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

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Abstract:

The purpose of this research was to find out the teachers' and students' perception cooperative language learning (CLL) at Hawariayat 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 Hawariayat general secondary and preparatory school. The data were collected through questionnaire for both teachers and students, interview for teachers and classroom observation.

The result obtained from teachers reveal that the majority of the respondents with a total mean value of 4 have seem to understand the concepts of cooperative learning in English classes. Similarly, most of the respondents with a total mean value of 3.9 shows that students have understood cooperative learning principles. Thus, the overall findings of this study indicated that the majority of teachers and students in the study had high level of perception principle. Although participant teachers and students had positive perception towards cooperative, the study shows that they failed to implement in their actual classrooms.

Key words: perception, observation, learning principles, cooperative learning,

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1Background of the study

In our secondary schools, 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).

1.2 Objectives of the study

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

1. Examine the perception of teachers towards cooperative learning.
2. Investigate the perception 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' perceive cooperative learning?
2. How do high school students' perceive 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' perception 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.

Accordingly, the study was delimited to grade 11th students and English teachers who are teaching in this school. Other contexts such as high school (grade 9th and 10th) classes and grade 12th students were not the parts of the study. In addition, college students and teachers were not the parts of this study.

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' perception 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' perception and 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.

Cooperative Language Learning (CLL): is operationally defined in the context of this study as utilizing strategies that group students with in the classroom and have them engage in specific tasks cooperatively which provides opportunities for each team member to practice the target language while interacting with each other (Kessler,1992).

Traditional teaching method: in the context of this study traditional teaching method means the ordinary methods of teaching that are non-cooperative.

Perception: is operationally defined as an act of being aware of one's environment through physical sensation, which denotes an individual's ability to understand (Lindsay and Norman, 1977).

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 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.

According to Xiaping (2003) cooperative learning refers to the instructional use of small groups in which students work together to accomplish meaningful study tasks. Research in the second or foreign language classroom indicates that cooperative learning is potentially beneficial for second language learners in a number of ways.

Christison (1994) also states that cooperative learning can be defined as a strategy for the classroom that used to increase motivation and retention to help students develop a positive image of self and others, to provide a vehicle for critical thinking and problem solving, and to encourage collaborative social skills.

Similarly, according to Kauchak and Eggen (2003:294), "Cooperative learning is a set of instructional strategies used to help learners meet specific learning and interpersonal goals in structured groups."

In addition, Slavin (1995:2) defines it:

> Cooperative learning refers to a variety of teaching methods in which students work in small groups to help one another learn academic content. In cooperative classrooms, students are expected to help each other, to discuss and argue with each other, to assess each other's current knowledge and fill in gaps in each others' understanding.

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"

Ineffective use of group time: Teacher monitoring, which we described as an effective tool against misbehavior, can also help combat wasted time. Stand back from time to time and observe the whole classroom.

According to Slavin (1995) cited in Kauchak and Eggen (2003), there are many cooperative learning strategies. However, research indicates that the most effective ones share the following characteristics:

- Group goals
- Individual accountability
- Equal opportunity for success

In general, cooperative learning is a feasible teaching method with characteristics compatible with the current wave of educational reform in our country. Cooperative learning does not only improve the students' communicative competence but also enhances their social skills performance in the English classroom in general secondary and preparatory school. In addition, cooperative learning processes focus on students working collaboratively in groups, thus allowing them to simultaneously learn the subject matter effectively as well as practice interpersonal skills.

2.2. Social skills

Webb (2002:10) defines social skills as group members knowing how to provide effective leadership, decision-making, trust building, communication, conflict-management, and be motivated to use the prerequisite skills. Cooperative learning requires students to utilize appropriate social and communicative skills in order to make groups function effectively.

Johnson and Johnson (1990) also states that students must be taught these skills and be motivated to use them. If group members lack the interpersonal and small-group skills to cooperate effectively, cooperative learning would not be productive.

