

## **The implementation of active learning techniques in teaching the English language at three primary BeteSeb schools**

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### **Abstract**

The roles of English teachers in the era of CLT are to direct and facilitate the teaching-learning process in a student-centered manner. Students should use the language in a meaningful manner by making them use different active techniques. The aim of this paper was, thus, to examine whether the teaching-learning process of English at BeteSeb Academy was student-centered or not. To realize the above aim, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Since the focus of the study was to describe and know the teaching methods/techniques and identify the existing problems in teaching the English language from different CLT quality related dimensions, a descriptive survey research design was used. Primary data were the sources of data for the study. Data were gathered through questionnaire and classroom observation. English teachers filled out the questionnaire given to them, and the researcher observed English classes of five teachers using checklist while they were running their classes. All twenty-three English teachers were taken as samples using census method. Qualitatively, five English teachers were selected as cases for classroom observation. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the quantitative data and narration was used to report the observation findings of the qualitative data. The findings revealed that English teachers at BeteSeb Academy used both teacher-centered and active techniques, but they dominantly applied teacher-centered approach while teaching the English language. Lack of technology access and large class size were identified by the English teachers as obstacles in teaching the English language effectively. Further, teacher respondents made clear that listening skill was a neglected skill in the Academy which contributed its own share negatively to the English competence of students. The Academy should dominantly use student-centered approach by using technology such as computer-assisted learning, videos and audios and applying various active techniques, helpful to promote meaningful interaction. Listening skill should also be thought like the other three major skills and three sub-skills in the computer lab of the schools.

**Keywords** active techniques, student-centered, teacher-centered, needs of teachers and skills

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## 1. Introduction

The main aim of education is to enable learners to develop knowledge, skills, know-how attitudes and practice, being achieved through different methods. Methods are the means of conveying ideas and skills of different subjects to learners. At different times, different methods of learning have been applied in teaching the English language and other subjects and remained dominant for certain period of time such as teacher-centered methods. Teacher-centered approach, however, leads students to boredom, lack of focus and lack of language proficiency since it focuses on superficial learning such as grammar (Bethel, 2011; Kruck, 2015; Devkota, 2017). The traditional method is, thus, being replaced by active methods which places learners at the center of the teaching-learning process by empowering and involving them actively, interactively and meaningfully (Heradika, 2012) so as to enable them to construct knowledge and skills independently and use the language in real and meaningful communication.

According to Doolittle, Wojdak, and Walters (2023, p.18), “Active learning is a student-centered approach to the construction of knowledge [which] focused on activities and strategies that foster higher-order thinking.” This advancement, which allows learners to construct knowledge independently, makes the relevance of traditional method somehow marginalized for the following reasons:

The traditional ‘chalk and talk’ approach with the students as recipients of knowledge may not be suitable for today’s generation. This is why in schools throughout the world, there is a movement from learning that is made up of facts to a new model i.e. active-learning which emphasizes understanding, making connections in the world around us, collecting and using information in active manner (Leu (2000, p.10) in Taye, 2008, p.1).

Teaching methodology can be the cause of success or failure in learning any subject in general and the English language in particular since it is ultimately the methodology that determines the ‘how?’ of instructions systematically and scientifically. In relation to the merits of active learning methods in academic achievement and learning effectiveness, a meta analysis studies reviewed by Doolittle, Wojdak, and Walters (2023, p.2) had this to say:

The effectiveness of active learning, in terms of positively impacting learning and performance was demonstrated by Freeman et al. (2014) who conducted a meta-analysis of 225 STEM-focused studies, comparing the impact of lecture versus active learning instructional approaches on exam performance and course failure rates. Freeman et al. concluded that active learning increased exam performance by almost one-half standard deviation, while decreasing course failure rates by 55%. Similarly, Theobald et al. (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of 41 studies focused on exam performance and course failure rates of students from underrepresented groups in STEM-related fields, comparing the impact of lecture versus active learning instructional approaches. They found that

“active learning reduced achievement gaps in examination scores by 33% and narrowed gaps in passing rates by 45%” (P. 6476). Finally, predating Freeman et al. (2014) and Theobald et al. (2020), Hake (1998) examined a large data set (N = 6,542), addressing the impact of lecture versus active learning on physics concept development across 62 introductory physics courses (14 lecture-based courses and 48 active learning-based courses). Hake found that an active learning approach (interactive-engagement) led to average gain scores (pre-test/post-test) on physics concept development, almost two standard deviations above the lecture-based approach.

