Perceptions and Practices of EFL Teachers in Implementing Active Learning in English Classes: The Case of Three Selected Secondary Schools in Dawro Zone, Snnprs, Ethiopia

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions and practices of active learning in EFL classrooms, in three selected secondary schools in Genna Bossa Woreda of Dawro Zone, SNNPRS. To conduct the study, descriptive survey design was employed. A total of 12 teachers and 60 students from high, medium and lower achievers were participated in the study through availability and purposive sampling technique. The study was complemented by mixed method approach that employed both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools such as observation checklists, questionnaires and interviews. The quantitative data was analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean and grand mean and the qualitative was analyzed thematically. The findings of the study revealed that most of the respondents have perceived active learning positively. In spite of their good perceptions, their practices of active learning were low/poor. The major factors affecting the effective implementation of active learning were large class size with fixed sitting arrangement, inadequate teacher training, tendency of focusing on teacher- centered method and time scarcity were among the most influential factors hindering its implementation. Finally, it is recommended that responsible bodies should rearrange the conditions and facilitate necessary inputs for the implementation.
Keywords: Perception, Practice, Active Learning

INTRODUCTION

The main objective of education is to enable learners develop knowledge, skills and attitude which are achieved through different methods. Methods are means of conveying ideas and skills to impart and acquire knowledge of different subject matters in a more concrete and comprehensive way. At different times, different methods of learning have been investigated and being remained dominant for certain period of time such as teacher-centered methods, (Bethel, 2011).

As an alternative way, active learning has become widely recognized as a desired strategy for teaching language since English language is being used as a medium of instruction from primary to tertiary levels in Ethiopia and the nature of language learning itself requires closed interaction of students with their teachers and peer groups with various exposures in the classroom and outside. Hence, learners are expected to have adequate proficiency in using the language. This is basically true because the students' skill in using the language highly determines their academic success (Atkins et al, 1995). Therefore, students are expected to develop their English language proficiency through appropriate methodology as it is obvious that the language has been considered as one of the most vital area of focus in the school curriculum in our country (Taye, 2008; Girma, 2013; Ayele, 2014).

Similarly, Aschalew (2012:74) states that "we live in a dynamic world where everything is changing. As a result, what we think true today may be false tomorrow and what we think false today may be true tomorrow. Hence, we have to adjust ourselves to the changing world or modify it to fit our needs. It is education that enables us to do so." This means that education enables us to lead a better life in this dynamic world. In this respect, education has passed through continuous change. Due to the number of weaknesses with teacher centered approach, active learning method was researched and supported by many scholars. According to the constructivists learning theory, active learning is known by the name "discovery learning". Learning begins with the experience of the student. The social constructivists think that the concept follows the action rather than preceding it. In other words, the activity leads to the concepts. Moreover, the constructivists' learning theory is based on the principle that through their involvement in various activities students discover their way of learning (Aggarwal, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

The idea that students are passive recipients of knowledge and that teachers are the transmitters of that knowledge is giving way to the notion that students learn better when they are involved in the process of creating knowledge for themselves. Moreover, the goals of education encompass not only the acquisition of knowledge

but also the guidance of the individual to his/her fullest potential, (Clark et al…2008).

It is obvious that using English language for communicative purpose is not at a satisfactory level in most high schools, Colleges and Universities in Ethiopia. Learners' proficiency in language use in the schools is much lower than the level required of them (ICDR, 1999). In spite of the number of years the students exposed to English language instruction, their level of performance in using the language is very low. The researchers believe that this is due to the lack of practice of active learning method regularly in English lesson classes as they have noticed the problems from their experience in teaching English at primary, secondary schools, Colleges and Universities. The researchers also believe that one of the possible reasons for this may be the inappropriateness of the methods and techniques employed in teaching English. As Mackey (1965:138) says the teaching methodology can be "…the cause of success or failure in language learning; for it is ultimately the method that determines the 'what?' and the 'how?' of language instructions."

