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Secondary School EFL Teachers' Beliefs about Active Learning and Their Classroom Practices

Mulugeta Addisu Hararu
Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia
(Email: mulugeta.gsr-3804-14@aau.edu.et)

Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to investigate secondary school English language teachers' beliefs about the active learning approach and their classroom practices in North Shoa of the Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. To achieve this objective, a descriptive survey research design that contains both quantitative and qualitative methods was employed. Data were collected from 72 English language teachers who teach at grade 11 and 12 levels. The simple random sampling technique was utilized to select the schools, while the voluntary and purposive sampling technique was used for teachers. Data were collected through questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and classroom observations. The data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as mean and standard deviation with the help of SPSS software, version 26. The qualitative data were analyzed through verbal descriptions. The findings from the questionnaire and interview showed that teachers hold positive beliefs regarding the contribution of implementing active learning for the students' learning. However, the result of classroom observation data revealed that teachers use a teacher-centered approach dominantly. Findings of the study could provide implications for teachers to examine their teaching methods, for stakeholders, and recommendations for future studies.

Keywords

Active learning approach, beliefs, EFL teachers, practice, secondary schools

Introduction

The advancement of modern education after the Ethio-Italian war is accelerated, and the English language has been given due emphasis in the Ethiopian formal educational system through each consecutive political exemption (Pankhrust, 1976, p. 305-325). It serves as the medium of instruction and is taught in subject areas, such as biology, chemistry, economics, history, and others at secondary school and tertiary levels (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2002:

121; Meseret, 2012, p. 16). The language is also used as the medium of instruction for business, education, diplomacy, science, politics and culture at both national and international levels (FDRGE 1994: 24 and Awol, 1999). The skill of the language, English, is considered as a vital means of communication to engage in the global economy and to gain access information and knowledge that serve as the foundation for both social and economic development.

Thus, considering the significant values of the English language in national and international relations, there has been a significant paradigm shift from the traditional, teacher-centered method of teaching to an active learning (student-centered) approach since the introduction of the new education and training policy as an alternative way in 2002 (Kitaw, 2017, p. 1; Yonas, 2003, p. 23-25). The main purpose of this change was to make learners at the center of learning, to maximize their learning, and to extend their understanding through building their own knowledge (Tesfaye, 2003, p. 23-25; MoE, 2007). It is also to make learners be more effective in communication than in grammatical knowledge. Moreover, because the language is used as a medium of instruction both at secondary and tertiary levels in Ethiopia, one of the main goals of this policy is to address the quality of the English language (MoE, 2002). The Ministry of Education indicated that the inadequate English proficiency at all educational systems is a critical problem, which the government is committed to resolve (MoE, 2002, p. 13).

Before the introduction of the new policy, the active learning approach, the method of teaching was a teacher-centered approach. Teachers transmit their knowledge of the language to the students, and the students attain what they hear from their teachers (Bell & Robinson, 2004, pp. 39–42; O'Neill & McMahon, 2005, p. 28; Napoli, 2004, p. 2). Teachers were considered as all-knowing and a resource of knowledge, whereas students were seen as passive receivers of information. Students were believed to be empty vessels, which could be filled by all-knowing teachers (Crosby, 2000, pp. 334–347). The only thing that students did was to answer a single word or phrase to their teachers when they were inquired to answer. This method of teaching can be the cause that affects the students' learning with passion and responsibility. Our teaching approach ultimately determines the "what" and "how" of language teaching and it can be the reason for either success or failure in the process (Mulatu & Bezabih, 2018).

Progressively, many developments and improvements in the process of language pedagogy have been introduced, and there has been a continuous change in the ways of building teaching and learning methods (Gamage, 2020). To this end, the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (EETP) have been working effectively to make new changes in education policy documents. For example, Tesfay and Berhanu (2015) reported that one of the changes was to introduce the model of the teaching and learning process from the traditional teacher-centered approach to the active learning (student-centered) approach. This shift was required because the traditional teacher-centered approach did not make learners comprehend their environments and take part in complex contexts.

