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The Practices, Challenges and Opportunities of Cooperative Learning at Hawassa University - Ethiopia

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Abstract: This research was meant to investigate the practices, challenges and opportunities of cooperative learning with reference to Hawassa University, Ethiopia. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a descriptive research design was used. A total of 240 instructors were randomly selected from all departments of the university. The instructors were made to fill in a close-ended questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview was held with 15 instructors randomly selected from those who had already filled in the questionnaire. Data obtained through the questionnaire were analyzed by using different types of descriptive statistics, and data collected through the interview were analyzed qualitatively by categorizing similar responses together in themes and the results were discussed by quoting some utmost responses directly. The results of the questionnaire and that of the interview were triangulated. Thus, this research employed a mixed-methods approach. The findings revealed that the instructors do not practice the different basic principles and techniques of cooperative learning. It was also found that there are challenges affecting the effective implementation of cooperative learning. There are some opportunities which can help instructors to effectively implement cooperative learning; however, the findings depicted that the instructors do know the existing opportunities as well as do not practice them. Based on the findings, recommendations are forwarded.

Key Terms: Practices, challenges, opportunities, cooperative learning, basic principles of cooperative earning

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I. INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

These days, universities are facing challenges due to the increasing number of students attending higher education. They struggle to organize teaching-learning activities that make students become active participants in academic discussions than passive listeners (Rocca, 2010). Universities also face a heterogeneous student body that need situational motivation to engage in deep level of learning that are necessary to reach the necessary level of understanding of complex phenomena studied at a university level (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

The role of the university professor is changing. It is believed that teachers of the 21st university will find it necessary to set aside their roles as teachers and, instead, become designers of learning experiences, processes, and environments. There is an increase in active learning and cooperative learning (CL) based pedagogies in colleges and universities around the world (Fink, 2004).

Cooperative learning principles and structures were developed in the 1960s and onwards as a response to the competitive and individualistic learning environments. Since then, these principles have been adopted as important teaching-learning pedagogies at the secondary, post-secondary and university levels. CL has become increasingly popular and is able to inspire deep approach to learning in higher education (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1998b).

Using CL in the classroom has many advantages. Some of the advantages suggested by different scholars include: (a) Students can enhance their social skills as in real life, (b) There can be more individualization of instruction as there is the potential for the students to receive individuals' assistance from teacher and their peers, (c) Students' participation can increase as students are active learners who need to construct knowledge by activating their own schemata; (d) Anxiety can decrease: students often feel anxious to speak in front of the whole class, but there is less anxiety connected with speaking in groups, (e) Motivation and positive attitude towards class can increase: as CL groups are interactive, pace of communication becomes student-centered than traditional classroom, (f) Self-esteem can increase: one purpose in education is to enable students to become life-long learners and (g) improves students' academic achievement: students develop peer norms in favor of doing well academically (Slavin, 1990).

Though it is believed to be the most effective among the 3 styles of teaching and learning (individualistic, competitive, and cooperative), CL remains the least used in classroom (Sarason, 1995). Johnson, Johnson & Smith (1991) found that CL has five basic elements that need to be presented and promoted by teachers to make CL effective.

1) **Positive interdependence**: This is the most important factor governing effective CL as its presence largely defines the presence of cooperation." Positive interdependence exists and is achieved when students perceive that they are linked with group members in such a way that they cannot succeed unless their group members succeed. In short, students must believe that they either "**sink or swim together**". Teachers can structure positive interdependence within a group by using different formats (positive goal interdependence, positive reward, positive resource interdependence, or positive role interdependence) (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

2) Face-to-face group interactions: This refers to group members encouraging and assisting each other to achieve and complete a task, to be productive and to obtain a goal. It is characterized by individuals helping each other with tasks and exchanging resources, for example, verbal feedback that students give to improve their team's productivity.

3) Individual and group accountability: This refers to dividing work among members and be individually responsible for specific tasks. This happens when the performance of each individual is evaluated and results are given back to the individual and the group, and students are held responsible by their group mates. This is important because the group needs to know who needs more assistance, support and guidance. Hence, there cannot be "**hitch-hike**" or "**free-riders**" that rely on the work of others.

4) Development of interpersonal and social skills: Having interpersonal and small group skills is one of the critical elements for CL to be most beneficial (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). A group that receives the social skills training function better as a group, display increased positive behaviors, fewer negative behaviors, like refusal to participate and off-task talk thoughtful discussion. So, if teachers promote social skills in class, students are better prepared to participate in CL appropriately (Baines, Rubie-Davies & Blatchford, 2009). Teachers can promote interpersonal and social skills by making team members practice and receive instruction in leadership, decision-making, communication and conflict management.

