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An Exploration of EFL Teachers' Perception in Implementing Cooperative Language Learning: Shashemene Secondary School in Focus

Kefyalew Woreta Haile

Faculty of Social Science and Humanities
Department of English Language and Literature
Wolayita Sodo University; Ethiopia

Abstract:

The study aimed at exploring grade ten English language teachers' Perceptions in implementing cooperative learning strategy in EFL classroom. To achieve the intended objective of the study, descriptive survey research design was employed. Questionnaire and interview were employed for all 8 English language teachers by using comprehensive sampling methods. Eight sections were selected randomly for classroom observation. The data collected from questionnaire were analyzed and interpreted using percentage and frequency in the table and the results of interview, open-ended questionnaire and classroom observation were analyzed qualitatively. The result of the study revealed that teachers have good understanding about the benefits of CLLS, however, their implementation were not compatible with their understanding. Moreover, lack of scientific and practical training, absence of information, lack of sufficient authentic teaching materials, lack of students' interest and large class size were the hindrances that contributed for teachers' negative perceptions and ineffectiveness regarding CLLS.

Key Terms: Cooperative Language Learning, EFL Teachers' Perceptions

1. Introduction

Many educational officers', academicians and educational policy makers in Ethiopia have been listened complaining about the students' language proficiency and academic performances frequently. They believe that students are not well taught in a way that helps them to develop linguistic and communicative competencies though English language has been taught as a medium of instruction starting from grade nine to university levels all over the country. It also taught as a subject starting from grade one to eight almost for all students in the country after 1994. To overcome such a claim and improve students' language improvement and linguistic competency, various scholars and researchers both internationally and nationally proposed CLLS as one of decisive modern language teaching which helps students to learn the language in a natural context and developed their language and social skills. Scholars believed that cooperative

learning strategy serves as an appropriate and promising language teaching and learning strategy so as to measure the effectiveness of language teaching and learning. It is also helpful in providing students with the skills of collaborating, cooperating, sharing and socializing. Soraya asserted that language is best learned when students are interacting with each other into certain heterogeneous groups to complete certain tasks and contents in real life context(13).

Therefore, in order to attain quality education in Ethiopian primary, secondary and tertiary education in the country, the Ministry of Education launched the one-to-five cooperative learning since 2011. This method is introduced to be implemented throughout the country's secondary, preparatory school and tertiary/university level. It is also designed with the assumption that an academically gifted and good performing student becomes a group leader and helps other medium and low performing students to achieve common learning outcomes in their academic careers.

However, in the Ethiopian situation, only attempts have been made to implement cooperative language learning through one-to-five grouping and its implementation has been affected by different variables. Of these, teachers and students perception seems to contribute for its ineffectiveness. Hence, this study will focus on exploring teachers' perceptions and their experience in implementing one-to-five cooperating learning in English language classroom in Shashemene Secondary school; Oromia Region.

2. Statement of the Problem

Researchers have proved that due to traditional teaching practiced by many of EFL teachers in Ethiopia and in many countries around the world, many of students at various levels have difficulties in using the four language skills. Abebe, explains that Ethiopian students do not possess sufficient English well to express their ideas and thoughts. They even fail to communicate orally and understand what they hear from their teachers or read in their textbooks, though, they started to learn English as a subject for more than decades (3). Thus, to address such difficulty, it seems reasonable and crucial to introduce cooperative learning strategy in EFL classes. Michael J, Lawson, argue that one way to implement high levels of interaction among students, and improve their communication, social and inter-dependent skills, it is unquestionable to implement cooperative learning strategy regardless of students grade levels and social backgrounds (19).

Hence, the researcher has informally discussed with EFL teachers and students about CLL to get some information. Most of EFL teachers in Ethiopian context are still observed less effective in implementing one-to-five cooperative learning strategies in their classroom; though, the ministry of education and other educational officers made an announcement about its benefit and implementation frequently. Many of grade ten English language teachers in different teaching positions seem not to believe in the validity of cooperative education or they are not sure that they could have the skills to implement it effectively. Therefore, to investigate why teachers resist and less effective in implementing one-to-five cooperative teaching and learning strategy in the classroom were the researcher's main objectives and fill the gaps that hindered their effectiveness.

3. Objectives of the study

3.1. General objective

The general objective of this study was mainly focused on assessing perceptions of Grade ten (10) English language teachers implementing one-to-five cooperative language teaching and learning strategy in improving students' language and social skills.

3.2. Specific Objective

1. To identify EFL teachers' perceptions in implementing cooperative learning strategy in their English classes.
2. To explore factors influencing EFL teachers' during the implementation of CL strategy in English classroom.