Following the introduction of the new policy, some forms of curriculum modifications have been introduced, emphasizing a problem-solving approach that engages learners at the center of learning by making the curriculum more pertinent and adopting suitable teaching environments (MOE, 2002, p. 121). As new curricula and syllabuses that promote active learning are introduced, instructional approaches are also changing over time (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Misseyanni et al., 2018). The revised syllabus also asserts that the book is designed to inform the production of a quality textbook that inspires the teachers' confidence in the teaching of the language. Therefore, teachers can use the active learning approaches in their teaching and learning process (Curriculum Framework of Ethiopia [CFE 2020], 24).

Active learning is described as an instructional approach or method that focuses on how the students learn rather than what they learn and engages them in the learning process (Weimer, 2002). Here, the emphasis is on what the students are doing in the actual classroom learning activities, but not on the teachers. It is a process that provides opportunities for the students to react, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and communicate on the presented information (Machemer & Crawford, 2007). That is, learning means engaging actively and students can learn through different means of learning processes. Students are actively involved in the lesson, i.e., they do things by themselves, such as discovering, processing, and applying knowledge. According to Bonwell and Eison (1991), active learning is any instructional activity that engages learners in doing things and thinking about what they are doing.

Literature Review

As mentioned in the introductory section, there is currently broad consensus that the teaching approaches used in Ethiopia's educational system (upper primary to tertiary levels) need to change their teaching emphasis (Saint, 2004). To achieve this change, new training programs have been offered for teachers at various levels, such as Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT), pre-service and in-service, and seminar and workshop program (MOE, 2003, p.7). The main purpose of this training was to qualify teachers in the English Language Teaching (ELT) field and make them more proficient in implementing the active learning approach (Mekonnen, 2008, p. 281-304). The availability of well-trained teachers through different training levels is significant in enhancing teachers' qualifications and improving the quality of education (Abebe, 2013; Olkaba et al., 2019, p. 157).

That is, active learning approach is acknowledged as a teaching strategy that can accelerate the success of students' learning of the target language and improves the quality of education. It is also recognized by various researchers and stakeholders (e.g., the Ministry of Education) as an instructional approach which enhances students' learning and motivation. The active learning approach has become call words among Ethiopian educators (Dejene & Ramos, 2007, p.115-150). The researcher also believes that language teachers should embrace this concept since they are part of the school community.

However, as a practitioner in the field of English language teaching, the researcher observed that most of the EFL teachers were not seen implementing active learning approach properly in ELT classrooms. They still play a dominant role in guiding and controlling the teaching and learning process. Moreover, during the departmental meetings, the departmental heads and supervisors complained that the active learning approach could not be practiced in ELT classrooms as intended in the curriculum. That means what has been incorporated into the curriculum could not be practiced in the actual classrooms. There is a discrepancy between theory and practice in the Ethiopian teaching and learning context (Tesfaye and Berhanu 2015: 29). Therefore, teachers could be exposed to the lack of the necessary knowledge, beliefs, or skills in implementing the approach. Quoting Girma (2013) and Ayele (2014), Surachai (2020, p. 37) stated that active learning has failed to be practiced in schools because teachers do not have training in this particular teaching method.

It is widely acknowledged that education is a complex psychological process, and teachers' beliefs shape their instructional choices in the teaching halls (Johnson, 1992; Serbessa, 2006, pp. 123–40). Teachers' classroom instructions could be influenced by different factors, such as their beliefs, educational background, learning environments, practical training, and personal dispositions (Li, 2012, pp. 139-142). Hence, the inconsistency between the theoretical framework and the practical application of active learning approach prompted the researcher

to investigate teachers' beliefs regarding the active learning approach and their classroom practices.

Several studies have been conducted in local contexts focusing on related issues across various grade levels, from upper primary to tertiary education (Birhanu, 2012; Kitaw, 2017; Menistie, 2023; Mulatu & Bezabih, 2018; Telore & Damtew, 2023; Teshome, 2017; Zewdu, 2017). For example, Zewdu (2017) carried out research to explore teachers' practices and challenges in implementing an active learning approach at Wolaita Sodo University. The findings of the study revealed that the interaction between teacher and students in English class was not by the principles of the active learning. Kitaw (2017) also conducted research to assess the implementation of active learning approaches in the teaching of English language support courses to first-year university students. The result of the study revealed that the techniques that the teachers used were limited to pair work, group work, and individual presentation. However, the current study is different from the previous studies, as the use of English at the university and college level in the Ethiopian setting varies from the secondary school level. Besides, the study is different from the previous one in the sense of research design (mixed research design), participants of the study, scope of the study, and contexts.