As can be understood from the above meta analysis, methodology affects students' success or failure greatly. Interestingly, the twenty-first century has gone a long distance, especially in the use of learning strategies and methods. The new generation is expected to focus on creativity, solving problems, making decisions, and collaboration (Demirci and Yavaslar, 2018). The role of teachers has become learning facilitators rather than being a source of knowledge and information. The traditional teaching methods are no more dominant as a result of active learning methods which enhance students' learning motivation, learning strategies, abilities and academic achievement.

As to Ethiopian English language instruction, after studying the English language at primary and secondary schools for many years, the majority of Ethiopian students can only perform English at a very basic level for communication. This problem can be the result of a teacher-centered method, used dominantly in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. The teacher-centered teaching approach is the favorite teaching style for most teachers in Ethiopia. Hence, it can be said that this teaching approach among others can be the leading cause which affects the teaching-learning of the English language negatively. It compels learners to learn passively without passion and real engagement, presenting language skills in a segregated manner.

Language learning is an active process by which human beings develop their language skills in order to use them effectively in their social life and professional life. Wang, Shang, & Briody (2011) noted that the teaching and learning of any language skill needs the use of effective techniques and strategies in order to enable learners communicate one's own thoughts, opinions, information and experiences.

In Ethiopia, students are expected to develop their English language proficiency through appropriate methodology, for it is obvious that the language has been considered as one of the most vital areas of focus in the school curriculum in our country (Girma, 2013; Ayele, 2014). Active learning has earned the attention of a large number of English scholars and educators. It is considered to have positive effects in learning the English language. However, the implementation of active learning techniques in teaching the English language in Ethiopia is still low (Mulatu and Bezabih, 2018).

Students are supposed to be effective communicators in both classroom and outside classroom setting, provided English teachers teach them in a student-centered manner which involves collaboration, presentation, role

play, debates, interviewing, discussion, groups and pairs work, etc. designing tasks in a meaningful and motivating manner. To check its being so, it is imperative to conduct a study to examine on how teachers teach in the actual class using different active techniques to promote the proficiency level of students.

### 1.1. *Statement of the problem*

Nowadays English in Ethiopia has become one of the basic criteria for the employability and the measurement of organizational and personal competence indicator (Temiru, 2013). It is very rare to find a vacancy in Ethiopia that could not require the English language knowledge and competence, and it has become an important asset for anyone seeking employment in education, business, industry or technology in Ethiopia. Accordingly, the main aim of teaching English in primary and secondary schools is to enable students to communicate in English so that they can pursue their academic study effectively, and they will become able to cope with the challenges of higher education and ultimately get employed in different government and private sectors.

However, as reported by Tamiru (2013), most teachers in Ethiopian schools are not proficient enough in English; as a result, it has become the cause for the great majority of students' lack of the basic language skills. Besides, English teachers employ traditional method which makes learners passive recipients of information despite the fact that the goal of education is to guide learners not only to acquire knowledge but also to cultivate students' potential to the maximum. To do so, the development of a multitude of skills, namely collaboration, communication, critical thinking, independent inquiry and group participatory behaviors are essential (Clark, 2008).

Due to these, some schools have been offering training on active learning techniques and formative assessment. A case in point is BeteSeb Academy which gives training on active techniques and formative assessment to its teachers before classes commence every New Year with the aim of changing classroom methodology from teacher-centered to student-centered so that students can be independent and motivated learners and effective scorers in all subjects in general and the English language in particular.

Offering training is one thing, but checking the actual implementation of the techniques is another thing. This study is, therefore, conducted by BeteSeb School, a private Academy, to examine if English teachers apply active learning techniques in their classrooms to make learners engaged in learning the English language. So, the following research questions were designed to see the effective implementation of active learning techniques while teaching English.

