

EFL Teachers' Use of Cooperative Language Learning Method to Promote Students' Speaking Skills: East Wallaga Zone, Hinde High School in Focus

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate EFL teachers' use of the cooperative language learning method to promote speaking skills. To this end, a descriptive research design was used in this study, and the subjects of the study were six EFL teachers of two different grade levels and 51 students of the same grade level. A mixed-method research approach was used to collect the data. For this purpose, questionnaires, classroom observations, and textbook analysis tools for data collection were employed. The quantitative data were analysed through frequency and percentage distributions, and the qualitative data were analysed thematically. The results of the quantitative data were triangulated with the qualitative data and analysed based on their categories. The findings of the study revealed that EFL teachers had a conceptual awareness of the advantages of the CLL method in enhancing students' spoken language proficiency through interaction with each other. However, regarding its use, the finding depicted that English language teachers' level of awareness could not match the practical materialization. In other words, it's been found that there is little use of the techniques of CLL since many of the elements of CLL are not yet put into practice. The commonly revealed factors for the low use of CLL principles were rushing to cover the contents of the course, teachers' incompetence in CLL principles, students' unwillingness to cooperate with each other, and teachers' communicative language incompetence. As a result, EFL teachers are recommended to use English for communicative purposes rather than focusing on language form. Accordingly, it is also suggested by the researchers that EFL teachers have to work hard to improve their interactive teaching skills and to create greater opportunities for students through cooperative work in line with CLL principles. Therefore, in order to cope with the challenges stated in ELT using the cooperative method, various in-service training programmes and continuous professional development should be in place for EFL teachers.

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INTRODUCTION

Effective teaching and learning processes require the use of appropriate methodologies to meet the demands of the learners. English foreign language teaching as a profession with

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the whole foundation of its principles and procedures was further developed in the early 20th century, seeking effective and sound teaching methods. This period was characterised by frequent change and innovation in language teaching ideologies. The basic factors that necessitated the changes and approaches to language teaching were the systematic set of teaching practises based on particular theories of language and language teaching (Richard & Rodgers, 1986).

Through a gradual process, the traditional teacher-fronted approach was replaced by a communicative approach developed in the 1950s in the United States. Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) is one of the communication-intensifying approaches that have attracted linguistics' attention since the 1970s (Kessler, 1992). CLL, as one of the current communicative approaches, is compatible with many assumptions associated with communicative language teaching (CLT). Richards and Rodgers (2001) claim that CLL is a popular approach to the organisation of classroom teaching in many parts of the world. It is an effective teaching method in English as a foreign or second language (EFL or ESL) as it emphasises active interaction among students of diverse abilities and backgrounds. CLL also demonstrates more positive results in academic achievement, social behaviour, and affective development (Liang, 2002).

Furthermore, Brown (1994) describes that cooperative learning in the English language classroom has changed from teacher-centred manipulation of discrete grammatical structure to student-centred enhancement of

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communicative competence. In this case, it provides contextualised and meaningful communication whereby students fit into place in extra-language practise with each other. That is, it provides opportunities for genuine communication rather than rote language drills. CLL is the current English language teaching method all over the world, and it is an alternative option for all levels of students as it emphasises active interaction between them (Apple, 2006). It also emphasises the learners' collaborative work, which helps to develop their language skills to communicate in the target language to share information, relate ideas, ask questions, etc. Thus, through the contextual use of CLL, it seems to be acceptable and helpful for Ethiopian high school English language classrooms.

The educational policy of Ethiopia is advocating active learning methods in all education levels after the introduction of a student-centred approach. Based on the education policy of 1994 in Ethiopia, the government illustrates that students must interact communicatively to achieve the desired goals, achievement, and learning. Moreover, MOE (2008) has designed a policy to achieve quality education through active learning strategies such as cooperative learning, problem-based learning, and content-based learning.

One of the main reasons for the students' low achievement in spoken language is that they are not given the opportunity to practise the language effectively. Instead, the teacher sets the same instructional pace and content by lecturing, explaining a grammatical point leading to drill work or asking questions of the

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whole class. Likewise, when it is observed from the researchers' point of view of English language teaching experience in the school, there is a gap in practising the language. It seems that the traditional teacher-centred and grammar-based approach dominates the English language classroom. In such an approach, teachers take the floor of speaking rather than students, and competition between students is more dominant than cooperation amongst them.

English language use in English language class is affected by many factors, of which proper utilisation of teaching methods has a great contribution. Many teaching methods have been practised, ranging from the oldest grammar translation method to the current learner-centred communicative approach (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Proponents of the current communicative approach suggest that contextualised and meaningful communication is the best possible practise that language learners can engage in, as it provides opportunities for their own learning through pair or group work activities. CLL, as an extension of CLT, embraces communicative interaction in the classroom through a learner-centred approach with the central goal of providing opportunities for interactive pair or group activities. It also enhances motivation, reduces learners' stress, and equips them with wider communication strategies through the teacher's facilitative role (Brown, 1994).

In language teaching, the kind of methodology that English language teachers follow has a great influence on language development. The CLL method in this case is appropriate to increase students' language use

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and oral participation, which in turn negatively affects their oral proficiency. Thus, English language teachers' determination to use CLL in the actual classroom plays a central role (Gilbert, 2009). Teachers determine the extent of students' learning.

