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Modernizing Amharic as a Foreign Language Pedagogy: Developing a Communicative Syllabus and Didactic Materials for Foreign Learners

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Article

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of the original script-first approach to Amharic as a Foreign Language (AFL) teaching and its impact on foreign learners' language development. While the number of individuals interested to learn Amharic is growing, specifically among diplomats and other professionals, AFL teaching continues to be based mainly on the memorization of the Fidäl alphabet and knowledge of grammar rules, which prevents learners from reaching their communicative goals. A cross-sectional mixed-methods design was used, thus making it possible to gather qualitative data from questionnaires filled in by 40 international AFL learners, semi-structured interviews with 10 AFL teachers. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis were used for quantitative data, whereas thematic analysis was employed for qualitative data. The findings suggest that Fidäl was difficult for the learners (M = 4.15), they felt relatively frustrated (M = 3.98) and they rated their communication ability (M = 2.55) and digital learning support (M = 2.48) relatively low. The correlation analysis showed significant relationships between the difficulty of the script and the level of frustration (r = 0.56) and between the difficulty of the script and the ability to communicate (r = -0.32). No causal effects are to be inferred from these associations. The findings indicate that participants perceived several limitations in the current AFL instructional approach and needs a more integrated teaching style. It suggests a mix of phonetic scaffolding, communicative language teaching, task-based learning, and digital-supported instruction. The proposed integration may provide a basis for more learner-centered and communicative AFL instruction, and bring AFL lessons up to date for students from all over the world.

1. Introduction

A significant language of Ethio-Semitic origin in the Afro-Asiatic family, Amharic plays an important role in Ethiopia in terms of culture, politics and linguistics (Smith, 2008). Amharic functions as the language of government, education, business and others in Ethiopia, because it is the working language in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Amharic has been developed in the course of historical interaction among different cultures and ethnic groups living in Ethiopia, as people from different ethnic communities have adopted Amharic as the variant used to communicate with each other (Baye, 2008). Notably, one of the features that made it significant is the fact that Ethiopia became more internationally important after its growing involvement in international affairs (Heyyi & Mekonnen, 2023).

Despite the increasing need for AFL teaching, it remains committed to conventional script-first methodology, which stresses the importance of mastering Fidäl writing system alongside formal grammar. Historically, the Ge’ez script was taught in conjunction with the traditional educational practices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, where both oral and written texts were used (Getachew, 2011). Although this tradition has helped in the preservation of the script, it has led to the introduction of the complex writing system to learners without fully developing their oral skills. Acquiring over 200 Fidäl symbols with various forms of morphological constructions at the very beginning of the learning process may present substantial learning challenges for some foreign learners, especially when they have a background in alphabetic writing systems (Heyyi & Mekonnen, 2023; Wolf, 1995).

According to some past works carried out regarding language learning, high demands put on learners in a class can negatively influence their motivation. In turn, this can limit the opportunities for effective communication (Ellis & Rod, 2020; Rastislav, 2024). In the case of AFL, the stress on script learning may be associated with a disparity between literacy skills development and communication effectiveness. Learners can master reading only but will have challenges communicating in reality due to the absence of spoken Amharic as well as lack of vocabulary and use of language in context. Moreover, the materials that are used in the process of teaching mainly focus on the formal varieties of Amharic language and ignore modern spoken forms that people use in their daily lives. This disparity can be explained by the diglossic character of various forms of Amharic used at classes and in informal life (Baye, 2008; Ferguson, 1959). Thus, the learners may know how to read, but they are not able to speak using their literacy skills in real life communication (Fang et al., 2022; Habtamu & Mendida, 2022).

The availability of standardized curricula, proficiency frameworks, and context-specific materials presents another challenge for AFL teaching. Different from other internationally taught languages, Amharic does not have widely used CEFR-aligned educational and assessment frameworks to improve learners' process of gaining knowledge (Council of Europe, 2001; Hailay & Abate, 2022). It is particularly a problem for the groups of professional specialists like diplomats, who use Amharic for specific purposes and whose jobs include communication, as well as culture and profession-related activities. Also, the involvement of technological innovations in the educational process of AFL is limited. The research into mobile-assisted language learning proves that usage of digital materials, video and interactive instruments increases learners' skills and retention (Agnes, 2012). Nevertheless, Amharic is not popular among well-known educational materials, making it impossible to access modern learning tools (Caleb et al., 2024).

Recent findings about language education reveal that learner-centered, communicative, and scaffolded approaches are crucial. Some examples of these approaches include Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), task-based learning, phonological scaffolding, and digital-supported teaching methods (Michael, 2015). These approaches are found to be effective in helping to ease cognitive loads and improve language learning and acquisition overall (Elahe & Rasoul, 2018; Hamidi & Bagherzadeh, 2018). Nevertheless, current studies on Amharic have largely studied the linguistic aspects of the language without addressing the creation of a comprehensive educational curriculum that combines literacy, pronunciation, communication, and digital learning. Little has been researched on evidence-based methods for learners from other countries needing to know Amharic functionally.

