With regard to data analysis method, both qualitative and quantitative were employed. The findings of the study showed that second and third year students have positive attitude towards their English medium teachers' English usage as a medium of instruction in English medium classes. Majority of the students believe that their teachers are contributing in improving their students' English language skills. Positive aspects are favoring the use of English as a medium of instruction in other subject classes. The result also indicates that significant numbers of English medium teachers are helping the students by facilitating positive environment to use English language for the classroom interaction. Therefore, the current study has been concluded with feasible recommendations.

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## I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Territory students in our context, need to acquire Basic English skills to understand their major subjects, accommodate the changes in these days of technology, globalization and become competent in the job market. For the effectiveness of this issue, English medium teachers can contribute much in improving the students' English language skills by creating needed support in their classes. A comfortable and attractive classroom is an environment which will be able to stimulate learning (Evans, S. 2002). Walberg (1991) mentioned that a conducive environment is always vital and effective for learning. In the world of globalization era, English plays a pivotal role serving as

a medium of instruction in most secondary and higher institutions. In the same way, in Ethiopia, English is used as a medium of instructions in all secondary and preparatory schools and higher institutions. Hence, students of these schools and institutions have a good reason for learning English. Against this background, the focus of this paper is to investigate the perceptions of Dilla university students towards the use of English by their English medium teachers to facilitate suitable environment to help students improve their English language skills.

Though English medium (subject) teachers in secondary, and preparatory and higher institutions are expected to use English while delivering their subjects, there are still some rumors which show that English medium teachers use mother tongue than English in their classes. The reason could be either these teachers pay more attention to students' understanding of their subjects rather than their use of English as a medium of instruction or they may not know their role in creating suitable environment to improve their students' English skills.

It is known that in our country students do not have the opportunity to communicate in English outside the classroom. The only place students communicate in English or use English is English medium classrooms. Thus, English medium teachers are expected to use English for all English medium subjects not only to help students understand these subjects but also to help students learn English indirectly through English medium subjects

This is clearly tells us that the success of educational objectives are highly dependent on English medium teachers' knowledge and use of English in their classes. As a result, students learn English indirectly through those subjects and quality of education will also be maintained.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As it is stated so far, in Ethiopian context, English is used as a medium of instruction in secondary and preparatory and in the tertiary levels of education. This shows that English medium teachers are highly expected to be equipped with English in order to facilitate their teaching. Similarly, if students are to

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language. However, some English medium teachers complain that students' poor English background is a great obstacle to real learning. On the other hand, students also complain that many English medium teachers English usage is a barrier to effective teaching-learning process.

Regarding university students' English proficiency in Ethiopia, Hailemichael Abera (1984:2) reported that "... the standard of English in the university has been alarmingly low." In addition to this, Mesafint (2009) found out that Ethiopian students who are joining higher education are linguistically ill-prepared. Thus, it appears that the great majority of the students in the universities in Ethiopia lack the basic language skills. This, in turn, has an adverse effect on the students' low performance in their major subjects. In this regard, Williams (1984) as quoted by Tadesse Terefe (1990:24) states that some of the overseas students fail to survive academically not because of lack of potential in their specialist subject but simply as a result of language difficulties.

Many teachers in higher institutions wonder why their students are unable to use the English language as effectively as required. Similarly, the majority of the students do not seem to realize why they are incapable of using the language efficiently. But, usually neither the teachers nor the students seem to have any clear idea of what actually went wrong, and so are unable to decide on the proper remedies.

Several studies prove that, if students cannot understand the subject they are taught in English, it is certain that they would show poor academic performance. This situation, according to Seime Kebede (1989), will force subject teachers to translate everything into Amharic or other vernacular language in their efforts to make students' understand the subjects. This misguided attempt of many Ethiopian teachers will eventually reduce the students' opportunity to develop language and deny them the greatest tool to knowledge. Moreover, Allen (1965) as quoted by Tadesse Terefe (1990:10) stated that "... no matter what field you are in, you will not do your best until you know the language well. This indicates that if we are to lead our students into effective language, we must be concerned with what kind of language we use to explore our subjects. Hence, for students' successful communication in English, English medium (subject) teachers have to play the main role in their subjects to strengthen their students' language competence.