Cooperative learning, if properly used in the actual classroom, is considered one solution for the fear of language educators about the attainment of English language proficiency in the formal classroom. This is a very useful instructional strategy in comparison with the other teaching methods, particularly in enhancing students' speaking skills. Furthermore, CLL activities in the classroom help to enhance students' oral skills and reduce their apprehension towards speaking. CLL activities in the classroom make students generate more ideas and have less stress to express their opinions. Through the CLL method, speaking activities can be highly motivated, and students can be willing to practise the language instead of being afraid of making mistakes in front of the whole class. If language teachers set up the activities properly and can give useful feedback, students will get tremendous satisfaction from them. Generally, if students interact in the classroom with their peers in small groups in line with CLL principles, access to the language increases. But the question is to what extent these principles are translated into practise (Liang, 2002).

However, although most research findings point out the positive influence of CLL on academic achievement, social behaviour, and affective development, many teachers in Ethiopia still find difficulty incorporating a student-centred approach to instructional

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methods in their classrooms (Derbessa, 2006). Similarly, teachers' incompetency to cope with and adapt teaching materials in line with CL principles is another problem that hampers teachers' use of cooperative learning (Endalew, 2009). And though there is much attempt at employing group work in English classes, some studies indicate that what has been prevailing in Ethiopian high school English classes is a traditional language teaching methodology (Girma, 1999). He also added that both teachers and students seem to lack awareness of the new approach.

From the researchers' point of view of English language teaching experience at Hinde High School (HHS, hear after), the practical use of CLL in teaching speaking skills does not seem satisfactory. That is, though the students of English language classrooms have mastered a great number of vocabularies and could be engaged in a great deal of grammatical rules in their minds, they can hardly speak complete sentences and are reluctant to use English during the spoken classes. Many of them are embarrassed if they make a mistake in front of the students. Here, it is difficult for Hinde high school students to communicate in English; their oral interaction skills are very low. As far as the researchers are concerned, this problem is closely related to traditional teaching methods. That is, the teachers were regularly spending more of the lesson time structuring the content, explaining it to the students, providing them with exercises, and asking questions to be attempted by voluntary students rather than involving all the students. Thus, most of the students found speaking difficult and even

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unable to express themselves in the target language. On the other hand, some changes in curricula and methods in English language teaching have been made in the past decades to tackle students' problems with English language usage in Ethiopia. However, they have frequently remained deficient in their ability to actually use and understand the English language in normal communication; their performance and achievements have been found to be below expectations (Alamrew, 1992).

Among the research conducted locally concerning cooperative learning, Endalew (2009), Teferi (2011), and Wondwosen (2008) can be mentioned. In his study on factors negatively affecting students' CL at the university, Endalew found that teachers' lack of plans for CL and students' lack of awareness to gain experience from each other were the major factors. Similarly, Teferi investigated teachers' perceptions and practises of the CL method with high school students and reached the conclusion that teachers understood the benefits of cooperative learning. Woodwomen, on the other hand, assessed oral group lessons in English for Ethiopia in grade seven to promote cooperative learning, and the results of the study showed that the oral group lessons in the textbook fulfil all the criteria of CL. However, neither of these studies has investigated teachers' classroom use of the CL method, particularly in promoting students' speaking skills. This study has attempted to bridge the gap by investigating English language teachers' use of the CL method to promote students' speaking skills in high school. To

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this effect, this study tried to investigate teachers' use of the CLL method in their English language teaching to enhance their students' speaking skills. Thus, the study endeavoured to address:

1. To what extent are English language teachers aware of the importance of the CL method in promoting students' speaking skills?
2. How do English language teachers use the CLL method in speaking classes?
3. What are the factors that influence the effective use of CLL in speaking lessons?

Materials and Methods

The main purpose of this study was to investigate English language teachers' use of the CLL method to enhance students' speaking skills. Thus, in order to address the intended research objective, a descriptive research design with a mixed-methods research approach was employed. A mixed-methods research approach enables the researchers to draw on all the possibilities and provides a broader perspective to the study, as the qualitative data helps to describe aspects that the quantitative data cannot address (Creswell, 2003).

The study was conducted at Hinde High School, which is located in East Wallaga Zone. The school was selected based on convenience sampling because of the researchers' familiarity with the area, which would make data collection easier. According to Mujis (2004), convenience sampling is the most common sampling method in educational

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studies as it allows the researchers to have easy access to a particular research area where there are teachers they have worked with. Hence, the participants of the study were grade nine and ten English language teachers and sample students of the same grade level.

Samples and Sampling Techniques

According to the information obtained from the school record, there were a total of 549 students in grades 9–10 learning in 10 sections and fifteen English language teachers teaching in the mentioned grade level in the 2017–2018 academic year. From these sections, three of the classrooms were selected for classroom observation. In addition, all of the teachers and 51 students were included in the study (*see below*). Students were not the focal points of the study but were meant to serve the cross-checking purpose of their teachers' use of CLL in enhancing their own speaking skills. Altogether, three classroom observations of each classroom and fifty-seven people were included in the study. The sample of the study was fifteen English language teachers at Hinde High School and 51 students of the same grade level.