It is thus necessary to rethink the approach being used for AFL teaching and learning purposes so that it could utilize some aspects of the old script-first method and still value Amharic literacy. The research aim is to study the impact the traditional Fidäl method has on the cognitive experience of students and their communicative efficiency and devise a new teaching model that encompasses phonetic scaffolding, syllabic instruction, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), task-based approach, and some aspects of modern digital learning strategies. The study is based on the following research questions:

1. What are learners' perceptions of script difficulty, frustration, and communicative ability under the script-first instructional approach?
2. Which ways can the integrated model that includes phonetic scaffolding, syllabic instruction, and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) contribute to the bridging of the gap between the formal AFL instructions and functional communicative proficiency?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Aim, Design, and Setting

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effectiveness of the conventional script-first approach to teaching the Amharic language and explore how integrated approaches may be able to address learner-related problems such as frustration, cognitive difficulties, or lack of communicative skills. The study employed a cross-sectional mixed-methods design, which makes it possible to analyze the collected data and comparisons between qualitative and quantitative methods can be made. Within this design, quantitative data is important to document learners' perceptions, difficulties, and preferences and, at the same time, qualitative data plays a critical role when revealing deeper issues concerning the utilization of certain approaches in practice. The study took place with consideration of AFL instruction in Ethiopia, which involved international learners and AFL instructors with previous experience in Amharic language teaching and learning. The context for the research included AFL learning scenarios where traditional teaching techniques and instructional materials were employed.

2.2. Participants and Sampling Procedures

The researchers chose a blend of purposive and convenience sampling to recruit participants with some level of experience in learning AFL and AFL teaching. 40 international AFL learners took part in the quantitative phase because they fit the profile of AFL programs' target audience. These include people who need Amharic for professional, educational, diplomatic, and social communication. Moreover, the qualitative phase of the research included 10 AFL teachers. The teachers were selected based on their teaching experience in Amharic teaching to non-native speakers, with all participants possessing a minimum of five years of AFL teaching expertise. Their involvement offered an expert opinion on the matter. The sample size chosen was deemed appropriate for exploratory mixed-methods research that was undertaken to ascertain patterns in learner perceptions and develop qualitative interpretations regarding pedagogical issues. Due to an exploratory, cross-sectional character of the study and the limited population of international AFL learners, no formal statistical power computation was performed. However, the sample size was considered suitable for descriptive analysis, correlation analysis, and thematic interpretation.

2.3. Research Materials and Instruments

In order to collect the data, two methods were applied: learner questionnaire, and instructor interview guide. The learner questionnaire was made up of items on a five-point Likert scale, aimed at evaluating

learners' views on script-first instructional approach in terms of Script difficulty, Communication ability, Material relevance, Phonetic support, Digital learning, and Overall frustration. The questionnaire was validated by AFL experts and tested on a small sample of students before the data collection began. The pilot test revealed Cronbach's alpha = 0.723 reliability evidence of item clarity, reliability of responses, and viability of the method scale. The semi-structured instructor interview guide was created with the purpose of purposeful understanding of teachers' experience with AFL teaching, including the challenges connected with Learner profile, Teaching approaches, Instructional challenges, Teaching materials, and Digital resource gaps. The interviews provided the opportunity to better explain teachers' pedagogical practices.

2.4. Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected in two stages. First, flyers with the description of the research and questionnaires for learners were delivered electronically to increase the chances of participation for international learners who belong to different geographical location. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with AFL teachers.

2.5. Data Analysis

Utilization of qualitative and quantitative data analytic methods is observed. Quantitative data collected through the learner's questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Means and standard deviations were calculated to establish the degree of Script difficulty, Communication ability, Material relevance, Phonetic support, Digital learning, and Overall frustration. Pearson correlation analysis enabled the study of relationships between important variables like script difficulty, learner frustration, and communicative competence. Qualitative information was gained through instructor interviews it was analyzed through thematic analysis. The latter included coding, detection of patterns, and building codes about the identified instructional problems. Present actual themes in results were limited orientation in Learner profile, Teaching approaches, Instructional challenges, Teaching materials, and Digital resource gaps. Using the combined results of quantitative and qualitative studies one can get a full picture of challenges in the traditional AFL teaching methods and use it in the development of a holistic pedagogical model.

3. Results

The research applied both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to analyze and understand the difficulties in teaching Amharic as a Foreign Language (AFL). Quantitative data was collected from 40 different learners through surveys, which were processed and analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Pearson analysis. Descriptive statistics were used in order to understand the degree of difficulty of learners in terms of their opinion about the challenges of Script difficulty, Communication ability, Material relevance, Phonetic support, Digital learning, and Overall frustration. The qualitative data was received from a semi-structured interview with 10 AFL teachers and analyzed data of AFL teaching resources. This qualitative data was analyzed according to the Braun and

Clarke (2006) of thematic analysis. The analysis revealed significant recurrent problems such as the Learner profile, Teaching approaches, Instructional challenges, Teaching materials, and Digital resource gaps. Both quantitative and qualitative data were useful in supporting the key findings in terms of old-fashioned methods of AFL instruction and provided grounds for the development of the proposed Integrated AFL Teaching Framework.

