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Language Use and Development Focusing on Ethiopia's Multilingual Education Policy

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ABSTRACT

Ethiopia's 1994 Education and Training Policy established a foundational framework for linguistic equity by granting regional states the constitutional right to select mother tongues as media of instruction and administration. However, the transition from policy enactment to sustained classroom implementation remains structurally impeded by institutional, financial, and communicative constraints. Employing a concurrent mixed-methods design, this study triangulates documentary analysis, survey data from 150 teacher trainees, and semi-structured interviews with 20 purposively selected stakeholders across three teacher education colleges in Woldia, Injibara, and Sekota in Ethiopia's Amhara Regional State. The findings reveal a pronounced disjuncture between institutional policy awareness and functional implementation capacity. While awareness of Mother-Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) among trainees is relatively high (55%) and early literacy outcomes show measurable improvement, and teacher candidates' functional readiness to manage linguistically heterogeneous classrooms remains critically deficient at 28%. A substantial sub-national disparity in material resource distribution is further documented: institutionally established colleges such as Woldia report 42% access to native-language instructional materials, whereas geographically peripheral institutions such as Sekota report only 15%, a disparity attributable to differential infrastructural development and inequitable funding allocation. Qualitative analysis identifies two compounding structural constraints: curriculum design that is insufficiently responsive to territorial linguistic specificities, and a 70% deficit in downward policy guidance transmission from federal to regional authorities, which constitutes a

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systemic constraint on localized instructional adaptation. The study concludes that sustainable MTB-MLE implementation requires localized capacity building, decentralized material development, and substantively reformed practicum provision, aligned with the sociolinguistic realities of individual institutional contexts.

Keywords: Multilingual Education; Ethiopia; Teacher Preparation; Linguistic Justice; Policy-Practice Gap; Territorial Disparity

1. Introduction

Ethiopia is widely recognized as one of Africa's most linguistically heterogeneous nations, constituting a complex sociolinguistic environment in which more than eighty indigenous languages are spoken across its federal regional states. These languages, representing the Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, and Omotic language families, function not merely as instruments of daily communication but as constitutive elements of Ethiopia's cultural heritage, social identities, and historical continuity^[1]. Within a modern federal state, this linguistic plurality represents a significant national resource; however, it simultaneously presents formidable structural challenges for the national educational system, particularly in the areas of multilingual classroom instruction, pre-service teacher preparation, and the equitable implementation of language-in-education policy^[2]. Given that language constitutes the primary medium through which knowledge is transmitted and cognitive development is facilitated, its role in formal schooling is foundational to the success of any educational reform agenda. Accordingly, Ethiopia's education system must achieve a carefully calibrated balance between effective classroom communication and substantive linguistic inclusion.

The theoretical basis of Ethiopia's current educational trajectory is grounded in the well-documented cognitive and pedagogical benefits of Mother-Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). A substantial body of research in psycholinguistics and educational psychology confirms that children acquire foundational literacy and content knowledge most effectively when initial instruction is delivered in their first language. This study, however, moves beyond purely pedagogical considerations by employing the framework of linguistic justice to evaluate whether policy mandates translate into equitable educational opportunities across institutional contexts. Within this framework, mother-tongue instruction is understood not merely as a pedagogical strat-

egy for optimizing cognitive outcomes, but as a normative entitlement ensuring that learners from linguistically diverse backgrounds have substantively equal access to quality education. Empirical data from Ethiopian educational contexts support this position, demonstrating that learners who receive initial instruction in their first language consistently outperform those immersed in an unfamiliar language of instruction from the outset^[3]. By integrating the cognitive rationale for MTB-MLE with the normative imperatives of linguistic justice, this study investigates whether Ethiopia's decentralized language-in-education policies effectively support regional languages or inadvertently reproduce new forms of educational inequality^[4].

The current language policy framework reflects Ethiopia's federal constitutional structure, granting regional states the authority to determine their own primary school languages of instruction. This decentralized approach has extended institutional recognition to a range of indigenous languages; however, it has simultaneously introduced significant administrative complexity in curriculum development, teacher preparation, and resource allocation^[5]. Among these dimensions, the availability and professional quality of language educators remain the most consequential determinants of policy effectiveness. Teacher education programs are accordingly expected to produce professionals possessing not only linguistic competence in regional languages but also the specialized pedagogical knowledge required to manage linguistically heterogeneous classrooms including competencies in structured code-switching, cross-linguistic instructional integration, and differentiated pedagogical practice^[6].

Notwithstanding the stated intentions of the 1994 Education and Training Policy, a persistent disjuncture exists between macro-level policy mandates and micro-level classroom realities. Existing studies indicate that Ethiopia's teacher education institutions face systemic constraints that limit their capacity to prepare educators adequately for the demands of multilingual instructional environments. A primary

structural deficiency is the misalignment between theoretical program content and the practical conditions prevailing in rural and geographically peripheral schools. Many pre-service programs allocate disproportionate attention to abstract linguistic theory while providing insufficient supervised practicum experience in authentic multilingual settings. As a consequence, newly qualified educators frequently enter the profession without the practical competencies required to operationalize policy intentions, producing a measurable gap between the principles of linguistic justice articulated at the policy level and the instructional realities of primary school classrooms^[7]. This gap is further compounded by the sociolinguistic complexity of secondary and higher education contexts. While English is formally designated as the medium of instruction at these levels, classroom interaction routinely involves concurrent use of Amharic, Afaan Oromo, and other regional languages. Research conducted in Ethiopian university settings confirms that even where English is the prescribed instructional medium, substantive multilingual communicative practices, including informal translanguaging, remain pervasive^[8]. This reality underscores the need for teacher preparation programs that systematically equip educators with pluralistic instructional strategies, enabling them to manage cross-linguistic interaction and support learners in navigating between local linguistic identities and formal academic discourse. Without structured training in multilingual pedagogy, educators are likely to encounter persistent difficulty in addressing the diverse learning needs of their students, irrespective of the prescriptions contained in the national policy framework.