In order to maintain the representativeness of the samples, the researchers have used simple random sampling, availability sampling, and systematic sampling techniques. In a simple random sampling technique, all the students have equal and independent chances of being selected. Thus, the researchers assigned a number to all 9th and 10th grade students from one to ten and wrote ten numbers on ten pieces of paper. They then pulled all the papers from a box and pulled them out at

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random. Lastly, four pieces of paper that contained three sections were selected for classroom observation. The systematic sampling technique was also used to select the sample students in grades nine and ten because of its simplicity and quality of being free from bias during the selection of the samples. In this case, the researchers first determined the desired sample size and then obtained a list of all the students. They then assigned a number to all of them. Lastly, they picked the first interval number, 11, and this number served as the constant difference between the consecutive numbers until they reached the last number of the students. Through this process, 51 students were selected as a sample size to respond to the questionnaires. Of these students, the total number of female respondents from the whole section was 27 (52.94%), and that of male respondents was 24 (47.05%). This process was done with the help of the English department head and English language teachers. In availability sampling, on the other hand, the goal was to select the population that was available for the study. Thus, all the English language teachers in grades nine and ten were included in the study to respond to the questionnaires because they were the only available English language teachers at the school.

Instruments of Data Collection

The objective of the study was to investigate English language teachers' use of CLL in promoting speaking skills. Then, to arrive at the goal, the researchers use three different instruments for data collection. These were questionnaires for teachers and students,

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classroom observation, and text book analysis as data collection tools. Of course, the data gathered through different tools was triangulated for the validity of the question items.

First, classroom observation is particularly used to address the current situation of teaching and learning English-speaking lessons, in which the researchers wanted to know whether CLL was applied or not, how students express their opinions, how they interact with each other, and how teachers use the cooperative language teaching method. Moreover, its aim is to know the extent to which CLL principles were used by teachers in speaking lessons. Having informed the purpose of the research in general and the observation in particular to the principal of the school, the researchers have arranged the dates and the sections with English teachers for the classroom observation. After preparing the observation checklists with detailed notes, the researchers observed the selected sections three times: 9C, 9D, and 10B, while teachers were conducting speaking lessons. The observation took place three times in each section.

Second, the questionnaire prepared for English language teachers was used to explore the factors affecting the effective use of the CLL method in teaching speaking skills and teachers' awareness of the importance of the CLL method in enhancing learners' speaking skills. The questionnaire was also used to gather data on the techniques English language teachers mostly use to teach speaking. In this case, it was hoped that teachers' points of view helped the researchers

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have general ideas about the use of CLL in speaking lessons. Thus, the researchers have designed a questionnaire for teachers to answer the basic research questions raised in this study. With regard to the background information of teachers, they are all male, and half of them are B.Ed. holders and others are M.A. holders in English language teaching. Regarding their teaching experiences, they have taught English for 11–15 years. This shows that the required level of education is maintained. Regarding the number of students in one section, there are more than 60 students in a section, which reveals the large number of students in each section that can have an adverse effect on classroom interaction. Similarly, a questionnaire was delivered to sample students to get additional information on teachers' responses regarding the use of cooperative group work. Students' questionnaires corresponded to teachers' questionnaires and were translated into Afan Oromo. The questionnaire was written in clear and simple language with definitions of important and uncommon terms to avoid ambiguity and misunderstanding. Further, textbook analysis was administered to triangulate the data gathered through classroom observation. It was also aimed at examining the degree of correspondence between the contents of speaking lessons and teachers' methods of teaching speaking to attain the objectives of the study.

Thus, the researchers have selected some significant criteria suggested by Cunnings Worth (1995) and analysed some grade nine and grade ten students' English language textbooks to assess whether or not the speaking lessons in the textbook promote

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CLL. The case in point is whether the contents of the speaking lessons are convenient for the use of cooperative learning or not, whether they allow students to work in groups or not, whether they contain sufficient activities that allow active interaction among students or not, and whether they provide authentic and realistic communication activities such as role-playing, brainstorming, and problem-solving activities. Based on these general principles of CLL as guide lines, the contents of sample speaking lessons in the grade nine and ten textbooks, which were taught while observations were conducted and analysed,

RESULTS

This section deals with the discussion of the results obtained through questionnaires, classroom observations, and textbook analysis. The chapter was divided into two main sections. The first section deals with the analysis of teachers' perceptions about the importance of CLL in developing students' speaking skills. The second section discusses English language teachers' use of the CLL method in speaking lessons. The items were categorised into thematic groups according to their similarities. Questions related to teachers' awareness of the CLL method were measured using interval scales supplying five alternatives: "strongly agree, agree, undecided, strongly disagree, and disagree," and were presented to teachers in a closed-ended questionnaire. Beside this, the techniques they mostly use in teaching speaking skills were presented to teachers through open-ended questions. On the other hand, items related to English language teachers' use of the CLL method in speaking

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lessons were presented to teachers and students through closed-ended questionnaires. These questions were measured by interval scales with five alternatives: "always, usually, sometimes, rarely, and never" to show how often teachers use the CLL method in speaking lessons. Likewise, the data gathered from classroom observations, questionnaires, and textbook analysis was analysed in combination with the questionnaires in terms of their similarities.

