

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVE LEARNING IN
COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES AT KOTEBE COLLEGE
OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN FOCUS**

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to assess the implementation of active learning method in communicative English language classes at Kotebe College of teacher education. To realize this objective, seven basic questions related to practice, attitude, knowledge, training modules, instructional materials, classroom environment and other problems were set.

Kotebe college of teacher education was selected as subjects of the study. A total of 91 respondents participated as the sources of the data: 16 English language instructors and 75 English language majoring students from second year. Simple random sampling was employed to select student's respondents, but all English language instructors were involved. Questionnaires and classroom observation were used as data collecting tools. The data collected were analyzed using percentage and descriptive statements.

The results of the study indicated that though teachers and students have favorable attitude towards active learning method, the magnitude of practicing active learning in communicative English language classes in Kotebe College of teacher education was low. The study also revealed that active learning strategies like problem solving, project work, case study, researching and visiting (field trip) were rarely employed by English language instructors. Besides, English language instructors from the selected college were not effectively applying active learning method; rather they tend to use active teaching because of several factors. Among the factors that negatively influence the effective implementation of active learning method, the major ones were lack appropriate training (pre-service and in-service), orientation, shortage of instructional materials, poor organization of course materials, un-conduciveness of classroom condition and unfair grading because of the over use of group assessment as the major tool for continuous assessment.

Key Words

AED= Academic for Education Development

BESO= Basic Education Strategic Objectives

LEP= Limited English Proficient

MOE= Ministry of Education

NGO's= Non-governmental Organization

PBL= Project Based Learning

TESO= Teacher-Education system Overhaul

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

There have been many underlying theories of learning that laid foundation for modern teaching and learning. These theories describe how people learn and understand the inherently complex process of learning. There are basically three main perspectives in learning theories: behaviorism, cognitive and constructivism which explain learning in different ways (Brown, 1994; Margaret, 2005; Stern, 1993).

According to Wilson (2000), learning from the behavioral approach is viewed as a change in behavior brought on by experience which is observable behavior and deal with discovering the relationship between stimuli and response to predict and control behavior. In behaviorist's learning is based on the thought process behind the behavior. In other words, behaviorism puts emphasis on active teaching rather than active learning. The teacher is actively devising techniques to alter the learners' behavior because the change of behavior is the evidence of learning. In this assumption, learning is passive.

The cognitive theorists are interested in how learners acquire knowledge and skills rather than how behavioral responses are conditioned. On the other hand, cognitive views is that learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based up on their current or past knowledge.

Constructivism emphasizes active learning more than active teaching. The learning theory of constructivism is founded on the premise that is on the basis of their experience, learners can construct their own understanding of the world. The view of learning and learning theories is supported by many scholars. For instance, Capel et al (1995: 229) state that learning can occur only when the pupils are active partners through out the activity to develop a sense of ownership and personal involvement for successful learning. Moreover, Amare (1998) states that student learns more when they have "internal commitment" and the "will" to learn as the process of learning is an active

process and not a passive one. Here, the emphasis is that it is the learners' activities and not the activities of their instructors that result in learning.

Teachers are expected to facilitate students' learning by encouraging students in activities. Here, it is quite evident that the active involvement of the student in the classroom and outside classroom teaching/learning process broadens students understanding and developing thinking skill.

Nardos (2000) explained that active learning strategies are likely to be enjoyed. They offer opportunities for progress and are less threatening than teachers' activities, active learning strategies foster more positive students' attitude towards the subject. Thus, active learning leads to effective teaching-learning to bring the expected behavioral change.

Similarly, the curriculum reform initiated in Ethiopia after the adoption of the education and training policy has led to the extensive change in education. One of the changes is the paradigm in the model of teaching and learning which involves the shift from rote learning to participatory, active learning (Lue, 1998: 1). This change has brought a major paradigm shift in out thinking about education in general and language teaching in particular.

The ideas of instructional approaches, like active learning, learner-centered, problem solving, participatory, discovery, student sensitive learning, and the practice of higher order thinking skills have been introduced through this reform.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Traditionally, we think of the classroom as the place where teacher knows and the students do not know and their reason for being there is to “find out”. The curriculum organizers emphasized academic knowledge and instructional methods, which initiated memorization and simple recall of facts by learners in recent years. However, language teachers have viewed this approach with less favor as they experiment with learner-centered, active learning and skill based learning. In spite of a number of years the students are exposed to English language, their level of performance in using the language is very low. Moreover, the experience of the writer of this research proposal reveals, that students do not participate (whether in group or individually) during English language lesson in the classroom.