There have been a lot of researches done in the area of English language use as the medium of instruction in classrooms by many researchers and language teachers. Most of these researches have studied teachers' opinions about the use of English / native language in the classroom or the influence of that usage. There have not been many studies exploring students' perspectives and reasons for using English

language when they are trying to learn major subjects in university classrooms. Most researchers believed that the medium of instruction in their class is up to the discretion of the subject teachers. Once the teachers believe that they can contribute for the improvement of their students' English language skills, they can facilitate better environment for practicing English language. The learning / improving English language skills will help the academic standards of the students. The present study considers the perspectives of learners that enable them to improve their English language skills.

#### a) *Objectives of the Study*

The main objective of this study is to explore the perceptions of second and third year students towards the use of English as a medium of instruction by their English medium teachers while the teachers are teaching their subjects. Accordingly, the study will seek answers to the following three basic questions:

1. What is the perception of second and third year students towards the use of English as the medium of instruction by their English medium teachers?
2. How much do the students think over their problems in using English for the exchange of subject information / skills in English medium classes?
3. Are second and third year students trying to improve their English skills by practicing in English medium classes?

### III. A BRIEF REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

According to the new education and training policy (1994) of Ethiopia, English has been taught as a subject starting from grade one and as a medium of instruction starting from grade 9 in all regions as well as in higher institutions. Moreover, all higher institutions in the country are expected to use English as their working language. On the other hand, as to Heugh et al, (2006), different regions have adopted different regional policies and attitudes towards English in their education system; some of the regions have made English to be a medium of instruction from grade 7, some from grade 8 and some from grade 9. Though this might be one reason for students' low English proficiency level, students as well as English teachers and English medium teachers are responsible for the failure or success of English in our context.

In addition to the roles English teachers play, English medium (other subject) teachers should be aware about the roles they play in helping students to improve their English language skills. In this regard Tiruneh. S (1997) states that the students' ability in speaking and writing and the level expected of them in their subject do not tally. Though English medium (other subject) teachers were aware of their subjects' deficiencies, they hardly showed effect in promoting their language skills. Further he recommended that other subject teachers need to be made aware of the

additional responsibilities for promoting their students' language competence and, thus work in collaboration with language teachers in this regard.

Above all, whenever teachers teach their respective subjects, they should encourage their students to use English. The learners are to be prompted to speak in English during classroom interaction and the environment of the class should facilitate to improve their language skills.

#### IV. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Two hundred seventy two second and third year students of Dilla University were involved in this study. These sample students were randomly chosen to participate in the study. The 272 sample students were chosen from three colleges (College of Technology, College of Business and Economics and College of Natural and Computational Science) to fill questionnaire. Questionnaire, semi-structured interview and classroom observation were used as a data collection instruments. 16 students were chosen (6 from college of Technology, 6 from college of Natural and Computational science, and 4 from college of Business and economics) for

interview to strengthen the views expressed in the questionnaire using simple random sampling technique. In addition to this, eight English medium classrooms were observed.

The study used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative method was used for closed ended questionnaires whereas qualitative method was used for semi-structured interview and classroom observation.

