

Cooperative Learning Approach in Teaching and Learning Writing Skills: Practices and Challenges

Mitiku Teshome Abeti
Department of English Language and Literature
Samara University, Afar, Ethiopia
mitshalove@yahoo.com

Italo Beriso
Department of Foreign Languages and Literature
Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia
italoberiso@gmail.com

Abstract: The study investigated the practices and challenges of the cooperative learning approach in teaching and learning writing skills among Grade 11 students at Logia Secondary and Preparatory School, Afar Regional State, in focus. More specifically, the study addressed the following research questions: (1) How is cooperative learning practiced in teaching and learning writing skills? (2) What challenges hinder the effective implementation of cooperative learning in writing skills? The study's main subjects were Grade 11 students at Logia Secondary and Preparatory School. Moreover, one of the social science classes was randomly selected. The data for this research were collected through students' questionnaires and interviews with teachers and students. Regarding the practices of CL in writing skills, both the teacher and students have positive attitudes, i.e., cooperative teaching improves students' writing performance. Both the teacher and students believed that the cooperative learning approach was practised in their teaching and learning of writing. Based on the data obtained from teachers' interviews and students' questionnaires, many challenges hinder the successful implementation of CL. These could be grouped under student-related, teacher-related, classroom-related, time-related, and weather condition-related problems. As per the students' questionnaire and interview, the fear of grammar, the writing itself, and how to organize ideas are the problems students face in learning writing skills. Some recommendations were forwarded to improve the implementation and overcome the challenges.

Keywords: Challenges of CL, Cooperative Learning, Cooperative Writing, Practices of CL, Writing Skills

1. INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of writing skills remains one of the most significant challenges in global education, especially in contexts of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Writing transcends the mere mechanical act of forming letters; it represents a sophisticated cognitive process that requires the simultaneous coordination of linguistic, stylistic, and rhetorical components.

Traditional teaching models, often based on a "product-oriented" approach, have historically regarded writing as an individual task in which the student creates a text in solitude, and the teacher serves as the exclusive assessor. Nevertheless, as educational frameworks evolve towards a learner-centered focus, the Cooperative Learning (CL) approach has emerged as a revolutionary pedagogical model, highlighting social interaction as the driving force of cognitive growth.

Despite the importance of writing skills in students' lives in and out of school, little attention has been given to them. For instance, Beriso (1999) states, "There seems to be a general tendency amongst language teachers to relegate writing to homework or avoid it altogether." Similarly, Mariam (2005) reports, "Writing is not effectively taught in high schools. The teachers do not teach writing properly, that is, they do not give attention to the teaching of writing." To change the attitude and practice of teaching writing in Ethiopian high schools, several measures can be taken to promote effective teaching methods and techniques that improve students' writing skills.

Incorporating cooperative learning is one approach that boosts students' writing skills (Kagan and High, 2002). Cooperative Learning is based on social constructivist theories, which suggest that learners can reach higher levels of understanding and skill development when they receive guidance from adults or collaborate with more skilled peers. In writing, Cooperative Learning transforms the classroom into a community of practice where students participate in brainstorming, peer editing, and collective problem-solving. By working in diverse groups, students encounter a variety of linguistic inputs and viewpoints, which alleviates the "writing anxiety" often linked to individual composition.

While the theoretical advantages of Cooperative Learning are well established in both Western and Asian contexts, implementing these practices in the African educational landscape faces distinct sociocultural and structural challenges. African classrooms are often characterized by high teacher-to-student ratios, often exceeding 50 or 60 students per class in many sub-Saharan regions. In such settings, the logistical organization of small groups becomes a significant challenge for educators.

Additionally, the dominant educational culture in many African countries remains heavily rooted in "top-down" teaching methods. The teacher is typically regarded as the ultimate authority, and "silence" is often synonymous with "discipline." Shifting to a cooperative model in which the classroom becomes inherently more dynamic and decentralized can be seen by both teachers and administrators as a relinquishment of control. Moreover, the lack of resources, such as sufficient physical space for group seating and localized instructional materials, further complicates the adoption of Cooperative Learning. Studies also show three significant positive impacts of collaborative learning: greater effort to achieve, more positive relationships among pupils, and greater psychological health (Johnson and Johnson, 1986). Thus, this research will contribute to the existing literature by investigating the effects of cooperative learning among adolescent learners in an Ethiopian secondary and preparatory school context. It will focus on the impact of collaborative learning on students' writing skills.

Teaching writing using a cooperative learning approach has been conducted by researchers internationally and locally, who have sought to promote its use in classroom settings to teach English. In the realm of writing, a student may grapple with the subtleties of argumentative coherence or the intricacies of sophisticated syntax. A peer with somewhat greater proficiency can offer essential scaffolding through

cooperative learning. This connection converts writing from a daunting endeavor into a feasible one. Moreover, Vygotsky's notion of "private speech" indicates that the internal discourse employed when writing originates from social communication. When students engage in group discussions about drafts, they assimilate critical analysis and peer feedback, ultimately turning these social exchanges into enhanced autonomous writing abilities.

Harmer (2006) states that group writing allowed the lecturer to give more detailed and constructive feedback since he was dealing with a small group rather than many individual students. Individual students also found themselves saying and writing things they might not have come up with on their own, and the group's research was broader than an individual typically was.