In addition, Ghaith (2002:7) views that collaborative skills receive emphasis because to work successfully with others, students need to develop collaborative skills such as asking for help, making suggestions, and disagreeing politely. Social skills determine the way students interact with each other as teammates. Usually some explicit instruction in social skills is needed to ensure successful interaction.

Therefore, in order to work with a group through cooperative learning students must possess some social and small group skills. Teachers should realize that social skills needed to be taught; a person does not simply wake up possessing the skill to work well with others. These small group skills are especially important when it comes to cooperative learning in the language classroom. It can be difficult for students to express themselves in the target language because they may feel that they are not skilled enough or they are simply afraid of to do so. In this situation it is very beneficial for students to know that their peers are willing to give them the opportunity of expressing themselves and supporting them without being interrupted or judged.

2.3. Informal cooperative learning

These are ad-hoc groups that last from a few minutes to a class period and are used to focus student attention or to facilitate learning during direct teaching. Johnson et al. (1998) mentioned that teachers can use them during direct teaching to focus students' attention on the material they are to learn, help set expectations as to what class will cover.

2.4 Cooperative Base Group

These are long term, lasting for at least a year and consist of heterogeneous learning groups with stable membership whose primary purpose is to allow members to give each other the support, help, encouragement and assistance they need to succeed academically.

According to Johnson et al. (1998) base groups meet formally to discuss academic progress of each member, and informally, members interacts everyday within and between classes, discussing assignments, and helping each other with homework.

2.5 cooperative learning methods

Various cooperative learning methods and models have been developed over the years by different scholars and put in to actual practice in the classroom. Although a large number of cooperative methods have proposed in literature, the researcher has focused on the following five common cooperative learning methods.

2.6 Jigsaw method

The Jigsaw approach was developed in the 1970s by Aronson. In this method, students are assigned to six member teams to work on academic material that has been broken down in to sections (Slavin, 1994). Interdependence among students is promoted giving each student in a learning group access to information comprising only one part of a lesson. Students are then accountable to their Jigsaw group for teaching that part of the lesson to the result of Jigsaw group members. In addition the students from the different groups, each having the same material to learn, meet in counterpart groups to discuss and learn their part of the lesson before attempting to teach the material to the students in their Jigsaw groups. In this way, cooperation among students occurs.

Generally, cooperative learning is an effective teaching approach for English language learners. In cooperative learning, pair and small group activities provide learners with more time to practice the target language than teacher-fronted activities. It also promotes learners autonomy and self-directed learning. In addition, in cooperative learning, small groups provide greater intensity of environment so that the practice of the target language is increased, and the opportunities for feedback and monitoring as well.

2.7 Cooperative learning in an EFL context

Ghaith (2003:451) states that cooperative language learning has been proclaimed as an effective instructional approach in promoting the cognitive and linguistic development of learners of English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL).

Besides, Richard and Rodgers (2001:193) suggest in foreign or second language teaching, cooperative learning has been embraced as a way of promoting communicative interaction in the classroom and is seen as

an extension of the principles of communicative language teaching. It is viewed as a learner-centered approach to teaching held to offer advantages over teacher-fronted classroom methods. They also add cooperative language learning also empowers learners to acquire increased language skills because cooperative language learning promotes interaction; learners have more opportunities to listen to, tack and produce the language.

Moreover, Gillies (2004) also describes that cooperative learning in EFL creates opportunities for students to actively interact with each other, negotiate meaning around a task, and appropriate new ways of thinking and doing.

To summarize, the use of cooperative learning activities provide significant opportunities for students who learn English as a foreign language to acquire academic English and improve language skills.

2.8 Teachers' and students' perception of cooperative language learning

According to Lindsay and Norman (1977), perception is the process by which organisms interpret and organize sensation to produce a meaningful experience of the world. In other words, perception is defined as an act of being aware of one's environment through physical sensation, which denotes an individual's ability to understand.