English Language Teachers' Perception of CLL to Promote Students Speaking Skills

Teachers' awareness of the use of CLL in enhancing students' speaking skills was

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analysed using descriptive statistics. That is, items related to teachers' awareness of CL were categorised into groups and analysed in frequency distribution. The categories of items were: how English language teachers perceive CLL; English language teachers' instructional use of CLL; English language teachers' perceptions towards students' roles; and teachers' views towards group work, which were analysed in these sections as follows:

Teachers' Awareness of the Use of CLL to Promote Students Speaking Skill

Teachers' awareness of the use of CLL to promote students speaking skills in terms of CLL principles was analysed based on the table below.

Table 1

Teachers' Awareness of the Use of CLL to Promote Students Speaking Skills

NO	Items	Responses						
		SA	A	UD	D	SD	Total	
1	CLL is a method primarily function as meaningful and naturalistic communication through cooperative group	F	2	4		-		6
		%	40%	60%	-			100%
2.	CLL promotes equal participation of all students	f	2	2	-	2		6
		%	33.3%	33.3%	-	33.3%		100%
.3	English Language teachers' roles in CLL is monitoring and facilitating.	F	2	4	-	-		6
		%	40%	60%	-	-		100%
4	CLL promotes individual accountability	F	1	4	1	-		6
		%	20%	60%	20%	-		100%
5	Peer-interactions help students obtain better achievement in CLL as it enables them to interact freely.	f	2	4		-		6
		%	40%	60%		-		100%
6	Every member of a group in CLL should have a role to play.	f	6	-				6
		%	100%	-				100%
7	CL focuses on students of mixed proficiency level to work together in group.	f	-	5		1		6
		%	-	83.3%		16.3%		100%

As can be seen from Table 1, item 1, which deals with the functions of CLL as meaningful and naturalistic communication through cooperative groups, 60% of teachers "agreed" and 20% of teachers "strongly agreed" that

CLL is a method whose primary function is meaningful and naturalistic communication through cooperative groups in English language teaching. With regard to item 2, 60% of the teachers (strongly agreed and agreed)

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except 20% of teachers who opted for disagree replied that CLL gives all students the opportunity to participate equally in speaking language practise.

The third item was meant to obtain data on the perceptions of teachers about their own roles in the CLL classroom. In response to this item, all the teachers (100%) (60% "agreed" and 40% "strongly agreed") perceived that their roles are those of facilitators and monitors. Concerning this, Cohen (1994) states that teachers' role in the CLL teaching method should not be that of someone who measures the capacities of the students in terms of a final product but in terms of facilitating the learning process. Item 4 in Table 1 was intended to elicit data on whether CLL promotes individual accountability or not. 605 of the English language teachers, except 20% who responded undecided, have "agreed" that the CLL method promotes students' individual accountability. Furthermore, all of the teachers (60% "agreed" and 40% 'strongly agreed") perceived that peer interaction among students promotes communication in the target language. In a similar way, all of the respondents (1005) of English language teachers "strongly agreed" that every member of the group in the CLL classroom should have a role to play. In response to the importance of mixing students of different proficiency levels, 83.3% of the teachers agreed that forming groups of students with different proficiency levels enhances learning.

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In sum, from the above data, it is possible to conclude that English language teachers included in the study have a positive perception of CLL principles. They seem to perceive that CLL enables their students to practise the language effectively because of the presence of interaction among them. Moreover, the responses to open-ended questions regarding teachers' awareness of the CLL method verified that it is one method of English language teaching in which students are taught in groups to attain common goals through cooperation with each other. It gives them the opportunity to practise the language more than teacher-centred instruction. For instance, two of the teachers responded that CLL is group learning, learning through social interaction that gives students a chance to talk, facilitates interaction, and maximises group work. The other four teachers perceived CLL in that it arouses students' interest and makes them work together in small groups to contribute to each other's learning through interacting with each other. Hence, from what teachers responded, it is possible to infer that they had a conceptual understanding of CLL principles.

Teachers' instructional views of CLL in the English Language Classroom

The following Table 2 incorporates English language teachers' views of CLL in terms of using it in their classroom instruction.

Table 2*Responses of teachers' regarding their instructional views of CLL in English Language Classroom*

No	Items	Frequency	Responses					Total
			S/agree	Agree	Undecided	S/Disagree	Disagree	
1	In my view, CLL improves the students' proficiency if they are grouped with high achievers	f 2	2 33.3%	2 33.3%	-	-	2 33.3%	6 100%
2	In my view, CLL is a good method to practice speaking skills because students do not have to wait for teachers to ask them to do the tasks	f 4	-	4 60%	-	2 40%	-	6 100%
3	Teachers in English Language classroom should use CLL, because it enhances cooperation among students to practice the language.	f 2	2 33.3%	2 33.3%	-	2 33.3%	-	6 100%
4	Students practice speaking skills more when they are taught in cooperative group than in whole class.	f 4	-	4 60%	-	2 40%	-	6 100%
5	I prefer CLL to lecture method since it gives students the opportunity to use the language.	f 4	-	-	-	4 60%	2 40%	6 100%
6	Using CLL method does not hinder teachers from covering the portion.	f 1	-	1 16.3%	-	-	5 83.3%	6 100%

As can be seen from Table 2 item 1, 60% of the teachers "agreed" and 40% strongly agreed" that CLL improves the performance of low proficiency students when grouped with high achievers. Similarly, in response to the second item, 60% of the respondents except 40% have "agreed" that CLL is a recommended teaching method of speaking since it encourages doing language tasks by themselves rather than waiting for teachers'.