3.1. Quantitative Result

3.1.1. Descriptive Analysis of Learner Perceptions

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the six instructional variables.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Learner Perceptions

Variable	Mean (M)	SD
Script Difficulty	4.15	0.66
Communication Ability	2.55	0.88
Material Relevance	2.83	0.71
Phonetic Support	4.05	0.71
Digital Learning	2.48	0.88
Overall Frustration	3.98	0.70

Descriptive statistics suggest variability in scores across the six instructional categories (Fig. 1). Script Difficulty had the highest average score (M = 4.15, SD = 0.66) and respondents indicated that they found Fidäl learning to be challenging. Phonetic Support also received high ratings (M = 4.05, SD = 0.71), indicating relatively high perceived value this kind of assistance during the initial stages of their learning process. Overall frustration was also high (M = 3.98, SD = 0.70). In contrast, Communication Ability (M = 2.55, SD = 0.88) and Digital Learning Support (M = 2.48, SD = 0.88) were rated much lower, suggesting that respondents felt limited ability when communicating and using digital learning support. Material Relevance was also reported relatively low (M = 2.83, SD = 0.71). However, it is worth noting that the presented results represent only the participants' viewpoints and should not be taken as direct indicators of communication efficiency.

3.1.2. Comparative Analysis

A comparison of the average scores in Fig. 2 shows that the ratings of script-related difficulty are the mean ratings were higher than the ratings of either communication abilities or digital learning support. Notably, the scores for Script Difficulty (M = 4.15), and Phonetic Support (M = 4.05), and Overall Frustration (M = 3.98) were higher than the values for Communication Ability (M = 2.55) and Digital

Learning Support (M = 2.48). While this difference in scores correlates with the responses given by the participants to the effect that learning scripts is very important in education, we cannot say that this difference in scores proves that the sequence of instruction is to blame for the slowing of communicative development. The low score for Digital Learning Support indicates that there is not enough technological support perceived by the participants, but it is not sufficient to conclude that there is a problem in the educational institution.

3.1.3. Pearson Correlation Analysis

Figure 3 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine relationships among the principal instructional variables.

According to the correlation matrix presented in Fig. 3, a fair number of weak to moderate correlations are evident between the research variables. Script Difficulty is moderately associated with Overall Frustration (r = 0.56) participants reporting greater script difficulty also tended to report greater frustration. Next, Script Difficulty has a negative correlation with Digital Learning (r = -0.44) and Communication Ability (r = -0.32), while it is positively associated with Phonetic Support (r = 0.47). Overall, these findings show that there is a connection between the experience of difficulty in reading script and communication capabilities, digital learning, and phonetic support. Communication Ability was found to be positively correlated with both Material Relevance (r = 0.36) and Digital Learning (r = 0.29), which means that those who reported better communication ability tended to perceive the learning materials and digital learning resources more positively. However, Communication Ability had a significant negative correlation with Overall Frustration (r = -0.56); this suggests that a higher perception of Communication Ability is correlated with lower levels of frustration associated with the process of learning.

Material Relevance was positively correlated with Digital Learning (r = 0.34) as well as negatively correlated with Overall Frustration (r = -0.42). This means that participants who perceived their instructional materials more relevant had a better digital learning experience and had lower overall frustration levels. Phonetic Support was positively correlated with Overall Frustration (r = 0.41), while it showed weak relations with Communication Ability (r = -0.33), Material Relevance (r = -0.18), and Digital Learning (r = -0.24). In summary, the correlation matrix indicates that the strongest observed association was between frustration and Script Difficulty (r = 0.56) and that frustration was also negatively correlated to Communication Ability (r = -0.56). Furthermore, Material Relevance showed a moderate negative correlation with Overall Frustration (r = -0.42) while Phonetic Support had a moderate positive correlation with frustration (r = 0.41). Despite the fact that these correlation coefficients indicate relationships between participants' expressed opinions, they do not imply the existence of any causal relationship. For instance, the positive relationship between Script Difficulty and Overall Frustration does not indicate that script difficulty causes frustration, nor does the positive association established between Digital Learning and Communication Ability indicate that digital learning resources lead to improvement of communication ability.

3.2. Qualitative Result

Information derived from interviews with the teachers and literature reviews was analyzed by way of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Code applications and theme developments made it possible to determine five major themes associated with teaching activities as presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Summarizes the participant teachers' responses based on the key themes

No	Theme	Main Finding	Interpretation
1	Learner Profile	• Learners prioritize practical communication	• AFL learners are primarily communication-oriented rather than academically oriented.
2	Teaching Approaches	• script-first instruction was predominant	• Participants perceived that traditional sequencing may limit early opportunities for communicative practice.
3	Instructional Challenges	• Fidäl learning as cognitively demanding	• Script complexity as affecting learner confidence and potentially slowing early progress.
4	Teaching Materials	• Materials lack communicative authenticity	• Existing textbooks inadequately represent real-world language use.
5	Digital Resource Gaps	• Limited technological support	• Lack of digital tools restricts autonomous and interactive learning.

Theme 1: Learner Profile

The interview respondents expressed the opinion that According to the data presented in Table 2 theme 1, the AFL learners were primarily adults who reported a need for practical communication rather than academic and most learners take AFL courses with the intention of acquiring skills for communication in real life. An IN4 and IN6 Amharic teachers said that:

Learners value competence that is grounded in actual communicative abilities rather than purely on academic competence. Therefore, participants noted that in developing any instruction and assessment process, the focus has to change from more traditional “academic" tests.

In addition to this, an IN2 and IN5 Amharic teachers said that:

Despite the fact that learners have a strong initial motivation, they encounter instant frustration as low proficiency prevents timely communication. Among other points, participants noted that it is necessary to use supportive and formative assessment (AFL) strategies to help overcome the first fear in learners that arise due to their low proficiency.