At the institutional level, teacher education colleges across Ethiopia are confronted by chronic resource constraints, including shortages of qualified teacher educators, an absence of standardized instructional materials in minority languages, and restricted access to contemporary educational technology. These deficiencies are most acute in geographically remote institutions, where recruitment and retention of educators proficient in local languages present additional systemic difficulties^[9]. The absence of structured and continuous professional development compounds these challenges further: in-service training is essential for enabling practicing teachers to update their knowledge and adapt to evolving policy requirements, yet access to such provision remains markedly uneven across institutional and regional

contexts^[10]. This unevenness is frequently attributable to a fragmented policy environment in which pre-service preparation and in-service professional development are administered as operationally separate functions without systematic coordination^[11]. The sociopolitical dimensions of language policy enactment in Ethiopia are equally significant. Questions of regional autonomy, cultural representation, and national identity are directly implicated in decisions regarding the medium of instruction, and policy implementation is accordingly shaped by broader political negotiations alongside educational considerations^[12]. Recent developments in digital language technologies and natural language processing offer potential supplementary support for low-resource Ethiopian languages, including AI-assisted material development and digital learning resources in regional languages^[13]. The effective integration of such technologies into teacher preparation curricula, however, remains a policy and implementation challenge that requires deliberate institutional attention.

This study addresses an identifiable gap in the existing literature: relatively few investigations have examined the specific relationship between teacher education program design and the institutional-level implementation of multilingual education policy. The present research examines this relationship across three geographically and linguistically distinct sites in the Amhara Regional State: Woldia, Injibara, and Sekota teacher education colleges selected to represent a range of institutional resource levels and sociolinguistic contexts. The following research questions guide the investigation:

1. What is the current status and practice of language teacher education in Ethiopia within the framework of multilingual education policy?
2. What structural challenges affect pre-service and in-service language teacher preparation in the implementation of multilingual education?
3. What strategies can strengthen language teacher education to effectively support multilingual education and promote national cohesion?

2. Methodology

The study employs a concurrent mixed-methods design, selected to examine the complex intersection of Ethiopia's

multilingual education policy and the practical realities of pre-service teacher preparation. By triangulating quantitative survey data with qualitative interview data and documentary evidence, the research moves beyond statistical description to produce a contextually grounded understanding of the structural factors that sustain the disjuncture between policy intent and institutional practice.

2.1. Site Selection and Sampling Procedures

Three teacher education colleges, Woldia, Injibara, and Sekota, were selected as primary research sites on the basis of their geographic distribution, differential institutional development, and sociolinguistic diversity within the Amhara Regional State. The selection criteria were designed to enable systematic comparative analysis across institutions representing varying levels of resource availability and infrastructural maturity, thereby capturing the range of implementation conditions characteristic of the region. A two-tiered sampling strategy was employed. The quantitative cohort comprised 150 teacher trainees selected through stratified purposive sampling, with 50 participants drawn from each institution. Stratification was defined by gender, year of study, and language specialization, specifically Amharic and regional mother-tongue programs, to ensure a representative cross-section of the trainee population. The qualitative cohort comprised 20 participants selected through expert purposive sampling, consisting of five regional education officials and 15 teacher educators. These participants were selected on the basis of their direct professional involvement in curriculum design, policy implementation, and institutional administration, ensuring that qualitative data reflected informed, experience-based perspectives on systemic constraints.

2.2. Data Collection Instruments and Validation

Three validated instruments were employed to capture a comprehensive account of the institutional implementation landscape. The primary quantitative instrument was a structured questionnaire utilizing Likert-scale items to measure trainee perceptions of training quality, material resource availability, and MTB-MLE policy awareness. Prior to administration, the instrument underwent pilot testing with a

representative participant group, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.856, which confirms satisfactory internal consistency across all measured variables. A semi-structured interview guide was developed to elicit qualitative data concerning implementation challenges that structured survey formats are methodologically unsuited to capture, including unanticipated institutional constraints and contextually specific participant experiences. To establish construct validity, the interview protocol was reviewed by two senior specialists in Ethiopian linguistics and education policy, ensuring conceptual alignment with the study's theoretical framework. A documentary review checklist was additionally employed to enable systematic comparison between official Ministry of Education policy documentation and the institutional realities described by participants, providing an independent evidential basis for assessing the degree of alignment between stated policy objectives and reported practice.

2.3. Data Analysis Procedures

The study employed a dual-strand analytical approach designed to ensure cross-verification of findings across quantitative and qualitative domains. Quantitative phase: Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, processed via SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics were selected as the primary analytical tool because the study's epistemological objective was not population-level generalization but rather precise, site-differentiated mapping of categorical variables specifically, material resource availability indices and practitioner perception scores across three institutionally distinct cohorts. This analytical choice is consistent with the study's embedded, comparative design, in which the identification of sub-national institutional disparities constitutes the central empirical aim. It is necessary to acknowledge the scope limitations of this approach: descriptive statistics do not permit causal attribution, predictive modeling, or the assessment of statistical significance between group differences. Quantitative findings are therefore interpreted as descriptive evidence of observed patterns and proportional trends, not as inferential claims regarding relationships between variables. Percentages were computed to identify dominant patterns, including material resource deficiencies and trainee dissatisfaction with practicum provision. Cross-tabulation was employed to enable systematic comparison of descriptive outputs across the three participating institutions.

Qualitative phase: Interview transcripts and field notes were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's^[14] six-step thematic analysis framework, a well-validated procedure widely adopted in applied linguistics and education policy research for its systematic transparency and capacity to generate replicable, theoretically grounded interpretations of experiential data. The analytical process encompassed data familiarization, line-by-line initial coding with participant sources designated as WTC1 (Woldia Teachers' College), ITC2 (Injibara Teachers' College), STC3 (Sekota Teachers' College), and REB4 (Regional Education Bureau) followed by iterative theme generation, review, definition, and formal naming. Integration: Systematic integration of the two analytical strands enabled cross-verification between macro-level statistical patterns and micro-level institutional accounts. The qualitative strand provided interpretive depth and contextual specificity where descriptive statistics identify only aggregate trends, while the quantitative strand provided cross-site comparability that unstructured qualitative data alone cannot furnish.

2.4. Ethical Considerations and Data Triangulation

Data convergence was achieved by comparing survey findings with interview data to identify areas of corroboration such as consistent acknowledgement of material resource deficiencies and divergence, notably the discrepancy between officials' assessments of policy effectiveness and trainees' reported levels of professional readiness. All participants provided written informed consent prior to data collection. Audio recording and transcription were conducted exclusively with participant approval, and institutional anonymity was preserved where formally requested, in accordance with established ethical research standards.