Regarding the third item, 60% of English language teachers "agreed" and "strongly agreed" that CLL enhances cooperation among students, but 40% of the respondents "disagreed". With respect to the 4th item, 40% of the 100% English Language teachers except 40% of English Language teachers "agreed" that students learn more when they

are taught in line with the CLL method than with teacher-fronted whole-class teaching. However, all of the teachers' (60% strongly disagreed" and 40% disagreed") responses showed that they did not prefer to use the CLL method to the lecture method. Lastly, in response to the question, which says using the cooperative learning method does not hinder teachers from covering the portions", only 16.3% of teachers "agreed" and the rest, . This reveals that a high proportion of the respondents perceive that CLL is more time-consuming than other English-language teaching methods to cover the portion.

The overall responses demonstrated that teachers' instructional view of the CLL method is positive for students to improve their spoken language proficiency by enhancing their participation

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through cooperation. However, a high proportion of the teachers believe that CLL is time-consuming. So, in order to cover the portion, using teacher-fronted teaching rather than CLL is considered a preferable teaching method.

This is also confirmed in open-ended questions in that the most serious problem teachers' face in using CLL is a shortage of time. Kagan (1995) shares this idea in that one of the limitations of CLL is that it is time-consuming. But this is true until teachers and students experience how to use the materials

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in line with CL techniques and principles. Thus, a shortage of practise time is one major factor that affects the effective use of CLL in speaking lessons.

English Language Teachers' Perception of Students' Role in the CLL Method

This section was intended to examine the way teachers perceive the roles of students while using the cooperative learning method in spoken lessons.

Table 3

Teachers' responses related the perception of students' role in using CLL during speaking lesson

No	Items	Responses					Total	
		Frequency	S.agree	Agree	Undecided	s.dis agree		Dis agree
1	CLL enhances greater responsibility for students own learning	-	-	2	2	-	2	6
				33.3%	33.3%	-	33.3%	100%
2	CLL method enhances students willingness to participate in speaking activities	2	33.3%	2	-	-	2	6
				33.3%	33.3%	-	33.3%	
3	Students' social interaction is promoted more in CLL classroom teaching than in teacher-centered grammar focused instruction.	-	-	4	-	2	-	6
				60%	-	40%	-	100%
4	Students' access to practice English Language for communication is best promoted in CLL	-	-	6	-	-	-	6
				100%	-	-	-	100%
5	Peer group interaction and cooperation best motivate students to practice English language.	2	40%	4	-	-	-	6
				60%	-	-	-	100%

As it can be inferred from Table 3 item 1, all the teachers responded differently (33.3% "agreed", 33.3% undecided," and 33.3% "disagreed") that CLL enhances greater responsibility for students. In response to the second item, 60% of teachers

("strongly agreed" and "agreed") indicated their agreement with the view that CLL enhances students' willingness to participate in the speaking activities. This could be an indication of the power of CLL to bear the responsibility for students' self-

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learning. In the third grade, 60% of the English language teachers, except 40% who opted for disagreement, showed their agreement with the suitability of the CLL method for promoting oral interaction among students while communicating with each other. Consequently, teachers' responses to item 4 revealed that all of the teachers were convinced of CLL's role in creating better opportunities for practising spoken English. With regard to item 5th, again, all of the teachers—four agreed and two strongly agreed—indicated their belief that CLL best promotes peer interaction and cooperation, thus motivating them to practise the English language. In general, the five items dealing with students' roles indicated that teachers' perceive the positive aspects of CLL in that it develops the students' responsibility and willingness to participate in speaking activities, which in turn positively affects their spoken language development and social interaction through cooperation. With regard to this, Hopkins (2005) stated that CLL has a powerful effect on

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raising students' active participation in learning and collaborative behaviour by developing social as well as academic skills; in CLL, students learn from each other besides their teacher and are responsible for their own learning. And this process could lead to more communication among them.