1. What kinds of teaching methodology and techniques are used by the English teachers while teaching the English language at BetSeb Academy?
2. What do English teachers need from the Academy to improve the teaching learning of the English language at BetSeb Academy?

3. At which English language skills are students poor who need support from the school and English teachers at BetSeb Academy?

### 1.2. *Conceptual framework*

Active learning method bases itself on constructivism. Constructivism refers to the active construction of knowledge by learners by using various strategies (Woolfolk, 1999 in Atlabachew (2017)). From constructivism perspective, learning occurs when learners integrate new knowledge with the existing knowledge, and this occurs when the learner is engaged actively in the construction of knowledge involving in behavioral, cognitive, or social activity—students doing things and thinking about things which they are doing and ultimately coming up with new skills, attitudes and practices (Prince, 2004; Graffam, 2007; Freeman, 2014).

Constructivism learning theory has many advantages to students. It enables them to own the teaching-learning of the English language. It stimulates and motivates students since it allows them to use the language actively. It promotes social and communication skills by creating opportunities for collaboration in the form of group and pair work. It improves students' higher order skills while students are reflecting, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating about the tasks they are doing (Bada, 2015).

### 1.3. *Definition of active learning*

Active learning is defined by different scholars differently. Nguyen et al. (2021), for instance, defined active learning as “classroom-based activities designed to engage students in their learning through answering questions, solving problems, discussing content, or teaching others, individually or in groups”. Here, the key terms are engagement, techniques and activities. Students are expected to be involved in doing tasks. While doing writing, speaking, listening, reading, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation tasks, learners should be engaged actively, interacting with both teachers and students which pave the way for effective use of the language.

For Bonwell and Eison (1991) active learning involves “students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing.” Again here students are not passive recipients, rather they are required to do and think at the same time or simultaneously about what they are learning. They learn the language through role play, conversation, presentation, groups and pairs work, etc. and at the same time monitor what they are doing. It involves social, cognitive, metacognitive and affective skills.

Another definition of active learning points out that it is “a process whereby students engage in activities, such as reading, writing, discussion, or problem-solving that promote analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of class content” (University of Michigan, CRLT, 2016). Similarly, Doolittle, Wojdak, and Walters (2023, p.18) put forward a more inclusive definition of active learning saying, “Active learning is a student-centered approach to the construction of knowledge focused on activities and strategies that foster higher-order thinking.”

According to Doolittle et al. and the University of Michigan, students are expected to learn independently and construct their own knowledge and

skills by doing different tasks and activities, selecting and using appropriate learning strategies and higher order skills when they use the language. From the above definitions, language learning, thus, becomes effective when students are active and exploit their higher order skills of Bloom's taxonomy effectively while doing tasks to construct knowledge instead of being simply passive recipients of information like that of the traditional approach where by everything is dictated by the language teachers.

To sum up, the active roles of students and teachers, the frequent interaction between students and teachers and students and students, the use of meaningful tasks, the use of effective strategies like problem solving, case study, inquiry, discovery learning, gamification and higher order skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation, independent learning in both class and outside class, collaboration, engagement, construction of new knowledge, skills and ultimately to be proficient in the English language (change of behavior) are some of the features of active learning which make it different from the traditional classes of language learning that limits the teaching learning at surface level, namely grammar competence.

#### 1.4. *Active learning in Ethiopia*

At policy level, Ethiopia endorsed the use of active techniques in 1994. In its proclamation, the document stated that "One of the aims of education is to strengthen the individual's and society's problem-solving capacity, ability and culture starting from basic education and at all levels." (1994,p.1) According to Teshome (1917), the policy and its associated documents identified non-traditional methodology such as learner-centered method, child-centered method, problem-solving method, etc as teaching methodology to be used by teachers.

In relation to English language teaching methodology, according to Atlabachew (2005, p.1), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the order of the day in teaching the English language in Ethiopia. Accordingly,

..., the syllabus of English, in Ethiopia, is designed in line with the features of communicative language teaching in such a way that the skills are presented in an integrated manner, using various active techniques such as project work, role play, pair and group work in order to promote meaningful interaction. This is assumed to empower learners to carry out their academic tasks and daily activities optimally.