5) Group processing: This is defined as reflecting on the group's work and identifying what was helpful and unhelpful, and possible modifications that can be made. The main purpose is to improve the effectiveness of the members in contributing to the collaborative efforts to achieve the group's goal. So, to effectively implement CL, teachers are expected to ensure that teams periodically reflect on what they are doing well as a team, what they could improve, and what they will do differently in the future.

Implementing CL in classrooms has always been a challenge. Educators who have ever used group work for learning know that merely placing students in groups and telling them to work together does not ensure CL. Although both theoretical and empirical studies suggest that there are a number of social and academic benefits of working in CL groups in classes, there are also challenges in implementing it. Few of the challenges are discussed as follows.

The first challenge is teachers' understanding of CL. Some teachers have had no exposure to specific training on CL, whereas others have a wealth of knowledge, having participated in CL professional development; however, they are not steadfast to implement it. Hennessey and Dionigi (2013) argue that teachers' knowledge of CL affects their ability to implement it successfully. Another challenge is students' social skills since the initial social skill of students has been identified as a challenge to successfully implement CL. Some students do not develop essential social skills at home (e.g., cooperation, respect and listening) providing difficulties for these individuals when relating to others.

The third challenge is the time and organization requirements. Firstly, time and organization is required by the teacher to get CL structures prepared. The time and work required to find suitable tasks, resources and set up group organization is a challenge to successfully implement CL. Secondly, time spent on CL in class is also a challenge. This is because considerable time is needed to introduce students to CL structures and their required roles and behaviors, including teaching social functioning skills, mentioned above, so that they can effectively cooperate (Dyson et al., 2016; Buchs et al., 2017).

Though there are challenges mentioned above, there are also opportunities to CL. For example, initial and continued training on CL is one. Lack of knowledge of CL appears to play a large role that why CL is not widely implemented. Hennessey and Dionigi (2013) believe that repeated and deep exposure to CL is necessary for teachers to integrate it into curriculum. The support teachers get from their learning community is another opportunity that gives them the confidence to use CL. This enables teachers to develop their skills in CL, form shared resources and have valuable discussions, all while feeling trust and support from the group (Jolliffe, 2015). For instance, teachers are supported by a group consisting of university staff or colleagues, graduate students as the group meets regularly to discuss, practice, share resources, and teachers are supported by a critical colleagues who also model lessons for the teachers and scaffold their learning (Dyson et al., 2016).

Teacher reflection-groups is still another opportunity for implementing CL. Groups of teachers who reflect on their practice operate using the critical elements of CL. Besides, when teachers experience their own success from participating in CL groups, they will be able to see the benefits of their students learning in the same way and hence they will be likely to use CL (Farrell & Jacobs, 2016). Therefore, giving the increasing popularity of CL at higher education in general and at Hawassa University in particular is timely to empirically assess the practices, challenges and opportunities in implementing CL as a teaching-learning activity.

Statement of the Problem

A number of researchers pointed out that learners can socially and academically benefit from working in Cooperative learning(CL) groups (Farzaneh & Nejadansari, 2014; Idowu, 2013; Johnson, D, Johnson, R. & Roseth, C.,2010). CL instruction has proved its efficiency in achieving higher academic achievement over the other competitive and individualistic structures (Johnson et al, 1998b; 2000; 2007; Slavin, 1996). One possible reason for such positive findings is the adoption of Johnson & Johnson's five principles of using CL.

Though active and cooperative learning approaches have proved their efficiency at both theoretical and academic levels, university teachers still show resistance to transform their traditional lecture mode classes into CL instruction classes (Jones & Jones, 2008; Weimer, 2008; Fink, 2004). In Ethiopia also mainly teacher-centered method still exists at higher education system as most teaching is characterized by a high degree of instructor control where there is students' passivity and powerlessness and instructors still seem playing dominant roles to guide and control the learning process (Hagos, 2012). Even if CL has been widely used in our globe since it was introduced, it has a recent history in Ethiopia. CL was legally approved as an active learning and problem solving approach in Ethiopia with the new education and training policy in 1994 (Transitional Government of Ethiopia, 1994).

Although there is an initiative to change traditional (only teacher-centered) teaching approach into student-centered, yet few instructors in Ethiopian higher education have adopted this pedagogical approach (Hagos, ibid). From their experience at Hawassa University, the researchers of this study could realize that most of the time instructors consider that any type of group work is co-operative in nature. In addition, in different workshops, seminars and meetings, it is frequently heard that instructors use group work usually and say that nothing makes CL different from mere group work though CL method is not just group-learning. Any group work activities are not equivalent to CL as the small group format is not the essence of CL, and nor does it underutilize CL principles (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Hence, from the instructors' complaints, the researchers were able to recognize that the instructors use traditional group work where the five basic principles of CL are not implemented. From their experience, the researchers were also able to realize that the instructors did not use the existing opportunities which help them implement CL effectively.