There were numerous studies that have been conducted in different corners of the world to solve problems in the implementation of active learning in schools. For instance, Taye (2008) and Bethel (2011) conducted their study on practices and perceptions of AL in Dilla University and school communities in implementing active learning in Bulbula secondary school respectively and their findings revealed that even school communities have positive perceptions in the implementations of active learning; its implementation in English lessons still needs further investigation. In their result, they disclosed that teachers and instructors have theoretical understandings about active learning. In relation to this, there were also other researchers who conducted their M.A thesis regarding student centered/active learning method; among them: Moges, (2007); Binyam, (2014); and Arikew, (2015) did in the same area. Their studies focused on large class size, shortage of time, awareness problems and readiness to implement active learning methodology are among the challenges affecting its implementation in English classes. In the same way, Girma (2013) and Ayele (2014) conducted their thesis on same issue and their findings revealed that active learning failed in to practice in schools due to scarcity of time to cover the portion, students attention on exam oriented topics and lack of adequate materials.

As we can see their focus above either local or international researchers, we can conclude that their findings mainly focused on the challenges that limit the implementation of AL in EFL classes because most of them tried to mention the barriers to AL practices in different levels is related to numerous responsible bodies in schools. But, none of them extended their work more specifically to teachers' perceptions which particularly plays an important role in implementing AL in EFL classes.

Objectives of the Study
General Objective
The main objective of this study was to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions and practices in implementing active learning in English lessons/ classes at three selected secondary schools in Genna Bossa woreda of (Woldehane, Ofa and Dilamo) in Dawro zone, SNNPRS.

Specific Objectives
To achieve the main objective, the following specific objectives were set. These are:
1. To examine the perceptions of EFL teachers towards active learning method in English lessons classes.
2. To identify how often EFL teachers practice active learning method in English lessons/classes in the schools.

Materials and Methods
Research Design
The study employed descriptive survey designs to collect, process, analyze and present the data. Thus, descriptive survey design was employed by using mixed method of data collecting and describing in organized way including the characteristics, features or facts about the given population in this study to make the obtained data more feasible and preferable to examine the present situation on perceptions and practices of EFL teachers in implementing active learning in secondary schools of the research site.

Setting, Population and Sampling Techniques
The setting for this investigation was Genna Bossa Woreda, which is one of the rural Woreda in Dawro Zone, SNNPRS which is located at the distance of 300 km far away from Hawassa and 575 km from Addis Ababa: the capital of Ethiopia. The target population of this study included of EFL teachers of Grade 9 and 10 and students those were from three selected secondary schools who were attending in the same grade level. Teachers were considered as rich sources of data, so all English teachers from three schools were selected. Students were also selected purposively as additional source of data to get necessary information. To select the sample size for this study, two sampling techniques were employed (purposive and availability sampling). The Zone and Woreda were selected from others through purposive sampling method based on the prevalence of inadequacy practice of

EFL teachers to implement active learning in the schools.

Again, among seven secondary schools in the Woreda, three schools were selected using purposive sampling technique because of the feasibility to the study and the familiarity to the researchers to have access of information. Based on this, the researchers believed that the sample size of 3 secondary schools would be representative enough to draw sound generalizations at the end of the study. Since it is difficult to employ all the population due to limited resource, the setting and the samples were delimited accordingly. Thus, the secondary schools selected as a sample encompass the population in Woldehane, Dilamo and Ofa secondary schools. In relation to teachers, all teachers in the three schools (Total= 12) were taken as a samples: 9 from Woldehane, 1 from Dilamo and 2 from Ofa using availability sampling, and 60 students were selected from those schools employing stratified sampling out of the total students. The students were selected grouping them in to strata based on their achievements: higher, medium and lower achievers. Then, the students which represent each stratum were selected through simple random sampling technique.