Tadesse et al., (2024), also carried out a research to assess challenges EFL teachers face in implementing active learning in Sidama Region, Ethiopia. Classroom conditions, material, and teacher related challenges are the major challenges for ineffective implementation of the approach. The studies have succeeded in studying factors affecting the implementation of the active learning and generated helpful findings that can be solved. However, the study did not see the teachers' beliefs regarding the active learning approach and their classroom practices in special contexts at the secondary school, with grades 11 and 12 levels in focus.

Moreover, Menistie (2023) conducted research to investigate the practice and challenges of implementing active learning approach between the old curriculum-trained teachers and the new curriculum-trained teachers in North Wollo governmental primary schools. The findings of the study revealed that there was a difference in the perception of the utilization of the approach by the old curriculum-trained teachers and the new curriculum-trained teachers. Teachers and students preferring the lecture method, lack of teaching materials, and shortage of time were among the identified challenges to implementing the approach. However, the current study is different from the previous study in the sense of its scope, grade levels, and participants. Besides, the focus of Menistie's study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers who were trained by the old curriculum and the new curriculum towards active learning in primary schools. However, the current study was conducted at grades 11 and 12 levels without referring to the participants' curriculum training background.

In general, while there have been some research attempts on related issues, the researcher personally believes that further investigation is needed regarding teachers' pedagogical beliefs about the active learning approach and how these beliefs are apparent in their actual classroom practices within local contexts. Therefore, the present study aimed to address the following two research questions:

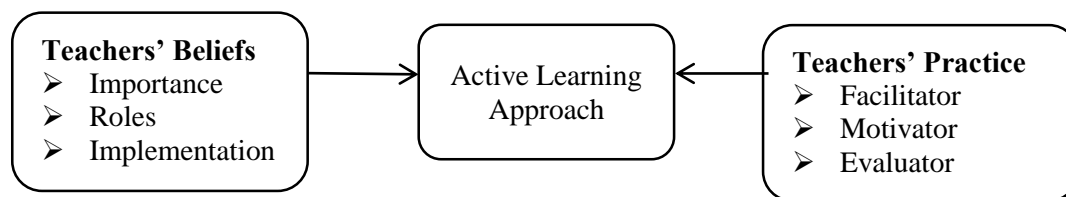
1. How do secondary school English language teachers perceive active learning approaches?
2. To what extent is the active learning approach practiced by the teachers?

The theory that supports an active learning approach is drawn from the constructivist theories of learning. The theory was developed by (Piaget 1973) and others suggesting that students can learn through building their own knowledge by relating with their prior knowledge and

experiences to form new understanding. Therefore, in this study, the constructivist theory of learning would be applied. This view was used as a base for conceptual framework.

Figure 1

Conceptual Frame Work of the Study (Own Explanation)



The conceptual framework (Figure 1) shows that active learning approach could be practiced effectively if teachers perceive the approach positively regarding its contribution to the students learning the language meaningfully and play their professional roles in the implementation of the approach. To realize their positive beliefs regarding the approach, teachers need to apply their theoretical knowledge into practice by facilitating, developing resources, monitoring, and evaluating the progress of the students' learning in active learning classes (ALCs).

Research Design

The study utilized a mixed-method research design to gain significant insights into teachers' beliefs regarding the active learning approach and their corresponding classroom practices. It was also employed to complement the weakness of one method with the strength of the other method and to triangulate the quantitative figures with the qualitative data. A mixed-method research design integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to extract comprehensive evidence of the research topics (Creswell, 2019).