3. Results

3.1. Quantitative Data Analysis: A Comparative Territorial Perspective

Quantitative data derived from surveys administered to 150 language teacher candidates (n = 50 per institution) provide a systematic evaluation of the disjuncture between pre-service training provision and practical classroom implementation within Ethiopia's teacher education system. Analysis of responses concerning institutional support and curriculum alignment across the three sites reveals that aggregate national averages conceal substantial sub-national institutional disparities.

As illustrated in **Table 1**, while 68% of candidates rated the overall quality of their theoretical preparation as moderate, a pronounced deficiency in functional classroom readiness is concurrently documented. The data reveal a substantive misalignment between curriculum content and practical instructional requirements: although theoretical linguistic principles receive considerable programmatic emphasis, 72% of respondents reported minimal exposure to MTB-MLE-specific classroom methodologies. This deficiency is compounded by the inadequacy of practicum provision; 64% of respondents indicated that their field placement experiences were either of insufficient duration or inadequately supervised, thereby constraining their capacity to translate theoretical knowledge into competent multilingual classroom practice. Consequently, only 28% of the total sample considered their training adequate preparation for the instructional demands of linguistically heterogeneous classrooms. This deficiency is most pronounced at Sekota (22%), indicating that limited functional readiness is systematically associated with peripheral institutional location and attendant resource constraints.

Table 1. Candidate Perceptions of Training Quality and Curriculum Relevance (%).

Evaluation Category	Total Average (N = 150)	Woldia (n = 50)	Injibara (n = 50)	Sekota (n = 50)
Overall Training Quality	68	74	66	64
Inadequate Practical Pedagogy Coverage	68	62	68	74
Minimal Exposure to MTB-MLE Methods	72	68	72	76
Inadequate Practicum duration/Supervision	64	60	64	68
Functional Job Readiness	28	32	30	22

Note: Percentages represent the proportion of respondents who affirmed the specific evaluation category.

The availability of instructional resources constitutes a primary determinant of teacher preparedness and the effective institutional implementation of MTB-MLE. As shown

in **Table 2**, a substantial disparity in resource distribution disproportionately affects geographically peripheral and institutionally newer colleges.

Table 2. Institutional Comparison of Instructional Resource and Facility Availability (%).

Evaluation Category	Total Average (N = 150)	Woldia (n = 50)	Injibara (n = 50)	Sekota (n = 50)
Native Language Textbooks	31	42	36	15
Material Availability (General)	69	72	68	67
Specialized Facilities (ICT/Labs)	25	30	28	17

Note: Percentages reflect the proportion of teacher candidates who reported “Consistent Access” to the listed resources within their respective institutions.

As illustrated in **Table 2**, only 31% of total respondents reported access to native-language instructional materials. A pronounced sub-national disparity is evident: whereas 42% of candidates at Woldia reported such access, the corresponding figure at Sekota is 15%. This differential indicates that institutions serving minority-language communities in geographically peripheral locations face a severe material resource deficit that directly undermines the 1994 Policy’s stated objective of equitable linguistic inclusion. Data concerning specialized facilities present an equally concerning pattern. Although access to general instructional materials including stationery and basic classroom furniture is relatively consistent across sites at 69%, only 25% of the total sample reported access to functional language laboratories or ICT infrastructure. At Sekota, this figure declines further to 17%. Respondents across all three institutions noted that available facilities are frequently rendered non-operational due to the

absence of sustained technical support and maintenance provision. This infrastructural deficiency directly constrains student engagement and prevents teacher candidates from developing competency with the digital pedagogical tools required for contemporary multilingual instruction. The deficit in specialized facilities therefore constitutes a structural institutional barrier that confines MTB-MLE implementation to theoretical and descriptive engagement, impeding the transition toward applied, technologically supported instructional practice.

Professional development is essential for strengthening the alignment between language policy mandates and classroom instructional practice. However, as demonstrated in **Table 3**, while the reported frequency of professional development opportunities is relatively high, the quality and institutional consistency of such provision vary considerably across the three participating colleges.

Table 3. Institutional Comparison of Professional Development Support and Consistency (%).

Evaluation Category	Total Average (N = 150)	Woldia (n = 50)	Injibara (n = 50)	Sekota (n = 50)
Workshop Frequency	60	65	62	53
Funding & Consistency	25	32	26	17
Fragmented Program Structure	70	66	70	74

Note: Percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who affirmed the presence of these support metrics within their respective institutions.

As illustrated in **Table 3**, 60% of the total respondents reported that their institutions offered workshops or seminars related to language instruction. A notable sub-national disparity is evident: in Sekota, only 53% of candidates reported access to such provision, compared to 65% in Woldia. This differential is further compounded by the finding that only 25% of the total sample considered professional development opportunities to occur with regularity or to receive adequate institutional funding. At Sekota, this figure declines to 17%, indicating that professional development

in geographically peripheral institutions functions predominantly as an infrequent, discretionary activity rather than a systematically resourced institutional commitment. Additionally, 70% of respondents characterized their program structures as insufficiently coordinated, citing an absence of inter-departmental collaboration and limited engagement with affiliated institutions. This structural fragmentation is most pronounced at Sekota (74%) and Injibara (70%), where deficiencies in inter-institutional communication channels impede the dissemination of effective pedagogical practices

and the sharing of locally relevant linguistic resources. Qualitative data corroborate this quantitative pattern: participants consistently noted that professional development activities lack systematic evaluation mechanisms to assess their impact on classroom instructional performance. The absence of continuity and structural coherence in professional development provision therefore constitutes an institutional barrier to the sustained professionalization of language educators, and constrains the long-term viability of Ethiopia's multilingual

education reform agenda.

The final component of the quantitative analysis examines the disjuncture between macro-level legislative provisions and micro-level institutional implementation. As shown in **Table 4**, while the 1994 Education and Training Policy is broadly recognized at the institutional level, its functional operationalization is severely constrained by fragmented inter-governmental coordination and insufficient downward communication of implementation guidance.