Theme 2: Teaching Approaches

According to the data presented in Table 2 theme 2 shows that, The interviewed instructors described teaching as predominantly teacher-centered. Even though teachers admitted that communicative methods are useful, they said that the curriculum does not always allow for the use of them and that some necessary steps have to be done before students can communicate. An IN10 and IN3 Amharic teachers said that:

The focus on teaching Fidäl first arises from strict formal conformity with the existing curriculum. The interviewees indicated that teachers follow this old order because the curriculum explicitly requires this and does not give way to other communication-related teaching methods at the beginning.

In addition to this, an IN1 and IN8 Amharic teachers said that:

Communicative approaches have been found to be very effective in practice. However, the application of communicative teaching methods is heavily impeded by institutional obstacles. Participants pointed out evidence of policy-practice gap, where rigid course books and bureaucratic limitations interfere with the teachers' intention of applying interactive methods in their language classrooms.

Theme 3: Instructional Challenges

According to the data presented in Table 2 theme 3 shows that the instructors noted that the Fidäl writing system is by far the most challenging barrier for learners. They explained that the introduction of so many characters at the early stages may make learning difficult. For instance, An IN7 and IN9 Amharic teachers said that:

An essential point of attrition occurs two months into the program due to fatigue from learning the letters repeatedly. Participants in the research stressed that this Participants reported observing early attrition/dropout among some learners is based on a mismatch between the way students and teachers see teaching and learning: students don't memorize letters and learn words at the same time.

In addition to this, an IN1 and IN6 Amharic teachers said that:

Separating early letter recognition from functional syntax erodes learners' confidence. Participants pointed out that students may learn letters, but they cannot put them together in phrases, which results in a lack of real language competence and even self-efficacy in their language skills.

Theme 4: Teaching Materials

According to the data presented in Table 2 theme 4 shows that the Participants perceived current AFL materials as insufficiently contemporary and communicative. They think that existing textbooks concentrate on formal Amharic or literary Amharic and do not give enough chances to practice spoken everyday language. An IN3 and IN4 Amharic teachers said that:

Too much emphasis is put on classical Amharic in current textbooks, resulting in a huge pedagogical gap. Participants mentioned that this scholarly focus on outdated linguistic structures completely

disregards the primary objective learner aim which is acquiring functioning contemporary communication skills for efficient daily communication.

In addition to this, an IN3 and IN7 Amharic teachers said that:

An acute deficit in interactive teaching materials significantly restricts oral output. Participants have pointed out that resource materials already in use do not provide any effective speaking tasks that would help teachers promote real communication skills and conversational practice with the learners.

Theme 5: Digital Resource Gaps

The last theme is a lack of digital learning resources. According to the data presented in Table 2 theme 5 shows that AFL learners face fewer opportunities to learn using technology when compared to students learning languages widely taught in schools such as English or French. An IN5 and IN6 Amharic teachers said that:

There is a notable lack of effective digital applications for learning Amharic. Participants pointed out that this gap in the reported shortage of digital resources may constrain opportunities for interactive learning because it leaves teachers and students without the digital tools and multimedia needed.

In addition to this, an IN6 and IN9 Amharic teachers said that:

The significance of implementing multimedia tools is worth highlighting as it promotes growth of important listening and speaking skills. The participants emphasized that the use of audio- and video-materials can greatly enhance oral-aural skills development due to its provision of real phonetic inputs essential for proper pronunciation and listening skills development.

3.3. Development of the Integrated AFL Teaching Framework

The Integrated AFL Teaching Framework, illustrated in Fig. 4, was created by bringing into play quantitative findings and reliable evidence from qualitative inquiries, as well as foreign language teaching principles. As a result, the framework serves to transform the research-derived findings into an appropriate teaching model for teaching Amharic as a Foreign Language. The quantitative findings presented the key problems faced by AFL learners in the instructional process. The learners showed the desire to develop skills in writing, which had an average score of 4.15. It was reported that learners have great phonic needs (M = 4.05) and learn in great frustration (M = 3.98). Moreover, the effectiveness of communication abilities (M = 2.55) and digital learning support (M = 2.48) was rated at a substantially lower level. The Pearson correlation analysis demonstrated a significant correlation between the level of script complexity and the degree of learning frustration (r = 0.56) and communicative capabilities (r = -0.32). The findings suggest that learners perceive the traditional instructional sequence as challenging; however, cognitive load was not directly measured for beginning learners who do not yet possess communicative skills.

The qualitative data added more detail to the quantitative findings by interpreting the factors influencing learners' experiences. All interviewed instructors reported that AFL teaching is still based on the script-centric method and that the current instructional resources focus on bookish language rather than authentic communication, and that the use of digital materials remains limited. Overall, these findings indicate that modern AFL teaching focuses on orthographic correctness instead of language proficiency. Taking into consideration the above-mentioned findings the Integrated AFL Teaching Framework consists of three interrelated components which are Input, Process, and Output.

The Input component lays the groundwork for instruction. It starts with the communication needs of the learners, links the goals of instruction to the levels of language proficiency outlined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and organizes the objectives of instruction around practical uses of the language rather than grammatical structures. The Input component is informed by CEFR proficiency descriptors.

The Process element put into action the educational techniques based on the study results. First, the most frequently used words are taught so that the learner can begin speaking right away. Phonetic scaffolding is intended to support learners during the early stages during the early learning stages due to the absence of memorization of the whole script. The lessons do not concentrate on isolated grammar but integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing into the process of learning. Fidäl instruction is introduced step-by-step together with the communicative use of language. Learners use technological support including audio and video materials, mobile applications, and online activities.