Data Gathering Tools

Furthermore, the study employed mainly qualitative and quantitative data collection tools. The relevant data were collected through different instruments, such as, observation, questionnaires and interviews. Thus, the researchers preferred the qualitative method to describe the data that were collected by semi- structured interviews and the quantitative method to describe all close ended questionnaires and observation checklist. Classroom observations were conducted in order to check whether the teachers are practicing active learning and students participation based on the principles that it is to be implemented during teaching and learning process in the English classroom. Five teachers were selected by simple randomly for observation (three teachers from Woldehane and the rests 2 from Dilamo and Ofa secondary schools). The one of researchers was a non-participant observer who collected data without taking part in the teaching learning process, but the other researcher was a co-observer directly entered into the classroom with observation checklists and looking and collected data. Two observers were assigned deliberately to collect data from the same context to minimize the subjectivity which comes from individual's bias.

Interview was also one of the selected data collecting instruments for the sake of assessing teachers' perceptions regarding AL. The researchers used tape recorder, video and photo camera while conducting the interview and it was conducted at their schools. It is clear that interview can provide data in-depth that is not possible with questionnaire. Data from interview were supplemented with other responses in application of the study. Therefore, to support and cross-check the findings from the questionnaire, well-constructed semi-structured interview questions were prepared to collect and administer data in depth from 3 selected secondary school teachers by the researchers. Furthermore, two sets of questionnaires (one set for the teachers and the other for students) were adapted, designed and administered. The questionnaires were adapted from Moges (2007) and Taye (2008) based on the objectives of the study and review of related literature covered in this paper.

Data Gathering Procedures

Regarding data gathering procedures, the researchers followed a series of its procedures in the study. Therefore, pilot study was conducted prior to the administration of the final questionnaires to all respondents. It was carried out by developing the adapted questionnaires and those were submitted to the experienced teachers and advisor for the sake of comment. After ensuring the appropriateness of questionnaires by advisor and teachers, the researchers made discussion with school directors, selected EFL teachers and students regarding the purpose of data he was going to gather and how it would have been done. First, the researchers collected data through classroom observation and then they conducted interview with some selected EFL teachers more specifically to assess or examine their perceptions towards AL and their practice of AL in the classroom. Finally, the questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and data were collected. The reason that the researchers sequenced the data gathering tools accordingly was that if teachers responded to questionnaires early, they might have arranged make up classes which they may not be practicing in the usual time. So, it helped the researchers to get valid and reliable information regarding practices of active learning in English classes. These all data gathering procedures ensure the reliability and validity of data in the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis were employed in order to answer the research questions and to attain the objectives. The quantitative data were collected, coded, tabulated, analyzed, described and interpreted in a manner that it supports finding obtained from the study. First, the data gathered through close ended questionnaire by using a five point Likert Scales (strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree) as suggested by Best (2003) and Kothari (2004) were tabulated in terms of frequency, percentage and mean value (to compute the proportionality of individual response of the items) by assessing the

scale value to each of the five scale responses. Classroom observation was also analyzed using frequency and percentage. Thus, the data processing and analysis were employed by the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20 computer manual to analyze the quantitative data. Next to that, data gathered through semi-structured interview were analyzed by using qualitative method with textual/thematic analysis. Finally, conclusions and recommendations were made based on the findings.

Results and Discussions

Using teachers' questionnaire, responses about their perceptions of active learning were tabulated and presented. In analyzing the perceptions of teachers on active learning, questionnaire entitled "perceptions of EFL teachers towards active learning" presented in table 1 and 2 below respectively.

Table 2: Perceptions of Teachers in Implementing ALMs in EFL Classrooms

	Items	strongly agree		agree		undecided		disagree		strongly disagree		Mean value
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
1	The quality of education can be improved if teachers shift their instruction from the lecture methods to ALM	-	-	7	58.3	5	41.7	-	-	-	-	3.58
2	Active learning enhances students' level of understanding and involves them in problem solving	3	25.0	6	50.0	3	25.0	-	-	-	-	4.00
3	Active learning creates the opportunities to share experiences and encourage friendship among students.	4	33.3	5	41.7	3	25.0	-	-	-	-	4.08
4	Active learning enhances active involvement of students in learning instead of passive listening.	1	8.3	6	50.0	5	41.7	-	-	-	-	3.67
5	Active learning enhances self-confidence and independent learning of students.	3	25.0	6	50.0	3	25.0	-	-	-	-	4.00
6	Teachers must encourage students to communicate effectively.	3	25.0	9	75.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.25
7	Active learning offers opportunities for progress of students' in language use.	2	16.7	5	41.7	5	41.7	-	-	-	-	3.75
8	Active learning prepares students for active participation in the lesson	5	41.7	4	33.3	3	25.0	-	-	-	-	4.17
9	Active learning makes students responsible for their own learning.	-	-	8	66.7	3	25.0	1	8.3	-	-	3.58
10	I am sure student centered approach has a great contribution to scale up the quality of education.	-	-	5	41.7	4	33.3	3	25.0	-	-	3.17
Grand mean												3.83

