

TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' CLASSROOM PRACTICE TOWARDS COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM: THE CASE OF HAWARIYAT GENERAL SECONDARY AND PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Dagninet Gebey Akalu, Head of the Department of English, Gambella University, Ethiopia.

Dr.Joghee Senthilkumar, Assistant Professor in English, Gambella University, Ethiopia.

Abstract:

The purpose of this research was to find out the teachers' and students' classroom practice at Hawariyat general secondary and preparatory school. The sample population of the study was 78 students who were selected randomly from grade 11th (10 sections) students and 6 English teachers were selected from Hawariyat general secondary and preparatory school. The data were collected through questionnaire for both teachers and students, interview for teachers and classroom observation. Although participant teachers and students had positive perception towards cooperative, the study shows that they failed to implement in their actual classrooms.

Finally, it is recommended that cooperative language learning should be used in English classrooms because the cooperative learning processes focus on students collectively in groups, thus allowing them to simultaneously learn the subject matter effectively as well as practice interpersonal skills. Therefore, the woreda education office and school principals should arrange training for English language teachers so that they will be committed to implement cooperative learning in their classrooms.

Key words: classroom practice, language learning, positive perception, randomly

1.1. Background of the study

English is used as the language of instruction for all subjects, except Amharic, and given as a compulsory subject. Thus, learners are expected to have adequate proficiency in using the language. To improve students English language ability, it is essential to implement the appropriate teaching and learning methods that help students to communicate as effectively as possible. Language experts have proposed various teaching and

learning methods. Hence, cooperative language learning is the one that an accepted and highly recommended instructional procedure at all levels of education (Johnson and Johnson, 1999).

According to Rodgers (1988) as cited in Richards and Rodgers (2001), in the early twentieth century U.S. educator John Dewey is usually credited with promoting the idea of building cooperation in learning in to regular classrooms on a regular and systematic basis. It was more generally promoted and developed in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s as a response to the forced integration of public schools and has been substantially refined and developed since then.

Richards and Rodgers (2001) also states that since the 1960s, cooperative learning has been substantially refined and developed. Educators were concerned that traditional models of classroom learning were teacher-fronted, foster competition rather than cooperation, and favored majority students.

On the other hand, Kessler (1992) states the application of cooperative learning to classroom teaching finds its root in the 1970s when Israel and the United States began to design and study cooperative learning models for classroom context. Now cooperative learning is applied in almost all school content areas and increasingly in college and university contexts all over the world, and is claimed to be an effective teaching and learning method in EFL or ESL classrooms (Johnson and Johnson, 1990 and Kagan, 1990).

Olsen and Kagan (1992) suggest that in second and foreign language learning theorists proposal several advantages for cooperative learning; increased student talk, more varied talk, a more relaxed atmosphere, greater motivation, more negotiation of meaning, and increased amount of comprehensible input .

In addition, Harmer (2003) stated that cooperative learning groups encourage student –student communication where oral language is emphasized. The responsibility for learning is placed up on the student, working in collaboration with classmates. Students do not learn much just by sitting in class listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They much talk about what they are learning, writing about it, relate it to past experience, and apply it to their daily lives.

A good deal of research exists in the area of education suggesting that cooperative learning is associated with benefits in such key areas as learning, self-esteem, liking for school, and interethnic relations Slavin (1996) as cited in Rechady and Richard, (2002: 53).

Hence, cooperative teaching is claimed to be an effective learning method in foreign language by scholar's abroad (Johnson and Johnson, 1990). It is generally asserted that cooperative learning is the best option for all students because it emphasizes active interaction between students of diverse abilities and backgrounds (Olsen, 1992) and demonstrates more positive student outcomes in academic achievement, social behavior, and affective development.

1.2 Statement of the problem

In Ethiopia, knowledge of English language is becoming the key for the success of students studying in different fields. In our country context, English language is the medium of instruction for all subjects in general secondary and preparatory schools. According to Freeman and Johnson (1998), as EFL teachers teach the language in different and more difficult situations than where English is taught as a first or second language, the need to develop contextual knowledge through inquiry and investigations in to whatever is involved in the teaching learning process appears evident.

According to Johnson and Johnson (1999), cooperative language learning is now an accepted and highly recommended instructional procedure at all levels of education. Besides Nunan (1992) states that cooperative learning in the language classroom especially in foreign language classrooms plays an important role to make students active and increase their motivation and reduce their anxiety.

Several studies and educational reports have pointed out that the solitary models of the traditional teaching method tend to make students over passive and indifferent to what is being taught (Liang, 1996). A study by Salvin (1995) as cited in Kauchak and Eggen, (2003:295) indicated cooperative learning strategies can improve students' achievement more than traditional approaches to instruction, both on teacher made and standardized tests. In cooperative learning, teachers teach students collaborative or social skills so that they can work together more effectively. Indeed, cooperation is not only a way of learning, but also a theme to be communicated about and studied Jacobs (2006) as cited in Larsen Freeman, (2000: 167).