The Output element outlines the expected learning outcomes of the framework. Combining communicative pedagogy with incremental literacy training, the framework aspires to achieve educational ends of three types: communicative competence, functional literacy in Fidäl writing, and independent study through appropriate digital tools. All the three ends match the needs revealed through the quantitative and qualitative study and represent the main aims of the state-of-the-art foreign language education.

The framework is guided by the basic principles of Communicative Language Teaching (Richards, 2006; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2020), communicative competence descriptors used in the CEFR, and Cognitive Load Theory of Sweller (1988, 2011). The framework introduces the principles to applicable features of Amharic with the emphasis on the complicating factors related to acquiring the Fidäl writing system along with pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative aspects. Moreover, the framework consists of a combination of communicative exercises, phonetic assistance, and phased instruction in writing.

4. Discussion

The research assessed the perceived difficulties in Amharic as a foreign language teaching and learning by combining information from questionnaires given to students and interviews conducted with teachers. The results showed that the participants regarded the initial Fidäl instruction as challenging

and expressed relatively high levels of frustration in comparison with their low level of competitiveness in terms of communicative skills and support of learning materials. Qualitative findings indicate that the components of the instruction have a mutual relationship, including Fidäl teaching, practice of communication, learning resources, and supply of facilities. Nevertheless, the fact that the study design is cross-sectional and that the participants are the only source of information makes it impossible to conclude that traditional teaching leads to cognitive strain, frustration, and lack of communication skills.

The main finding relates to the relevance of Fidäl writing system in the early stage of teaching AFL. The participants indicated the extent of challenge they had while learning the writing system high (M = 4.15) and noted the level of frustration they experienced, too (M = 3.98), and, in addition, Pearson's correlation analysis indicated the fact that the levels of how hard it is to master Fidäl were positively correlated with the levels of frustration and negatively correlated with the levels of competence (r = .56 and r = –.32, respectively). The outcomes of this research add to the previous studies on AFL learning that were focused only on linguistic aspects of Fidäl (Gebremariam & Gedamu, 2022; Littlewood, 2014) and reveal the fact that complexity of the writing system is, no less important, an issue of instructional design. It seems possible to assume that the way the instruction is organized influences the difficulties the students face instead of the writing system itself. This assumption coincides with the ideas of Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988, 2011) which supports the idea that the process of learning becomes inefficient if the demands of the learning process exceed working memory capacity.

The results also make a significant addition to the literature related to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Prior research consistently demonstrated that CLT is effective in terms of fostering communicative competence development (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2020; Littlewood, 2014; Richards, 2006). The current findings are broadly consistent with since both learners and teachers acknowledge the importance of communicative practice in the early stages. However, findings also indicate that applying CLT to languages with complex scripts, such as Amharic, does not work without their adaptation. Specifically, teachers noted the advantages of Communicative Language Teaching but observed that institutional curricula require them to teach graduate learning of the Fidäl writing system before undergoing communicative practice. Thus, The findings suggest that CLT may need to be adapted in order to account for language features of Amharic, and phonological scaffolding and gradual writing instruction needs to be implemented starting from the initial stages of learning. This proposed adaptation may contribute to discussion of on CLT, as it proves that teaching approaches need to be based on the spelling system of the language.

The second implication has to do with phonetic scaffolding. Learners felt strongly in favor of getting support in the form of pronunciation aid (M = 4.05). Teachers reported the common use of Latin-script transliteration to ease the pronunciation process as well as classroom communication. The findings of the current study are consistent with earlier studies that show the role of instructional scaffolding in decreasing cognitive load and increasing the ability to acquire a foreign language (Abdullah et al., 2026; Kardoust, 2024; Kauffman, 2020; Klimova, 2017; Tilahun & Mezgebu, 2024). However, this research

suggests that phonetic scaffolding should be regarded as a transitional technique, not a substitution for Fidäl literacy.

The study indicates the significance of instructional materials and the role of technology in learning. The learners' feedback indicates lower figures regarding material relevance (M = 2.83) and digital support for learning (M = 2.48), while on the contrary, the instructors mention textbooks focusing only on formal written Amharic at the expense of authentic communication. Furthermore, the lack of mobile applications, audio materials, and multimedia materials gives limited opportunities for self-learning. Thus, the findings confirm the previous studies highlighting the positive influence of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) on the increase in learners' motivation, pronunciation skills, and language use (Anne & Okim, 2024; Burston, 2015; Kukulska-Hulme, 2020; Persson & Nouri, 2018). Nevertheless, unlike other research conducted for more popular languages, it is evident from the study that he findings suggest that the usefulness of technology also depends on the availability of appropriate Amharic-language resources the pedagogical aspect but also because of the availability of digital resources in the respective language, which means that there is a need to enhance digital resources for AFL when designing the curriculum.

Qualitative findings show that participants were aware of instruction issues and discussed issues related to teaching practices and teaching context. The teachers stated that they have some backing regarding meeting demands of communication/active learning approaches, while they also pointed out limitations coming from curriculum, textbooks, and assessment. The findings fit well into existing literature stating about the importance of coherence in terms of curriculum, instructional materials, assessment, and teacher development (Fullan, 2016). Accordingly, teacher training/developmental activities, review of curriculum as well as institutional support can be seen as a way out; however, the study does not aim to measure their effectiveness.