Teshome and Beriso (2021) argued that, as the importance of English in our country for education and communication increases, research into the quality of English teaching and learning is vital. Specifically, studies related to reading and writing appear to be more important than other skills in helping students use these skills in their studies. Reading and writing skills allow them to pass their courses successfully or write essays effectively. To achieve it, cooperative learning should be implemented effectively, though it has various challenges. Therefore, the researcher is hence initiated to conduct this study due to the failure to use cooperative learning effectively to teach writing skills by EFL teachers, as far as my experience is concerned, and the absence of effective implementation of collaborative learning in EFL classrooms in preparatory schools in the Ethiopian context, as mentioned in the literature and research I have read through. Thus, this study aimed to answer the following fundamental research questions.

The research questions proposed in this study are: (1) How is cooperative learning practised in teaching and learning writing skills? (2) What challenges hinder the effective implementation of cooperative learning in writing skills? The study's general objective is to investigate the practices and challenges encountered using CL in teaching and learning writing skills. More specifically, the study tried to: (1) Investigate how cooperative learning is practised in teaching and learning writing skills, (2) Identify the challenges that hinder the effective implementation of CL in writing skills.

There are many claims about pupils working together cooperatively. Indeed, seating children in small groups is a common practice in UK classrooms, but this may not mean they are cooperating. Thus, it is essential to be clear about the defining features of cooperative learning. Regarding its classroom application, Cohen (1994a) defined cooperative learning as "*Students working together in a group small enough that everyone can participate in a collective task that has been assigned. Moreover, students are expected to complete tasks without direct and immediate teacher supervision.*" This indicates that cooperative learning is a broad concept with a range of methods; the key factor being that pupils are placed in small groups and *help one another* with academic tasks. Similarly, Johnson and Johnson (1984) state that "*cooperation is working together to accomplish shared goals.* The key aspects concern joint working with a shared purpose.

CL advocates believe that placing students in groups and expecting them to work together is not enough. This set of teaching principles can be most effective only if certain conditions are met. Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1999) suggest five elements, which they call "the essential components of cooperation", that should be

present to consider a teaching instruction as CL: positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing. These elements should be structured together to obtain satisfactory positive results.

Positive interdependence is regarded as the first and most crucial element in structuring CL, in which students work toward a common goal and rely on each other to succeed, each performing an individual focal role to ensure the end product is positive. Johnson and Johnson (1999) argue that positive interdependence occurs when “individuals realise that their efforts are required for the group to succeed so that it is not possible to get a free ride.”

In other words, this component underlies students' perception that they are related to one another in some way in which the participant in a group cannot succeed unless their team-mates succeed –the benefit is a two-way process. Group members are positively interdependent and make specific contributions to the success of the whole group through shared resources, common goals, mutual support, and celebration of the joint reward. They will perform better in their writing when there is strong positive interdependence among their groupmates.

Positive interdependence creates promotive interaction. The latter occurs when “individuals encourage and facilitate each other's efforts to accomplish the group's goals” (Gillies, 2006). This component promotes the group participants' productivity in the foreign language and achievement when each of them gives and receives practical help, assistance, and feedback; exchanges explanations; and challenges each other's way of thinking through acting trustfully, being motivated for mutual benefit, influencing efforts to achieve common goals, and encouraging one another.

Though participants in a cooperative group join their abilities and work together for the benefit of all the members, “each student needs to be made accountable for his/her contribution to the task completion,” (Ellis, 2004). Members are responsible for completing their part of the task and assisting their partners in completing their work. If learners perceive that their performance will affect the group's outcomes, they will put in more effort to realise their objectives. Thus, each member's contributions, performance, quality, and quantity are assessed and evaluated separately, and the results are reported to the individual and the group to determine who needs more assistance, support, or encouragement. Since individual accountability has been proven to increase students' academic achievement and improve their performance when they feel their efforts are recognized, teachers need to structure ways to help them assess each participant individually.

This fundamental element promotes higher achievement and, more importantly, builds positive relationships among students, personally and professionally (Gillies et al, 2008). Crandall (1995) believes that, for a group of students who cooperate striving towards attaining a shared goal successfully, “individual members need to develop not only linguistic but also social skills which facilitate teamwork, create trust and enhance communication, leadership, problem solving and decision-making in group interaction.” Moreover, Slavin (2015) adds that individuals must have or be taught the social and cooperative skills necessary to interact effectively with peers and, hence, produce more. They are trained to get to know and trust one another, negotiate viewpoints and respect diverse opinions, resolve disagreements and differences positively, and encourage and help one another (Gillies et al., 2008).

Groups need time to evaluate their goals and discuss how well the group participants are progressing and maintaining effective working relationships. Similarly, Gillies et al. (2008) contend that teachers should devote some time at the end of each session to give learners the chance to: “(a) describe what member actions were helpful and unhelpful and (b) make decisions about what actions to continue or change.” In other words, they reflect on their experience as a cooperative group to determine what was positive in their handling of the task and to modify and improve what was less helpful in their joint work.