In most general secondary and preparatory schools, teaching is too teacher-centered. Richards (2005) has suggested that a teacher's role should include organizing, motivating, counseling, providing accurate language models, developing materials and acting as a friend. However, in many general secondary and preparatory schools, the teacher's role is mainly to act as an instructor, explainer, and corrector of errors. Mean while, the students role is to do what the teacher says. Therefore, students tend to be over dependent on their teachers and always think that teacher as knowledge provider.

Therefore, the present researcher supports the view that cooperative learning is one important option to consider in increasing academic success of students at the general secondary and preparatory level.

Hences, this study tried to investigate both teachers and students classroom practice towards cooperative learning and their practical application of cooperative learning in English classroom with particular reference to Hawariyat general secondary and preparatory school, grade 11 in focus.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study was to assess students' and teachers' classroom practice of cooperative learning in English classes. Specifically, the study was intended to:

1. Examine the classroom practice of teachers towards cooperative learning.
2. Investigate the classroom practice of students towards cooperative learning.
3. Assess the implementation of cooperative learning in English classes.

1.3 Research questions

This study was guided by the following research questions.

1. How do high school teachers' classroom practice in cooperative learning?
2. How do high school students' classroom practice in cooperative learning?

1.4 Significance of the study

Since cooperative learning refers to instructional methods and techniques in which students work in small groups, this study is expected to bring together the approach of cooperative learning and foreign language teaching to create the best possible or optional teaching- learning experiences for the students.

This empirical study is expected to provide a close link between cooperative learning and the communicative approach, and at the same time, it gives chance for English teachers to know or understand their students' classroom practice towards cooperative learning.

The study might also use to propose guidelines for the teachers who which to implement cooperative learning to enhance their students language proficiency. By carrying out this study, the researcher hoped that active learning will receive more attention and enjoy more popularity among students.

Generally, this research might help for English teachers, school principals and teachers who want to conduct a research in this area as a source.

1.5 Scope of the study

This study was delimited to Hawariyat general secondary and preparatory school which is found in south nations, nationalities and peoples region (SNNPR), specifically Gurage zone, muhir Aklil woreda. Since the school is situated in the woreda town i.e. Hawariyat; it is relatively advantageous than other high schools which are found in the woreda. Learners in the school are ethnically homogeneous and speak Guragegna language.

In addition to this, this study was delimited to only one particular teaching strategy which is cooperative learning. In other words, the study specifically focused on teachers' and students' classroom practice towards cooperative learning in English classroom. Other foreign language teaching strategies are not the part of this particular study.

1.6 Limitation of the study

This study has got some limitations. Primarily, although this study provides some important findings about teachers' and students' classroom practice towards cooperative learning in general secondary and preparatory school, the study was limited to only one general secondary and preparatory school and one grade level.

In addition, the sample size of the study was limited to only 6 teachers and 78 students who were selected from one school. This could often create problem to made generalization on the study. It could have been better and more effective if greater number of schools and participant teachers and students were included in the study.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

Cooperative Learning (CL): cooperative learning in this study means a variety of concepts and techniques for enhancing the value of student-student interaction. In addition, in the context of this study, cooperative learning refers to instructing students to learn and study together as a group, completing tasks per group, and all members giving their suggestions and ideas.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter begins with a discussion of the relevant concepts of cooperative learning, such as definition of cooperative learning and elements of cooperative learning. The chapter also discusses cooperative learning activities, cooperative learning in an EFL context, the role of the teacher in cooperative learning, the role of the student in cooperative learning and etc.

2.1 Enhancing students' social skills

In cooperative learning groups, students can exercise their collaborative skills and practice working with others to achieve mutual benefit for everyone.

Holliday (2002) states that one of the most appealing attributes of cooperative learning is, its dual focus on academic and social learning benefits. Social benefits include more on-task behaviors and helping interactions with group members, higher interpersonal and self-esteem, more positive relations with others, more involvement in classroom activities, more favorable attitudes toward schooling, less disorder in the classroom, as well as improved social-emotional skills.

Carter (2001) also indicates that the social skills attained through cooperative learning include: communication and listening skills (verbal and non-verbal communication skills), leadership (problem solving, decision making, and the acceptance and support of others), trusting building (maintains working relationships and enhances team work).

Therefore, in cooperative learning, social relationships improved because when students work together toward a common goal they have a chance to get to know one another as individuals.