4. Research Questions

1. How do grade ten EFL teachers perceive cooperative learning strategy in their English language classroom?
2. What are the hindrances EFL teacher's faces during the implementation of cooperative learning in their language classroom?

5. Research Methods and Design

The researcher used a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research design as the study was descriptive survey. This research design was used because it is appropriate method and technique to exploring grade ten English language teachers' perceptions and their engagement in implementing one-to-five cooperative learning in their classroom. It also provides opportunities for the researcher to collect and describe numerical and non-numerical data.

6. Population and Sampling

The participants of the study were grade ten (10) English language teachers in the selected school in the year 2016 G.C. In order to collect data, different sampling techniques were used to determine the sample size of teachers. The total number of English language teachers who had been teaching English in grade 10 was 18. All of them were selected to fill the questionnaire and for face-to-face interview by using comprehensive sampling techniques. Furthermore, 8 sections were selected randomly for actual classroom observation and each section was observed four times each based on the arranged class schedules.

7. Instruments of Data Collection and Procedures

In order to gather reliable information for the study, the researcher used questionnaire, interview, and classroom observation as an instrument for data gathering purpose.

7.1. Questionnaire

Questionnaire is important data gathering tool because it helps to collect data from a large number of participants. Hence, with respect to teachers' perceptions and their engagements in implementing cooperative learning in EFL class rooms, both open-ended and close-ended types were prepared and distributed for sample teachers. Pilot testing was carried out before preparing and administering the questionnaire.

7.2. Interview

Cathrine, suggested that the main reason of using interviewing is to obtain participants' attitudes, perceptions, values, and behaviors and experiences and their views about cooperating teaching and learning strategy in depth. To achieve such purposes the researcher was designed semi-structured interview to pleat data regarding grade ten EFL teachers' perceptions, views and experiences in implementing one-to-five cooperative networking strategy in their classroom (88).

7.3. Observation

The main purpose of actual classroom observation was to get information about the teaching-learning process and to see how grade ten English language teachers implement one-to-five cooperative language learning strategy and to observe how well they are effective in implementing it and work on students language development. Moreover, this tool is also appropriate to collect qualitative data that will allow the researcher to validate what has been responded in the questionnaire and interview and what actually takes place in the actual

classroom teaching learning process. During each classroom observation, standardized observation checklist adopted from scholars which is attached in the appendix was used.

8. Procedures of Data Collection and Analysis

After developing the research tools and get prepared for final distributions, all grade ten English language teachers were organized in to a school meeting hall during morning break time and have given brief information about what they were expected to do, the research purposes and about their confidentiality. Following this, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to the sample teachers at the same times. Then after, face-to-face interview was carried out. To make the data more reliable, audio record was used and each teacher's data was recorded. Finally, classroom observations were conducted and each observed teacher's data was recorded independently by using observation check-list.

In the process of analyzing the collected data from the three research tools, different procedures were carried out. The data collected through the questionnaires were organized under similar characteristics and interpreted and analyzed quantitatively by using percentage and frequency under their respective tables. On the other hand, the data gained through interview and classroom observations were organized in different parts and summarized, interpreted and discussed descriptively in words.

9. Data Presentations and Discussions

The data collected from the three research tools were discussed and analyzed in the preceding sections as presented below. The main purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of grade ten EFL teachers and their experiences, short come during the implementation of one-to-five cooperative language learning strategy. Therefore, respondents' perception with regard to cooperative language learning strategies, challenges they confront and their understanding about cooperative learning are presented in the tables below.

9.1. Data Analysis of Teachers' Questionnaire

Table 1: Teachers' response regarding their understanding, experience, with regard to CLLS

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<i>No</i>	<i>Item Description</i>	<i>Options</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>TF</i>	<i>%</i>
1	Do you have any concept regarding one-to-five CLLS?	Yes	15	18	83.3
		No	3		16.7
	Total	100			
2	Do you use one-to-five CLLS as one alternative teaching method in your language classroom to improve your students' language skills?	Yes	5	18	27.7
		No	13		72.3
	Total	100			
3	If Your answer for question number '2' is, 'yes' how often do you use in your classroom?	Always	3	18	16.6
		Sometimes	8		44.4
		Rarely	7		39
Total	100				

In the above Table1, item number 1, the first question which was asked was whether or not teachers have awareness about one-to-five cooperative language learning strategy in improving their students' language skills. With this regard, almost all (83.3%) of the language teachers in the study setting had positive understanding about the role and benefit of cooperative learning in language classroom. Under open-ended item teachers replied that CLLS increases interaction among group of students to share information and social skills using the target language while the students discussed in real life context as the teacher act as a facilitator and input provider. On Contrarily, few (16.7) of the participants did not have clear understanding about it. Therefore, it seems possible to generalize that the majority of the respondents have awareness about the role and benefit of one-to-five cooperative language learning in improving students' language and linguistic competency.