English Language Teachers' Use of the CLL Method in Teaching Speaking Lessons

The way teachers perceive the CLL method and its principles was described thoroughly. In this section, the extent to which English language teachers' use CLL in English-speaking lessons is addressed. The same questions were posed to students to triangulate the data obtained from the English language teachers. The responses of both teachers and students were analysed together for triangulation purposes. Then, the results obtained from the two sources are triangulated by the data gathered through classroom observation and textbook analysis as follows:

English Language Teachers' Use of Cooperative Language Learning

Table 4. Teachers' and students' responses to items related to cooperative language learning

No	Items	Responses							
		Subjects	Fre & per	Always	Usually	Some times	Rarely	Never	Total
1	Teachers form cooperative language learning of students based on heterogeneity principle.			-	-	2	4	-	6
				-	-	40	60	-	100
				3	5	13	14	16	51
				5.88	9.80	25.49	27.45	31.37	99.9
2	Teachers take cooperative language teaching groups 'report from all group members randomly.			-	-	2	2	2	6
				-	-	33.3	33.3%	33.3	100
				2	4	7	18	20	51
				3.92	7.84	13.72	35.29	39.21	99.98
3	Teachers assign roles to every member in all groups.			-	-	1	5	-	6
				-	-	16.3	83.3	-	100
				7	7	12	13	12	51
				13.72	13.72	23.52	25.49	23.52	99.97

As can be seen from Table 4 item 1, 60% of the teachers and students indicated that they

"rarely" arrange groups of students on a heterogeneous basis, and 40% of them replied

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that they "sometimes" form groups based on the heterogeneity principle. In terms of students' responses to the same item, 58.82% (31.37% and 27.45%) of them responded that their teachers "rarely" and "never" form heterogeneous groups, respectively. 25.49% of students responded "sometimes", and 15.68% always," respectively. So, the data gained from the two sources implies that students have not had the chance to help each other and learn from one another. In response to item 2, which was intended to identify whether or not teachers and students take cooperative groups' reports from all group members randomly, 60% of the English language teachers responded that they "rarely" and "never" took groups' reports on a random basis, respectively, and the remaining 40% of English language teachers replied that they sometimes involve students in responding to groups' reports randomly. Students' responses to this item are almost similar to those of teachers in that 74.50% (39.21% and 35.29%) of the students replied that their teachers never or rarely took groups' reports at random. 13.72% of the students responded "sometimes" and 11.72% responded "usually" to the item. This shows that 83.3% of the English language teachers were not providing all members of the group with the opportunity to report their groups' efforts randomly. This could imply that participation is limited to a few active or voluntary students.

Regarding item 3, which was intended to elicit data on whether teachers assign roles to every member in all groups, 83.3% of the English language teachers reported that they "rarely" assign roles to every member of the

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group. And 16.3% of the teachers responded that he "sometimes" assigns roles to every member of a group. With regard to students' responses, 49.01% (25.49% and 23.52%) of the students claimed that their teachers "rarely" and "never" assign roles to all of them, respectively, and 23.52% of them claimed "sometimes". On the other hand, 26.44% (13.72% each) responded "always" and "usually" to the item. Hence, the extent to which teachers assign roles to every member of the groups is very low. This implies that teachers lack the skills to facilitate roles. To substantiate the responses obtained concerning the components of grouping processes, it is important to look at what Johnson & Johnson (1990) state. According to these authors, placing students in groups to work together, even under the name of cooperative learning or task structure, did not ensure that they would engage in the kinds of positive interactions that promote learning.

The result obtained from classroom observation concerning group formation shows that the teachers were attempting to put students in groups. But the groups formed in all the observed classes were based on randomly arranged seats. There was no group formed on a heterogeneous basis. For instance, most of the groups in the observed classes were all males or all females. Teachers were providing classroom exercises for already-formed groups based on seatmates. No mixed (heterogeneous) groupings were observed. Groups' attempts at tasks were reported or answered by voluntary students. In two out of three observed classes, teachers were trying to involve the whole class in

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participation (drill work), and they were attempting to provide tasks for students in groups with very little time allotted to the tasks. Similarly, students were not seen discussing in pairs or groups. Only in one out of the three observations did a teacher come up with an attempt to give students two roles (group leader and reporter) within a group of four to five on average. It seemed that group roles that can be shared among students had to be restricted to group leaders and reporters.

Thus, it can be concluded from the results of the two sources that teachers lack facilitation skills on how to organise and guide students for effective use of CLL strategies and how to encourage students to group work. As a result, they often gave little focus to group formation and the students' involvement in the activities. So, the researchers have the view that due attention was not given to creating a conducive environment for effective use of CLL in teaching speaking skills.

The result of classroom observation for this item revealed that teachers were not seen walking around the class to engage all the students in the activities. Instead, they were standing in front of the class and giving justification by writing some new words on the blackboard. From the students' side as well, they were not actively participating and having hot discussions with their groups. Most of the students in the groups were idly sitting, and some others were doing their own work. What the researchers deduced from this is that students were not accustomed to working actively in groups at previous grade levels, which resulted in a lack of interest in using the target language for oral communication. In addition, what teachers were trying to exhibit

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during classroom observation could be artificial. This means they had not been encouraging the students by going around the groups in their usual and actual classroom discussion. The benches and desks in the observed classrooms were also not arranged in rows to free space for movement in the classroom; they were overcrowded and disordered. The number of students in classes was also too large. Thus, the teachers' movement in the classrooms was limited. These could be another factor that affects teachers' facilitating role. However, the exercises and tasks provided in the speaking sections of the textbook enhance cooperative learning among students. For example, on page 91 of the speaking section, the activities let the students work in pairs or groups to add extra information to the sentences given by using the phrases provided, which helps them develop their spoken language proficiency. Furthermore, the languages used in the activities are authentic and like-real-life English, which can develop students' language use.