Participants and sample size

The data for this study was collected from EFL teachers, who teach at grade 11 and 12 levels in North Shoa Zone of the Oromia Regional State (Salale). A total of 72 teachers (58 males and 14 females) were teaching English in the 15 selected secondary schools. They all were involved in the study using a voluntary sampling technique to fill out the questionnaire. The schools were selected using random sampling technique from 58 government secondary schools, which is found in the Zone. Furthermore, six teachers for an interview and five teachers for classroom observation were chosen from those who participated in filling out the questionnaire through purposive sampling techniques to generate relevant information.

Instruments

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was selected because it helps to collect a great deal of information within the limited time and also helps to reach a large group of research subjects (Kothari, 2004). Therefore, a closed-ended questionnaire was used for the study because it helps to minimize respondents' reluctance to respond to all items in writing and to manage in the subsequent interviews if there is the chance of missing pertinent information under the questionnaire. Moreover, a questionnaire was utilized to gather information regarding teachers' beliefs, feelings, and responsibilities related to the implementation of the active learning approach, allowing the researcher to collect data from a large number of participants.

In order to develop a questionnaire for the study, previously used local and international questionnaires like (Horwitz, 1988, p. 283-294) were reviewed with some modifications on

most of the items and ideas to make them fit with the objectives and contexts of the current study. The questionnaires were developed to get information from the EFL teachers about their beliefs concerning the implementation of the active learning approach and their actual classroom practices. To produce answers open to statistical treatment and analysis of data, the questionnaires were organized in the form of a Likert scale. The respondents answered each question using a five-option Likert scale: strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, undecided = 3, disagree = 2 and strongly disagree = 1. The questionnaires comprehend two sections: part I, information about teachers' beliefs about the implementation of active learning, and part II, concerning teachers' self-report on their classroom practices of the approach.

Interviews

An interview is a qualitative research method that involves person-to-person discussion and can lead to greater insight into people's thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors regarding an important subject (Patton, 1987). It was used following the questionnaire to conduct a comprehensive investigation on the research topic. It was also employed to validate the results collected through the questionnaire and to set classroom observation question notes based on the information obtained through an interview. Therefore, the semi-structured interview was employed to give freedom to the interviewer to raise new questions during the interview and also to help the participants to express their feelings freely. The interview had been held with the participants who were observed. The purpose of interviewing the participants who were observed was to cross-check the data that had been obtained through questionnaires and interviews and what was going on during the classroom instructions. In doing so, six EFL teachers were employed for the interview from those who had participated in the filling out of questionnaires through purposive sampling techniques. The interview was audio recorded with the harmony of the interviewees.

Observation

Observation is a crucial tool that can be employed in descriptive and other qualitative research because of the richness and credibility of information it can provide (Hancock 1998: 89). Therefore, classroom observation was held to complement the data generated through the questionnaire and interview regarding the teachers' beliefs about an ALA and what was actually happening in the ELT classrooms. The data were also valued to see some related issues that had been elucidated during the questionnaire and interview for further clarification. To do so, five English teachers were observed in ELT classes through purposive sampling technique from those who had participated in filling out the questionnaire and interview. Each teacher was observed twice in different consecutive periods based on their willingness, availability during the data generation process, and their teaching experience towards the teaching profession. Ten classroom observations were conducted in total.

During the classroom observations, the researcher tried to focus on some elements of instructional events going on, such as classroom conditions and facilities, teachers' and students' activities, and classroom management (individual exercise, pair or group work, and instructional activities). To validate the pertinence of the observation data, observation notes and video recordings were used thoroughly.

Data analysis

In order to collect available data, both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis were used. The data generated through the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, with the help of SPSS software, version 26. The reliability coefficient of each questionnaire was examined. Therefore, the questionnaire's

Cronbach's alpha for teachers' beliefs about active learning approach was (0.807), whereas classroom practice was (0.808). Moreover, the data generated through interviews were analyzed using verbal descriptions. The classroom observation data were presented with brief reports on each teacher's instructional patterns and detail emphases. In the process of analyzing and discussing, there was an extensive mixing of results and cross-checking of the obtained data through employing the instruments. Finally, conclusions and recommendations were made based on the findings.

Results and Discussion

This section summarizes the results and discussions that were studied to address the research objectives. Thus, the results of quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed as follows.