The purpose of asking item number 2 was intended to get teachers' overall experience in implementing one-to-five cooperative learning strategy in English language classroom. Thus, the data clearly depicted that's several (72.3%) of English language teachers did not employed CLLS as one of the alternative language teaching strategy in their English lesson. In contrast, few (27.7%) of them use the strategy as one alternative language teaching strategy in their English lessons. The classroom observation data also clearly shown that teachers were not seen

implementing this strategy as one alternative language teaching method in the course of the researchers observation periods.

From the above result, therefore, it appears possible to generalize that teachers understanding about the concept of CLLS and their commitment in implementing it and working on students' English language improvement and social skills were quite a paradox due to several reasons.

As it can be seen in item 3 in the above figure, the respondent were asked how often they were experienced in implementing one-to-five CLLS in their classroom. The data depicts that a number (44.4%) of the respondents use CLLS strategy '*sometimes*'. The remaining (39%) and (16.6%) of them use the strategy '*rarely*' and '*always*' respectively. Hence, from this data, it seems impossible to say that one-to-five CLLS was effectively implemented by language teachers in the study school in a very organized and consistence manner; even though, they have clear understanding about its benefits.

The following questions (1-6) were intended to gather data in the way how teachers faced challenges related to their own teaching experience and perception, classroom environment, and students with regard to cooperative learning.

Table 2: Teachers, students and classroom size related impediments that affect the effective implementation of CLLS

<i>N</i> <i>Q</i>	<i>Item Description</i>	<i>Options</i>						
			<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Total</i>
1	My own teaching experience and perception about CLLS affect me not to implement it usually in my lessons.	<i>Fre</i>	10	5		2	1	18
		<i>%</i>	55.5	27.7		11.1	5.5	100
2	Absence of information how to implement CLL in the classroom	<i>Fre</i>	11	4	-	3	-	18
		<i>%</i>	61.1	22.2	-	16.6	-	100
3	I always think that CLLS takes me much time during group discussion and require preparations	<i>Fre</i>	6	8	1	3		18
		<i>%</i>	33.3	44.4	5.5	16.6	-	100

4	Students' interest to learn cooperatively discouraged me not to implement it	Fre	6	9	-	3	-	18
		%	33.3	50	-	16.7	-	100
5	Large class size with inflexible seats demotivate me not to implement it	Fre	4	8	-	-	6	18
		%	22.2	44.4	-	-	33.3	100

Item number 1 in the figure presented above, teachers were asked to express their agreement and disagreement whether their perception and past teaching experience have the direct effect in their attempt to implement CLLS or not. Hence, almost half (55.5%) of respondents '*strongly agree*' that their teaching experience and perception regarding CLLS was the major hindrances that minimize their effective implementations. The remaining (27.7%), (11.1%) and (5.5%) of them replied '*agree*', '*disagree*' and '*strongly disagree*' with the statement presented for them respectively. Therefore, one could see that around 80% of the respondents agree that their own perceptions and their past traditional teaching experience were the main contributing factors for the ineffective implementation of the strategy in English lessons in the classroom.

Regarding item 2 in the above figure, a number of teachers (61.1%) and (22.2%) '*Strongly agree*' and '*agree*' that they did not have clear understanding how to implement the strategy in their classroom respectively. Whereas, the remaining (16.6%) of them answered '*disagree*'. This seems to indicate that the majority of the respondents did not have sufficient information how CLLS could be implemented in language classroom. Hence, from this data we could review that teachers' negative perceptions might be developed from lack of clear information and practical training as more than 80% of the respondents agree they have absence of information with regard to the implementation of method.

Concerning item 3 in the table above, the majority (33.3%) and (44.4%) of the respondents replied that they '*strongly agree*' and '*agree*' that implementing CLLS is time taking and required additional preparation to prepare tasks and activities respectively. On the other hand, the remaining (5.5%) replied and (16.6%) of them respond '*undecided*' and '*disagree*'. Regarding this item the data from open-ended question teachers' interview confirmed the same fact that teachers were encounter with shortage of time to organize students to certain cooperative group as students' number is too large.