2.2 Appreciating differences

Gillies (2008) determine that cooperative learning is an effective way to build community between home and school cultures with culturally and linguistically diverse students. In cooperative learning settings, students from different backgrounds and characteristics work together towards common goals, to know each other, and to work with each other as equals, which results in a wide variety of outcomes. The more students work in cooperative groups, the more they understand, retain, and feel better about themselves and their peers.

In addition, Gillies (2004) states that cooperative learning creates opportunities for students to actively interact with others negotiate meaning around a task, and appropriate new ways of thinking and doing. Cooperative learning groups provide students with opportunities to enhance inter-ethnic relation and learn to appreciate differences. Besides, cooperative learning activities in the classroom improve students' relationships with others, especially those of various social and ethnic groups.

2.3 Increasing students' participation

When groups are used, students receive much more chance to speak. Jacobs (2006) expresses that cooperative learning encourages all the group members to feel that they need to participate and learn. It also increases students' participation and interaction with each other, thus creating an environment for productive learning. Foreign language learning fits cooperative learning though the interaction hypothesis which states that language learners increase the quantity of comprehensive input they receive by interacting with the people with whom they are speaking.

Thus, cooperative learning activities provide a context in which students may be more likely to interact than in a whole class setting.

2.4 Increasing motivation toward learning

In a traditional class, only teachers provide encouragement to students. However, in cooperative learning groups, students can encourage and help each other.

According to Ghaith (2003) in cooperative learning, learners can realize that classes and learning may be enjoyable. He adds that cooperative learning leads to great motivation toward learning, to increase time on-task, and to improve self-esteem. This promotes language acquisition by providing comprehensive input in developmentally appropriate ways and in a supportive and motivating environment.

2.5 Definitions of cooperative learning

In the recent years, many academic pieces have been written regarding employing cooperative learning as a technique in the classroom. In addition, in the last decades there has been growing interest among ESL/EFL teachers using cooperative learning activities. The literature offers a variety of definitions for cooperative learning.

Moreover, Johnson and Johnson (1990:69) define cooperative learning as “instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning”

Finally, Olsen and Kagan (1992) as cited in Richards and Rodgers (2001:192) also states that cooperative learning is activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others.

In addition, in language teaching, cooperative learning has the following five goals:

- To provide opportunities for naturalistic 2nd language acquisition through the use of interactive pair and group activities.
- To provide teachers with a methodology to enable them to achieve this goals and one that can be applied in a variety of curriculum settings (e.g., content based, foreign language classrooms, mainstreaming).
- To enable focused attention to particular lexical items, language structures, and communicative functions through the use of interactive tasks.
- To provide opportunities for learners to develop successful learning and communication strategies.
- To enhance learner motivation and reduce learner stress and to create a positive affective classroom climate (Richards and Rodgers, 2001:193).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically (Kothari, 2004). The research methodology is a strategy of enquiry, which moves from the underlying assumptions to research design, and data collection (Myers, 2009).

This chapter will discuss the research design, data sources, and instruments of data collection, procedure of data collection and method of data analysis that was used in the study.

3.1 Research design

A research design is the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure (Kothari, 2004). In short, it is strategy specifying which approach was used for gathering and analyzing the data. In fact, the research design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data.

This study employed a descriptive survey design. Descriptive research studies are those studies which are concerned with describing the characteristics of a particular individual, or group (Kothari, 2004). This design was chosen because it enables to investigate the current practice of cooperative learning in Hawariyat general secondary and preparatory school through narration of events, comparison and drawing conclusion about the opinions, practices based on the information secured from respondents.

3.2 Research approaches

According to Kothari (2004), there are two basic approaches to research, i.e. quantitative approach and the qualitative approach. Quantitative approach involves the generation of data in quantitative form which can be subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis in a formal and rigid fashion. In this approach the data are expressed in numbers and they are analyzed statistically. However, qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behavior. In this approach the data are expressed in words and pictures.

Therefore, the researcher used both quantitative and qualitative research approaches because the data of this study were expressed both in numbers and words and analyzed in statistically and statements.

3.3 Data sources

The study was conducted in Hawariyat general secondary and preparatory school. The principal data sources for the study was grade 11th students who are learning in Hawariyat general secondary and preparatory school and teachers who are teaching English at that school. There were a total of fifty eight (58) teachers and one thousand five hundred thirty (1530) students in the school and five hundred twenty (520) of them were grade 11th students. Among fifty eight teachers, six were teaching English language. They have taught for more than four years and have extensive experience in teaching the language in different levels of students. Furthermore, they understand different approaches of teaching English as a foreign language.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This chapter consists of the conclusion and recommendation of the research result. This study, as mentioned in chapter one, was aimed to find out the teachers' and students' perception of cooperative language learning. As a result, in order to answer the overall research question of the study, three types of data gathering instruments (questionnaire, interview and classroom observation) were used. Based on the analysis and discussion, the following conclusion and recommendation are made.