Table 4. Institutional Comparison of Policy Awareness and Implementation (%).

Evaluation Category	Total Average (N = 150)	Woldia (n = 50)	Injibara (n = 50)	Sekota (n = 50)
Policy Awareness (1994 ETP)	55	60	56	49
Implementation Knowledge	30	34	30	26
Perceived "Communication Gap"	70	68	72	70

Note: Percentages represent the proportion of teacher candidates who confirmed awareness, demonstrated implementation ability, or identified communication as a primary barrier.

As detailed in **Table 4**, approximately 55% of the total sample demonstrated awareness of the 1994 Education and Training Policy. However, a pronounced deficiency emerges when candidates are asked to describe its practical application: only 30% reported sufficient capacity to implement policy mandates within an authentic classroom context. This disparity between policy awareness and functional implementation capacity is most acute at Sekota, where only 26% of candidates reported confidence in practical execution. The data identify a primary structural determinant of this deficiency: 70% of the total sample attributed inadequate implementation capacity to ineffective communication between federal and regional education authorities. As illustrated in

Figure 1, which traces the progressive decline from policy awareness to functional classroom readiness, deficient inter-governmental communication functions as a systemic constraint on instructional adaptation. Respondents across all three institutions consistently noted that while official policy circulars are disseminated, they characteristically lack the pedagogical guidance and contextualized resource support necessary for institutional-level adaptation. Consequently, the 1994 Policy remains insufficiently operationalized at the classroom level, a condition attributable not to an absence of policy intent but to a fragmented administrative structure that fails to ensure coherent, bidirectional communication between central authorities and regional implementing institutions.

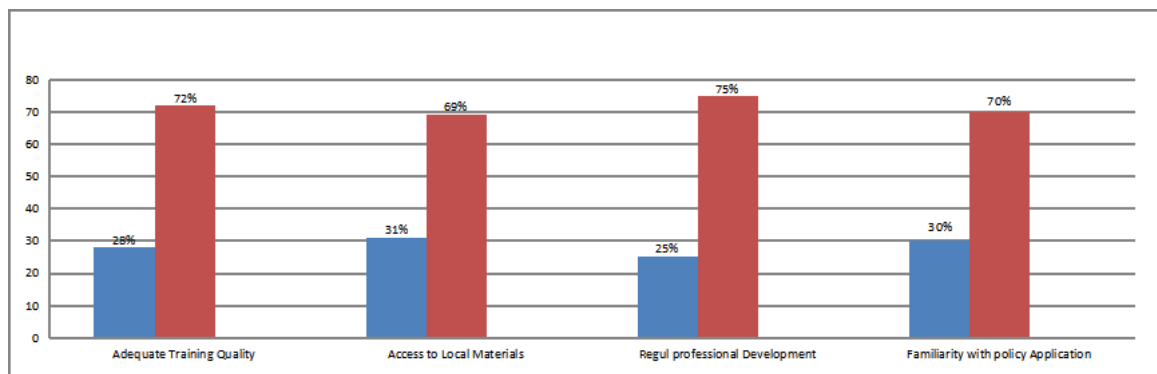


Figure 1. Gap Analysis of Multilingual Education (MLE) Metrics by Institution.

As a concluding component of the quantitative analysis, **Figure 1** visualizes the sub-national institutional disparities within Ethiopia's language teacher education framework

across the three studied sites.

As a concluding component of the quantitative analysis, **Figure 1** visualizes the sub-national institutional disparities

ties within Ethiopia's language teacher education framework across the three studied sites. The findings collectively indicate three converging patterns of institutional deficiency. First, the data demonstrate a systematic association between material resource availability and teacher preparedness: the markedly low access to mother-tongue instructional materials and ICT infrastructure at Sekota (15%) corresponds directly with the lowest recorded level of functional classroom readiness across the sample (22%). This pattern indicates that pedagogical competence is not an independent variable but is substantively conditioned by the availability of material and technological resources at the institutional level. Second, a pronounced disparity between policy awareness and functional implementation capacity is evident: while aggregate policy awareness reaches a moderate level of 55%, the rate of reported practical implementation remains substantially lower at 30%. This differential reflects the structural consequences of the 70% deficit in effective federal-to-regional policy communication identified across all three institutions. Third, the data collectively demonstrate that geographical location and differential resource access are primary determinants of teacher preparation quality, producing measurable and systematic inequalities between peripheral institutions such as Sekota and Injibara and the comparatively better-resourced Woldia College.

3.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic analysis of interviews conducted with five regional education administrators and 15 teacher educators ($n = 20$) provides an interpretively substantive account through which the moderate quantitative ratings reported in **Table 1** must be contextualized. While survey data indicated that 72% of respondents identified theoretical curriculum content as a primary programmatic emphasis, the qualitative accounts reveal that this emphasis is frequently misaligned with contemporary classroom demands and pedagogically outdated in relation to the sociolinguistic realities of each institutional context. Four interrelated themes emerged from the coding process, shifting the analytical focus from aggregate descriptive patterns to the territorially specific institutional conditions that characterize the Ethiopian teacher education system.

- **Theme 1: Curriculum Design and Territorial Lin-**

guistic Specificity

While teacher preparation programs are nominally broad in their disciplinary scope, interview participants consistently characterized them as insufficiently responsive to the current instructional environment. This qualitative evidence complicates the quantitative finding of 68% theoretical satisfaction by demonstrating that positive ratings of high-level conceptual content do not correspond to perceived adequacy of pedagogical application. This disjuncture is most clearly articulated when comparing participant accounts across the three colleges, each of which identified distinct forms of misalignment between program content and institutional context. Participants from ITC2 identified a temporal and geographic dimension to this misalignment:

"The syllabus is a relic. We teach the 'idea' of multilingualism using an old framework that doesn't account for the specific Agaw-language nuances needed here. We are producing teachers for a generic classroom that doesn't exist in this region."

This concern regarding the absence of territorial linguistic specificity was further elaborated by participants from STC3, who identified the curriculum's standardized assumptions as structurally incompatible with the resource conditions prevailing at peripheral institutions:

"In Sekota, we aren't just teaching a language; we are managing a resource drought. The national curriculum assumes we have access to the same digital and print libraries as Woldia. When the curriculum says 'use supplementary materials,' it ignores the fact that those materials haven't been translated into the local languages of this zone yet. We are essentially forced to improvise a hidden curriculum just to survive."