Better understanding of a certain teaching method will help the teaching- learning process to become successful. In the recent years, many academic pieces have been written regarding employing cooperative learning as a technique in the classroom. Educators underline that tradition models of classroom learning are teacher-fronted, foster competition rather than cooperation which is favored by the majority of the students. However, cooperative learning creates a learning environment that maximizes the potential of all students. A study by Johnson and Johnson (1998) on cooperative learning performed at about two standard deviations above students who learned within an individualistic or competitive academic environment.

2.9. Teachers' perception of cooperative language learning

According to Johnson and Johnson (1994), in order to achieve the objectives of cooperative language learning and provide maximum benefit, teachers have to create well-structured tasks, set the goals of activities clearly, organize groups and assign students to different roles, and select suitable materials to be taught. The success of all these preparations and effectiveness of cooperative language learning depend on the perception or view of the language teacher towards cooperative language learning.

Related to the perception of teachers' towards cooperative learning, Yeabsira (2015) has conducted a research and the finding revealed that the sample teachers did not have the right understanding or concept about cooperative learning and practiced the traditional method of teaching. According to her study, it is possible to

conclude that the teacher neglect cooperative language approach and sick to traditional method of teaching due to lack of understanding about cooperative learning.

Therefore, teachers' perception construct their practices which in turn lead to whatever progress both the learners and the teachers achieve. This indicates that the teachers' perception of cooperative learning directly affects the classroom practice of cooperative learning.

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 (Koth ari, 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 perception and practice of cooperative learning in Hawariyat general secondary and preparatory school through narration of events, comparison and drawing conclusion about the opinions, perceptions and 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.

3.3.1 Sample and sampling techniques

The study was taken all English language teachers found in the school as participants of the study. The school contained five hundred twenty (520) grade 11th students which consisted 10 sections. From the total population, 15% (78) of students were taken as a participant of a study by using random sampling. Therefore, a total of 78 (45 male and 33 female) students which was selected from 10 sections and six (5 male and 1 female) English teachers were taken as a data sources for the study.

3.4 Data collection tools

According to Myers (2009) qualitative data sources include observation and participant observation (field work), interviews and questionnaires, documents and texts. The tools of this study was developed and adapted from a variety of sources in order to investigate the teachers' and students' perception and practice towards cooperative learning. The study collected the data through questionnaire, interview and classroom observation. Then the researcher was tried to give some explanations and discussions about the purpose of the above tools and the reason that the researcher used as a data collection tools for this study one by one as follows.

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Teachers have a positive perception towards cooperative learning activities and they also mentioned different types of activities such as group work, conversation, dialogue and gap filling activities.

According to Webb (2002), social skills refers to group members knowing how to provide effective leadership, decision making, trust building, communication, conflict management, and be motivated to use the prerequisite skills. Cooperative learning requires students to utilize appropriate social and communicative

skills in order to make groups function effectively. Therefore, the result shows that most of the students were seen to implement different social skills during cooperative group work.

In general, this implies that although teachers have perceived cooperative learning activities positively, they were not active to implement different cooperative learning activities in their actual classrooms.

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 leaning 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 leaning. 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` perception 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 perceptions of CLL.

- ❖ The ministry of education (MOE) and other concerned bodies (e.g. woreda education office) should organize a training sessions on how to teach the language through cooperative learning approach so that teachers can get the chance to share experiences on how to cope with the existing problems in general secondary and preparatory schools.
- ❖ English teachers should be aware of that only getting together and studying does not mean cooperative learning, and does not lead to effective learning. Cooperation is much more than being physically near other students. Regarding this, Johnson and Johnson (1989, 1990, 1994, and 1999) expressed that positive interdependence, individual accountability; face to face interaction, social skills, and group processing are considered as important conditions that promote cooperation.
- ❖ Teachers lack practical application of CLL principles and techniques. Teachers should be given the chance to play the roles of planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning. Therefore, teachers' education programs should give in- depth training on language teaching methodologies.

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