One of the possible reasons is the inappropriateness of methods and techniques employed by EFL teachers in teaching English at college level. In connection is the place of teaching methodology; Mackey (1965: 138) says the teaching methodology can be “...the cause of success or failure in language learning; for it is ultimately the method that determines the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of language instructions.”

The method which is used in teaching English is very vital in helping the learners become effective. In this regard, there is a current approach or technique which is commonly known as active learning.

Active learning, according to Silverman (1996), is a collection of instructional strategies that make students do most of the work, use their brains, study ideas, solve problems and apply what they learn. It also promotes interaction, working collaboratively, etc and these in turn promotes language learning. Learning is most effective when the learner is the initiator of the learning process. For this, as many scholars have suggested, active learning is important for the learners playing the initiative role. Bonwell (2003), for example, states, “All genuine learning is active, not passive”. It is a process of discovery in which the student is the main agent, not the teacher.” In short, Active learning is a learning process through discovery, analysis, evaluation, problem solving etc-to creates

new knowledge and understanding rather than transmitting of knowledge or repeating of information. Now, this approach is being practiced in Higher Education institutes in Ethiopia. Particularly teacher trainers who have been involved in higher diploma program have been taking active learning as the major part of the course. One of the objectives of this program is to train teachers to implement active learning in schools (of all grade levels). This is because developing students' cognitive ability and problem solving capacity are among the major goals stated in the policy of 1994 (MOE, 2003). These abilities and skills are partly achieved through the implementation of active learning techniques.

However, it may be doubt full whether or not teachers (particularly, according to the researcher's experience teachers in colleges) implement active learning properly. They might lack the necessary knowledge, perception and attitude and skills to implement it. Even if they acquire the required knowledge, and develop the appropriate skills to implement active learning approach, it may not be easy to change in to practice because most teachers in colleges have been accustomed to the traditional lecture method "chalk and talk" and it seems difficult to break away from it with in a short period of time. In other words, teachers' and even students' preferences or dislikes might affect the choice of method, which is partly related to their personality, perception, philosophy and style of teaching and learning.

All the above views clearly disclose that there is a gap between what is inferred "theory" and what is being done "practice" in the implementation of active learning instructional approach. Thus, it seems imperative to assess the implementation of it in order to suggest a means to close otherwise minimize the gap. In other words, there is a need to undertake regular and systematic assessment of its effectiveness. This study thus, was focused on assessing the implementation of active learning in teaching English at KotebeCollege of teacher education.

1.3. Objective of the Study

The major objective of this study was to assess the implementation of active learning in second year communicative English language classes at KotebeCollege of teacher education.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- Look in to teachers' and students' knowledge and attitude towards active learning to implement and practice it at classroom level
- Investigate the degree to which active learning is implemented in the university
- Identify factors that may affect the implementation of active learning approach/method.

The researcher believes that language learning might be highly influenced by the method and techniques that the teacher employs in the classroom. Making the class interactive is seen as one of the important things for the improvement of students' language. The study is attempted to answer the following basic research questions:

1. Do EFL teachers have the necessary awareness to implement active learning methods?
2. To what extent do the teachers use active learning methods in the classroom?
How often do they use?
3. What factors may affect the implementation of active learning in teaching/learning English?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This research aims at assessing the implementation of active learning in teaching English. These days, active learning is given a top emphasis in the process of learning and teaching especially in language classes. However, the practice is not well evaluated so far in KotebeCollege of teacher education. Accordingly, the result of this study is believed to be useful in the following aspects.

- It will give feedback to the college on the status of teachers' implementation of active learning.
- It will show EFL teachers minimize those factors that hinder the implementation of active learning at classroom level.

- Researches done on the implementation of active learning in teaching English at KotebeCollege of teacher education is very limited so the study will enrich the existing literature.

1.5. Scope of the Study

The scope of the study was limited KotebeCollege of teacher education English language teachers and second year English language majoring students.

1.6. Definition of Terms

Approach: is a prospective, an assumption, away of thinking or a way of dealing with a nature of teaching and learning.

Method: is an over all plan for the systematic presentation of knowledge based up on a selected approach.

Technique: refers to specific activities manifested in the classroom that are consistent with the method and therefore in harmony with the approach.

Anthony (1963) Cited in Richards, J and Rodgers, T (1986: 15)

1.7. METHODS OF THE STUDY

1.7.1 Methodology

The principal objective of this study was to assess the implementation of active learning in EFL classes at KotebeCollege of teacher education. To this end, a descriptive research method was employed on the ground that it would help to reveal the practice of active learning in communicative English language classes.

1.7.2 Sources of Data

In the selected college, the primary source of data was obtained from second year English language majoring students and their instructors.