Teachers' beliefs about the active learning approaches

This section aimed to answer the first research question: "How do secondary school EFL teachers perceive active learning approaches?" To attain this, 19 items were designed to gather data regarding teachers' beliefs about their implementation of the approach (ALA). The items address three dimensions: the perceived significance of implementing the approach for meaningful student learning, and the role of the teachers in its implementation to provide a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' beliefs and highlights the critical role they play in fostering an effective learning environment and their responses about their beliefs related to implementing the approach in their actual ELT classrooms.

Table 1

Teachers' Beliefs about the Importance of Active Learning Approach

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	Active learning approach emphasizes the students' language learning for communicative competence	72	4.17	1.904
2	Active learning enhances the students' self-confidence in independent learning.	72	4.20	0.894
3	Active learning values student-centeredness and makes them more responsible for their learning.	72	4.03	1.021
4	Active learning promotes students' cultures of working together.	72	4.24	0.927
5	Active learning helps students to develop their English language skills	72	4.15	1.122
6	Active learning improves students' critical thinking and problem-solving ability.	72	4.22	0.953
7	Active learning encourages students to use integrated skill.	72	4.14	0.939
8	Active learning has a great contribution to scaling up the quality of education.	72	4.29	1.027
Grand Mean			4.18	1.098

N = Number of respondents

Scale: strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2), strongly disagree (1)

As can be noticed from Table 1, the teachers' mean responses to four items (2, 4, 6 and 8) indicated strong agreement. This suggests that the teachers acknowledged the significance of implementing the active learning approach in fostering students' engagement and their skills of life-long learning in the English language. For example, the teachers expressed their strong agreement with the statement that expressed ALA has a great contribution to scaling up the quality of education (mean = 4.29) and promotes the students' cultures of working together

(mean = 4.24). They also showed their strong agreement with the ideas that an ALA improves students' critical thinking and problem-solving ability (mean=4.22) and enhances their self-confidence in independent learning (mean=4.20). This implies that the teachers held positive beliefs about implementing the ALA in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms were significant for helping students learn successfully and improving the quality of education.

Furthermore, the teachers' mean responses to four additional items revealed agreement, with scores ranging from 4.03 to 4.17. The participants, for instance, expressed their agreement with emphasizing students' language learning for communicative competence (mean=4.17), and encouraging students to use integrated language skills (mean=4.14). During the interview sessions, the participants also confirmed their positive beliefs towards the value of active learning for the students' learning successfully though there were potential factors impeding them from practicing the approach.

However, while teachers expressed strong beliefs about the significance of active learning approach for the students' learning, these beliefs were not consistently reflected in classroom practices observed during the study. Despite recognizing the value of active learning, teachers reported significant barriers to its implementation, such as unfavorable classroom conditions, shortage of time, students' class sizes, and varying student backgrounds. These findings align with (Kember and Leung, 2005), who emphasize that an effective active learning strategy requires supportive environments that promote critical-thinking and problem-solving skills essential for students' future careers.

In general, the overall mean score reflecting teachers' beliefs about the importance of active learning approach for students' learning of the English language was 4.18. This score indicates that teachers strongly believe in the importance of implementing ALA to enhance students' learning outcomes. The stronger mean score for active learning has a great contribution to scaling up the quality of education (M= 4.29), and the lower mean score encourages students' responsibility for their learning (M= 4.03). However, while teachers express their positive beliefs, addressing the barriers to implementation is crucial for translating them into effective classroom practices.

The next section analyzes data collected from six items designed to investigate EFL teachers' beliefs regarding their roles in active learning classrooms (ALCs). These beliefs are critical for understanding how teachers perceive their responsibilities in facilitating effective learning environments.

As noticed in Table 2, the teachers expressed their agreement with five items, with mean scores ranging from 3.74 to 4.14. The teachers seemed to be aware of the pedagogical roles they play in active learning classrooms. For instance, the teachers agreed that one of the teacher's roles is to maximize positive relationships among the students and between the teacher (mean = 3.74) and to communicate knowledge through engaging and challenging ways (mean = 4.07) and elicit students' understanding through involving them in problem-solving activities (mean = 4.11). That means the teachers acknowledged their pivotal role in the teaching and learning process within EFL classrooms. During the interview sessions, the teachers also stated that the successful implementation of active learning approach is contingent upon the teachers' practical classroom actions. This confirms the belief that teachers are expected to be experienced in the fundamental principles of student engagement and active learning strategies in order to support students effectively.