Item 4 in the figure above was asked whether students interest towards learning cooperatively affect their attempt in implementing CLLS or not, almost all (33.3%) and (50%) of the respondents responded '*strongly agree*' and '*agree*' respectively that when student are ordered to form certain cooperative groups they showed unwillingness instead they prefer to do other activities than discussing the subject matter using the target language. Managing such difficulties were other contributing factors for the ineffective implementation of the strategy. On the other hand, the remaining (16.6) of the participants responded '*undecided*' about the issue.

Regarding whether the classroom size and seats appeared interesting to implement CLLS for them in item 6, (22.2%) and (44.4%) of the respondents replied '*strongly agree*' and '*agree*' that a large classroom and the immovable desks were a contributing factors for their ineffectiveness. The number (33.3%) of them on the other hand replied '*strongly disagree*' for the idea presented. Generally, one can observe from the above data that in addition to teachers negative perceptions, implementing cooperative language teaching strategy were affected by other related variables directly or indirectly.

9.2.Data Obtained from the Teachers' Interview

The first question the interviewees asked were whether cooperative learning strategy (CLLS) helped their students to learn the language in a more relaxed and better environment or not, all (18) of the English language teachers agreed that CLLS was one of the most decisive teaching strategy that helps students to learn the language in a more practical ways. Therefore, both the data gathered from the teachers' questionnaire and interview indicated that all the language teachers had understanding about the benefit of the CLLS in improving students' communicative language and social skills.

The other question that the teachers were asked to give their evaluation whether CLLS is effectively implemented by the language teachers in their school or not, half of them (13) reported that they do not totally believed it is implementing effectively. Whereas, the other half (5) of the interviewee reported that they believe it was implemented effectively rather to some extent. However, all the interviewees agreed that they were not implementing in a more organized and scientific manner. All of them replied that they simply organized students to a certain traditional groups based on their sitting arrangement, students interest and attendance list and gave them different activities and assignments. They were also asked why they thought that

it is not implemented effectively, and all of them (18) agree that large number of students in a classroom, teachers and students own perceptions, shortage of time and lack of clear and practical training regarding its practical implementations were their short comes that hindered their performance and effectiveness as it also triangulated in the questionnaire data above.

The third question which was asked was how teachers perceived CLLS. Almost all (17) of the interviewee reported that teachers and students did not perceive positively. They complain that it was due to absent of practical training and awareness about the strategy. They further elaborated that many of the teachers believed that it is unscientific and wastage of students' and teachers' time. The data from interview and open-ended questionnaire revealed similar facts as presented above.

The fourth question which was asked was whether they had the experience in implementing CLLS in their class room or not, the majority (6) of the teachers explained that they had the experience in implementing in their classroom as one of the language teaching strategy. The remaining few (12) of them reported that they did not have the experience. This fact is confirmed by item number 2, above that teachers attempt to implement one-to-five learning strategy was un structured and seems very traditional.

9.3.Result of Classroom Observation

The classroom observation data was collected from 8 randomly selected sections of grade 10. Each section was observed for 4 successive periods of each. One checklist was used for one classroom observation and a total of twenty five (32) checklists were used. After the researcher arranged the periods with English language teachers based on their classroom schedules, actual classroom observation was taken place.

The data found from classroom observation proved that many of English language teachers did not observed organized students to certain cooperative learning groups. During four successive classroom observations, the researcher observed that the majority (80%) of the language teachers were not seen organizing students in a formal and structured ways of cooperative groups rather they simply let students to form a group of five, ten, in pair or more based on students' sitting arrangements when they gave a class works/activities and assignments. Such group organization seems traditional which was not scientifically structured and lack purposes, group heterogeneity in which only active and volunteer students got little knowledge

from the groups. The researcher observed only three teachers who were formulated students based on ability group which seems to have heterogeneity. Therefore, it seems possible to conclude that many of the English language teachers in the study school organized students traditionally.

In most of their teaching periods, almost all of the teachers were observed that after once they gave students certain activities from students' textbook, they simply wrote the instruction on the chalk-board or told them orally what students would do in the activities. While the students worked in groups, some of (40%) of the language teachers tried to act as a *facilitator and coordinator* by moving and encouraging around the students' seat. However, the majority of the teachers kept themselves in front and observed students' activities and watched their time again and again to stop the discussion. When the time is over, most of them let students answer the questions individually or in groups.