Some local researchers (Seid, 2013; Leul, 2014; Mengestu, 2015; Hanna, 2015; Belesti, 2014; Belilew, 2015) have conducted researches on CL and pointed out its positive influence on students' academic achievement, social behavior, and affective development. These studies and some others focused on effect, attitude, perception, and implementation of CL generally. But, as far as the knowledge of the researchers of this study is concerned, no study has been conducted to investigate the practices with regard to each principle of CL, challenges and the existing opportunities which help instructors implement CL effectively. Therefore, investigating the practices, challenges and opportunities of CL in a university context is worth mentioning.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

General Objective

The general objective of this study was to investigate the practices, challenges and opportunities of cooperative learning with reference to Hawassa University.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this research were to:

- Find out whether or not cooperative learning is being put into practice effectively.
- Identify challenges affecting the effective implementation of cooperative leaning.
- Describe the existing opportunities for effective implementation of CL.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the following three questions were formulated.

1. Is cooperative learning being implemented effectively according to its basic principles?
2. What are the challenges affecting the effective implementation of cooperative leaning?
3. What are the existing opportunities exist for the effective implementation of cooperative leaning?

III. MATERILAS AND METHODS

Description of the Study Area

This research was conducted at Hawassa University which is found in Hawassa City, capital of South Nation, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS) of Ethiopia, which is 274.7 Km far away to the south of Addis Ababa. This university was purposefully selected as a study site for some reasons. First, it is this university that the researchers identified the problem. Second, the researchers are familiar with the instructors and other subjects of the study and its immediacy would make them easily access the needed information. Finally, no similar research has been conducted in this university with regard to this topic.

Subjects of the Study

The subjects of this research include instructors, department heads and college deans. That is, a total of 240 instructors (26 from each of the 8 colleges and 32 from the Institute of Technology), 15 school/department heads and 4 college deans were randomly selected by drawing lots. The researchers chose a simple random sampling since it gives equal chance of being selected.

Study Design

This study employed a descriptive research design in conjunction with a mixed-methods approach.

The major purpose of descriptive research is description of the state of affairs as it exists at present. In social science and business research, we quite often use the term Ex post facto research for descriptive research studies. The main characteristic of this method is that the researcher has no control over the variables; she/he can only report what has happened or what is happening (Kothari, 2004, p.2).

Data Collection Tools

This research employed 2 instruments of data collection: close-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

Close-ended Questionnaire

The researchers prepared a questionnaire by taking ideas from the related literature and based on the objectives of the research. The questionnaire was prepared in English since the researchers felt that the instructors could understand the language well. The questionnaire has three parts; the first part included items intended to assess whether or not cooperative learning (CL) is being put into practice, whereas the second and the third parts included items meant to identify challenges affecting the effective implementation of CL and to describe opportunities exist for the effective implementation of CL respectively. The first and the second parts were prepared in the form of four-point scale where each item has four possible responses (never, occasionally, sometimes and always)**,** and the third part was prepared in the form of two-point scale where each item has two possible responses (yes or no). Cronbach's alpha was computed to check the reliability of the items of the questionnaire, and to achieve its validity, the researchers' most senior colleagues were requested to comment on the questionnaire.

Semi-structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview was prepared in English for instructors, department heads and college deans.. The instructors' interview had 3 parts (items on instructors' practice of CL, challenges they encounter and opportunities exist for the effective implementation of CL). The interview with college deans and school/department heads focused only on over all opportunities exist for the effective implementation of CL and challenges instructors face when implementing CL. Thus, the interviews were meant to reveal data which cannot be obtained by the close-ended items of the questionnaire.

A semi-structured form is chosen for some reasons. Firstly, it has the characteristics of both structured and unstructured interview, each with its strengths. Secondly, data obtained by this form of interview are not difficult to categorize and interpret thematically. Thirdly, it enables each participant to elaborate the open questions that are posed (Freeboby, 2003). To achieve validity, the researchers' senior colleagues gave comments on the interview items.

Data Collection Procedures

One instructor was selected from each college and from the Institute of Technology to coordinate the data collection. The researchers held discussions with the selected instructors to get conducive environment to make the participants to fill in the questionnaire and take part in the interview with concentration; it was also stressed that they need to make the non-returnable rate of the questionnaire zero. Then, the instructors distributed the questionnaire.

After collecting back the questionnaire, interviews were held with instructors selected from those who had already filled in the questionnaire and then with the school/department heads and college deans. To be specific, interviews were held with 15 instructors (3 from four colleges in the Main Campus of the university and 3 from the Institute of Technology), 15 school/department heads (3 from four colleges in the Main Campus of the university and 3 from the Institute of Technology), and 4 college deans selected randomly by drawing lots.