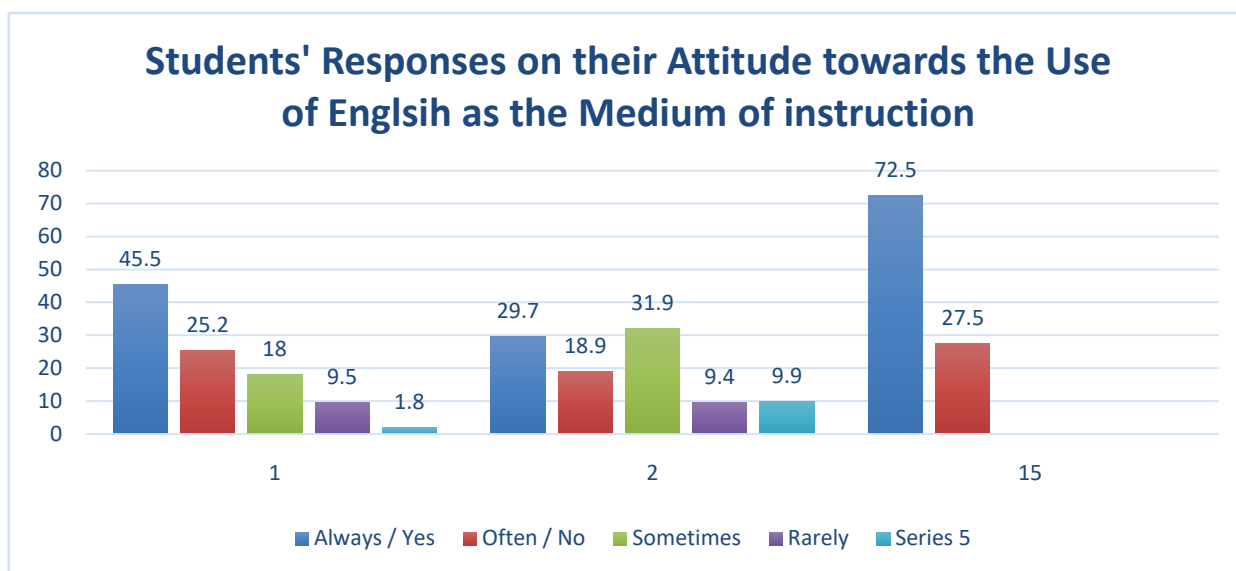
After associating the information with the interpretations and involvements of students from questionnaires, the interviews and classroom observations, the data is analyzed to investigate the perceptions of the students towards the use of English as the medium of instruction by their English medium teachers in other subject classes to improve their English language skills.

#### V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The data gathered from the questionnaire, the interviews and the observation were discussed under four tables below.

Table 1: Students' attitude towards the use of English as the medium of instruction

Item	Always	Often	sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. I prefer my teacher to use English in Subject classes.	45.5	25.2	18.0	9.5	1.8
2. I feel more comfortable when I talk to my teacher in English.	29.7	18.9	31.9	9.4	9.9
Item	Yes	No			
15. Once I can understand and interpret my subject classes whose medium of instruction is English, I will get good grades.	72.5	27.5			



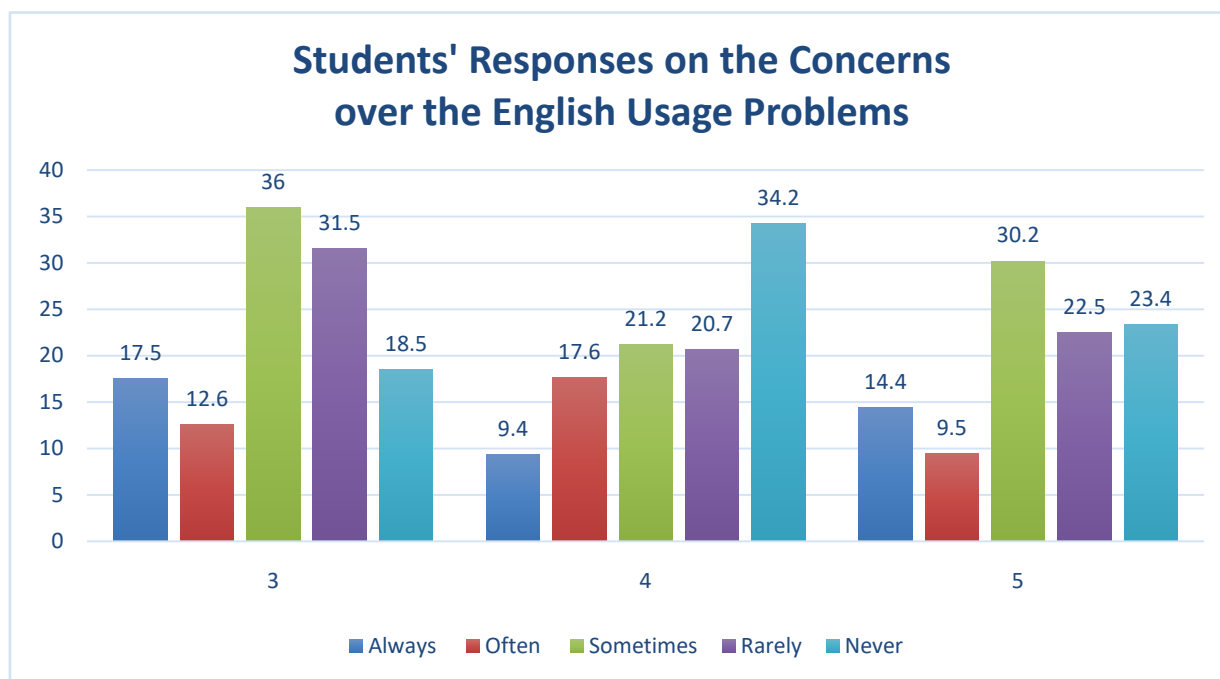
The data in the above chart shows the perception of students in using English as the medium of instruction. Nearly 90% of the students prefer the teachers using English as the medium of instruction. Further 80% of the students expressed that they wish to interact with the teachers in English to exchange their subject related issues. More than 70% of students believe that they will be benefited in subject content also with English as the medium of instruction in subject classes. One of the interviewed students proved this. The student said, "Since English is the medium of instruction in higher education, we (students) must