1.7.3. Sampling Techniques

The research has purposefully selected the college and the classroom that is KotebeCollege of teacher education. This is because the researcher had background

information about this college and the classroom. Moreover, the section was selected on the basis of cooperativeness and politeness of the students and teachers. Among 85 students in 2nd year English language majoring students 75 respondents were included in the study. This covered 88.23% of the total population. Sample students respondents were selected using simple random sampling techniques to avoid subjectivity. Regarding English language instructors as respondents, all of them in the selected college was included in the study which is covered 100% of the total population.

1.7.4. Instruments of Data Collection

1.7.4.1. The Questionnaires

Two the questionnaires were prepared for both students and classroom teachers. All questions were closed ended which involved quantitative rankings and ratings.

1.7.4.2. Classroom Observation

Classroom observation was the major data collection tools in this study. Accordingly, the classroom observation check list was designed and conducted based on pre-planned point, specially for the purpose of this study that would help the researcher to gather information and to examine the extent of implementation of active learning and to identify factors that affect the implementation of it in communicative English language classes at Kotebe College of teacher education.

Being the classroom as an observer, the researcher has got large information from what was going on in the actual classroom. He attempted to see how students interacting each other as well as with their teacher during communicative English language classes.

The main focus during classroom observation was how English language instructors and students practice active learning techniques at classroom level, what kind of techniques it

uses to present communicative English language lessons, does it attract students' attention and interest and to what extent it gives freedom for students to express themselves. Generally being in the real classroom situation, help the researcher to compare and contrast the answer given to the questionnaire by the students, as well as the teachers with what was going in the actual classroom.

The observation checklists have the following elements regarding classroom instruction.

1. Observation of the classroom condition and setting arrangements
2. Observation for the roles and activities of the teachers
3. Observation of students' activities
4. Validity and utilization of visual aids
5. Observation of ways of assessment techniques

1.8. Methods of Data Analysis

The data was distributed, collected, carefully read, presented and analyzed. The responses obtained from observation check list and questionnaires were tabulated, interpreted and analyzed using statistical tools and, percentage. In this study, the researcher was tried to describe each theme by synthesizing the data obtained. The researcher will try to inculcate his own understanding of the participants' intentions.

The interpretation, analyses and discussion were based upon the results obtained, accompanied with what the literature says about the issues (in chapter two).

1.9.SUMMARY,CONCLUSIONAND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.9.1. Summary

Active learning method is the widely advocated method of instruction now days in many countries. It is aimed at changing active teaching (teacher-centered instruction) to active learning because learners learn more when they participate actively in the learning/teaching process. It has the contribution to increase language learning efficiency and attention of students. The main purpose of this study was to assess the implementation of active learning method in communicative English language classes at KotebeCollege of teacher education. Particularly, the specific objectives of the study were to:

- Look into teachers' and students' awareness and attitude towards active learning to implement and practice it at classroom level.
- Investigate the degree to which active learning is exercised in the college.
- Assess factors that may affect the implementation of active learning approach/method.

In order to achieve the above objectives, the following research questions were raised.

- Do English language teachers and students have the necessary awareness to implement active learning methods?
- To what extent do the teachers use active learning methods in the classroom?
How often do they use?
- What problems teachers and students encounter in attempting to implement active learning approach or method?

The study was conducted at KotebeCollege of teacher education. The respondents were English language instructors and second year English language majoring students. The

study employed questionnaires and classroom observation as data collection tools. The data obtained from different sources of information, using the above mentioned data collection tools was analyzed. According to the analysis made the following major findings were obtained.

- The study revealed that the majority of English language teachers and students have desirable attitude towards active learning. However, the magnitude of practical implementation of active learning methods in communicative English language classes was very low. The reason for the low level of practicing active learning method was found to be shortage of training materials (modules), resources (library equipped with recent and appropriate references) lack of time and lack of appropriate handling skills. English language teachers in the selected teachers training college lack practical experience with active learning teaching method they advocate in theory.
- Many teachers agree that the effectiveness of instructional strategy highly depends on the adequacy of skilled manpower in the learning teaching process in the case of this study. But, the findings disclosed that the training (in-service and pre-service training) is not adequate for teachers and no orientation was given for students at the beginning of college training concerning the application of different active learning techniques.
- As to active learning strategies which encourage students in solving their immediate problems were concerned, the finding indicated that teachers do not employ them in their classroom instruction. Moreover, students were not involved in active participation in classroom is found to be very low.
- English language training modules/English language teaching materials were not organized in such away that students actively involved in the teaching/learning process so as to develop their communicative competence. Rather, they were found to be poorly organized, insufficient activities and exercises that enable students to reflect and emphasis given to teacher's explanation.
- Instructional resources are one of the major factors in the teaching-learning process at colleges. The presence of resources make the learning process a like and practical and change the complex nature of learning simple and objective.