Participants from WTC1, while benefiting from comparatively superior resource access, identified a distinct form of programmatic inadequacy concerning the absence of contemporary pedagogical guidance:

"Even here in Woldia, where we have the textbooks, the curriculum is a 'closed loop.' It focuses heavily on Amharic grammar and syn-

tax but offers zero guidance on how to handle the increasing number of bilingual students from surrounding zones who use different dialects. We have the materials, but the 'pedagogical manual' is silent on modern strategies like translanguaging. We are teaching 21st-century students with a 20th-century script."

Collectively, these accounts indicate that while linguistic theory receives programmatic emphasis, curriculum design fails to reflect the sociolinguistic specificity of individual institutional contexts. Where individual instructors attempt to incorporate locally relevant content, such efforts remain dependent on personal initiative rather than formalized institutional policy. These findings reinforce the quantitative result that only 28% of trainees reported functional classroom readiness, as the preparation they receive is substantially decoupled from the diverse linguistic environments they are expected to manage professionally.

- **Theme 2: Sub-National Resource Disparities and Instructional Material Quality**

The quantitative deficit in instructional resources, most notably the 15% native-language textbook access rate at Sekota compared to 42% at Woldia, is qualitatively explained by stakeholders as a systemic failure in the production and distribution of contextually appropriate instructional materials. The interview data further reveal that this material deficiency extends beyond logistical inadequacy to encompass a deficit in specialized human capacity and a deterioration of linguistic fidelity in translated content. Participants from REB4 articulated the human capital dimension of this deficiency:

"We aren't just missing physical books; we are missing the specialized human capital, the people who possess the academic registers to write high-level pedagogy in regional languages. In this zone, we are often forced to use 'placeholder' materials that were never intended for a multilingual classroom."

In Injibara, participants from ITC2 identified a qualitative dimension of material inadequacy related to the loss of linguistic fidelity during the translation process:

"When materials move from the federal center

(Addis Ababa) to our periphery, they lose their 'pedagogical soul.' The translations are often literal and clunky, ignoring the unique syntax and idiomatic richness of our local speech. It's a form of linguistic erasure; the students are reading their language, but they don't recognize the voice."

At Woldia, where material access is comparatively higher, participants from WTC1 identified a distinct form of resource inadequacy concerning the absence of localized digital content:

"We have the 'General Material' availability, but it's generic. We have ICT labs that sit empty because the software isn't localized. The federal policy assumes a digital leapfrog that we cannot make because the 'coding' of our pedagogical tools hasn't caught up to the complexity of our multilingual reality."

These qualitative accounts collectively demonstrate that resource inadequacy operates across three intersecting dimensions: a deficit of physical instructional materials, a shortage of specialists with the academic linguistic competence to develop contextually appropriate content, and a loss of linguistic accuracy and cultural relevance during the translation process. This interpretive account confirms that the quantitative deficits in language laboratories and library resources, compounded by the budgetary constraints identified in the documentary analysis, disproportionately affect geographically peripheral and institutionally newer colleges such as Sekota. Critically, these findings indicate that increasing the quantity of instructional materials will remain an insufficient response unless the contextual adequacy and linguistic fidelity of those materials are simultaneously and systematically addressed.

- **Theme 3: Institutional Capacity and Professional Development Deficiencies**

A consistently recurring concern across all interview participants was the shortage of teacher educators possessing the dual competency of pedagogical expertise and functional linguistic proficiency in regional languages. The qualitative data further reveal that institutional capacity constraints are not uniform across sites but vary substantially in their

nature and severity. At Woldia, capacity limitations are characterized by the professional obsolescence of existing staff expertise rather than by numerical shortage. Participants from WTC1 noted:

“We have the staff, but we are ‘conceptually exhausted.’ Most of our professional development is too short and too general. It feels like a box-ticking exercise for the regional bureau rather than a deep dive into the multilingual realities of our classrooms. We are experts in the old way, trying to navigate a policy without new tools.”

At Injibara, the primary capacity constraint concerns the absence of educators with the specialized linguistic competence required for Agaw-language instructional tracks. Participants from ITC2 noted:

“Our teachers are overburdened because they are learning the specialized academic register of the regional language at the same time they are supposed to be teaching it to others. We are building the plane while flying it, and the professional development offered by the bureau is far too brief to bridge this expertise gap.”

At Sekota, capacity deficiencies are most severe, manifesting as the absence of structured supervisory provision for practicum-phase teacher candidates. Participants from STC3 described:

“There is no one to watch us. Our supervisors are so overworked and underfunded that my practicum was basically a solo flight. I had no feedback loop, no expert to correct my multilingual strategies. In Sekota, the policy says we are being ‘trained,’ but the reality is we are just being ‘placed’ in schools and left to figure it out.”

These findings demonstrate that the 70% deficit in effective federal-to-regional policy communication identified in the quantitative data reflects not merely an administrative coordination failure but a more fundamental deficiency in human resource development and structured institutional support. The absence of sustained, contextually differentiated professional development prevents these institutions

from developing the specialized instructional capacity that effective MTB-MLE implementation requires. A standardized approach to professional development is demonstrably inadequate given the divergent institutional needs identified across the three sites: programmatic modernization at Woldia, linguistic specialization at Injibara, and foundational supervisory infrastructure at Sekota.

• **Theme 4: Policy–Practice Linkage and Oversight Deficiencies**

The fourth theme identifies a systemic disjuncture between national language policy mandates and their institutional operationalization. While the quantitative data document a 70% deficit in effective inter-governmental policy communication, the qualitative accounts reveal that this figure reflects not merely an informational deficiency but a broader absence of structured monitoring, evaluative feedback, and implementation support across administrative tiers. At Woldia, the linkage failure is characterized by the absence of operational guidance accompanying formal policy directives. Participants from WTC1 noted:

“On paper, there are clearly defined policies, but they arrive as cold circulars. There is no pedagogical justification attached. We are told to ‘implement multilingualism,’ but the federal Ministry provides no rubric for success. Without a feedback loop, we are essentially guessing if our methods align with the national vision.”