communicate in English. If we do so, our English proficiency will be improved gradually and this may lead us to score good grades in our major subject areas." This clearly shows us that most of the students are interested and believe that their subject knowledge will be improved with English as the medium of instruction.

With a careful comparison of the above data with the interviews and classroom observation, it is understood that majority of the students are positive in their perception in using English as the medium of instruction.

Table 2: Students' Responses over the English Usage Problems

Item	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. I can write well in English but cannot speak in English to express my ideas in classes.	17.6	12.6	36	31.5	18.5
2. I can speak well in English but cannot write in English in class notes / assignments / examinations.	9.4	17.6	21.2	20.7	34.2
3. I can learn / use English words but making sentences is a big problem.	14.4	9.5	30.2	22.5	23.4



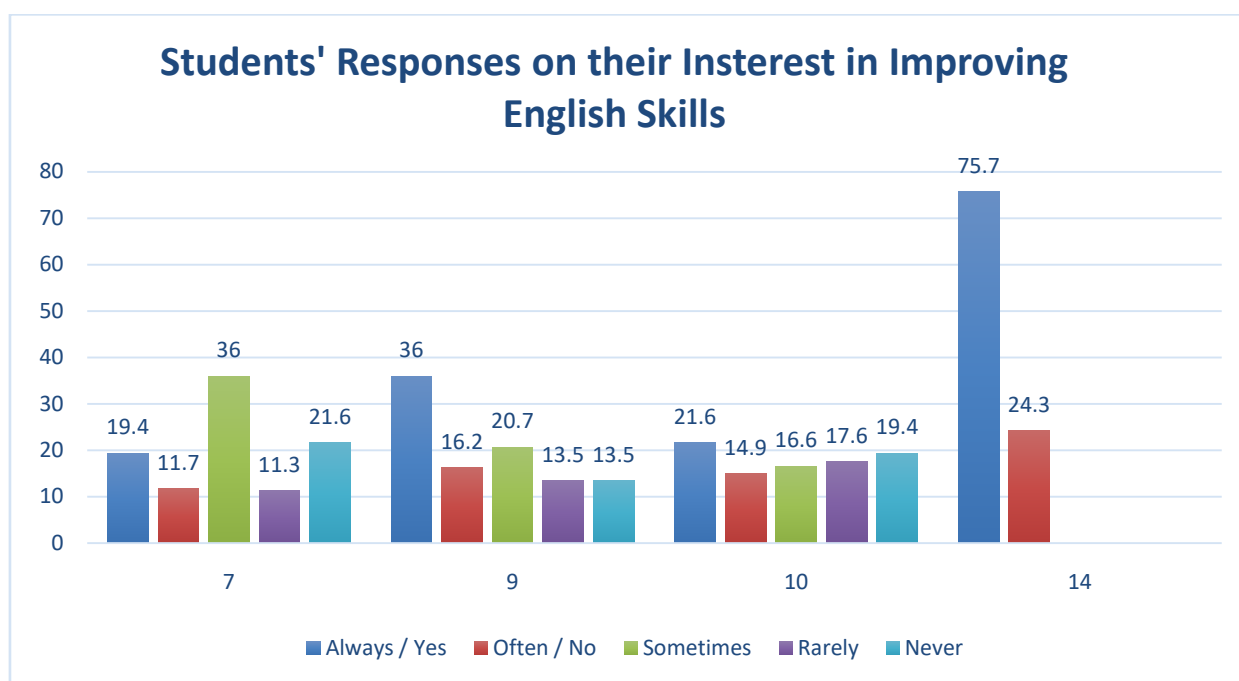
The data in the above chart shows the concern of students over their problems in using English for the classroom interaction. Half of the students believe that they have problems with regard to their abilities speaking / writing in English to express their subject knowledge in English for classroom interaction. Another interesting aspect is that nearly the same numbers of students have the problems in constructing error-free sentences, though they have good subject knowledge and needed vocabulary. From these it is clear that the students have some problems with regard to sentence construction that directly influence their writing and speaking skills.