However, the findings indicated the necessary resources for training for foreign language are not available. For instance no library equipped with appropriate and recently published English language reference materials.

- Regarding classroom environment and seating arrangement, the results of the analysis revealed that the conduciveness of classroom condition to implement active learning method is low. large class size, traditional layout arrangement of classroom furniture and shortage of language-infrastructure were some reasons for poor classroom condition.
- The study also revealed that assessment in English language classes are mostly confined to group work and presentation which account for about 83.3% of the total grade. Assessment techniques (instruments) contributing to the final grades of students were not put into practice. This could increase the dependency of majority students on minority students or some working and unfair and subjective grading system.

19.2. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following-conclusions were drawn.

- Several research findings showed that teachers and students attitude towards active learning affect its practical application negatively or positively. The result of this research revealed that the majority of English language teachers and students in KotebeCollege of teacher education do have favorable attitude towards active learning method. However, its practical application at the classroom level was found to be low. Thus, it can be conclude that teachers lack the practical application and skills to use active learning method as they advocate the method in theory.
- Courses in the form of seminars and workshops for teachers and orientation for students do have great input about active learning method. In this regard, the finding of the study showed that the majority of teachers reported that they had participated on higher diploma program yet in adequate.

- Students' classroom activity tends to associate more to passive than active and interaction. Because most of the interaction observed dependent on teacher's talk and copying notes.
- The findings indicated that the modules were poorly organized. The respondents reported that there are insufficient activities and or exercises that enhance the active participation of learners and poor distribution of modules are the major reasons. This discloses the preparation and distribution of English language training modules in this college is not facilitating the implementation of active learning method.
- Regarding other factors affecting the implementation of active learning method, tendency of teachers to the traditional lecture method, unfair and subjective grading system because of the over use of group work and presentation in continuous assessment, shortage of time, large class size and lack of instructional resources were the other problems that can hinder the implementation of active learning method.

1.9.3. Recommendations

Based on the major findings and conclusion of the study it seems reasonable to suggest the recommendations mentioned here under, with the hope that it could be helpful to improve the practice of active learning in English language classes at Kotebe College of teacher education in particular.

1. Since the practice of active learning method in communicative English language classes in this college was found to be low, it is advisable to give continuous orientation and conduct cyclical evaluation of its application on both theoretical and practical aspect of active learning method. Moreover, in-service training through workshops and seminars should be frequently offered to teachers so as to upgrade their awareness, performance and skills to implement active learning method effectively in English language classrooms.

Hence, ministry of education along with the college administration has to arrange different kinds of training and workshops. In addition to this, the administration of the college and department co-ordinator should give orientation for students about active learning method.

2. In relation to English language training modules, the finding showed that the organization, activities and distribution were not conducive to practice active learning method.

Thus, it can be recommended that:

- Content evaluation should be made by the concerned bodies to decide on the quality of English language training modules for the practical application of active learning method.

- Especial training should be given for English language module writers through needs analysis of learners and teachers.
 - As subject matter specialists, all English language teachers in the selected teachers training college should take part to give constructive comments and develop different activities on different skills and merge their work to produce the final English language teaching material.
3. Instructional resources have great role in implementing active learning method, because they can provide practical experiences and help students to integrate their prior knowledge/experiences. However, the findings of the study demonstrated that there is lack of instructional materials: no library equipped with appropriate and recent references.

Thus it is advisable that the establishment of standard library equipped with good and recent reference materials should be the initiation of the teachers training college. To do this, the college along with Ministry of Education should allocate budget and establish modern language laboratory and standard library step by step. In addition to this, English language coordinators at this college should design project and ask for sponsorship of nongovernmental organization.

4. A classroom condition is the other major factor which hinders the implementation of active learning method in English language classes at this teachers training college. Some chairs and desks are not easily moveable and allow flexible arrangement. Hence, it is recommended that the college should share experience with other colleges about the conduciveness of facilities in the classroom for the effective application of active learning method.
5. It was asserted that students achievement is mainly evaluated through group work and presentation which results to unfair and subjective grading. To alleviate this problem, English language department at the selected college should take measures to make evaluation fair and worth while. Moreover, teachers should have adequate continuous

assessment techniques and be responsible to give regular, reliable and timely assessment.

6. Finally, the study was very limited for it involved investigation only in one teachers training college. Hence, it seems reasonable to recommend the conduct of similar study on the same or other subjects so that the findings will be compared and verified.

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