Regarding the extent to which teachers provide authentic language teaching materials in cooperative learning classroom, almost all (7) of the observed English language teachers did not bring different tasks and materials that could motivate students to learn the language in a cooperative manner and fit their levels and interest during cooperative learning. From the eight observed teacher only (1) attempted to use authentic materials and tasks that were compatible with the theories of cooperative learning; students' levels and interest. Therefore, we cannot generalize cooperative language learning strategy is implemented effectively by the English language teachers in Shashemene Secondary and Preparatory School. As the teachers' interview data confirmed, some of the teachers are reluctant to implement cooperative language learning strategies as it required them additional effort in organizing students in group and prepare different tasks and activities.

The observation data regarding factors related to classroom environment in related to cooperative learning the desks which were not moveable and flexible, the large class size in a single classroom was observed as the main factors which hindered the teachers' effectiveness in implementing the strategy. Similarly, the data found from the teachers' questionnaire and interview clearly indicated that the respondents underlined and agreed on the same issues as presented in the above data. Thus, it is possible to conclude that classroom environment is

considered as one of the key factors in conducting any teaching-learning process particularly cooperative approach to language learning.

The classroom observation data related to students-related factors, indicates that more than half of (68%) the students were observed that they had no great interest to learn in cooperative group and work with their peers. When the teachers ordered them to form the groups based on their sitting arrangement, the number of students were not seen interested and active in participating in their groups. Even when the teachers motivated them to join any group they, blacken their faces and act immorally whereas, nearly half (32%) of the observed students were seen having willingness to learn cooperatively and share ideas among their groups. This depicted that students' perception towards cooperative language learning strategy could be one sort of the impediment for teachers unsuccessfulness in implementing cooperative language learning.

10. Findings

The data gathered from the three research tools: questionnaire, interview and classroom observation indicates that: The majority of English language teachers had positive understanding about the paramount usefulness of CLLS in improving students' language and social interdependence skill if they were used in their language classrooms. However, as the collected data revealed the implementation of CLLS was affected by different variables. Among those variables teachers' and students' perceptions were the major ones. Teachers did not perceive this strategy positively as they believed that they did not have sufficient information and practical training in the way how they could implement it. The data clearly depicted that teachers developed negative perception about CLLS as they believed students did not have interest, it was time taking and required additional energy in preparing authentic teaching materials and tasks. Moreover, they believed that large number of students in a single classroom, inflexible desks in the classroom, past traditional teaching and learning experience of them were found the core challenging effect that have a direct correlation in developing teachers' negative perception and minimize their effectiveness in using the strategy in their classroom lessons.

11. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher will draw the following as possible conclusions.

As the data presented above showed, teachers had acquired a better understanding with regard to CLLS as it helps students to develop their language proficiency and social skills. Even though, the concepts of their understanding about CLLS and their real world experience in implementing it were not compatible and seem a paradox. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that teachers' ineffectiveness in implementing cooperative language teaching and learning strategy were affected by teachers negative perceptions that were developed due to lack of awareness and practical training in the ways how they could implement it practically in real world practices.

Generally, one can conclude that the implementation of CLLS was given less attention by the teachers, concerned body: educational officers, language curriculum and syllabus designers, educational policy makers in capacitating teachers' knowledge, skills and attitude by providing practical training with regard to cooperative language teaching and learning. As Soraya argues that the more teachers pedagogically capacitated the more they get the exposure and situations to discuss and argue with each other, to assess each other's current professional knowledge, skills and attitudes so that they could get the chance to fill the gaps they professionally have before (14).

12. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher would like to forward the following as possible solutions.

The collected data proved that the ineffective implementations of cooperative language teaching and learning were affected by teachers' misperception which results from lack of awareness and practical training. Therefore, the concerned body: educational officers, language curriculum and syllabus designers, educational policy makers should capacitate teachers by creating opportunities for short-term and long-term training so that teachers misperception might be reduced. Consequently, teachers would develop positive perceptions and became committed in implementing cooperative language teaching and learning strategy to work on their students' language and social improvement.

Students interest to learn cooperatively, large numbers of students, lack of authentic teaching materials were found the other contributor for teachers' ineffectiveness and negative perceptions to implement CLLS. Hence, awareness creation and short term training should also be given by the concerned bodies for students so that they can develop a sense of cooperativeness with their peer and classroom environment; desks should be arranged in a way that could motivate both teachers and students for cooperative teaching and learning.

To sum up, English language teachers should also take responsibility in motivating students during cooperative learning by creating exposure to play certain roles and responsibilities while they are learning in a cooperative groups so that they could develop a sense of belongingness a among the groups. As scholars suggested that teachers are expected to give clear directions and instructions clearly and precisely about what students are expected exactly to do before they are organized to learn and do tasks cooperatively (Cathrine24).

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