In spite of these expectations, studies report that most teachers apply teacher-centered approach while teaching the English language. This happened probably most English teachers are not proficient in the language they teach which forces them to use teacher-centered approach. Besides, the roles of teachers in student-centered approach are to be managers, friends, helpers, facilitators, etc. These roles are difficult for some traditional teachers to apply, feeling that they are not at the centre of the teaching learning process, hence stick to the traditional method.

#### 1.5. *Types of active learning techniques*

According to Orlich (1981) in Halimi and Summiyani, there are several alternative active learning techniques which can be employed by teachers in

the learning process. In fact, scholars claimed that there are more than 250 active learning techniques (228 of them were summarized and listed from different sources by Yee (n.y)), and interestingly anyone can introduce active learning techniques of his/her own to class as far as they meet the features of active learning: interaction, active engagement and knowledge construction through deep learning.

Some of the examples of active learning techniques include discovery learning, case study, inquiry method, cooperative learning, flipped learning, problem based learning, fishbowl strategy, jigsaw method, mind maps, brainstorming, storytelling, games, peer teaching/review, groups and pairs work, role play, conversation, think-pair-share, debates, field trips, demonstration, drama, flash card, hot seat, hot air balloon, jeopardy, card ranking, diamond ranking, creative matrix, visual aids, etc.(Merecat, 2022).

### 1.6. *Advantages and challenges of active learning*

#### 1.6.1. *Advantages of active learning*

Studies point out that active learning has several benefits which can be classified into cognitive, affective, and psychomotor categories. In relation to cognitive category, the benefits of active learning incorporate improved student knowledge and understanding, better retention, memorization and advanced critical thinking, better academic performance and achievement. As for the affective category, the merits identified include self confidence, high self-efficacy and motivation, and positive learning experience. The psychomotor category constitutes benefits such as increased student participation, collaborative learning, and effective communication skills (Rahman, et al., 2022).

#### 1.6.2. *Challenges of active learning*

The challenges of applying active learning can be broken down into three groups: student factors, teacher factors, and pedagogical factors. These challenges can be classified in turn into internal and external challenges in active learning. Student factors can be defined as the obstacles that students face while using active learning strategies to learn such as time constraints, technology illiteracy, too much workload, lack of interest, lack of knowledge of active learning strategies, and lack of interest to participate actively among others are few to mention. The challenges related to teacher factors can be defined as the obstacles teachers face while applying active learning strategies in their classrooms. These challenges include time constraints, lack of knowledge of active teaching strategies, and poor teaching skills. The pedagogical category refers to external factors that influence active learning negatively like large class size, difficult subject content, and busy and loaded timetable (Rahman, et al., 2022).

### 1.7. *Empirical findings on active learning methods*

In Ethiopia studies were conducted at government primary schools on the perception and implementations of active learning methods. Such studies were not, however, common in private schools. For instance, Seid and Mohamed (2019) carried out a study on the understanding and implementation of active learning methods in the public primary schools of

south Wollo zone by employing descriptive survey research and sampling 305 school teachers, and their findings revealed that active learning methods were not properly implemented. Fasil and Chambo (2020) assessed the practice, perception and the challenges of active learning in public school of Mirab Abaya woreda, Gamo Gofa zone. They used descriptive survey research design. Teachers, school principals, supervisors and students were the subjects selected with simple random and purposive sampling techniques, and their findings showed that the respondents had a good understanding of active learning methods, however, they did not implement the teaching learning process effectively. Melaku and Merga (2023) also assessed the implementation and challenges of active learning strategies in government primary schools in the East Wollega zone, collecting data from 146 teachers of ten primary schools. The findings revealed that teachers had positive attitude towards active learning, nevertheless, they did not apply active learning methods due to traditional lecture styles, large class sizes, and a lack of instructional materials.