At Injibara, the absence of substantive monitoring creates conditions in which compliance reporting is decoupled from actual instructional practice. Participants from ITC2 observed:

“The monitoring system is a one-way street. We send reports up to the bureau saying we are using mother-tongue materials, but no one comes down to see that those materials are poorly translated or insufficient. It is a paper-based success masking a classroom-based struggle. The link is broken because the ‘monitors’ only care about statistics, not students.”

At Sekota, the absence of oversight is most absolute, with participants describing a condition of effective institu-

tional isolation from the national policy framework. Participants from STC3 stated:

“In Sekota, we are off the radar. The federal policy feels like it was written for a different country. We haven’t seen a pedagogical supervisor in two years. Implementation here isn’t about policy; it’s about survival. If a teacher is committed, the language is taught; if not, it isn’t. There is no national backbone supporting us.”

These findings confirm that even structurally sound policy frameworks will fail to achieve their intended outcomes in the absence of organized monitoring systems, structured evaluative feedback, and differentiated implementation support. The absence of such mechanisms produces institutionally differentiated outcomes: Woldia implements policy directives through improvised interpretation; Injibara maintains a compliance-oriented reporting posture that obscures actual practice; and Sekota operates in effective administrative isolation. This pattern substantiates the study’s central finding that the 1994 Policy remains insufficiently operationalized at the classroom level, a condition attributable to a fragmented administrative architecture that lacks the inter-governmental coordination mechanisms necessary to translate federal policy intent into contextually responsive institutional practice.

4. Discussion

Ethiopia’s language teacher education landscape emerges as a multi-faceted domain where high policy ambitions collide with systemic territorial barriers. While the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP VI) reports measurable institutional improvements, the present findings reveal a substantial misalignment between federal intent and local practice, driven by inadequate funding allocations and structurally deficient communication channels^[15,16]. This misalignment is most productively interpreted through Ricento and Hornberger’s^[17] layered policy framework, which conceptualizes language policy not as a unified directive but as a multi-tiered system in which legislative intent is progressively filtered, diluted, and re-contextualized at institutional and interpersonal levels. Applied to the present data, this framework illuminates why ESDP VI’s stated com-

mitments to multilingual education fail to materialize uniformly at the college level: each administrative layer, federal, regional, and institutional, introduces its own interpretive constraints, resource limitations, and power asymmetries, such that the policy arriving at the classroom bears limited resemblance to the policy formulated at the center. This tension is not unique to Ethiopia; it resonates structurally with patterns documented in comparable multilingual federations across the Global South, including India’s multilingual education policy–practice gap^[18], South Africa’s post-apartheid language-in-education policy^[19], and Papua New Guinea’s vernacular education reforms^[20]. The present study thus contributes an empirically grounded, site-differentiated account that advances international understanding of why such gaps endure despite sustained institutional and financial commitment.

Unlike previous studies that characterize Ethiopia’s implementation challenges as a uniform national struggle^[21,22], the present data delineate a tiered crisis defined here as a hierarchical disparity in institutional capacity wherein implementation outcomes are contingent upon regional political strength and the infrastructural maturity of individual colleges. The stark territorial disparity in resource access (42% in Woldia versus 15% in Sekota) provides quantified sub-national evidence for what Breidlid^[23] and Barrett et al.^[24] have theorized as the periphery penalty the compounding disadvantage experienced by geographically and politically marginal institutions in federally administered education systems. Critically, however, the present data do more than confirm this theoretical construct; they specify its mechanism. The periphery penalty in this context operates through the intersection of three mutually reinforcing variables: infrastructural age, which determines the baseline capacity of a college to absorb and implement policy directives; regional political leverage, which governs differential access to discretionary funding allocations; and communicative isolation, which prevents peripheral institutions from receiving the contextualized policy guidance that more centrally positioned colleges routinely access. This tripartite mechanism represents a theoretical refinement of the periphery penalty construct that existing scholarship has not previously articulated at the sub-national, institution-specific level.

The Resource Pedagogy Correlation identified in this study whereby material scarcity in implementation frontiers

such as Sekota produces a measurably more severe pedagogical gap than in relatively central institutional hubs is analytically coherent with Hornberger's^[25] continua of biliteracy framework, which posits that the conditions enabling or constraining multilingual practice are not binary but exist along intersecting continua of context, media, content, and development. The present findings operationalize this theoretical insight empirically: as resource availability diminishes along the macro-to-micro contextual continuum, the pedagogical space available for multilingual instruction contracts correspondingly, producing the graduated territorial disparities documented in **Table 3**. This analytical application demonstrates that the continua of the biliteracy framework, originally developed to describe individual bilingual development, retain explanatory power when transposed to institutional and territorial scales, a theoretical extension with direct relevance for comparative multilingual education research in low-resource federal contexts^[26,27]. The implication is theoretically and practically significant: broad national mandates, however well-intentioned, cannot compensate for the structural asymmetries that the continua framework identifies as the foundational determinants of multilingual implementation capacity. Differentiated, territorially calibrated investment strategies are therefore not merely a policy preference but a theoretical necessity if equitable multilingual outcomes are to be achieved.

The qualitative strand of this study introduces a further dimension of theoretical significance by actively challenging the moderate quantitative satisfaction rating (68%) for training quality. While student-teachers nominally acknowledge the adequacy of their preparation, thematic analysis reveals the operation of a Static Curriculum, one that functions as an institutional relic by failing to accommodate territorial linguistic specificities, most notably the Agaw-language particularities characteristic of the Injibara context. This disjuncture is analytically illuminated by Cummins'^[28] distinction between coercive and collaborative relations of power in educational institutions. The Static Curriculum operates as a coercive instrument: by standardizing preparation frameworks around a linguistically neutral default, it systematically suppresses the localized linguistic knowledge that student-teachers bring to their training and that their future learners will require of them. The quantitative satisfaction rating of 68% does not contradict this interpretation; rather,

it reflects what Cummins identifies as the internalization of institutional norms by participants who have no alternative framework against which to evaluate their experience. The gap between declared satisfaction and expressed pedagogical frustration is therefore not a methodological inconsistency but a theoretically predicted artifact of coercive institutional power one that the mixed-methods design of the present study was uniquely positioned to expose^[29,30].