Data Analysis Methods

The data gathered by the questionnaire and by the interview were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively respectively. To analyze the data of the questionnaire, first tables were presented before the analysis and interpretation. Then, the data were first presented in frequency and percentage. To make the discussion easier, the items of the responses were categorized into three sub-parts based on the specific objectives of the study. Data collected by the interview were analyzed qualitatively. To be specific, similar responses of each item were categorized together in themes and the results were discussed by quoting some utmost concepts directly. Lastly, implications were drawn based on the views of the majority of the respondents. The results of the questionnaire and that of the interview were triangulated.

IV. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

Discussion and Interpretation of the Results of Questionnaire

Instructors' Practices of Cooperative Learning (CL)

This section presents the discussions and interpretations of the results of instructors' questionnaire on their practice of the five basic principles of CL.

Table 1: Positive Interdependence

No.	Items	Fr. & %	Responses			
	When your students are working in groups of 3 or more, how often do you:		1	2	3	4
1	Explicitly explain to the group members that they are positively linked together?	Fr	215	-	25	-
		%	89.6		10.4	
2	Check that members in groups are heterogeneous?	Fr	200	40		
		%	83.3	16.7		
3	Establish mutual goals & objectives of the task where students learn & make sure that other group members learn?	Fr	240			
		%	100			
4	Give students a group production grade, an individual grade, and bonus points if all the members achieve the group's goal.	Fr	213	20	7	
		%	88.8	8.3	2.9	
5	Assign roles for each member than selecting leader?	Fr	230	10		
		%	95.8	4.2		

Key: 1= Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Always

Table 1 shows the instructors' responses regarding their practice of positive interdependence in implementing CL. The majority of the respondents (215, 89.6%) replied that they never explain to the group members that they are positively linked together. Only 25 (10.4%) of them replied that they do so sometimes. The table also shows that 200 (83.3%) & 40 (16.7%) of the respondents never and occasionally check members in a group are heterogeneous respectively. All of the respondents (100%) reported that they never establish mutual goals and objectives of tasks where students learn and make sure that other group members learn. The majority of them (213, 88.8%) agreed that they never give students a group and an individual grade, and bonus points even if all of them achieve the group's goal, and only 20 (8.3%) & 7 (2.9%) of them responded that they do so occasionally and sometimes respectively. The majority (230, 95.8%) of them replied that they never assign roles for each member than selecting leader, and only 10 (4.2%) of them said that they do so occasionally**.** Here, the results show that almost all the respondents do not practice the different activities which are meant to promote positive interdependence among group members.

Table 2: Face- to-Face Interaction

No.	Items	Fr. & %	Responses			
			1	2	3	4
	How often do you:					
1	Check that each member accomplishes the task to promote success?	Fr	150	63	27	
		%	62.5	26.3	11.2	
2	Debrief students at the end of each work session to review how the group worked as a team.	Fr		201	25	14
		%		83.8	10.4	5.8
3	Request students encourage each other's learning by either coaching or teaching certain topics within their group.	Fr	234		6	
		%	97.5		2.5	

Key: 1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Always

Table 2 shows the respondents' responses regarding their practice of face-to-face interaction in implementing CL. Accordingly, more than half of the respondents (150, 62.5%) never check whether or not each member in a group accomplishes the task to promote success. The rest 63 (26.3%) and 27 (11.2%) of them replied 'occasionally' and 'sometimes' respectively. The majority (201, 83.8%), and few (25, 10.4%) and (14, 5.8%) of them replied that they debrief students at the end of each work session to review how the group worked as a team occasionally, sometimes, and always respectively. The majority (234, 97.5%) and few (6, 2.5%) respectively replied that they never and sometimes request students encourage each other's learning by either coaching or teaching certain topics within their group to others. Thus, the results show that almost all the respondents do not promote face to face interaction.

Table 3: Individual Accountability

No.	Items	Fr. & %	Responses			
			1	2	3	4
	How often do you:					
1	Call anyone randomly to present his/her group's work to the class?	Fr	224	16		
		%	93.3	6.7		
2	Assign roles (leader, secretary, checker, etc.) for each member of the group to play during a learning activity?	Fr	229	11		
		%	95.4	4.6		
3	Assign a grade to individual students based on the overall performance of the group as a whole?	Fr		190	50	
		%		79.2	20.8	
4	Give bonus points for a group if all the group members do well individually?	Fr	235	5		
		%	97.9	2.1		
5	Assign a grade to individual students based on their particular contribution to the group's performance?	Fr		193	17	30
		%		80.4	7.1	12.5
6	Assign each individual a grade for the group's overall performance & grade for unique contribution to the group's success?	Fr	227	13		
		%	94.6	5.4		

Key: 1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Always

Table 3 shows that an overwhelming majority (224, 93.3%) and very few (16, 6.7%) of the respondents respectively replied that they never and occasionally call anyone randomly in the group to present his/her group's work to the class. In the same table, 229 (95.4%) and 11 (4.6%) of them respectively responded that they never and occasionally assign different roles for each member in a group to play during a learning activity in that order. Again, 190 (79.2%) and 50 (20.8%) of them respectively said that they occasionally and sometimes assign grade to individual students based on the overall performance of the group as a whole.