In relation to English language, Mebratu and Woldemariam (2017) conducted a descriptive survey study in SNNPRS government three selected primary schools to examine the perceptions and practices of English teachers. They found out that English teachers had positive perceptions of active learning, but their practice was low. Similarly, Tesfanesh and Abebe investigated the factors which affected the implementation of active learning methods in SNNPRS using mixed methods, and they reported that lack of motivation and interest of English teachers were the factors which impeded the effective implementation of active learning techniques among others. All the above studies were conducted in public primary schools. And it is not common to find studies being conducted at private primary schools. This study was conducted to fill the gaps.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1. Design of the study*

The study employed mixed methods. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. A descriptive survey research design was used since the study tried to describe the type of active learning techniques used by English teachers. And it also attempted to identify the needs of English teachers and the skills students were not good at. Doing so can improve the teaching learning process and make the required intervention. Self reported questionnaires are subjective. They can lead to inaccuracies of data. Respondents can offer unintentionally biased information. To fill the gap and triangulate the accuracy, validity and reliability of the data, selected English teachers were observed using checklist to cross check the responses of the teachers with their actual implementation of active techniques.

### *2.2. Population*

English teachers of BeteSeb schools were the population. Three primary English schools (Lebu, Kara and Bethel) were selected from Addis Ababa since they were convenient for the researchers to gather data. In other words, a school from Jimma was not incorporated due to distance barrier.

### 2.3. *Sampling techniques and sample size*

All twenty-three English teachers who thought in the three primary schools were taken as a sample of the study using census technique so as to know the methodology they use to teach English, to know the needs of English teachers to improve the teaching-learning process of the English language, and to identify the skills and sub-skills that required improvement since students were assumed to be poor. Five English teachers were selected for classroom observation who were conveniently available.

### 2.4. *Data gathering tools*

It made use of primary data sources by making classroom observations and distributing questionnaires. Naturalistic classroom observation was made. According to Delve and Limpaecher (2020a, n.p.), “With naturalistic observation, observation occurs directly in the environment where the phenomenon occurs. The observations are made as unobtrusively as possible with the researcher not directly interacting with the participants in any way.” Thus, five teachers who were nominated conveniently were observed while teaching different skills. Each teacher was observed in three rounds, in each period, teaching for 45 minutes.

A questionnaire was also distributed to be filled in to all English teachers of the Academy in Addis Ababa. Having twenty seven active and traditional teaching techniques based on the review of literature and empirical studies, teachers were asked to identify the techniques they applied while teaching English. Besides, teachers were asked to rank their needs in order to improve the teaching learning process. They were also asked to identify the skills and sub-skills that required improvement from students angle.

### 2.5. *Validity and Reliability*

After reviewing different studies and literature, the questionnaire was developed and shown to two experienced English university lecturers to check its content validity. The experts commented on including some active techniques, and accordingly they were included. Incorporating their comments, it was distributed to the respondents. Reliability refers to the consistency of responses made by respondents at different times. A test-retest method was used to check the reliability of the tool, and the result of the Cronbach’s alpha was .81 which was good.

### 2.6. *Method of Data Analysis*

Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics such as mean values, standard errors and standard deviations were used to analyze the results. A statistical package for Social Science 20 was used in calculating the findings. As to observation, 21 indicators were used as observation checklist to examine the use of active learning methods and dichotomous questions were used while gathering data through observation and the findings were reported in narration form on the basis of “Yes” and “No” responses.

### 3. Findings

In this section, analyses and interpretations of the results regarding teaching techniques, needs of teachers to improve the teaching-learning process and students' gap related to their English proficiency are made.

#### 3.1. Analysis of the Questionnaire Responses

##### 3.1.1. English Teaching/Learning Techniques

Table 1  
*English teaching/learning techniques*

Techniques	N	Range	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std.	
						Deviation	Variance
1. Copying down to notebooks	21	3	1	4	3.38	.805	.648
2. Teacher reading stories	23	3	1	4	3.04	.706	.498
3. Students memorizing words and phrases	22	2	2	4	3.50	.598	.357
4. Singing songs	23	2	1	3	2.00	.798	.636
5. Children repeating after the teacher	22	2	2	4	3.45	.671	.450
6. Role-play	22	3	1	4	3.09	.750	.563
7. Silent reading	23	3	1	4	3.13	.815	.664
8. Listening to the tape/ CD	23	3	1	4	2.00	.953	.909
9. Students telling stories	23	3	1	4	2.83	.834	.696
10. Playing games	23	2	1	3	2.61	.656	.431
11. Rhymes or poems	22	3	1	4	2.68	.839	.703
12. Working on the computer	22	2	1	3	1.59	.734	.539
13. Watching videos/ TV	22	3	1	4	2.09	1.019	1.039
14. Handwriting exercises	22	3	1	4	3.41	1.008	1.015
15. Grammar exercises	23	1	3	4	3.78	.422	.178
16. Students reading out loud	23	2	2	4	3.43	.662	.439