This pedagogical inadequacy is further compounded by the 70% Communication Gap documented in **Table 4**, which operates as a systemic ceiling on instructional adaptation. Interpreted through Shohamy^[31], language policy as a socio-political negotiation framework, this gap is not reducible to administrative inefficiency; it is a structural mechanism through which the federal center retains interpretive authority over policy meaning while simultaneously displacing implementation responsibility to peripheral institutional actors. Shohamy framework holds that language policies are enacted not through formal documents alone but through the ensemble of mechanisms tests, curricula, resource allocations, and communicative channels that govern how policies are received and operationalized at the local level. Applied to the present data, this framework reveals that the consistent arrival of policy circulars without pedagogical justification constitutes a deliberate, if not always consciously designed, restriction of the interpretive latitude available to instructors at implementation frontiers. Even professionally motivated and committed educators are thereby prevented from bridging the divide between the 1994 Language Policy and current classroom realities^[32,33], because the communicative infrastructure through which such bridging would occur has not been constructed. This finding extends Shohamy framework by providing rare empirical, sub-national evidence from a linguistically complex African federal state a context substantially underrepresented in the dominant Anglophone and European scholarship on language-in-education policy and by demonstrating that the socio-political negotiation Shohamy describes operates not only at the macro level of policy formulation but is reproduced and intensified at each successive institutional tier, with consequences that are most severely felt at the geographic and political periphery.

Taken together, the analytical application of Ricento and Hornberger's layered policy model, Hornberger's continua of biliteracy, Cummins' coercive-collaborative power

framework, and Shohamy's socio-political negotiation theory produces a theoretically coherent and mutually reinforcing interpretation of the study's findings. No single framework is sufficient to account for the full complexity of the policy–practice gap documented here; it is precisely their convergence on the same empirical patterns territorial inequality, administrative opacity, Static Curriculum, and communicative isolation that strengthens the interpretive validity of the conclusions. In doing so, the study extends these established theoretical frameworks beyond their predominantly Western institutional contexts, affirms their explanatory relevance for the Global South, and simultaneously specifies the contextually particular structural variables that require incorporation into those frameworks to enhance their empirical adequacy and cross-contextual applicability.

As illustrated in **Figure 2**, the four core themes, curricu-

lum relevance, resource adequacy, human capacity, and policy linkage, constitute an interdependent system rather than a set of discrete variables. The diagram makes explicit that no single theme operates in isolation; instead, each exerts directional influence on the others and on the structural nucleus of the framework: the policy–practice gap. The shortage of qualified educators (Theme 3) exerts a demonstrably adverse effect on curriculum adaptability (Theme 1), compelling individual instructors to rely on personal agency rather than institutionally formalized pedagogical policy. This dynamic is represented in the diagram by an indirect-impairment pathway traversing the left margin. Far from being an incidental operational shortcoming, this displacement of responsibility reproduces what Shohamy theories describe as the inherent fluidity of language policy, a condition shaped by local power dynamics rather than linear, top-down mandates.

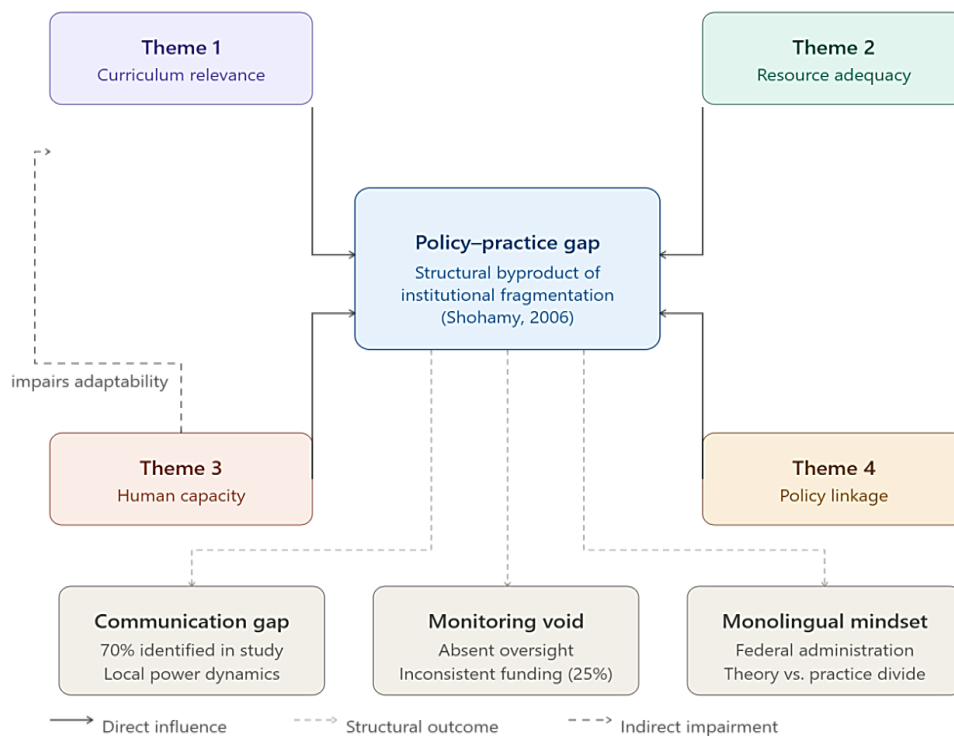


Figure 2. Thematic Relationship Diagram: Language Implementation in a Multilingual, Low-Resource Federation.

The three structural failure nodes positioned at the base of the diagram, the communication gap (70%, as documented in the study data), the monitoring void, and the monolingual mindset are presented as measurable systemic outcomes rather than peripheral anomalies. The monitoring void, when read alongside the inconsistent funding allocation

documented in **Table 3** (25%), reveals how the federal Centre sustains a de facto monolingual orientation in administrative execution even as it nominally endorses multilingual policy frameworks. This theoretical operational contradiction constitutes a central empirical contribution of the study. Taken together, these findings position the present research as an

empirical frontier model of language policy implementation. The study demonstrates that in linguistically diverse, low-resource federal contexts, the policy–practice gap is not an expression of inadequate political will but rather a structural byproduct of institutional fragmentation. The framework thereby offers a transferable analytical template for multilingual Global South nations seeking to progress beyond isolated infrastructure interventions toward integrated policy coherence. As the diagram underscores, durable reform necessitates treating language policy as a socio-political negotiation, one that demands systematic coordination across themes, sustained financial investment, and decentralized, community-embedded capacity-building mechanisms^[34].