Writing is considered an essential and complex process in the function of language. This involves the significance of information, formal production, and organisation in writing an idea. This requires moving through different stages to make a successful piece of writing. Harmer (2006) states, "Writing is a process, that is, the stage the writer goes through to produce something in its final form". In support of this idea, Hedge (2000) identifies four main categories of the writing process: planning, revising, drafting, and editing. While Hedge (2000) stated, "Writing is the result of employing strategies to manage the composing process... it involves several activities: setting goals, generating information, selecting appropriate language, making a draft, reading and reviewing it, then revising and editing." So, these stages help students complete their writing tasks successfully and foster the writing process.

The three types of writing tasks are controlled writing, guided writing, and free writing. Controlled writing draws students' attention to specific features of written language. It can be used to reinforce grammar, vocabulary, and syntax in context. Raimes (1983) states, “Controlled writing tasks allow students to produce a great deal of almost error-free writing and draw their attention to

troublesome grammatical and syntactic features.” Raimes (1983) further notes that controlled writing is valuable at all levels. The tasks in controlled writing make students focus on one or two problems at a time. Thus, controlled writing leads students to produce correct written work.

Guided writing is a teaching component designed to teach students a specific skill or grammar and give them practice in writing. Guided writing allows students to practice a grammatical item or syntactic structure within a text. In guided writing, students are supported as needed by a teacher who provides instruction through writing lessons and conferences. Indeed, the writing lesson focuses on specific writing skills students need to develop. The purpose of guided writing is to allow students to expand their writing skills. It is also an essential step in the continuum towards free writing. Teachers could present writing lessons based on what students need to learn from observing their writing.

Free writing is an activity in which students practice earlier exercises without teacher support. In this kind of activity, there should be a link with the previous work, but students must create their own essay on a given topic. Free writing enables students to write down in their own words what they feel, their ideas, and what they think about a topic. According to Raimes (1983), "Free writing is an activity where students generate, organize, and express their ideas in sentences". Free writing is the final stage of a writing lesson. At this stage, students might also need assistance getting started and organizing their ideas to focus on the actual writing activity. The emphasis in free writing activity is usually on content and fluency rather than on accuracy and form. It is believed that once ideas are written down on the page, grammatical accuracy and organisation follow.

The writing task has three phases: pre-phase (pre-writing), writing phase, and post-phase (post-writing). This phase prepares students to perform the task. It is directed by the teacher, so the teacher is expected to explain or discuss the language forms essential to complete the task. The teacher also helps students relate the input to the writing task. The second phase of the writing task centres on the task itself and gives various roles to the students. Here, the teacher monitors the process. Students undergo different steps during this phase, including planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Here, students report their writing, the teacher or peers give feedback and comment on it, and students then proofread and prepare the final draft.

Though cooperative learning has proved to be incredibly effective and evidence shows an overwhelming number of benefits resulting from its instruction in language classes, various drawbacks or challenges are encountered when implementing it in classrooms. These include students benefiting from the work of others and a lack of time to get through the curriculum. The possibility of inactive students and unequal work contributions can also be avoided by incorporating positive interdependence and individual accountability. If individual students are responsible for a part of the project, they know that if they do not do the work, the group will not succeed, which means they cannot achieve. In addition to unequal work, many challenges prevent the successful implementation of cooperative learning in the classroom. Therefore, under this subtopic, the researcher will discuss the drawbacks of collaborative learning from the three dimensions: teacher-related, student-related, and classroom-related.

According to Crandall (1999), one of the biggest impediments to cooperative learning is the “cultural expectations of appropriate roles of teachers and learners.’ That is, teachers are reluctant to implement. They also find it difficult to delegate authority and responsibility to learners because, if they do, the class becomes chaotic, and learners will not cover all the information intended to be learnt. Teachers also fear the loss of control in the classroom regarding content and discipline (Gillies et al., 2008). Furthermore, Jolliff (2007) believes that many teachers lack the self-confidence to try new teaching methods that may expose them to unexpected challenging situations and unanticipated questions. Some teachers have expressed concern about whether they will have time to get through the assigned curriculum when they incorporate cooperative learning. This is a valid question, but it might be a larger problem when traditional group work is used instead of a cooperative learning approach. Therefore, teachers are among the problems contributing to the ineffectiveness of cooperative learning. According to Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1999), teachers’ lack of understanding of cooperative learning, unreasonable group division, incorrect identification of students' roles, lack of an effective evaluation mechanism, and unclear objectives of cooperative learning are teacher-related problems.

Students also play a significant role in making CL unable to function properly. Crandall (1999) states that students think teamwork wastes time and effort, and the teacher is not doing their job; thus, they will not cover the entire content. Similarly, Harmer (2007) says, students may not have equal participation in group learning; therefore, “one student may dominate while the other stays silent.” Similarly, another possible problem that can arise during cooperative learning is when group members

do not get along. This can easily happen because, if groups are formed according to cooperative learning guidelines, they may have very different personalities.

In addition, using the mother tongue when discussing various topics is another drawback of cooperative learning practice. Harmer (2007) states that students working cooperatively often talk “about something else completely in their first language.”