Table 2

Teachers' Beliefs about their Role in Active Learning Classes (ALCs)

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	Balancing the students' engagement between dependent and independent learners.	72	4.22	0.996
2	Maximize positive relationships among the students and between the teachers.	72	3.74	1.278
3	Communicating knowledge through interesting and challenging activities.	72	4.07	1.214
4	Electing and delivering appropriate lessons based on the students' learning backgrounds.	72	3.99	1.216
5	Monitoring the level of the students' understanding and involving them in problem-solving activities.	72	4.03	1.210
6	Differentiate instructions to meet an individual student's need in active learning classes.	72	4.14	1.092
Grand Mean			4.03	1.168

N = Number of respondents

Scale: strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2), strongly disagree (1)

Additionally, the teachers' mean responses to one item, balancing the students' engagement between dependent and independent learners, revealed strong agreement (mean=4.22). This indicates that differentiating instructions based on students' learning backgrounds is a core component of teachers' daily professional practice. This finding supports Xhemajli's (2016) conception of teachers as multifaceted professional, such as designers, organizers, researchers, and advisors, who manage the learning process to help students prepare for enduring learning. Under the part of the interview, the teachers confirmed that students actively participate, think critically, and cultivate a collaborative learning culture under the teacher's guidance.

This qualitative data aligns with the strong quantitative support for teachers' roles in facilitating active learning, as indicated by the survey results. This suggests that teachers possess a strong foundational knowledge of the active learning and its importance in effectively supporting ELT. As noted by Bada and Olusegun (2005, 66-70) in active learning classes, the role of the teacher is to guide and suggest, develop a comfortable environment for the students to discover, evaluate the progress of their learning, and promote social interaction among the students. This shows that teachers take on a less dominant role in the sense that they do not engage in direct instruction but guide students through conversation and questioning.

The following five items were designed to obtain data on teachers' responses about their beliefs related to implementing an ALA in their ELT classrooms. As shown in Table 3, the teachers' mean responses to two items: implementing active learning requires a large amount of time (mean=2.81) and students learn best when teachers use active learning strategies (mean=2.75) demonstrate agreement. That is, the teachers believe that implementing active learning needs considerable time and it is the best approach for the students' learning. Conversely, teachers' mean responses to covering portions in allotted time, having the basic knowledge to practice a variety of active learning strategies, and beliefs about implementing active learning strategies in their ELT classroom unveiled disagreement (mean=2.50), mean=2.39, and mean=2.33), respectively.

Overall, the results from the teachers' responses to the surveys and interviews indicated that they have positive beliefs about an Active Learning Approach (ALA). The statements could be

healthy for the assumptions that the MOE laid out a new education policy to qualify teachers in the ELT field and make them more efficient in the implementation of the language in active ways (MOE, 2003).

Table 3

Teachers' Beliefs Related to their Implementation of Active Learning Approach

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	I believe that I am implementing an ALA effectively in my ELT classes	72	2.33	1.101
2	I believe that implementing active learning approach requires a considerable amount of time.	72	2.81	1.252
3	I believe that I hold the necessary knowledge to use a variety of active learning strategies.	72	2.39	1.108
4	I believe that implementing active learning makes it difficult to cover the portion in a given semester or year.	72	2.50	1.267
5	I believe that students learn best when the teacher uses the active learning strategies.	72	2.75	1.207
Grand Mean			2.56	1.187

N = Number of respondents

Scale: (Very frequently (5), frequently (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2) not at all (1))

Teachers' self-report about their classroom practices of active learning

This subsection summarizes the findings for research question number two: "To what extent is the active learning approach practiced by EFL teachers?" To this end, the teachers' responses to eight items are presented in the table below.