English Language Teachers use adequate activities and speaking skills practises for their students

In providing adequate speaking tasks so as to enable students to practise the language for a wider communication purpose, English language teachers are expected to have a lion's share of the contribution. For this reason, questions under this were aimed at assessing whether teachers provide speaking activities to allow students access to oral communication.

English Language Teachers Role to Involve Students in Speaking Practices

Table 5

Responses to items involving students in speaking practices

No	Items	Subje	Fre&	Response					Total
				Always	Usually,	Some times	Rarely	Never	
1	Teachers ask students to express their views and opinions supporting or opposing ideas reported by other students.	T	f	-	2	2	2	-	6
			%	-	33.3	33.3	33.3	-	100
		S	f	4	6	11	16	14	51
		%	7.84	11.76	21.56	31.37	27.45	99.98	
2	Teachers engage students to discuss in groups and then give oral feed-back on their practices.	T	f	2	2	-	2	-	6
			%	33.3	33.3	-	33.3	-	100
		S	f	7	8	9	14	13	51
		%	13.72	15.68	17.64	27.45	25.49	99.98	
3	Teachers develop students' social skill by using CLL method.	T	f	-	-	5	1	-	6
			%	-	-	83.3	16.3	-	100
		S	f	6	9	12	14	10	51
		%	11.76	17.64	23.52	27.45	19.60	99.97	

Table 5 Item 1 was intended to investigate whether English language teachers involve students in expressing their individual views on ideas reported by other students from any other group. In response to this item, 40% of the teachers responded that they "usually" make students express their individual views by supporting or opposing the ideas reported by other group members. And the rest four responded that they "sometimes" and "rarely" involve students to suggest their individual opinions. Regarding students' responses to the same item, 58.82% (31.37% and 27.45%) of them claimed that their teachers "rarely" and "never" involve them in expressing their individual views to the report provided by other group members. But 21.56% of the

students answered that their teachers sometimes engage them in the process.

As far as the result from classroom observation is concerned, the researchers could not come across any student who suggested on groups' reports either supporting or opposing. However, teachers were observed trying to involve students in commenting on answers' on tasks. But students were waiting for what the teacher was saying and writing. Most of the students were sitting idle when the teacher attempted to let them do the activities in the textbook. Thus, many students were passive listeners to the English language teachers and to the few active students. This implies that English language teachers lack adequate skills to arouse their students'

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interest and to involve them in the oral lessons effectively. It could also lead to the conclusion that students' silence could be due to fear of making mistakes that make them overly dependent on their teachers and think of teachers as knowledge-givers. Contrary to this reality, the tasks provided in the speaking parts of the textbook analysed could have enabled students to act up in role-playing, storytelling, and debating techniques. The speaking sections were designed with several CLL activities that involve students in short talks and conversations on specific topics that are closely related to their daily lives.

Regarding item 2, 60% of the teachers responded "usually" and "always" each, and 40% replied "rarely" that they engage students to discuss in groups and provide feedback to the discussion. Contrary to this, more than half (52.94%) of students responded that they were rarely or never given feedback on their discussion, and 29.40% (15.68% and 13.72%) of them claimed usually and always to the item, respectively.

Item 3 was an attempt to extract information on teachers' efforts to work on developing students' social skills through the cooperative learning method. Thus, the result showed that 83.3 percent of the teachers responded that they "sometimes" work to develop students' oral skills through the use of the CLL method, and 16.3% of English language teachers replied "rarely" to the item. On the other hand, students' responses (47.05%) indicated teachers' attempts to involve students in cooperative groups to develop their oral skills were found to be rare/never, 29.40% always/usually, and

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23.52% sometimes, respectively. From the observation as well, teachers were seen initiating students to help each other, though the practise was very little. This shows that teachers' and students' involvement in line with the cooperative learning principle is still insufficient.

In connection to this concept, Oxford (1997, p. 447) quotes the advantage of CLL over other teaching methods, saying that "what we know about effective instruction indicates that cooperative learning should be used when we want students to learn more, like the school better, like each other better, like themselves better, and learn more effective social skills". She further claims that numerous studies have confirmed the advantages of CLL compared to competitive and individualistic learning experiences in that it is more effective in promoting intrinsic motivation and task achievement, generating higher-order thinking skills, improving attitudes towards the subject, developing academic peer norms, etc.

As far as the textbook analysis is concerned, the activities and exercises presented in the speaking units analysed were prepared in such a way that they made students learn from each other as part of the socialisation process. The contents invite students to interact with classmates due to the adequate and repeated provision of pair or group activities, which are generally the core principles of CLL aimed at developing students' interactive skills. Furthermore, the contents and activities of the speaking lessons provided in the speaking part of the textbook analysed are conducive to the kind of teaching

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and learning that the CLL method advocates. For instance, in grade 10, on page 104, the debating section instructs students to choose one topic from the given alternatives, make notes for or against the topic, and then let them prepare a speech for the debate.

