



EFL Teachers' Views about The Application of Collaborative Learning at Addis Ababa Science and Technology University, Ethiopia

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate teachers' views about the implementation of collaborative learning in English classes. Collaborative learning helps students to improve their English language performance. The data was collected through observation, questionnaires, and interview. The quantitative data were analyzed using percentage and frequency. Theme analysis technique was used to analyze the qualitative data. The result of the study indicated that most EFL teachers widely implement students' collaborative learning, but the type of collaborative learning they are implementing is not collaborative group learning. Most of the teachers simply make their students to sit side by side to talk with each other as they do their individual assignments, and some teachers assign a task to groups. Then, one or two of the group members do the work and the other group members get equal credit. Although each of these is important in collaborative learning, they do not qualify collaborative learning rather traditional group learning. The data obtained from teachers' interview revealed that teachers widely implement both informal and base group collaborative learning since most of the teachers allow their students to work collaborative from few minutes to a class period and most of the groups ('Net works') formed are with stable membership for the semester. In addition to this, some teachers were not playing their roles as they are expected. Teachers and other concerned bodies ought to deliver sorts of orientations to the students about the importance of collaborative learning to maximize their views before implementing collaborative learning.

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Introduction

The idea of collaborative learning was imported from England to a Lancastrian school in New York, where Joseph Lancaster and Andrew Bell championed it in the late 1700s. The technique continued to be employed during the common school movement in the 1800s. Colonel Francis Parker, superintendent of public schools at Quincy, Massachusetts, from 1875 to 1880, was known for his belief in collaborative learning and a democratic classroom atmosphere where student individuality was valued (De Hei *et al.*, 2015; Baker, 2015; Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1993) as cited in Putnam (1997). Another education philosopher and reformer who promoted collaborative learning and incorporated it into his "Project Method" of instruction emphasized democratic, egalitarian curriculum measures (Almajed *et al.* 2016; Dewey (1943). They believed education should not stress lectures and teachers but focus on experience and students.

The communicative language teaching marks the beginning of a major paradigm shift within language teaching in the twentieth century, one whose ramifications continue to be felt today (Le, *et al.*, 2018; Richards and Rogers, 2001). Although collaborative language



learning originates outside of language teaching, it is compatible with many of the assumptions of communicative language teaching. It has become a popular and relatively uncontroversial approach to organizing classroom teaching in many parts of the world.

As Putnam (1997), Scager *et.al* (2016) and Pardede (2020) state, collaborative learning have emerged as a powerful method for fostering children's achievement and socio-personal development in today's heterogeneous classroom. *Collaborative learning* is a successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is responsible for not only learning what is taught but also for helping teammates to learn by creating an atmosphere. As Jakobs (1988, p.97) states, "Through collaborative learning sound language learning becomes sound education as well.", consequently, studying university EFL teachers' views about the implementation of collaborative learning is worthwhile to see whether they have enough awareness to implement it or not. EFL teachers are expected to have a positive feeling about the implementation of collaborative learning, give a dominant role to their students and facilitate students' learning by allowing them to work collaboratively together, creating a conducive atmosphere that encourages students' active participation in completing a task and following procedures that maximize student achievement as the attainment of the goals of teaching English as a foreign language

In Ethiopia, some researchers have conducted their study on the implementation of group work at secondary school and university levels. For example, Birhanu G/Michael (2000) and MoE (2021) tried to see cooperative learning focusing on group work organization of grade eleven, Seifu W/yohhanes (2005) conducted a study to assess the implementation of group activities, Wondwosen Tesfamichael (2008) conducted a study to assess oral group lessons in promoting cooperative learning focusing on group work organization in grade eleven, Almirew G/mariam (1992) conducted a study to explore EFL teachers role in implementing group work. However, no one has conducted a study to assess EFL teachers' views about implementing collaborative learning. Therefore, the researcher was interested in assessing university EFL teachers' views about implementing collaborative learning at Addis Ababa Science and Technology University. The main reason was that students at university are expected to be helped by teachers to be collaborators, critical thinkers, problem solvers, and negotiators to help them effectively in helping the community after they graduate in the business world (Lane, 2016; Jacobs et al., 2016; Woolley et al., 2015).

In Ethiopian universities, even though EFL teachers attempt to employ collaborative learning, it was stated that they fail to interact successfully (Birhanu, 2000). This may be due to their negative views about the implementation of it. Based on those assumptions, the researcher is inspired to assess EFL teachers' views about the implementation of collaborative learning. The general objective of this study was to assess EFL teachers' views about the implementation of collaborative learning. The specific objectives of this study include the following points; to assess the types of collaborative learning that EFL teachers employ during collaborative learning, to investigate classroom activities that teachers employ to deliver their subject, to assess teachers' roles during collaborative learning, and to identify teachers' reaction (attitude) about the implementation of collaborative learning.