4.1 CONCLUSION

In light of statistical analysis and the findings of the study, the following conclusions are therefore, drawn in response to the research question of the study. The overall findings of the study revealed that although English teachers' and students' have high understanding about cooperative language learning; many teachers remain passive to implement cooperative learning in their actual classroom.

Teachers' and students' responses concerning their perception of cooperative language learning with regard to the principles of cooperative learning ($m=3.9$ and $m=4$ for students and teachers respectively) show that high school English teachers and students seem to be aware of the importance of cooperative language learning. This mean value again indicates that the participant teachers and students have almost a similar view or understanding about cooperative learning principles and activities.

The results obtained from the teachers' questionnaire and interview revealed that there is a mismatch between teachers' classroom practice about CLL and teachers actually practice. For example, a questionnaire that concerned with conceptual perspective items about cooperative language learning indicated that the majority of the respondents with a mean value of 4.3 have understood the main concepts about cooperative learning. However, the result obtained from classroom observation that focus on instructional activities reported that the majority of the observed teachers were not implement cooperative learning activities in their actual classrooms. The result again indicates that there is lack of similarity between what teachers understood about cooperative language learning and what they really practice in the actual classrooms. Teachers stated students' lack of interest in participating in cooperative learning greatly affected the implementation of cooperative learning activities. Large class size was also indicated as the major problem in implementing cooperative learning.

In addition, the result obtained from the students' questionnaire implied that the majority of the participant teachers with a mean value of 3.9 have a positive view about cooperative language learning concepts which is mentioned in the analysis part. In other words, this result implies that the respondents have understood the concepts of cooperative language learning, and what should be the role of the teacher and students in English classrooms. Therefore, this result confirms that it is possible to assume that students can use cooperative learning activities in their actual classrooms.

4.2. RECOMMENDATION

On the basis of the results and the conclusions of the present study, the researcher would like to suggest the following recommendations for the improvement of the classroom practice of CLL.

- ❖ From the result, it observed that although teachers have good understanding about cooperative learning, they were not active to implement CL activities. Consequently, the woreda education office in collaboration with the school principals should motivate teachers in order to be committed to implement cooperative language learning.
- ❖ To enhance the effective implementation of cooperative teaching, school principals, supervisors, and department heads should support or encourage English language teachers by conducting classroom supervision to change their roles from being the main source of teaching process to that of facilitating, guiding, managing and encouraging the teaching learning process.
- ❖ Ministry of Education (MOE) should organize professional development activities to enhance teachers` knowledge, skills and commitment to implement cooperative language learning activities.s

References:

Harmer, J. (2003). **How to Teach English**. New York: Longman.

Holliday, D.C. (2002). **Using Cooperative Learning to improve the academic achievements of inner-city middle school students**. New Orlean

Jacobs, G. (2006). **Cooperative Learning and Second language Teaching**. Cambridge: Cambridge university press.

Johnson, D.W, and Johnson, R.T. (1990a). **What is cooperative learning?** In M. Brubacher, R.payne, K.Rickett(Eds.), **perspectives on small group learning. Theory and practice**. Canada: Rubicon publishing Inc.

Johnson, D.W, and Johnson, R.T.(1994). **Learning Together:** Ins. Sharon (ed.): The hand book of cooperative learning methods. West port, CT: Praeger publishing

Johnson, D.W, Johnson, R.T, and Holubec (1994). **Cooperative Learning in the classroom:** Alexandria, Association for supervision and Curriculum Development

Johnson, D.W. and Johnson, R.T. (1998). **Cooperative learning and social interdependence theory:** In R. Trindale, L.et al (Eds.): Theory and research on small groups. New York: plenum.

- Johnson, D.W. and Johnson, R.T. (2003a). **Gifted students illustrate what is not cooperative learning? In M. Brubacher, R. Payne, and K. Rickett (ed.), perspectives on small group learning: Theory and practice.** Canada: Rubicon Publishing, Inc.
- Joliffe, W. (2007). **Cooperative learning in the classroom: putting in to practice.** London : Paul champan publishing
- Kagan, S. (1992). **Cooperative learning.** San Juan Capistrano: Calif
- Kagan, S. and Olsen, R. (1992). **About cooperative learning: In C. Kessler (ed.). Cooperative language learning: A teachers Resource Book.** New York: prentice Hall
- Kagan, S. (1994). **cooperative learning.** California: Kagan cooperative learning
- Kessler, G. (1992). **Cooperative Language Learning: Engce wood cliffs, NJ: practice – Hall**
- Kothari, C.R (2004). **Research methodology: methods and techniques.** New Delhi: new age international publisher.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2000). **Techniques and principles in language teaching (2nded.) .Oxford:** oxford university.