Besides teachers and students, many factors challenged the effective practice of cooperative learning in an EFL classroom. If the seat in a school, for example, is fixed to the ground, it is difficult to form cooperative groups. Another obstacle to the use of collaborative learning is the difficulty of forming groups. Harmer (2007) refers to this problem, stating that "students may not like the people they are grouped or paired with", especially if they do not know each other. Similarly, the class size will also be another problem in implementing cooperative learning. For instance, it isn't easy in large classes to form collaborative groups and manage them to complete tasks.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

The principal design of this study is descriptive, chosen for its ability to provide a thorough overview of the current state of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) training. The descriptive design is most suitable in this context as the research does not aim to modify variables or demonstrate definitive cause-and-effect linkages within a controlled laboratory environment. It seeks to observe, document, and study the authentic practices and challenges of Cooperative Learning (CL) as they manifest in the writing classroom.

Employing a descriptive framework enables the researcher to tackle the complex nature of writing, a skill that is both intellectually challenging and socially contextualized. This methodology facilitates an in-depth examination of the implementation of collaborative learning (CL), the prevalence of specific collaborative techniques used by instructors, and the widespread obstacles that may impede student performance.

2.2. Data Sources

The participants and data sources of this study were Grade 11 students and the English teacher of Samara Secondary and Preparatory School.

2.3. Sample and Sampling Techniques

A simple random sampling technique was used to choose a preparatory school for the study. To this end, Samara Secondary and Preparatory School was selected using convenience sampling. This technique was chosen because the researcher could easily select subjects based on their relative ease of access (Kumar, 2001). Since this study is too large to handle grades 11 and 12, the researcher delimited the grade level to grade 11. On the one hand, looking at a specific grade level is manageable. Similarly, Teshome and Beriso (2021) state that grade 12 is busy taking the entrance exam; for this reason, they cannot fully engage in the study. Therefore, the sample grade level for this study was grade 11 students at the preparatory school, comprising 60 students from two sections.

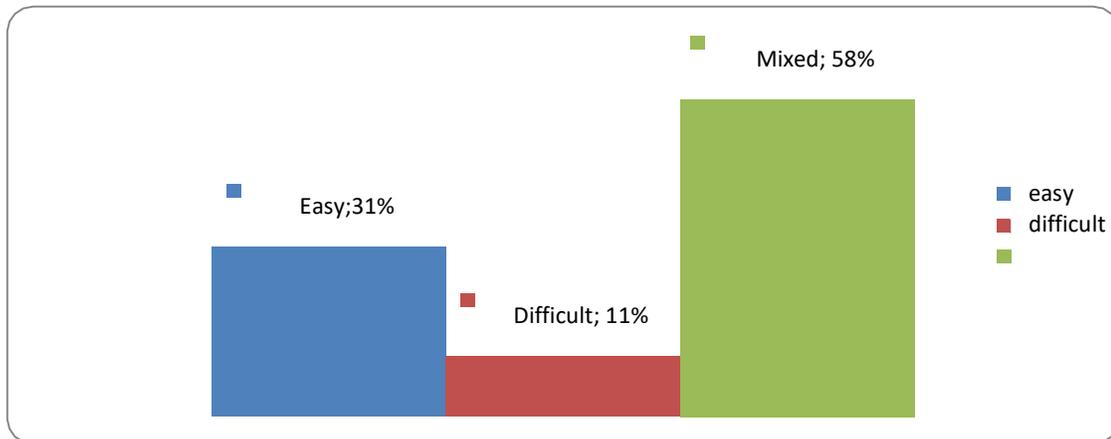
2.4. *Data Gathering Methods*

This research employed a questionnaire and an interview to collect data. The students' questionnaire and the interviews with both teachers and students were utilized to investigate the application of Collaborative Learning in writing skills and the obstacles that impede its effective practice.

3. RESULTS

This study employs a descriptive research approach to uncover current practices and address obstacles to the use of cooperative learning to improve students' writing skills. The researcher aims to identify the precise factors that either promote or obstruct the effectiveness of CL in the EFL environment. The study employs quantitative and qualitative data analysis approaches to acquire a comprehensive understanding, including statistical measures such as frequencies, percentages, mean values, and standard deviations.

Initial data were collected via a generic information questionnaire that asked students to assess their experiences in English classes to date. Providing three distinct options for evaluating difficulty levels revealed considerable variation in student perceptions.