Nearly all (235, 97.9%) and only (5, 2.1%) of the respondents reacted never and occasionally respectively that they give bonus points for a group if all the group members do well individually. It is also depicted that 193 (81.4%) of the informants agreed that they occasionally assign a grade to individual students based on their particular contribution to the group's performance. The rest 17 (7.1%) and 30 (12.5%) of them respectively answered that they sometimes and always do the same. The majority (227, 94.6%) and only 13

(5.4%) of them respectively responded that they never and occasionally assign each individual a grade for the group's overall performance and their unique contribution to the group's success. These results show that the respondents hardly promote individual accountability within CL.

Table 4: Group or Social Interaction

No.	Items	Fr. & %	Responses			
			1	2	3	4
	How often do you:					
1	Present or review strategies for conflict resolution prior to starting a new group activity?	Fr	229	11		
		%	95.4	4.6		
2	Encourage a sense of partnership between group members?	Fr	224	9	7	
		%	93.3	3.8	2.9	
3	Encourage students to appreciate & express gratitude to each other within a group?	Fr	231	4	5	
		%	96.3	1.6	2.1	
4	Teach leadership principles prior to implementing CL projects or activities?	Fr	220	20		
		%	91.7	8.3		

Key: 1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Always

Table 4 depicts the participant-instructors' responses as to their practice of group or social interaction as one of the five basic principles of CL. To begin with, a very large number (229, 95.4%) and only 11(4.6%) of the participants respectively replied that they never and occasionally present or review strategies for conflict resolution prior to starting a new group activity. A large number (224, 93.3%) of them also responded that they never encourage a sense of partnership between group members. Hardly any (9, 3.8% & 7, 2.9%) of them respectively responded sometimes and occasionally to the same item. Almost all (231, 96.3%) and very few (4, 1.6 & 5, 2.1) of them replied that they occasionally and sometimes encourage students appreciate and express gratitude to each other in that order. The majority (220, 91.7%) and the remaining only 20 (8.3%) of the respondents respectively answered that they never and occasionally teach leadership principles prior to implementing CL activities. Thus, nearly all of the respondents do not promote social interaction principle.

Table 5: Group Processing

No.	Items	Fr. & %	Responses			
			1	2	3	4
	How often do you:					
1	Assess students' group work with tests & presentations?	Fr	215		25	
		%	89.6		10.4	
2	Give feedback on learners' performance?	Fr		227	13	
		%		94.6	5.4	
3	Use a pattern or system to organize students into groups and to do activities (e.g., think-pair-share, jigsaw, three step interview, number heads together, etc.)?	Fr		215	20	5
		%		89.6	8.3	2.1
4	Debrief students at the end of each work to review how the group worked?	Fr	227	13		
		%	94.6	5.4		
5	Ask each group member to list 1-3 things that they could do to improve their group's performance?	Fr	233	7		
		%	97.1	2.9		

Key: 1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Always

Table 5 shows the responses of the participants to investigate whether or not the instructors practice group processing as one of the basic principles of CL. Accordingly, the vast majority (215, 89.6%) and only 25 (10.4%) of them respectively replied that they never and sometimes assess students' group work with tests and presentations. A great number (227, 94.6%) and only 13(5.4%) of them replied occasionally and sometimes respectively. Many (215, 89.6%) and (20, 8.3%) and only 5 (2.1%) of them respectively reported that they occasionally, sometimes and always use a pattern to do activities through CL techniques. The table also shows that the vast majority (227, 94.6%) and only 13 (5.4%) of them respectively answered that they never and occasionally debrief students at the end of each work to review how the group worked. Almost all (233, 97.1%) and very few (7, 2.9%) of them respectively said that they never and occasionally ask each group member to list 1-3 things that they could do to improve their group performance. These results show that the vast majority of the instructors do not practice group processing as one of the basic principles of CL.

Challenges Instructors Face to Implement CL

This section presents the discussion and interpretation of the results of instructors' questionnaire on the difficulties they encounter to implement CL techniques.