Though teachers often try to use some cooperative learning strategies like group discussion, debating, and guiding their students to do some speaking activities depending on the students' textbook, they often focus on demonstrating how to do an activity rather than encouraging the whole class to learn by themselves through interaction and sharing of ideas. In addition to this, they rarely rearrange the students' seats, ensure their students' organisation in small groups, and supervise or facilitate their activities moving around the group. Hence, these weaknesses could lead to the conclusion that teachers lack the skills of classroom management and organisation to actively encourage all the students to use their speaking lessons effectively.

DISCUSSIONS

Cooperative learning is a current teaching method that has received much attention. According to Johnson and Johnson (1999), CL is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximise their own and each other's learning. It is a group learning activity organised so that learning depends on the socially structured exchange of information among learners in groups. In this case, each learner is responsible for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others through successful

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interaction between the group members (Cohen, 1994). Thus, CL is characterised by a set of highly structured and sociologically based techniques that help students work together through free discussion to reach learning goals (Oxford, 1997). Cooperative classrooms provide students with the opportunity to help each other discuss and argue with each other and assess each other's current knowledge. It also encourages mutual respect and learning among students with varying talents, abilities, and backgrounds and fills in gaps in each other's overall understanding (Cohen, Brody, & Shevin, 2004).

Teachers' perceive the positive aspects of CLL in that it develops the students' responsibility and willingness to participate in speaking activities, which in turn positively affects their spoken language development and social interaction through cooperation. With regard to this, Hopkins (2005) stated that CLL has a powerful effect on raising students' active participation in learning and collaborative behaviour by developing social as well as academic skills; in CLL, students learn from each other besides their teacher and are responsible for their own learning. And this process could lead to more communication among them.

Kagan (1995) shares this idea in that one of the limitations of CLL is that it is time-consuming. But this is true until teachers and students experience how to use the materials in line with CL techniques and principles. Thus, a shortage of practise time is one major factor that affects the effective implementation of CLL in speaking lessons. In line with this,

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Kagan (1994) claimed equal participation, which refers to the involvement of all students equally in tasks in their groups and contributing as equally as possible regardless of perceived ability or social status to the groups' achievement, is among the principles of CLL.

The study shows that all the teachers have a conceptual understanding of the advantages of the CLL method; they were found to have a positive outlook on the majority of the techniques and principles it utilises in enhancing students' speaking skills. EFL teachers perceived that slow learners would benefit from the CLL method when they worked in collaboration with peers. As far as the EFL teachers' role is concerned, they are aware that they are the facilitators of learning activities, with the central students' role as resources for each other in such a way that their language use will be motivated. However, there are a few principles on which teachers have an unfavourable perception. For instance, they perceive that CLL is time-consuming, and therefore, it is difficult to cover the portion as compared to lessons delivered by the teachers. Thus, they were employing very few cooperative learning strategies. This limited the students' opportunity to interact with peers and improve their speaking skills. In sum, in spite of some unfavourable views on some of the principles of the CLL method, all of the teachers perceived a favourable instructional outlook.

In general, the overall findings of the study indicated that teachers have a relatively high level of awareness of the importance of CLL. However, the extent to which they

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implemented CL principles and techniques was not satisfactory. That is, the method of teaching that dominated the EFL classrooms was in line with the traditional teacher-dominated instructional method. EFL teachers set notes at home ahead of time from activities provided in the textbook. Though the language focus (grammar) is provided in the curriculum in an intermingled way with oral practise activities, teachers noted down the grammar contents and used them for classroom teaching. Students were also expecting what the teachers wrote on the blackboard. So, EFL teachers' talk was the dominant classroom teaching method, and students were not given much opportunity to practise the language during the speaking lessons, and they became overly dependent on their teachers.

The implementation of the CLL method during speaking lessons is not frequent, and many of the elements of CLL are not well practiced. EFL teachers were not exercising group formation in the heterogeneous grouping system in the way that students of different backgrounds (sex, religion, language proficiency, social skills, etc.) learn from each other. All the groups formed were based on the interests of the students, and the provisions of activities were according to their seating arrangement out of heterogeneity principles. Speaking activities that were set in the textbook were answered by voluntary students rather than involving all students on a random basis.

Role sharing with group members in such a way that students take responsibility for their own learning and their groups' learning is not practiced. Even when roles were shared, they

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were limited to group leaders and reporters. Similarly, EFL teachers were not moving around the class and attending to students' participation in oral activities. Teachers' provision of tasks and activities to students was limited to sample exercises in the textbook alone. Hence, students were not exposed to adequate spoken language practises to improve their communicative skills through wider opportunities. Over all, EFL teachers were inclined towards grammar sections that allow them to lecture rather than involve students, though the current English for Ethiopia textbooks in grades nine and ten do not allow a deductive way of teaching grammar (teaching grammar in isolation rather than in context).

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the study highlights English language teachers' classroom use of cooperative language learning methods to promote

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students' speaking skills. It shows that English language teachers understand the advantages of the CLL method and have a positive outlook on the majority of the techniques and principles to be utilised in enhancing students' speaking skills. However, they were employing very few cooperative learning strategies. This limited the students' opportunity to interact with peers and improve their speaking skills. In sum, in spite of some unfavourable views on some of the principles of the CLL method, the teachers perceived a favourable instructional outlook.

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