Research Method

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches because the researcher was interested in assessing EFL teachers' views about the implementation of collaborative learning, the type(s) of collaborative learning they apply for their roles during collaborative learning and the classroom activities they employ during collaborative learning. The study was conducted at Addis Ababa Science and Technology University, with special reference to EFL teachers and first-year pre-engineering students. The researcher used questionnaires, interviews and classroom observation to collect data from the respondents.

The questionnaire was extremely flexible and can be used to gather information on almost any topic involving large or small numbers of people (Abiy *et al.*, 2009). Questionnaires were prepared for teachers. The questionnaires contained both close-ended and open-ended questions. The main purpose of the open-ended questions was to elicit more information from the concerned research participants. That is because open-ended questions can provide a wealth of information since respondents feel comfortable expressing their feelings and opinions (Ranjit, 1996; Lane, 2016). The items in this tool were designed in line with the study objectives, review of related literature and research questions. Classroom observation was conducted to check whether teachers play their roles during the implementation of collaborative learning in response to the questionnaire in the classroom while the actual class lesson was going on. To avoid the potential personal bias that might occur in the meaning given to what was being observed, the observation was conducted by the researcher and one EFL teacher as a co-observer.

The purpose of the interview was to substantiate the result obtained from the questionnaire and classroom observation, to obtain greater depth of information, free and flexible responses and to get information concerning feeling, attitude or emotion to certain questions, which are not possible through questionnaire and classroom observation (Koul, 1984 and Selinger and shohamy, 1988) as cited in Wondwosen (2008). The interview questions were prepared similarly to the questionnaire. It was comprised of structured interviews. Because structured interview maximizes reliability and is easier to classify and quantify (Abiy, *et al.* 2009). Along with the co observer, the researcher observed each classroom two times and put () for activities that were practiced and (X) for activities that were not practiced. Second, the questionnaires were administered to a sample of 10 teachers. Then, the researcher did the distribution of the questionnaire. Third, three randomly selected teachers were interviewed.

This descriptive survey study used quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods because quantitative and qualitative data were gathered. The quantitative data were treated by counting and converting the tallies into percentages and explaining that in line with the research objectives. Mean values were also used to analyze and interpret data regarding teachers' attitudes, roles and classroom activities they employed during the implementation of collaborative learning. In short, the data gathered through interviews and observations were described qualitatively to support the data gathered through questionnaire. Finally, the findings obtained using these tools were summarized and concluded. Recommendations were also given based on the conclusions that were drawn.

Results and Discussion

In this section, an attempt has been made to analyze and interpret the data gathered from EFL teachers of Addis Ababa Science and Technology. Three data gathering tools were



used. These were questionnaire, interview and observation. Accordingly, data obtained from these tools were interactively presented and analyzed in the following organizational scheme.

- Teachers’ understanding and experience about the implementation of collaborative learning
- Teachers’ attitude about the implementation of collaborative learning
- Teachers’ roles during the implementation of collaborative learning
- Classroom activities that teachers employ to deliver their subject

The data were discussed in the order they are put above. In addition, the data gathered through the three tools were presented in any order as relevant.

Table 1. Responses for teachers’ and students’ understanding and experience towards the implementation of cooperative learning

No	Item	Variables	f	%
1.	What type (s) of teaching do you widely implement during your teaching?	Competitive learning	-	-
		Collaborative group learning	9	90
		Individualistic learning	1	10

As can be seen from Table 1 above, with regard to item 1, 9 (90%) of the teachers said they widely implement collaborative group learning but 1 of them said he/she widely implements individualistic learning, but none of the respondents said he/she implements competitive learning. Research also shows that collaborative group learning has emerged as powerful method for fostering students’ achievement and socio-personal development in today’s heterogeneous classroom, and students learn the most when the work cooperatively (Putnam, 1997; Chandra, 2017; Gillies, 2016).

With regard to the question of how they implement collaborative group learning in their classroom? Most of the teacher respondents said they make their students sit side by side to talk with each other as they do their individual assignments. Some of the respondents said they assign a task to groups then one or two of the group members do the work and the other group members get equal credit, but one teacher said he/she makes his/her students work together toward a common goal.

Similarly, T₁ in the interview, states:

There are separate and constant groups with around 6 to 12 members in each ‘Network’, I give each group a task to discuss with their group members, and then the group leader presents what they have discussed, in front of his classmates.

Contrary to this, collaboration is not having students sit side by side at the same table to talk with each other, not assigning a report to a group of students where one student does the work and the other put their names on the product (Johnson and Johnson, 1987; Altun, 2015; Buchs, *et al.* 2017).