Proposed research-informed framework is the Integrated AFL Teaching Framework that combines quantitative findings, qualitative themes, and theoretical background into a teaching roadmap. The framework stresses the importance of learning needs, aims based on CEFR, gradual Fidäl instruction, phonetics, vocabulary, communicative activities, and use of technology in education. The framework serves as a basis for discussion among curriculum designers/textbook authors/educational professionals. But at the same time, its practical and effective usage should be evaluated thoroughly to make reliable statements about its effectiveness in reaching learning goals.

5. Limitations of the Study and Future Research

There are some limitations that must be taken into account when interpreting the results. First, the quantitative sample consisted of 40 AFL learners and the qualitative sample consisted of 10 AFL instructors sample sizes. The small sample size and non-probability sample restricts generalizability of the statistical conclusions of the research to other AFL contexts and educational settings. Secondly, an exploratory, cross-sectional mixed-methods design only gives an indication of the perceptions of the

subjects but does not allow conclusions regarding the changes in learning process over time or causation relations among the variables. The main quantitative measures in this study were self-reported perceptions and not direct measures of communicative competence, development of reading and writing skills, cognitive load, motivation and success in learning. Therefore, the answers in the self-report could be subject to the influence of recall, interpretation or social-desirability. Thirdly, the correlation analysis shows that there are associations between the variables but does not provide any direction or causation in the relations found. Also, inferential significance and confidence intervals were not reported so the coefficients should be interpreted carefully. Fifth, the study did not implement or compare the Integrated AFL Teaching Framework with the traditional scripted approach. Therefore, the effectiveness of the new framework is still a hypothesis and term. Additionally, the study took place in Ethiopia, which limits its scope and application in other contexts like different student populations, curricula, and teacher training resources. Future research should be carried out with larger and more diverse subjects, appropriate practical measures, and longitudinal studies to investigate the degree of increase in students' communicativeness, literacy, motivation, and use of technology in education.

5. Conclusion

The pedagogical difficulties experienced in teaching Amharic as a Foreign Language (AFL) were evaluated with the help of student questionnaires and teacher interviews which have pointed to the learners reporting relatively high levels of frustration by the initial learning of Fidäl as well as the participants’ ability to communicate in AFL and the effectiveness of digital means used in the learning process being rated lower than expected. Despite the positive correlation between the perceived difficulty of the writing system, frustration levels, and communicative competence, it cannot be confirmed that teaching the writing system first leads to cognitive overload, thus confirming the need for evidence-based recommendations.

The main advancement presented in this research study is the proposition of an Integrated AFL Teaching Framework, which is based on the research results and relies on theories, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and Cognitive Load Theory. This framework structures language instruction in accordance with the learners' needs and uses the principles of common vocabulary, gradual Fidäl teaching, tools to encourage speaking, phonetic attention to pronunciation, and technological tools for their learning. The results of the research do not suggest that the new framework is efficient for improving learning outcomes; rather, it defines the framework as an idea supported by theory and careful empirical research.

Framework provides a research-informed basis for the curriculum designer, textbook writers, teacher trainers, and those making decisions in the education sector in designing a program of AFL, which is learner-centered, technology-supported, and in line with the CEFR. Further investigations are needed to check the impact of the framework. Experiments and long-term studies conducted involving various and more numerous groups of learners can be run in future.

Abbreviations

AFL
Amharic as a Foreign Language
CEFR
Common European Framework of Reference
CLT
Communicative Language Teaching
IN
Instructor
M
Mean
MALL
Mobile-Assisted Language Learning
SD
Standard Division

Declarations

Ethical Approval

The study was ethically approved by the Department of Language and Literature-Amharic research ethics committee, Woldia University, with the approval/reference number DLLA0145 dated 02/05/2025. The study was conducted according to the ethical principles and institutional requirements applicable to research with human participants. All procedures involving human participants were in compliance with the relevant institutional ethical guidelines and regulations.

Informed Consent

All participants gave informed consent before participating in the study. The participants were told the purpose and procedures of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, their right to refuse participation or to withdraw, as appropriate, and the intended use of the information collected for research purposes. Participant confidentiality and privacy was maintained during data collection, analysis and reporting.

Clinical Trial Number:

Not Applicable.

Author Contribution

The design of the research study, conducting the literature review, the development of research instruments, collection of qualitative and quantitative data, and interpretation of the results were also done by G.E.R. The author approved the final version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to extend heartfelt appreciation to all those who contributed to the success of this research.

Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available in the supplementary information files of this article.