After comparing the above data with the opinions and experiences of students during interviews and classroom observation, it is understood that there are problems with regard to sentence construction which are directly influencing students' abilities of speaking and writing. One student in her interview said, "One or two of English medium teachers discourage us when we use incorrect English, but majority of them encourage us to use correct English in our classes....." Moreover in one observed class, students were presenting group work assignments. After the presentation the teacher was observed while he was

giving oral feed back to the presenters and advising them to use correct English as much as they can.

Table 3: Students' Responses on their Interest in Improving their English Skills

Items	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
7. I understand new vocabulary only when I use English-Amharic, English-Afan Oromo etc bi-lingual dictionary.	19.4	11.7	36	11.3	21.6
9. My English medium (major subject) teachers also support me to use correct English in their classes.	36	16.2	20.7	13.5	13.5
10. My subject teachers also help me in correcting my English language errors –spelling, sentence construction, pronunciation	21.6	14.9	16.6	17.6	19.4
<b>Item</b>	Yes		No		
14. I learn / acquire many English words related to my subject from my subject teachers.	75.7		24.3		



The data in the above chart shows the interest of students in improving their English language skills in their English medium or subject classes. More than 60% of the students are using bilingual dictionaries to improve their English vocabulary. Above 70% of the students expressed that their subject teachers are helping them in improving their English language proficiency.

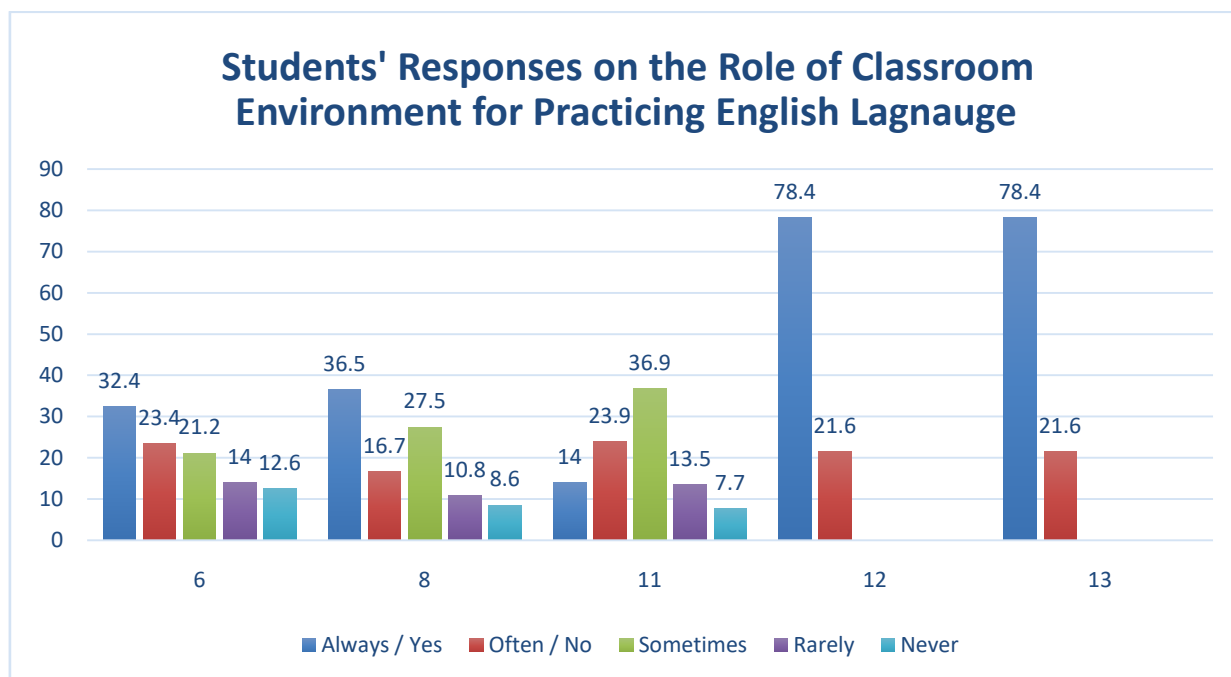
Nearly 50% of the students expressed that their English medium teachers are helping them to improve their English spellings, pronunciation and sentence construction. Further, 75% of the students felt that their subject teachers are responsible for the improvement of the English vocabulary related to their subject knowledge. From this information, it is clear that the teachers are contributing for the improvement of the students' capacities in using English for expressing the subject information in the classroom assignments, classroom activities and examinations.