In the above table, the items related to assumptions about active learning, advantages of active learning and their views about active learning were presented properly to find out their perceptions. Item 1 aims to assess if the quality of education can be improved when teachers shift their instruction from the lecture methods to ALM. As it can be seen in table 1, 7 (58.3%) and the mean value of their responses (3.58) ranges from "Agree" to "Strongly Agree." Hence, most of the teachers agreed on the idea. On the other hand, item 2 assess if active learning enhances students' level of understanding and involves them in problem solving. The percentages for 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were 3 (25%), 6 (50%) respectively and the mean value for this response was 4.00. That means teachers reflected their strong agreement. This implies that most of the teachers believe that AL can enhance students' level of understanding and enables them to solve problems independently.

Table 3: Perceptions of Teachers Especially on the Side Effects of AL According to Their Assumption

Items		5= strongly agree		4 =agree		3 = undecided		2= disagree		1=strongly disagree		Mean value
		f	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%	
11	Teaching is the sole responsibility of teachers	-	-	2	16.7	3	25.0	2	16.7	5	41.7	2.17
12	Active learning minimizes students and teachers workloads and save time.	-	-	-	-	7	58.3	2	16.7	3	25.0	2.33
13	Active learning frustrates behavior of students	-	-	-	-	7	58.3	1	8.3	4	33.3	2.25
14	Active learning is not economical to use instructional aids.	-	-	2	16.7	5	41.7	4	33.3	1	8.3	2.67
15	I know that active learning adds work load on teachers.	-	-	2	16.7	7	58.3	2	16.7	1	8.3	2.83
16	If there is no lecture method, it is impossible to control the students/the class become noisy while they perform Active learning methodology	-	-	1	8.3	7	58.3	3	25.0	1	8.3	2.67
17	It is a tiresome activity for teachers to implement active learning in language classroom.	-	-	4	33.3	4	33.3	4	33.3	-	-	3.00
18	I believe that teaching facts alone is enough to prepare students to understand their environment.	-	-	1	8.3	4	33.3	4	33.3	3	25.0	2.25
Grand mean												2.52

According to table 2, item 11 was strong disagreed by most of the teachers. This means teaching is the sole responsibility of teachers is not the way in which students are benefited. In addition, they were asked to show their view on that teaching fact alone is enough to prepare students to understand their environment which is stated in item 18 of table 2. Accordingly, among the teachers, except one said "agree" but others replied it as neutral and disagree were 4 (33.3%), and 3 (25.0%) responded it as strongly disagree. For all items, the mean values exceed from 3.00 to 4.17. This indicates that almost their view/ perception towards AL is approximately average/good. Item 14 tries to examine whether active learning is economical or not economical to use instructional aids. A high percentage 4 (33.3%) of the respondents disagreed and 5 (41.7) replied undecided with the statement.

Based on the analysis of the data, almost most of the teachers had a positive perception towards AL but some of them lack awareness about the term itself since they responded neutral/undecided for many items in the questionnaire. During the interview, it was disclosed that all teachers (who were interviewed) had a positive perception towards active learning. Concerning this, Hatfield (as cited in MoE, 2004:79) states active learning is not only a set of activities, but the perception on the part of the teacher and the learner that makes learning effective. Again, it is obvious that AL demands not only teachers to be experts in their fields, but also that teachers should understand how students learn. Thus, various research findings confirmed that there is a strong relationship between teachers' perception towards active learning and their attempt to implement it. For instance, a survey study carried out in Botswana in 2009 proved that teachers who had a positive perception towards active learning showed a better effort in implementing and using AL than those teachers who perceived it negatively (GDE, 2009).