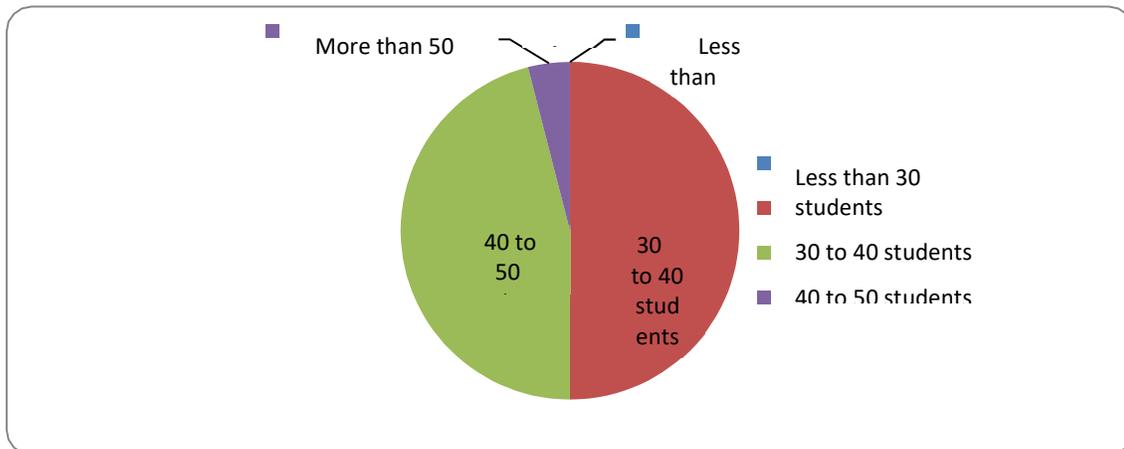


Graph 1. Level of difficulty in English classes

In the above item, students were asked how difficult or easy their English classes are. From the above graph, as anyone can see, 31% of the learners answered that English classes are so easy, but 58% responded that some English courses are easy. At the same time, some of them are difficult, whereas 11% of learners answered that English classes are challenging. Over half of the participants reported a "mixed" experience. This indicates that, while the cooperative approach is being implemented, it is not a seamless experience for everyone. A "mixed" sentiment often suggests that students see the value in peer interaction but are simultaneously grappling with the "challenges" identified in the study's design—such as unequal participation, time management, or group conflict.

From this, we understand that English classes could be moderate, meaning they must be at an easy, understandable level. Otherwise, students would be unmotivated

and dislike learning English. Furthermore, students were asked about the typical class size in their classrooms.



Graph 2. Class size

As shown in the graph above, 50% of respondents reported a class size of 30 to 40, while 46% reported a class size of 40 to 50. As a researcher, I observed that grade 11 sections A and B were 36 and 37, respectively, whereas the social science class, section C, was 45. The class size does not seem too large. However, teaching them in a group was very tight compared to the classroom size, and it might also be difficult for classroom management. An English class needs various social interactions and discussions, so the class should be conducive to this purpose.

3.1.1. *Students' Attitudes towards the Practices of CL in Writing Skills*

The first section under this part was about cooperative learning practices in writing classes. In item 1, students were asked whether cooperative learning implementation is complex in the writing class. More than half of the subjects (58.33%) reported that implementing collaborative learning in a writing class is challenging. However, in item 2, most subjects (65%) responded that students practice cooperative learning easily and effectively. However, it is challenging to implement in the writing class; students practice it when given. In response to item 3, students were asked whether teachers' intervention is necessary for implementing cooperative learning. As shown in the table above, more than half of the respondents (68.33%) stated that teachers' intervention is necessary for implementing CL. Similarly, the interview data also confirmed that teachers' intervention is required to implement CL. In item 4, students were asked whether they play their roles accordingly in CL. Thus, the results indicate that more than half of the respondents (66.66%) replied that students play their roles accordingly in CL. Similarly, item 5 asked them whether group assessment enhances CL practices. Furthermore, 76.67% of the respondents agreed that group assessment enhances CL practice.

3.1.2. *Students' Attitudes towards the Challenges of CL in Writing Skills*

The results in this part show that the implementation of cooperative learning in writing classes was challenging. In the first item, students were asked whether there is a high probability that some students will not participate actively in a cooperative

group. More than half of the respondents (56.66%) replied that some students are reluctant to participate actively in cooperative work. Similarly, in response to item 2, students were also asked whether they like working with someone who is not their choice. Concerning this question, 53.33% of the respondents agreed that they don't like working with someone who is not their choice. From this analysis, we understand that if students have a preference for working with someone in cooperative work, it will be challenging to form a heterogeneous group. Item 3 asked the students if they were shy about working with a group of pupils. More than half (50%) of the respondents responded that they are not shy about working with a pupil group.

In item 4, students were asked whether their teachers have enough understanding of CL. Regarding this, 50% of the respondents reported that their teachers have sufficient knowledge of cooperative learning. Moreover, in item 5, students were asked how groups were formed. Most respondents (65%) said they are grouped by their seats. In the teacher interview, it has been said that teachers sometimes use a conventional group in group formation. According to the teacher, a traditional group is composed of 1 to 5 students, based on their academic achievement, and is made by the school administration. Similarly, in item 6, students were asked whether there is a lack of teachers' guidance and supervision during CL. More than half of the respondents (63.34%) agreed there is a lack of teachers' guidance and supervision during cooperative learning. Unlike collaborative learning, cooperative learning requires close follow-up and teacher supervision to succeed. Therefore, teachers who teach writing using the cooperative learning approach must follow up and intervene with the group as much as possible to ensure its effective implementation (Teshome and Beriso, 2021).

In items 7 and 8, students were asked whether classroom seating and weather conditions are challenges to implementing cooperative learning. The results (61.67% and 63.34%, respectively) show that classroom seating and weather conditions are among the difficulties that hinder the successful implementation of cooperative learning. The personal observation and interview results also confirmed that the classroom seating and the region's very hot weather conditions do not allow students to stay close together and work cooperatively. Item 9 asked students whether CL creates disciplinary problems among students. Regarding this question, more than half of the respondents (60%) agreed that cooperative learning can create disciplinary problems among students if it isn't implemented effectively. In addition, item 10 also asked students what they do when the teacher uses CL. Similarly, 61.66% of respondents reported that when the teacher uses CL, students tend to move away from the work.