Table-2

No	Item	Variables	f	%
2.	Do you think your students are interested to work with their classmates during collaborative learning?	Yes	7	70
		No	3	30

Regarding to item 2, 7 (70%) of the teacher respondents replied yes, but 3 (30%) of them replied no. However, in the observed sections, it was seen that most of the students were not participating actively during group discussion; working collaboratively with their group members rather they were disturbing the class. Thus, they were not interested to work collaboratively with their group members.



In a similar way, T2, in the interview commented that:

Some students come to school without textbook, they fear to speak in front of their classmates; they have no interest to discuss with their classmates during cooperative learning.

Table-3

No	Item	Variables	f	%
3.	Do you have an interest to implement collaborative learning?	Yes	10	100
		No	-	-

As can be seen from Table-3 above, with regard to item 3, all of the teachers said they have an interest to implement cooperative learning. With regard to the question how often do you implement collaborative learning in your classroom?. Majority, 9 of the respondents (i.e. 90%) of them replied most of the time, but one of them said sometimes. This implies that majority of the teachers (i.e. 90%) of them mostly implement collaborative learning in the classroom.

Table-4

No	Item	Variables	f	%
4.	What type (s) of collaborative group learning do you mostly implement in your classroom?	Formal (which lasts from one class period to several weeks)	4	40
		Informal (which lasts from few minutes to a class period)	3	30
		Base group (lasts for at least a year)	3	30

As can be indicate from Table-4 above, regarding item 4, 3 (30%) of the teacher respondents said they mostly implement informal collaborative group learning and 4 (40%) of them mostly implement formal collaborative group learning. In addition, 3 (30%) of them implement base group collaborative learning. The same is true, T3 in the interview said,

“...most probably informal, because most of the time I allow my students to work cooperatively ten to twenty minutes per a period...”

Contrary to this, T1 and T2 in the interview confirmed that:

“Base group collaborative learning. Because, each ‘Net Work’ is with stable membership throughout the semester.”

Table-5

No	Item	Variables	f	%
5.	What type (s) of groups do you form while you are implementing collaborative group learning?	Heterogeneous (students with different ability)	10	100
		homogeneous (students with the same ability)	-	-

As can be indicated from Table-5 above regarding item 5, all of the teacher respondents stated they form groups with different ability. In addition, one teacher interviewee stated:

There is a constant ‘Net Work’ with high, medium and low achiever students and one group leader, who can help his group members to do the tasks given.

Contrary to this, the researcher has observed that there were some groups, which are composed of students with the same ability, like student-selected groups. Contrary to this, according to Putnam (1987) and Wyman and Watson (2020) most teachers employ group-learning strategies: however, many forms of group learning do not qualify as collaborative learning. Student-selected groups characterize collaborative group learning characterized by heterogeneous groups, but traditional group learning.



Table 6. Responses for classroom activities (methods of collaborative learning) that teachers employ to deliver their subject

Scale value	Statements		Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Not at all	Total	Mean
Item		Fr.and %							
1.	Jigsaw (groups with five students are set up. Each member is assigned some unique materials to learn and then to teach to his or her group member).	F	7	1	1	1	-	10	4.4
		%	70	10	10	10	-	100	
2.	Think-pair-share (during the first step individuals think silently about a question, then pair up and finally share their responses with each other)	F	2	-	6	2	-	10	3.2
		%	20	-	60	20	-	100	
3.	Three-step-interview (each member chooses a partner, then interviews his/her partner then reverse their roles and finally share their partners' response).	F	2	-	2	2	4	10	2.4
		%	20	-	20	20	40	100	
4.	Round-Robin-Brainstorming (class is divided into small groups with one person appointed as a reorder)	F	2	3	5	-	-	10	3.7
		%	20	30	50	-	-	100	
5.	Three-minute-review (teachers stop any time during lecture and give teams three minutes to review what has been said)	F	-	4	4	-	2	10	3.0
		%	-	40	40	-	20	100	
6.	Numbered-Heads-Together (teams of four is established each member is given numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 then the teacher calls out two numbers to answer the question)	F	2	2	2	-	4	10	2.8
		%	20	20	20	-	40	100	
7	Circle-the-sage (students with special knowledge stand and spread out in the classroom and the rest of the classmates surround them)	F	5	1	-	1	3	100	3.4
		%	50	10	-	10	30	10	



8.	Team-Pair-solo (students do problems first as a team, then with partner and finally on their own)	F	2	3	4		1	10	3.5
		%	20	30	40		10	100	
9.	Partners (the class is divided in to teams of four, partners move to one side of the room and half of each team is given an assignment to master and to be able to team the other half)	F	2	1	4	3	-	10	3.2
		%	20	10	40	30	-	100	

As can be seen from Table 17 item 1 above, 7 (70%) of the teachers mostly use Jigsaw, 1 teacher uses it *always*, 1 teacher uses it *sometimes* and 1 teacher uses it *rarely*. Thus, they use Jigsaw method most of the time. In addition, the mean value shows that teachers mostly deliver Jigsaw method. Concerning to item 2, 6 (60%) of the teachers use think-pair share method use *sometimes*, 2 (20%) of them use it *always*, and 2 (20%) of them use it *rarely*. In other words, most of the teachers sometimes use think pair-share method, because the mean value inclines to sometimes (i.e. 3.2).