Table 4. Teachers' use of ALMs in EFL Classrooms

No.	**Items** How often do you use these ALMs in the classroom?	5= always		4= frequently		3= sometimes		2= rarely		1= not at all		Mean value
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
1.1	Lecture/ explanation	1	8.3	7	58.3	4	33.3	-	-	-	-	3.75
1.2	Problem solving method	-	-	-	-	2	16.7	8	66.7	2	16.7	2.00
1.3	Role-playing	-	-	-	-	3	25.0	7	58.3	2	16.7	2.08
1.4	Group Discussion /syndicate	1	8.3	3	25.0	6	50.0	2	16.7	-	-	3.25
1.5	Brain storming	-	-	1	8.3	3	25.0	8	66.7	8	66.7	2.42
1.6	Peer Teaching	-	-	-	-	3	25.0	7	58.3	2	16.7	2.08
1.7	Cooperative learning	-	-	1	8.3	4	33.3	7	58.3	-	-	2.50
1.8	Group work	-	-	4	33.3	6	50.0	2	16.7	-	-	3.17
1.9	Demonstration	-	-	-	-	1	8.3	6	50.0	5	41.7	1.67
1.10	Student independent work by giving homework/ assignments	-	-	3	25.0	6	50.0	3	25.0	-	-	3.00
1.11	Inquiry method	-	-	-	-	3	25.0	4	33.3	5	41.7	1.83
1.12	Case study	-	-	-	-	1	8.3	5	41.7	6	50.0	1.58
1.13	Discovery method	-	-	-	-	2	16.7	5	41.7	5	41.7	1.75
1.14	Educational visits/field trip	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	100	1.00
Grand mean												2.30

To assess the extent to which AL has been employed in teaching English, both teachers and students reacted through the questionnaire, and again teachers through the interview. These were also substantiated by the classroom observation. As presented in the table above, most of the teachers in the school practice explanation/lecturing method in item 1.1 as rated by 7 (58.3%) that is followed by group work in item 1.8 which its rating is 4 (33.3%). And some of them said that they use ALM sometimes which imply that most of them are interested in teacher centered methodology rather than student-centered strategies. Among the respondents 6 (50%) said that they rarely provide tasks like inquiry method, case study, brain storming, problem solving and cooperative learning in the classroom which are very vital for students to develop self-confidence, deep thinking and problem solving potential.

According to the analysis, the findings revealed that teachers in the referred schools were frequently employing explanations/lectures, discussions, group or pair works, Student independent work by giving homework/assignments. On the other hand, other AL techniques, which are expected to be widely used in teaching English those can expose learners to develop various critical thinking abilities like brain storming, and discovery learning capacity and others such as problem solving, inquiry learning, case study, project method, etc. were rarely employed/or relatively not at all in teaching English. In line with this, Bonwell and Eison (2003) noticed that students must do more than just listen. They need to read, write, discuss or engage in problem solving activities. In real active learning model, students must be engaged in higher order thinking skills as synthesis, analysis and evaluation. In general, based on the above discussion, it is possible to say that the degree of practicing major active learning techniques in teaching English was low and the kind of techniques teachers widely used was the traditional ones.

Analysis of Classroom Observation
Classroom observation was also used to collect data to see whether teachers apply AL or not and how they apply it techniques in teaching English. It confirmed that there is no enough sitting space, all the seats are not movable and the classroom layout was not arranged to facilitate active learning. This tells that class room situation is almost not suitable to implement AL. In short, the inappropriateness of class size and immovability of desks (sitting) made AL not to be implemented besides to teachers' perception. It means that the classroom situation supported most of teachers practice of the strategies in English classroom negatively which implicitly means that their average perception towards AL with unsuitable classroom situation hindered them not to implement it in the classrooms. As indicated in the observation, we can indirectly deduce that almost all teachers in the schools are more dominant and active than learners which imply that they tended to use teacher centered instruction