Table 6: Challenges Instructors Face to Implement CL

No.	Items	Fr. & %	Responses			
			1	2	3	4
	When your students work in CL groups, how often do you face difficulty in:					
1	Finding the time to plan and develop lessons that use cooperative learning techniques?	Fr			15	225
		%			6.2	93.8
2	Getting students' willingness to work & communicate effectively in CL groups?	Fr			41	199
		%			17.1	82.9
3	Dedicating the time needed to grade & record individual as well as group performances?	Fr		140	45	55
		%		58.3	18.8	22.9
4	Matching the curriculum with appropriate CL methodology?	Fr			203	37
		%			84.6	15.4
5	Keeping all students within each group on-task for the entire period?	Fr			19	221
		%			7.9	92.1
6	Allocating the time needed to teach students how to work effectively in cooperative learning?	Fr			97	143
		%			40.4	59.6
7	Monitoring each student in terms of his/her understanding of the content being addressed?	Fr		27	143	70
		%		11.2	59.6	29.2
8	Obtaining training needed to implement different CL techniques?	Fr			103	137
		%			42.9	57.1
9	Availability of instructional materials to practice CL?	Fr			19	221
		%			7.9	92.1
10	Arranging of chairs & tables which are suitable to effectively implement CL?	Fr			14	226
		%			5.8	94.2

Key: 1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Always

Table 6 shows the participant-instructors' responses regarding challenges they face not to implement CL techniques. Accordingly, almost all (225, 93.8%) of the respondents always face challenges in finding the time needed to plan lessons that are appropriate for CL. The rest very few (15, 6.2%) also face the same challenge sometimes. The majority of the respondents reported that they sometimes and always (except items 3 & 7 where they face the challenges occasionally) face all the challenges indicated in Table 6. From this, one can understand that the instructors face many challenges that hinder the effective implementation of CL.

Opportunities for the Effective Implementation of CL

This section presents the discussion and interpretation of the results of instructors' questionnaire on the opportunities for the effective implementation of CL.

Table 7: Opportunities for Implementing Cooperative Learning

No.	Items	Fr. & %	Responses	
	In order to implement cooperative learning successfully, I have:		**Yes**	**No**
1	Prepared guideline/manual for effective implementation of CL by referring different sources.	Fr		240
		%		100%
2	Attended a conference presentation & conventions about effective implementation of CL.	Fr	19	221
		%	7.9	92.1
3	Participated in an in-service workshop on how to use CL techniques (e.g. Think-pair-share, Three-step interview, etc.)	Fr	21	219
		%	8.8	91.2
4	Used different resources when planning CL activities.	Fr	111	129

		%	46.3	53.7
5	Worked with my colleagues who have awareness to implement CL in their classes.	Fr	29	211
		%	12.1	87.9
6	Read books and/or journal articles about using CL in my class to improve quality of education.	Fr	26	214
		%	10.8	89.2

The table shows that all the respondents (240, 100%) replied that they have not prepared guideline/manual for effective implementation of CL. In response to item 2, a great majority of them (221, 92.1%) reported that they have not attended a conference presentation & conventions about effective implementation of CL; however, only 19 (7.9%) of them reported that they have attended. The great majority of them (219, 91.2%) reported that they have not participate whereas only 21 (8.8%) of them agreed with this idea.

More than half of the respondents (129, 53.7%) agreed that they have not used different resources when planning CL activities, whereas the remaining 111 (46.3%) of them replied that they have used different resources to implement CL. The majority of the respondents (211, 87.9%) also said that they have not worked with their colleagues who have awareness to implement CL, while the remaining only 29 (12.1%) of them agreed with this idea. The last item asked the respondents whether or not they read books and/or journal articles about using CL. In response to this, the majority of them (214, 89.2%) said that they do not read whereas very few of them (26, 10.8%) responded that they do that. Thus, the vast majority of the respondents witness that even if there are some opportunities, they are not aware of the opportunities for effective implementation of cooperative learning.

Discussion and Interpretation of the Results of the Interview

This part deals with the discussion and interpretation of the results of the interview held with the selected instructors, school/department heads and college deans regarding instructors' practice of CL in classes, challenges that hinder the successful implementation of CL, and opportunities that can help instructors to incorporate CL as part of a common instructional approach. The interview responses are thematically discussed as follows.

Instructors' Practice of CL

The first item asked the instructors whether or not they know about cooperative learning and have they ever practiced it. They responded differently to this question. Almost all (13 out of 15) had nearly the same views about CL. For example, the following are few of their responses.

(1) I viewed cooperative learning as a group of people working together on something and have common understanding of it *(CL as group work).*
(2) I know group work, and what you call cooperative learning is not a different thing except the naming.
(3) I don't have much understanding of it… it's something to do with group work and working as a team and I have used group work. In the group there are higher achiever and lower achiever, then the higher achiever helping the lower one.

Here, from the respondents' views it can be said that the participant-instructors equated group work with CL and they did not appear to recognize that CL extends beyond traditional group work. Besides, the interviewees' responses show that there had been a misconception about CL. The results obtained through the interview also show that the teaching approach that the respondents were practicing in their classes was teacher-centered as well as student-centered.

The second question was meant to realize whether or not the instructors promote the five basic principles of CL. According to the responses of the interviewees, none of the instructors used material rewards though according to Johnson & Johnson (2008b), using rewards can promote positive interdependence and individual accountability and thus, help avoid free-riding (social loafing). More specifically, as stated below, the researchers of this study were able to recognize that the basic five principles of CL have not been promoted appropriately.