Table 4

Teachers' Practice of Active Learning Approach in ELT Classes

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	I provide activities that encourage students to interact with each other.	72	2.81	1.182
2	I provide students adequate time to express their sights on the topic they have been taught.	72	2.27	1.113
3	I create relaxing classroom to foster students' learning.	72	2.72	1.165
4	I facilitate contexts for students so that they get the chance to reflect on their work.	72	2.69	1.158
5	I encourage students to develop responsibility for their learning.	72	3.15	1.122
6	I motivate students to present their classwork allied with their real-life experiences.	72	2.97	1.363
7	I encourage my students to practice the given activities in sharing of individual experiences.	72	3.29	1.272
8	I go around the class and encourage my students to engage in and practice the given activities in pair.	72	3.15	1.250
Grand Mean			2.88	1.203

N = Number of respondents

Scale: (Very frequently (5), frequently (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2) not at all (1))

As Table 4 portrays, the teachers' mean response to seven items revealed that teachers sometimes practice an active learning approach, with mean scores ranging from 2.69 to 3.29. This indicates that they mainly practice the teacher-centered method of teaching in their ELT classrooms. For example, the teachers reported that they sometimes provide students with activities that encourage them to interact with each other (mean = 2.81) and create relaxing classroom settings to foster students' learning (mean = 2.72). This practice could hinder students' opportunities for collaborative learning and deeper understanding of the given materials. Conversely, the teachers' mean responses to one item: providing students with adequate time, demonstrates infrequent (mean = 2.27). This suggests that most of the instructional time is covered by the teachers. This result confirmed the finding of previous studies by Mulatu and Bezabih (2018) and Menistie (2023), which indicated that teachers occasionally implement an active learning approach in their EFL classrooms.

Under the part of an interview too, the teachers confirmed that they infrequently practice the approach because of different barriers, like shortage of time, large class size, and fixed seating arrangements. Classroom observation data also depicted teachers' tendency to favor the traditional teacher-centered method of teaching.

Overall, the teachers' grand mean score is 2.88) indicating that they sometimes practise the approach. This could affect the policy that the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2002: 24) has laid down in the curriculum, stating ALA should be implemented to foster students' learning and critical thinking.

Qualitative result

The study employed ELF teachers' interviews and classroom observations as data-gathering instruments for further investigation and analysis of teachers' beliefs about ALA and their actual classroom practices following the questionnaire. Therefore, the results of the two instruments are presented below respectively.

Analysis of teachers' interviews data

To obtain a closer understanding of the teachers' beliefs regarding the significance of implementing an active learning approach for the students' learning, questions were posed to the six EFL teachers. The analysis of data has shown consistent results with the findings of the questionnaires. The teachers confirmed that implementing active learning values student-centeredness, give them more responsibility for their own learning, and helps students feel confident and share their responsibilities. They also stated that it develops students' culture of cooperative learning and promotes long-term knowledge retention. This reveals that teachers have perceived the ALA positively in terms of contributing to students' learning the language effectively. The active learning approach is more helpful than the teacher-centered approach because students acquire knowledge and skills by practicing and reflecting rather than by looking at or listening (Felder et al. 2000: 26-39).

Regarding teachers' beliefs about their professional roles in active learning classrooms, it seemed that they are responsible for the success of effective learning taking place. All of the participants confirmed that the role of the teacher is facilitating favorable classroom conditions for the students' learning, getting students to learn through collaboration, and promoting social interaction among the students. They also stated that the role of the teacher involves planning and creating engaging lessons tailored to meet the individual needs of each student prior to the class session. In active learning classrooms, the teacher's role is guiding, developing

comfortable contexts for the students to discover, evaluating the progress of their learning, and promoting social interaction among the students (Murphy, 1993, pp.12-21).

Furthermore, the survey results indicated that the teachers “strongly agree” with the questionnaire item stating that one of the teacher’s roles is to balance students’ engagement between dependent and independent learning. This finding is also aligned with the previous study of (Telore & Damtew, 2023), which stated that the role of the teacher is to create relaxed and enjoyable contexts and construct learning activities that inspire students to work together and share their individual experiences. In active learning classrooms, the role of the teacher encompasses not only educational and vocational responsibilities but also requires them to be a designer, organizer, researcher, innovator, and educator; additionally, they promote a culture of collaboration and knowledge sharing through practice and reflection (Arbona, 2016, p.33; Harmer, 2007).