In items 11 and 12, students were asked whether CL needs much time. In item 11, 68.33% of the respondents answered that there is insufficient time to prepare students to work in groups. Similarly, in item 12, 78.33% of the respondents replied that CL implementation takes too much class time. Therefore, we understand that CL is often not implemented in English classes in general and writing classes in particular due to the time it takes to prepare and implement. Regarding item 13, students were asked whether their diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds challenge the implementation of CL. More than half of the respondents (58.33%) agreed that when students from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds come together, it creates a problem in implementing CL efficiently, as students fear they will not join the group freely. In summary, the results showed that many challenges hinder the successful

implementation of CL, which can be grouped into student-related, teacher-related, classroom-related, time-related, and weather condition-related problems.

Results of the Teacher's Interview

3.2.1. CL Implementation in Writing Classes

To assess the implementation of cooperative learning in writing classes, the teacher was asked to answer interview questions (Q8, 9, 10, and 11). In the first question (Q8), the teacher was asked about group formation in general, who forms the group, group composition, and group size in particular. The teacher states,

The group is formed by me. I form groups of five to six students. The group has a heterogeneous composition, taking into account ability and gender. Six is the best group size. If they exceed it, there will be chatting and disturbance.

To effectively assess the implementation of cooperative learning (CL) in the writing classroom, a series of targeted interview questions (Q8-Q11) was administered to the instructor. The foundational element of this inquiry, Question 8, focused specifically on the mechanics of group dynamics—namely, the authority behind group formation, the specific composition of the units, and the rationale behind the chosen group size. The teacher's response offers a critical window into the pedagogical strategy that balances classroom management with collaborative productivity.

The teacher explicitly noted, "The group is formed by me." This preference for instructor-led formation over student-selected grouping is a deliberate pedagogical choice often used to prevent the "friendship bias" that can hinder academic rigor. When students choose their own partners, they frequently gravitate toward social comfort rather than academic synergy. By maintaining control over group assignments, the instructor ensures that the "cooperative" element of the lesson remains a structured academic exercise rather than a social gathering. This approach allows the teacher to act as an architect of the learning environment, strategically placing students where they are most likely to both provide and receive support.

A key highlight of the interview was the teacher's commitment to diversity, particularly in terms of ability and gender. By mixing students of varying proficiency levels, the instructor fosters a "peer-tutoring" dynamic. In a writing context, this is invaluable; higher-achieving students solidify their understanding by explaining grammatical or structural nuances, while those struggling with the material receive immediate, personalized feedback. Furthermore, balancing gender within these groups promotes a more inclusive classroom culture and ensures that diverse perspectives are brought to the drafting and peer-review processes. This diversity acts as a catalyst for critical thinking, as students are forced to negotiate different viewpoints and writing styles.

Perhaps the most pragmatic insight offered was the teacher's stance on group size. The instructor identified five to six students as the optimal range, explicitly stating that "Six is the best group size." This reflects a sophisticated understanding of the "social loafing" phenomenon. In groups smaller than four, the creative pool may be too shallow for complex writing tasks; however, the teacher warns that if groups exceed six, the environment rapidly devolves into "chatting and disturbance." When a group becomes too large, individual accountability diminishes. The teacher's observation

underscores the reality that excessive numbers provide "hiding spots" for disengaged students, leading to a breakdown in classroom discipline. By capping the size at six, the instructor maintains a "sweet spot" where there are enough voices to sustain a vibrant discussion, yet not so many that every student's contribution remains visible and necessary. This balance is essential for the high-intensity environment of a writing workshop, where focus and quiet collaboration are the primary drivers of success.

Therefore, we understand that teachers in the study area usually form heterogeneous groups based on ability and gender proportion. Regarding the learner's role (Q9), the teacher was asked what roles students play in cooperative groups. He responded that students play different roles in their groups. Students mostly assign these roles to one another, but sometimes the teacher divides them among students to play.

In a cooperative group, students play different roles. In a group, one person may act as a leader, while another serves as a timekeeper, recorder, or facilitator. The roles are usually assigned by the teacher, but sometimes they are shared based on preferences.

From the above discussion, we understand that students play different roles in a cooperative. Their teachers may give them roles, or they may assign themselves to play various roles. Therefore, students should play their roles in practical cooperative work. Regarding the nature of the tasks for collaborative writing (Q10), the teacher was asked what functions they select for cooperative writing. He states,

I have tasks from a textbook. I mostly use them when writing letters, biographies, essays, etc. I teach my students using a step-by-step approach from a textbook. When the textbook says to discuss and write a report, I group them to do so. The procedure continues in such a way.

From the above discussions, one can understand that tasks for cooperative writing should be simple, easily understandable, of interest to learners, and include various subtopics. Regarding implementing collaborative writing, assessing students' writing was a concern. The teacher was asked how they evaluated the group work in their writing classes. He states that the paper has been evaluated, marked, and is available to all group members.