As the responses of the interviewees show, the instructors did not make students in CL classes generally share goals that were determined by the teacher and help one another complete the task (**positive interdependence**). As the respondents disclosed, they did not make students in groups usually carry out their share of the group work assigned by the teachers, work independently and help one another to learn the content (**individual accountability**). From the responses, the researchers were also able to clearly recognize that instructors did not make students in groups to usually discuss the content, interact with each other, and provide to and receive explanation from their peers related to the content (**face-to-face interaction**). In addition, the interviewees said that they did not show any thing to their students in the groups generally to increase their ability to interact in a polite way with the others, such as thanking the previous group for their answer, agreeing on the same answers, actively listening, taking turns and keeping a low voice when speaking, all of which are

considered to be important to successfully implement CL (**social skills**). Finally, almost all of the interviewees told the interviewers that they did hardly anything to encourage students reflect on their work and differentiate between the actions that helped and those that did not help them with their group work (**group processing**).

Challenges that Hinder Successful Implementation of CL

In the following section, the responses of the instructors, school/department heads and college deans are discussed together. To begin with, the respondents were asked generally about the difficulties/challenges that hinder the effective implementation of CL. Nearly all of the respondents agreed that the time given for implementing CL is reasonably difficult. As many of them said, there's a lot of input from the teacher required for the successful implementation of CL. For example, there's a lot of work in finding suitable tasks and finding good resources. Additionally, five of the instructors commented on the difficulties students have in adjusting to group work. Example responses are as follows:

Well, I think with any group task the difficulty is getting the students to listen to the teacher (In-7) and, just a few difficulties in the beginning, as you need to change their whole way of thinking and how they've done things for years. It's a whole new mindset for many of our students (Ins-8).

From these responses, it can be deduced that there is no hesitation that CL requires careful groundwork and implementation because teachers need to ensure that the five key elements mentioned above for successful group work are time-honored.

On the other hand, as six of the school/department heads replied, among the dynamic issues that negatively affect the successful implementation of CL is the obligatory assessment (specially, the so called continuous assessment) required by the Ministry of Education (MoE). As the respondents strongly agreed, this kind of assessment is meant to evaluate individual and not the group performance of students. Thus, the assessment strategy was also a challenge that instructors faced to effectively implement CL. As the respondents explained further, this banned instructors from giving marks for CL group work which, according to Johnson et al. (2008), should be given along with individual marks to promote the two basic principles (individual accountability and positive interdependence) among the five. In this regard, two of the respondents strongly stated that:

I have no freedom to amend this evaluation and use marks for what you call cooperative learning group. I mean assessment strategy that we have been using is a challenge (Ins-6). I have done group assessment in the past. It's always a problem because there's always someone who says they've done more work than the others. I have been looking at things like assessing how they're going in the group but that's not really formal assessment (Ins-9).

More than half of the heads and deans expressed that the main problem that many instructors are frequently heard about in using CL is free-riding. As they explained, some students do not participate in group work and some others do not do most of the work. Furthermore, according to the deans' responses, another challenge is students' long past experience with the lecturing method. Another challenge expressed by the deans that can negatively affect instructors' use of CL is the quality of students. As the deans explained, this is to mean that using CL with friendly students coming from sociable and educated families is much easier; however, if students are not like that, this may not make instructors avoid using CL but it will be more difficult to successfully implement it.

In addition to the above, almost all of the heads and deans felt that the instructors' long time use of a single teaching method (especially lecture method) makes it hard to change. The respondents explained that instructors strongly complain that they do not want to give responsibility for their students' learning in the class; rather, they themselves want to take responsibility for their students' learning. Specifically as the deans mentioned, in fact, changing teaching methods is not an easy task because a teacher needs to take theoretical and applied courses, pay visits to expert teachers in other departments or universities, and get support from experts in order to implement CL; however, that all place a burden on the teacher (e.g. Extra workload).

Still another major challenge mentioned by the deans, heads and instructors was covering the curriculum and time-consuming nature of CL tasks. As most of the respondents stressed, it was difficult to cover the curriculum established by the MoE, which is expected to be entirely covered according to the calendar. According to the respondents, this curriculum contains a sizeable amount of information and content, which in their option requires instructors to adopt lecture-style to deliver it in entirety in the available class time. Another reason argued by all the deans, heads and instructors was that some of the contents are far above students' level of understanding to take responsibility of learning in CL. This led teachers to adopt a mixed approach where part of the content was delivered by lecturing and part by using mostly traditional group work and to some extent CL techniques.

Furthermore, the responses of some school/department heads and instructors in this investigation indicate that group composition could be a challenge. Even if all the instructors and heads tend to recognize the importance of heterogeneity in terms of students' academic level performance, some of them (especially

instructors) in the interviews declared that when the majority of group members are weak, this had a negative impact on the quality of the discussions, interaction and task completion.