After comparing the above information with the views and experiences of students during interviews and classroom observation, it is understood that the teachers are trying to improve their students' English language skills. These efforts are directly influencing students to use correct English in classroom interaction, in classroom activities, assignments and examinations.



Table 4: Students' responses on the role of class room environment for Practicing English language

Item	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
2. I prefer to do pair/group work activities/experiments with my classmates in English.	32.4	23.4	21.2	14	12.6
8. I can understand my teachers' classes in English and prepare notes on my own.	36.5	16.7	27.5	10.8	8.6
Item	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory
11. What do you think of your level of understanding English	14	23.9	36.9	13.5	7.7
Item	Yes		No		
12. Do you think that your communicative skills in English are improving because you listen all your subject classes in English?	78.4		21.6		
13. Do you think that the use of English by English medium (subject) teachers improves your listening and speaking capacities in English?	78.4		21.6		



The data in the above chart shows the role of classroom environment for students to practice English in English medium classes. More than 75% of students preferred to use English for classroom interaction, activities and experiments. Nearly 80% of the students opined that they are capable enough to understand with English as the medium of instruction and also can prepare notes. Above 74% of the students believe that their level of understanding in English is satisfactory or above that level. From these observations, it is apprised that students are favorable to facilitate ambience conducive for practicing English language in other subject classes.

After triangulation of the above information with the data collected through interview and classroom observations, it is can be deduced that students are consistent in improving their linguistic competency. Further, it is analyzed that both the teachers and students are contributing for the practice of English language in other subject classes.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### a) Conclusions

In this section, conclusions have been drawn from the findings and discussions, mainly based on the acquired data sources.

1. As seen in the study, a number of positive aspects are favoring the use of English as the medium of instruction in English medium classes.
  2. It has been found that the perception of students' towards English as a medium of instruction is positive.
  3. The study also showed that there are problems with regard to sentence construction which are directly influencing students' abilities of speaking and writing.
  4. Majority of students perceive that their teachers are practically contributing to improve English language and communication skills by error analysis and error elimination.
  5. Students also believe that the majority of English medium teachers feel that they are also responsible for the language development of their students.
  6. The finding shows that students are facilitated the positive environment to use English language for the classroom interaction and by providing emotional support.
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#### b) Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made.

1. English medium teachers should use English while delivering all of their English medium subjects.
2. The study showed that the students' present English skills are poor because of various reasons. Hence, the university should facilitate remedial classes and language training centers for English medium teachers and students to practice English.
3. In order to enhance English medium teachers contribution for English language skills, attention should be given for teacher training.
4. Lastly, awareness creation workshop should be regularly conducted for English medium teachers to aware the roles they play in improving students' English skills.

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