I assess the group as individuals after they finish. So, the mark given for the group also belongs to each member. Therefore, they work together to score well or poorly together. An individual's success is a group's success, and a group's failure is also an individual's failure.

We understand, from the above discussions, that during cooperative writing, teachers should support and intervene as necessary when the group writes, and finally evaluate the work and give equal marks for all group members because in collaborative learning, there is sinking or swimming together (Teshome and Italo Beriso, [20]). However, most teachers are unable to implement the cooperative structure effectively. They tend to put students in groups without carefully structuring positive interdependence and individual accountability, which means students sink or swim

together, because they perceive cooperative learning as a time-consuming approach to teaching writing.

3.2.2. *The Problems Teacher Faces in Teaching Writing Skills*

Under this subsection, the interview questions (Q12 and Q13) were investigated, focusing on barriers to the implementation of cooperative learning in writing classes and possible solutions. In the first question, the teacher was asked what barriers hinder the implementation of cooperative learning in the writing class. The respondent stated that students' frustration, stemming from concerns about grammar, is a serious problem. He puts, 'The first and foremost barrier is the frustration. They fear writing before trying it. They also worried about grammar. These kinds of shortages make students fear writing.' On the other hand, similarly to (Teshome and Beriso (2001) stated, the classroom seating, students' behaviour, classroom size, and the region's weather conditions are also some other barriers that hinder the implementation of cooperative learning. The respondent also states,

The classroom environment is not conducive to teaching in this way. The students' behaviour is a serious barrier to teaching and learn writing using the method. The classroom size is also challenging to manage in such a way. Weather conditions also affect the technique's failure rate.

Regarding the challenges of cooperative learning implementation, students were also asked and reflected that the fear of writing, lack of grammar knowledge, weather conditions, classroom seating, and students' behaviour were some of the barriers that hindered its implementation. Regarding the second question (Q13) under this subtopic, the teacher was asked how they can overcome these challenges. The respondent mentioned two possible solutions. The first one is that there should be training for both teachers and students on how cooperative learning works in English class. Secondly, attention should be given to writing skills from lower grades onward (Mitiku Teshome and Italo Beriso, [20]). Similarly, the teacher states,

In my opinion, a university, Samara University, should arrange training for both teachers and students on the learning and teaching process in general and cooperative learning in particular. The other one may be focusing on writing skills from the lower grades onward.

From the above discussion, one can see that to overcome the challenges listed above, we need to apply different strategies, such as training, classroom arrangement, and choosing an appropriate time for cooperative work to avoid adverse weather conditions. In addition to the teacher's proposed solutions, students reflected on possible solutions, such as focusing on writing skills in lower grades, providing ample opportunities to practice writing, and creating a conducive environment for cooperative writing.

3.3. *Results of Students' Interview*

3.3.1. *Students' Attitudes towards the Implementation of Cooperative Writing*

Questions (Q6, 7, and 9) were given to the students during the interview session to investigate students' attitudes towards cooperative learning practices in English

classes. In the sixth question, learners were asked about group formation and composition. Regarding group formation, most respondents said teachers form the group. But some of them reflected that the teachers use either the conventional group, which was already formed by the school administration, or a group formed based on students' interests. A respondent states;

The teacher primarily forms groups in our English class, but sometimes we can also create our own groups. The group size is a maximum of 7. The mix of students that works well is an ability- and gender-based approach, with heterogeneous group composition. It focuses on gender and groups top, medium-, and low-ability students together to work more effectively (KII-3).

However, when a teacher forms groups based on students' interests, it creates a problem with balancing group heterogeneity. A respondent stated, "The teacher formed the group based on the students' interests. The group size is 6 to 9. The teacher grouped students based on their ability level, meaning there are clever, medium, and low achievers who come together in each group"(KII-7). Regarding group size, as mentioned above in the respondents' answers, the groups formed in their English class were usually four to seven. A respondent states, "The teacher forms the group. The number of groups is four to six. The mix works well when students of different abilities come together. For example, I think top, medium, and low-ranked students with an average gender mix work well" (KII-1). Group composition should be planned to ensure equal participation among group members. Group composition is the study of how groups are composed. Students were asked about the composition of their groups and responded as follows: When we reach the top of the group composition, the group is heterogeneous, with equal distribution of ability and gender. One of the key informants states,

Regarding group formation and composition, the teacher randomly forms groups of four to six students, with some sitting in front and others in back. Therefore, it is a random composition, meaning that in some groups it is all top students, and in another group it could be low students. And in another, it could be all-male or all-female. So, in my opinion, it is regardless of ability and gender. Sometimes, once a month, a teacher forms a heterogeneous group, paying attention to both the ability and gender mix.

In addition to this, another respondent also states, "It is a teacher who forms a group. In each group, there is a maximum of ten students. The teacher forms a group based on their ability level, which means in each group there are clever, medium, and low-achieving students." From the above discussion, one can understand that the group is better when formed by the teacher. The best group size is four to seven, manageable and achievable. All group members can benefit from heterogeneous groups, based on students' ability and gender, because groups with diverse backgrounds encourage interaction, friendship, and achievement.