The last big challenge which almost all the interviewees aggressively mentioned is large class size (60-70 students in a class). As they stressed, this could be a problem when implementing CL as it creates difficulties to move inside the classroom space and may lead to considerable amount of noise in the class when many students are moving around and working in groups. Finally, the interviewees mentioned that lack of support from the university administrative bodies is also another challenge that hinders the effective implementation of CL.

Opportunities for Successful Implementation of CL

The first question asked the respondents to think that there are some opportunities if used will help instructors implement cooperative learning successfully. One of the interviewed instructors said, "I thank the college dean who always encourages us to give training on technical implementation of CL by experts from our university for teachers and for students." As this respondent further explained, training is helpful as it provides a setting for sharing ideas with colleagues to successfully implement cooperative learning. According to the suggestions given by this respondent, shared views and closely working with colleagues is an opportunity for the effective implementation of CL as there are many experts in the university.

The deans and heads were also asked whether they organize seminars or workshops on cooperative learning and make instructors participate in it. The instructors were also asked whether they participated or not on CL implementation workshops. The deans replied that they organized two days training on CL. The interviewed instructors verified that the deans did that but that was not specifically on cooperative learning; rather, on active learning that they got the training in Higher Diploma Program (HDP). In this regard, the instructors said that the training offered was good and they also suggested having workshops from time to time as there had been frequent resistance from both the instructors and students. Here, it can be concluded that organizing workshops for experience sharing on CL can be as an opportunity for the successful implementation of it.

Instructors were asked whether they access books or journals from internet which have guidelines or manuals on implementing CL. In response to this question, hardly any of them agreed in accessing books or journals from the internet on CL**.** This finding shows that instructors did not consider that accessing books or journals from the internet is one of the opportunities for the effective implementation of CL.

The findings of current study correlate with the findings of some other studies. The first similarity is that other studies also show that teachers do not consider the 5 basic principles of CL. For example, Mohammed (2014) in his study found out that teachers do not consider the basic principles of CL. According to this study, the five principles were not observed in every observed lesson. In addition, Belilew's (2015) finding indicated that the subject teachers did not have good understanding of the principles (especially, individual accountability and face to face interaction) of CL. Based on the findings of this study, we can say that nearly all of the participant-instructors did not promote the basic principles of CL. This finding correlates with the finding of Weldemariam & Girmay (2016) and Pausen & Faust (2008) which state that the student network in Ethiopia is rarely practiced in line with the principles of cooperative learning. Generally speaking, based on the finding, CL has not been practiced in the current study setting. This correlates with Fink's (2004) finding which states that even though many may dabble into the realm of CL as indicated by, it is not common practice.

According to the finding of this study, there are different challenges (related to students, instructors and university facilities) as clearly discussed under Table 6 and in the discussion section of interview responses, and also there are some opportunities or suggested solutions which can help instructors implement CL effectively. In relation to this, Anwar (2017), Robyn & Michael (2010), Amina (2017) and Weldemariam & Girmay (2015) pointed out that there are many challenges which hinder the effective implementation of CL relate to time, students' reluctance, and unavailability of facilities.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The following conclusions are made based on the major findings of this study.

- The instructors were found that the way they designed lesson tasks and the possibility of using cooperative learning to teach different topics is nearly absent; however, they adopted a mixed approach where both cooperative learning and lecture-style may co-exist in lessons and mentioned the factors that prevented them from using cooperative learning for the whole class. That is to say, the vast majority of the instructors were not well aware of promoting the five basic principles of cooperative learning which distinguish it from the traditional group work.
- The instructors face challenges to effectively implement CL, and the challenges include rushing to content coverage, instructors' misunderstanding of cooperative learning, students' social skills and time costs, large

class size, lack of support from university administration, and students' reluctance to participate in group work.

- Training on cooperative learning, teachers' collaboration and social skills development are considered as opportunities so as to lessen the challenges instructors face when implementing cooperative learning.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been forwarded based on the major findings and conclusions of this study.

- ❖ Instructors should systematically structure the five basic principles of cooperative learning into group learning situations so as to ensure cooperative efforts and to successfully implement it, collaborate with their colleagues when practicing CL and teach their students the essential social skills for CL tasks as this would help them improve their teaching methods and share new knowledge with other instructors in their institution, and use whatever opportunities they have that can help them overcome the challenges which hinder the effective implementation of CL.
- ❖ Hawassa University at large and concerned academic units in particular should organize short time trainings and workshops for instructors on CL implementation (especially on how to promote the five basic principles of cooperative learning) and allow instructors to visit some universities in the country and get experience so that they would be able to promote the basic principles of CL in their classes.
- ❖ Interested researchers/institutions may need to conduct studies on related topics by taking any felt limitations of this study especially in relation to its scope and methodology as a spring board.

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