Concerning teachers’ practice of the active learning approach, nearly all of the teachers stated that they rarely practice this approach in their ELT classrooms. They stated various reasons that impede them from practicing the approach. These include fixed seating arrangements, large class size, insufficient time, scarcity of teaching and learning resources, and lack of the students’ motivation. Despite these challenges, the teachers designated that they occasionally practice active learning strategies, such as pair work, group work, and presentations based on activities found in their textbook. Classroom observation data also confirmed the teachers’ responses. Their primary method of teaching remains the lecture format, followed by giving notes on specific topics. Data from the questionnaire also confirms the interview responses. This result aligns with the study of Mulatu and Bezabih (2018), which concludes that the practice of the active learning approach is infrequent.

Analysis of classroom observation data

Ten classroom observations were conducted with five EFL teachers who had previously completed a questionnaire and participated in an interview session. Each teacher was observed twice in different consecutive periods. During the classroom observations, the researcher mainly focused on some elements of instructions, such as the classroom conditions and facilities, teacher and student activities, and classroom organization (e.g., individual, pair, or group work and class discussion). The observations were documented using notes and video recordings.

To this effect, most of the observed classroom conditions shared common features. For instance, the desks were fixed so that they are not conducive to accommodate various learning styles that support Active Learning Classrooms (ALCs), except for organizing students into pairs or groups based on their seating arrangements. Students were made to sit facing the blackboard or the teacher. Moreover, some windows were broken, and that may disturb the students’ attention during the teaching and learning procedures. There were a large number of students in one classroom (45 to 50 on average), which makes it difficult for the teacher to walk around the class and help students. Classroom physical condition can make or break an active learning approach (Silberman, 2009).

The researcher noticed that the teachers practiced almost identical teaching and learning processes, with only slight differences. Their teaching styles were more of a teacher-centered method based on the activities given in the students’ textbook. Most of the class time was occupied by the teachers’ instructions, with the teachers acting as the only source of knowledge. The teachers gave a quick review of what the students had been taught in the previous lessons,

taking about five minutes, and then introduced the topics that students were going to learn in that specific time. This was followed by detailed explanation and notes. The students were not encouraged to participate in the instruction and were not provided with adequate time to think or discuss the new subject with their partners in relation to their previous lesson or experiences. The only thing that students did was copy notes from the blackboard and discussing on some class activities in pairs or groups at their desks.

Furthermore, the classroom instruction was not supported by instructional materials like charts, posters, or diagrams. This observation suggests that most of the EFL teachers use a teacher-dominated approach, leaving students as passive receivers of information rather than active participants who interact with the teacher and each other.

Conclusion

The current study tried to investigate the secondary school English teachers' beliefs about the active learning approach and their classroom practices in the EFL context, with the case of grades 11 and 12 in focus. To this end, the general findings from the questionnaires and interviews revealed that teachers possess strong positive conviction regarding the significance of implementing an active learning approach for the students' English language learning in better ways. On the other hand, teachers were observed using a routine pattern of teacher-dominated methods of teaching with little practice of active learning strategies, such as pair work, group work, and presentation. Students were passive for the entire period except for the reaction of a few students on the given homework or class activities. Teachers looked to fail to have the theoretical and practical conceptions about the active learning approach for the students' academic achievements.

This discrepancy suggests that while teachers acknowledge the potential benefits of active learning approach for the students' academic career, they may feel constrained by traditional teaching practices or lack the necessary support and training to fully integrate these methods into their classrooms.

Overall, though the existing curriculum has introduced a modern pedagogical theory and practice into the education system, shifting from a teacher-centered approach to active learning, the teachers could not seem to practice the approach as intended in the curriculum. Instead, they were observed following the traditional teacher-centered method of teaching. This could be due to various factors, including students, resources, and other related issues. Thus, it is recommended that teachers should examine their teaching methods. Investigating the contextual factors that hinder teachers from implementing the approach is beyond the focus of this study but should be an area for further research.

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