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Figures

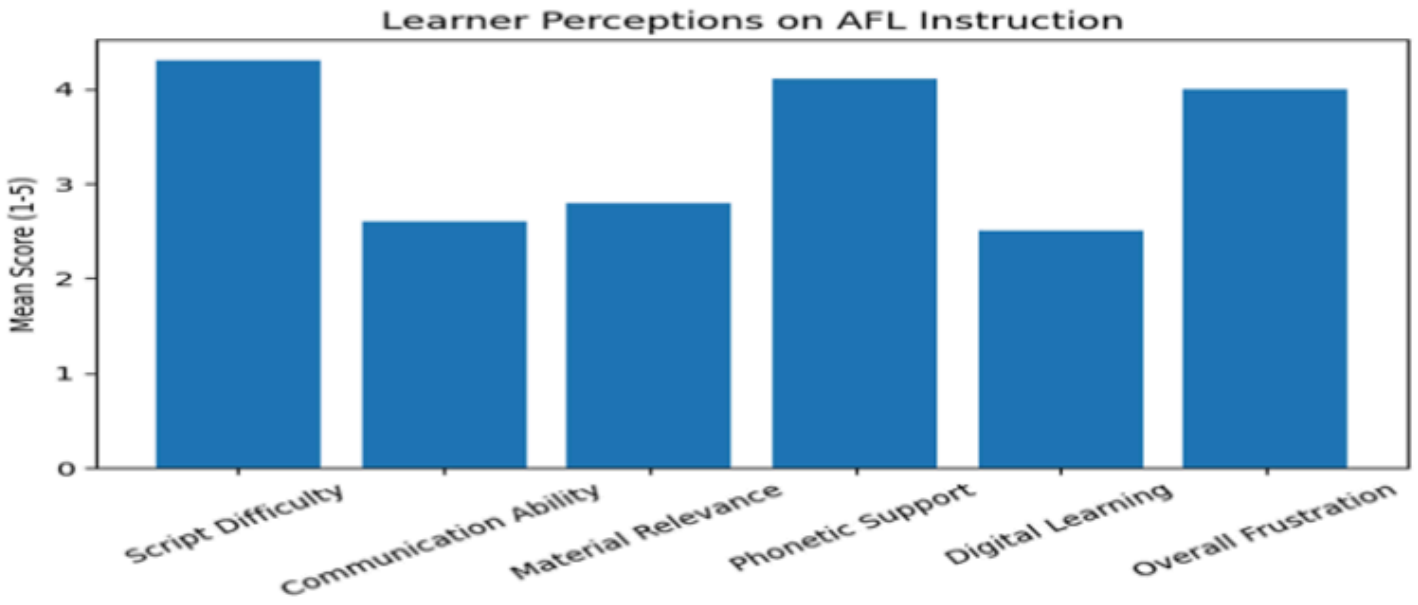


Figure 1

Bar chart showing means scores for all six variables

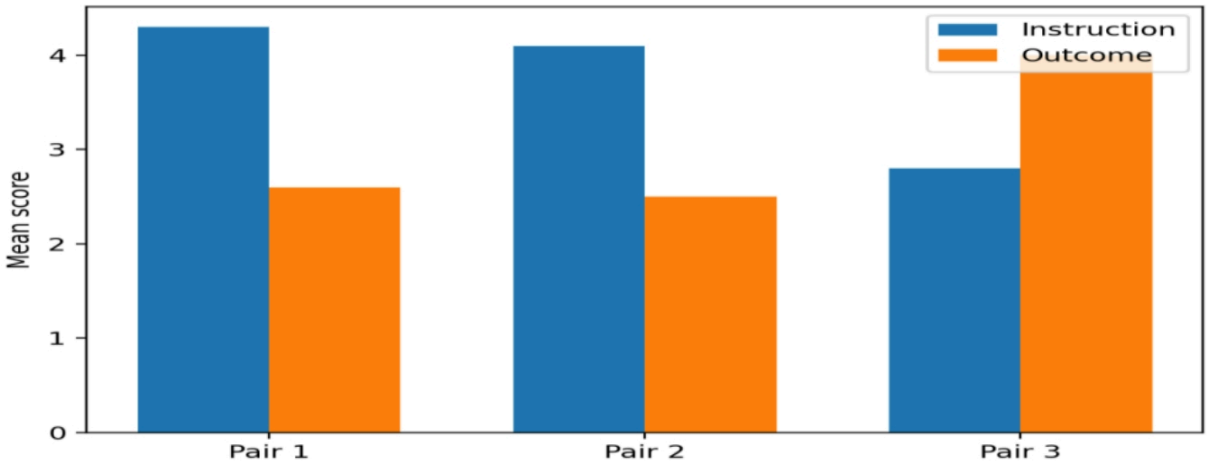


Figure 2

Clustered column chart comparing instructional variables (Script Difficulty, Phonetic Support, and Material Relevance) with learning outcome variables (Communication Ability, Digital Learning, Overall Frustration)