As can be indicated from item 3, 4 (40%) of the teachers do not use three-step-interview method, 2 (20%) of them use it *sometimes*, 2 (20%) of them use it rarely and 2 (20%) of them use it *always*. From this, we can say most of the teachers rarely use three-step-interview method. With regard to item 4, 5(50%) of the teachers *sometimes* use Round-Robin-Brainstorming, 3 (30%) of them use it *mostly* and 2 (20%) of them use it *always*. Thus, half of the teachers *mostly* use round-Robin-Brainstorming method, since the mean value is 3.7.

Regarding to the fifth classroom activity (method), 4 (40%) of the teachers use it mostly, 4 (40%) of them use it *sometimes* and 2 (20%) of them do not use it at all. In other words, most of the teachers *sometimes* use three-minute-review method of collaborative learning, since the mean value is 3.0. With regard to the sixth item, 4 (40%) of the teachers do not use it at all, 2 (20%) of them use it *sometimes*, 2 (20%) of them use it *mostly*, and 2 (20%) of them use it *always*, as the mean value inclines to *sometimes* (i.e. 2.8).

Concerning to item, 7 (50%) of the teachers said that they use it *always*, 3 (30%) of them do not use it, 1 of them uses it *mostly* and 1 of them uses it *rarely*. The mean value also inclines to *sometimes* (i.e. 3.4). With regard to item 8, 3 (30%) of the teachers employ team-pair-solo method *mostly*; 4 (40%) of them use it *sometimes*; 2 (20%) of them use it *always* and 1 of them does not use it *at all*. Thus, most of the teachers *mostly* employ team-pair-solo method of collaborative learning.

As can be indicated from item 9, 4 (40%) of the teachers employ partners sometimes, 3 (30%) of rarely, 2 (20%) of them always and 1 of them mostly. And the mean value shows us teachers employ it sometimes, (i.e. 3.2). Even though EFL teachers have positive attitude about collaborative learning, they are not clear with how to implement it, what roles to play during the implementation, what type (s) of collaborative learning to implement, what type (s) of classroom activities (methods of collaborative learning) to employ and the difference between collaborative learning and traditional group learning. This finding is similar with the findings of (Moges, 2019; Baker, 2015; Gregersen-Hermans, 2017; Pardede, 2020; Hei *et al.* 2020).



Although numerous research findings which are established the enormous potential impact of teachers' view about the role and type of collaborative learning to improve students' language performance, it is unlikely that such results will take place on a large scale unless both teachers and students agree and practice collaborative learning in EFL classes. To agree or disagree to a phenomenon can be based on teachers' view of implementing collaborative learning in English language classes. As a result, knowledgeable and experienced people are likely to influence their environment for change. In the same way, if students are exposed to certain learning/teaching situations, they are likely to act or react to the situation based on their experiences and knowledge. For that reason, the interplay between the EFL teacher's view about applying collaborative learning to help students improve their English language performance and action lead to improved outcome(s) in the teaching-learning processes of English language skills.

Conclusion

The study results conclude that most EFL teachers widely implement students' group learning. However, the type of group learning they are implementing is not collaborative group learning, i.e., traditional group learning, because most teachers make their students sit side by side to talk with each other as they do their individual assignments. Some teachers assign a task to groups. Then, one or two group members do the work, and the other group members get equal credit. Although each is important in collaborative learning, they do not qualify as collaborative group learning but rather traditional group learning.

The data obtained from teachers' interviews revealed that teachers widely implement both informal and base group collaborative learning since most of the teachers allow their students to work collaboratively for few minutes to a class period and most of the groups ('Net works') formed are with stable membership for the semester. In addition to this, some teachers were not playing their roles as they expected. For example, they do not arrange the class into small groups and evaluate their student's achievement at the end of the lesson, despite encouraging their students' participation.

Recommendation

First, since most of the teachers are not clear with the difference between traditional group learning and collaborative group learning, they should use different opportunities to train themselves on the principles of collaborative learning, how to implement it, what roles to play, what types collaborative learning and classroom activities to employ by relating to the instructional objectives designed. As a result, they can implement it effectively and appropriately.

Second, since some teachers lack practical knowledge of how to implement collaborative learning, they should be given training on how to implement collaborative learning. Third, teachers and other concerned bodies ought to deliver sorts of orientations to the students about the importance of collaborative learning to maximize their views before implementing it. Fourth, course designers should aim to build students' interest. This can be done by providing interesting and motivating classroom activities, which necessarily appeal to students' age, interest and level of understanding.



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