Analysis of Data Collected through Interview
Among 12 EFL teachers, four teachers were selected for interview on the basis of their teaching experience since

the researchers believed that they can provide valuable data regarding the implementation of ALM in EFL classrooms in their school. All teachers were taken from WSS because they are more experienced in teaching English starting from the least seven years up to 29 service years. In addition to that, 3 of them were also selected for observation. To assure the validity and reliability of data, digital photo and video camera was used to record and document their responses and for keeping the secret. According to the interview conducted with them in relation the nature of AL, almost all of the teachers replied that AL means practical way of teaching and learning process and it is student centered approach that helps students to feel confident and share their responsibilities in the classroom. Furthermore, most of them assured that the practicability of AL in their school was in question that they do not implement it usually due to time and large portions of content nature of the subject.

In connection to the advantages of AL method, most of them forwarded that using AL has a great contribution for improving students' active participation in the lesson and developing self-confidence. It also mediates learners with effective language use if teachers and students frequently practice it. This directly confirms that all teachers involved in the interview perceive AL positively and they have clear understanding on the importance of it. Moreover, they replied "sometimes" for the question that says how often they practice AL in the classroom. This depicts that even there were no commonly and usually practiced ALM in their schools, group work, group discussion, pair work and peer teaching were used sometimes

Conclusions

The main purpose of this study was to assess the perception and practices of EFL teachers in implementing AL in English lessons particularly the case of three selected secondary schools namely (Woldehane, Dilamo and Ofa) in Genna Bossa Woreda of Dawro Zone, SNNPRS. All the subjects of this study were English teachers who were teaching from grades nine to ten (2nd cycle) and students in the referred schools. The data were gathered using questionnaires, classroom observations, and interviews. The questionnaires were administered to all 12 English teachers in the three schools and 60 students from high, medium and low achievers (40 from grade 10 and 20 from grade 9). All teachers and students returned the questionnaire. The classroom observation was conducted with five teachers who were teaching grade 9 and 10 students. The interview was also conducted with four EFL teachers who were included in observation. The data obtained through questionnaires and classroom observations were analyzed in percentages, mean values and grand mean values and based on the analysis of the data, the following findings were obtained from the study.

The analysis of the data indicates that most of the teachers involved in the study have perceived AL positively. However, the extent of perception of some teachers varies between experienced and inexperienced ones; that means it is higher among the experienced than in experienced ones. Thus, it was indicated that the participant groups assured that when the teachers practice active learning, the students learn better and develop the ability to express their feelings confidently. In addition, the participants viewed that AL plays an important role in developing self-confidence. Furthermore, they believe that to practice it, they must get special training and support. Moreover, the analysis of the data disclosed that the extent of the practices of active learning in the referred schools was found to be low. The two groups of the respondents (teachers and students) confirmed that they practice active learning in their classrooms "sometimes" and relatively their response approaches to "rarely", which leads to draw the conclusion that the practices of active learning is below the required level.

Recommendations

It is difficult to realize that the intended objectives and practices without considering various factors that could contribute in one way or the other to enhancing learning at any level. This is because educational achievements are the outcomes of interwoven factors. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher would like to forward the following recommendations for the improvement of the practices of active learning.

Concerned bodies/stakeholders should be aware of the application of ALM in the classroom in collaboration with school directors; Woreda and Zone education offices and departments should arrange either short or long term training on it and facilitate good environments for the implementation of AL. Therefore, it is important to carry out in- service short term training so that their use of ALM will be improved. Moreover, the students are also expected to be active participant and involve themselves in the lesson; so they should also be aware of the importance the methodology. In general, those all mentioned above gaps lead the magnitude of practicing active learning to be low. Hence, short-term training for the teachers on the issue should be emphasized by concerned bodies in collaboration with different Colleges and Universities in nearby schools, Woredas, Zone and region. In short, in order to correct this deplorable situation profile that teachers at every level must fit has been determined; teacher training institutions have been strengthened and enriched; and teacher advancement or promotion scale have been set and are under implementation.

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