Students were also asked what roles they play in a group regarding implementing cooperative work. Most key informants reported that students play different roles in a collaborative group, such as group leader, facilitator, timekeeper,

recorder, and summariser. The teacher assigned them to different roles based on their interests. It was believed that cooperative writing and group work would be fruitful when students fulfilled their roles.

Under this subtopic, students were also asked how they feel about the difficulty of writing skills. Most respondents believed writing skills are more difficult than other language skills for different reasons. A respondent states, “I think writing skills are difficult because when you write, you have to have enough vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Writing doesn’t use simple, random words like in a talk; we have to use powerful words that clearly express our ideas. These things make the writing difficult.” Similarly, another respondent also states, “Writing is a challenging skill because, for example, we all fear that writing needs knowledge about grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. These challenges, I think, make writing a difficult skill.”

However, according to one of the key informants, the difficulty of writing skills at the preparatory school is due to the limited attention given to the skill in lower grades. When students are in lower grades, no attention is given to their writing skills. He states,

In my opinion, it is not that difficult. However, the Ethiopian education system didn’t pay attention to lower grades, especially kindergarten through grade five. At the primary level, the lack of attention to writing creates difficulty with the skill. Therefore, the system should pay attention to the skill at the primary level.

Therefore, one can understand that writing is more difficult than other language skills because it requires more attention and knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, and spelling.

3.3.2. *The Problems Students Face in Learning Writing Skills*

Question no 10 was targeted to assess students' challenges in learning writing skills. Students have had various difficulties when learning to write. Most respondents reported that students fear writing because of grammar, vocabulary, ideas, organisation, and mechanics. A respondent stated, “In my opinion, the most horrible issue is the grammar, how to say it. The other one is the lack of word power or vocabulary. And again, I worry about the mechanics and organising the ideas.’ Similarly, another respondent states, ‘The most challenging difficulties are like grammar, organising ideas together, and putting them on paper using correct mechanics are some of them.’”

In addition, some respondents reported that students fear the writing itself. For example, one of the key informants states,

For most of us, belief is what helps us write effectively. If you believe that you can write, you can write. But the fear of writing is challenging for most of us. The lack of appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics is a difficulty in writing skills.

Thus, one can see that writing poses many challenges for students. They face difficulties with grammar, vocabulary, organisation, content, and mechanics when

they start writing. The quantitative data highlight a critical tension in the EFL writing classroom. When asked to evaluate their English classes, a dominant **58%** of learners reported a "**Mixed**" experience, while **31%** found them "**Easy**" and **11%** found them "**Difficult**". This high "Mixed" percentage suggests that while Cooperative Learning (CL) practices are likely present, they have not yet neutralized the inherent challenges of the writing process.

The qualitative data provides the necessary context for this "Mixed" sentiment. Respondents identified a fundamental "fear of writing itself," rooted in a lack of linguistic tools such as vocabulary, grammar, organization, content, and mechanics. This data suggests that even when working in groups, students are grappling with deep-seated anxieties about their individual proficiency.

Finally, question No. 11 was used to ask students how to overcome these challenges. The respondents reflected on some possible solutions to ease their writing. Some suggested solutions were focusing on the writing skills of students in lower grades, providing regular practice, referring to dictionaries and additional reference books, training students in writing, and helping each other in a cooperative writing group. Similarly, Ismail (2007) states that writing skills can be developed when learners' interests are acknowledged, and they are given frequent opportunities to practice writing.

The results unequivocally corroborate Stephen Krashen's theory. The observed "fear of writing" functions as a significant Affective Filter—a psychological barrier induced by anxiety and diminished self-esteem. One informant specifically asserted that "belief facilitates effective writing." When children lack this conviction, their emotional filter increases, hindering their ability to acquire language skills despite effective instruction. The 58% "Mixed" outcome likely indicates that students perceive the social advantages of collaborative learning but are impeded by emotional barriers when confronting the intricacies of writing.

The results indicate that although Collaborative Learning (CL) offers a structural framework for education, it necessitates complementary support for linguistic mechanics to reduce the affective filter. The popularity of the "Mixed" experience suggests that cooperative learning approaches are being utilized; nonetheless, the issues of student fear and technical deficiencies continue to pose substantial obstacles to good writing performance.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights that while cooperative learning (CL) shows promise, its implementation in writing classes is fraught with practical obstacles. Although students engage with CL when structured correctly, they often revert to passive roles in traditional formats. Key barriers include significant time demands for preparation, rigid classroom seating, and extreme regional heat, which discourage the close physical proximity required for effective group work. These challenges are categorized into student, teacher, classroom, time, and weather-related factors; however, the data suggest that consistent teacher intervention and group-based assessments can significantly enhance the efficacy of CL during writing instruction.

To address these challenges, several recommendations are proposed to better integrate CL into the curriculum. The primary focus should be on maintaining manageable class sizes and ensuring that teachers actively monitor and intervene during group sessions. Students should be encouraged to take ownership of assigned roles to foster accountability, while writing tasks should be simple, engaging, and multifaceted. Furthermore, Samara University is encouraged to provide targeted training for both faculty and students on CL methodologies. Finally, foundational writing skills must be prioritized in lower grades to provide students with a stronger base and a more conducive environment for collaborative practice in their later academic careers.

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