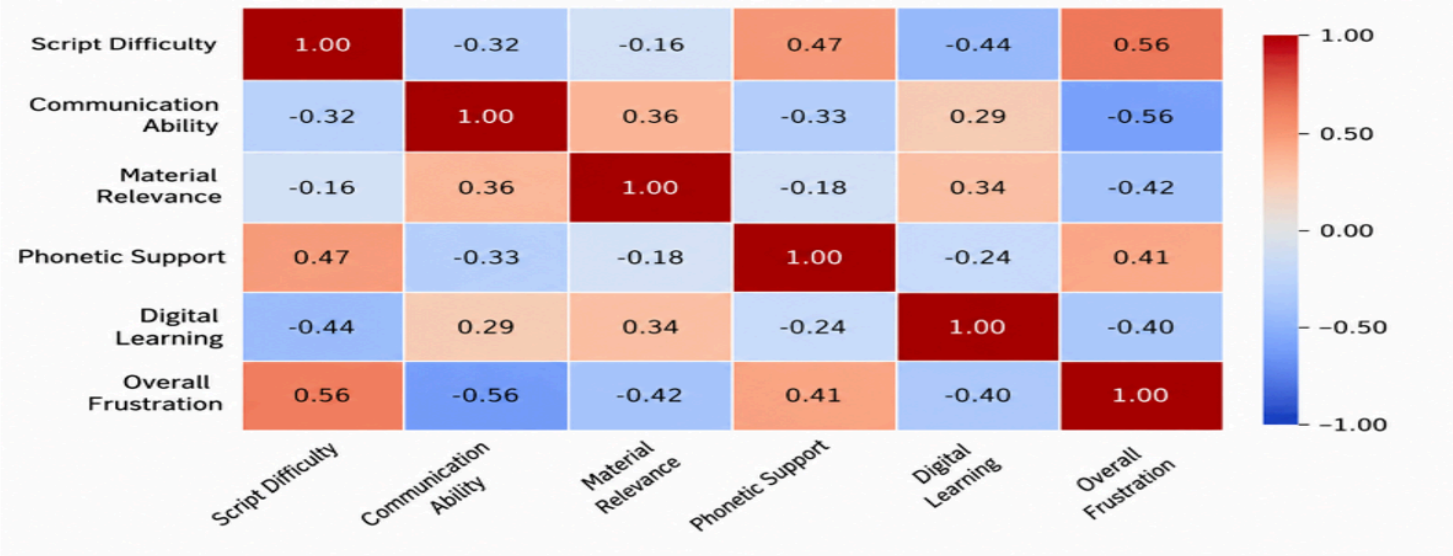


Figure 3

Correlation heat map displaying the Pearson correlation coefficients among the six variables

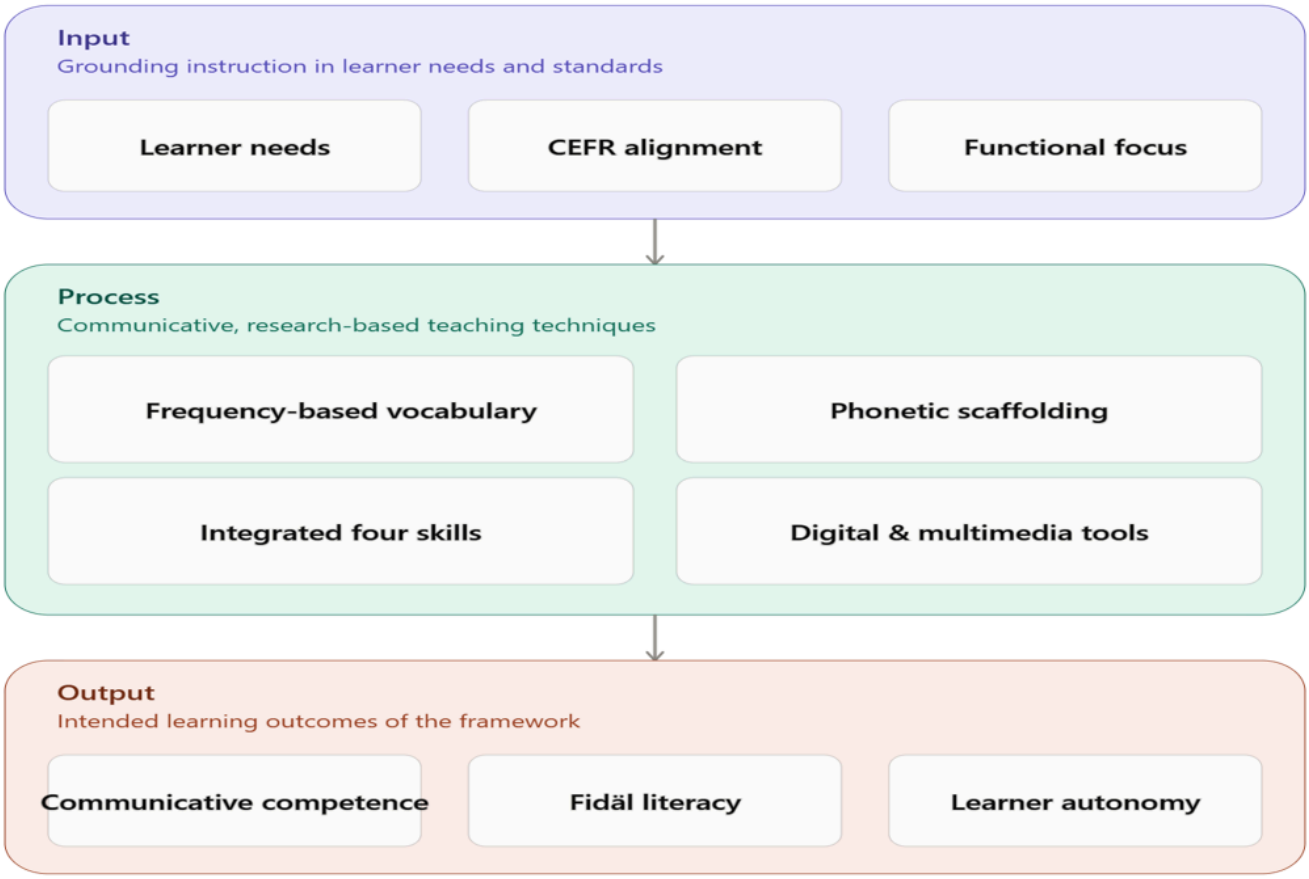


Figure 4

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- RawandProcesseddataforSupplementaryFile1.xlsx
- SampleLessonUnitforSupplementaryFile4.docx
- VariabledetailsandFormulaeforSupplementaryFile2.docx
- surveyinstrumentsandprotocolsforSupplementaryFile3.docx