5. Limitations of the Study

This study is subject to several methodological limitations that warrant acknowledgement. First, the findings are necessarily bounded by the three institutional contexts examined, Woldia, Injibara, and Sekota and cannot be directly generalized to teacher education settings beyond the Amhara Regional State without further empirical verification. Second, the quantitative strand relies predominantly on self-reported trainee perceptions, which may be subject to social desirability bias, potentially affecting the accuracy of responses concerning training adequacy and policy awareness. Third, the study's focus on pre-service teacher education means that the instructional practices of in-service teachers and their measurable effects on student learning outcomes were not systematically investigated. Fourth, the absence of a longitudinal research design, attributable to constraints of time, funding, and institutional access, precluded systematic tracking of policy implementation trajectories and institutional change over an extended period.

6. Future Research Directions and Recommendations

To advance understanding of language policy implementation in Ethiopia, future research should expand its geographical scope to encompass a more linguistically and ethnically diverse range of regional contexts beyond the Amhara Regional State. Longitudinal studies are particularly warranted to evaluate the sustained effects of MTB-

MLE on measurable outcomes including social cohesion, teacher retention rates, and student academic achievement. The integration of direct classroom observation protocols and standardized student assessments would additionally provide empirically grounded evidence of pedagogical effectiveness at the instructional level. Comparative research examining implementation experiences across other multilingual African nations would further provide analytically useful benchmarks against which Ethiopia's institutional performance and policy alignment may be systematically evaluated.

In light of the structural disjuncture between policy intent and institutional practice identified throughout this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Curricular and Pedagogical Reform:** Pre-service language teacher education programs require systematic revision to incorporate multilingual pedagogy, applied sociolinguistics, and classroom-based language assessment as core curricular components. Within a nationally coherent framework, individual institutions should be afforded structured autonomy to contextualize program content in accordance with regional sociolinguistic conditions. Practical training provision should be re-oriented toward supervised, community-engaged, and peer-supported learning models to strengthen the transition from theoretical preparation to applied classroom competence.
- **Resource and Infrastructure Development:** Addressing the documented 31% native-language material access rate necessitates a coordinated federal-regional funding framework. Policy priority should be directed toward the development of high-quality, linguistically accurate instructional materials across all recognized regional languages, accompanied by sustained investment in digital learning infrastructure and functional language laboratory provision.
- **Policy Coordination and Institutional Accountability:** Resolving the 70% deficit in effective federal-to-regional policy communication requires the establishment of a dedicated national coordinating body for multilingual education, with a formal mandate to align the operational activities of the Ministry of Education, regional education bureaus, and research institutions. A

structured monitoring and evaluation framework is additionally required to enable evidence-based resource allocation and systematic assessment of implementation outcomes.

- **Professional Development and Research Investment:** Strengthening the professional status of language educators through financial incentives, clearly defined career progression pathways, and formal institutional recognition is essential for improving staff retention. Targeted government research funding should be allocated to support applied investigation into multilingual classroom practice, thereby building a cumulative evidence base for the ongoing development of Ethiopia's inclusive education framework.

7. Conclusions

This study concludes that Ethiopia's language teacher education system operates within a structurally complex environment in which ambitious policy commitments are systematically constrained by institutional, financial, and communicative deficiencies at the sub-national level. While the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP VI) documents measurable institutional improvements, the present findings reveal a substantial misalignment between federal policy intent and local implementation practice, driven by inadequate funding allocations and structurally deficient inter-governmental communication channels. Unlike previous studies that characterize Ethiopia's implementation challenges as a uniform national condition, the present data delineate a pattern of hierarchical institutional disparity in which implementation outcomes are demonstrably contingent upon the infrastructural maturity, resource availability, and regional administrative capacity of individual colleges. The stark sub-national disparity in native-language textbook access—42% at Woldia compared to 15% at Sekota—empirically substantiates the argument that MTB-MLE implementation is not a uniform process but is inextricably conditioned by the specific structural variables of each institutional context. The systematic association between material resource availability and functional teacher preparedness documented in this study indicates that geographically peripheral institutions such as Sekota experience disproportionately severe pedagogical deficiencies, necessitating strategically

differentiated, localized investment rather than uniformly applied national mandates.

The qualitative findings substantively complicate the moderate quantitative satisfaction rating of 68% for training quality by identifying a curriculum design that is insufficiently responsive to the territorial linguistic specificities of each institutional context most notably the Agaw-language characteristics of the Injibara catchment area. This disjuncture between nominally adequate theoretical preparation and substantively expressed pedagogical inadequacy is further compounded by the 70% deficit in effective federal-to-regional policy communication, which constitutes a systemic constraint on localized instructional adaptation. The consistent transmission of policy directives without accompanying pedagogical guidance prevents professionally committed instructors from operationalizing the provisions of the 1994 Language Policy within their specific classroom contexts. The study therefore concludes that while Ethiopia's multilingual education policy establishes a normatively inclusive framework for linguistic equity, its sustained effectiveness is undermined by sub-national resource asymmetries, institutional fragmentation, and deficient administrative coordination. The pronounced disparity between high institutional policy awareness (55%) and critically low functional implementation readiness (28%) among teacher candidates reflects these structural conditions directly. Achieving sustainable policy implementation requires a strategic reorientation from centralized policy dissemination toward differentiated, locally embedded capacity building specifically including the decentralized development of linguistically accurate instructional materials to address the documented 31% access rate, and substantive reform of practicum provision to address the 64% dissatisfaction rate through significantly extended and adequately supervised field placement. Without territorially differentiated institutional support, Ethiopia's linguistic plurality will remain an underutilized resource rather than a realized instrument of equitable educational development and national cohesion.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Institutional review board approval was waived for this study because it focused on language policy and educational development evaluation, involving minimal risk to participants.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

AI Use Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) solely for language refinement. No AI tools were used for data analysis, interpretation, or generation of scientific content. All outputs were critically reviewed and edited by the author. The author takes full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

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