17. Project work	22	3	1	4	2.82	.733	.537
18. Studying grammar rules or tables	22	2	2	4	3.45	.671	.450
19. Creative/ Free writing	22	3	1	4	2.95	.785	.617
20. Filling in gaps/ blanks	23	1	3	4	3.48	.511	.261
21. Spelling exercises	23	2	2	4	3.43	.590	.348
22. Puzzles	23	3	1	4	2.52	.730	.534
23. Arts and crafts (drawing, painting, puppet making, etc.)	23	2	1	3	1.96	.825	.680
24. Pair and Group Work	23	2	2	4	3.30	.635	.403
25. Presentation	23	2	2	4	3.26	.541	.292
26. Realia	16	2	1	3	2.06	.854	.729
27. Cards and Flip charts	19	3	1	4	2.42	.961	.924

Table 1 displays the type of teaching techniques that BeteSeb English teachers use. As can be seen from the Table, both student-centered and teacher-centered techniques were applied, having differences in mean scores. English teachers gave high rating to grammar exercises (M=3.78), students' memorizing words or phrases (M=3.50), fill in the blanks (M=3.48), studying grammar rules (M=3.45), children repeating after the teacher (M=3.45), students reading loud (M=3.43), spelling exercises (M3.43) and handwriting exercises (M=3.41) which are all traditional-teaching techniques. The application of the above techniques implies that English teachers at BetSeb Academy view students in most cases as passive recipients of information, knowledge and language skills. Such perception disallow students to exploit their potential to use the language for communication, and teachers cannot teach the English language in a creative and interactive manner.

On the other hand, from active techniques, pairs and groups work (3.30), presentation (3.26), role play (3.09), students telling stories (M=2.83), and creative writing (M=2.83), project work (2.82), playing games (2.61), puzzles (M=2.52) received the highest rating from English teachers. On the other hand, working on the computer (M=1.59), arts and crafts (M=1.96), listening to tape/CD (M=2.00), singing (M=2.00), realia (M=2.06), watching TV/Videos (M=2.09), flip charts (M=2.42) received the lowest ratings from respondents which are all active or student-centered techniques. This table clearly implies that the English teachers have a good understanding of active techniques, and they applied them in their daily practice. However, the teachers are inclined to teacher-centered approach since most of the

traditional techniques got the highest mean scores. In other words, partly students were not active and responsible for their learning. They did not collaborate and cooperate in meaningful communication.

### 3.1.2. Needs of Teachers to Improve English Teaching/Learning

Table 2

*Needs of Teachers to Improve English Teaching/Learning*

Concerns	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Better access to print materials	22	1	1	2	1.41	.503
Reading clubs	21	1	1	2	1.48	.512
New technologies such as computers or DVDs	22	1	1	2	1.64	.492
Receiving training in new teaching methods	22	1	1	2	1.18	.395
Improving one's own English and using English in the compound	22	1	1	2	1.14	.351
Smaller classes	21	1	1	2	1.57	.507
Appropriate supplementary materials	21	1	1	2	1.48	.512

Table 2 shows the factors which affect at BeteSeb Academy the teaching-learning process of English negatively from the highest to the lowest. Facilities such as computers and DVDs (M=1.64) and class size (M=1.57) received the highest means, followed by reading clubs (M=1.48) and supplementary materials (M=1.48).

The implication is that the Academy should furnish classes with the required technology since technology personalizes learning by using various interactive tools. It makes the teaching-learning process more engaging and motivating for students. Technology also revolutionizes learning by increasing accessibility and enabling students to learn the language from different places and with different backgrounds and interests, at all times and at their own pace (Motteram, 2013; Walkington, 2013, & Haleem et al., 2022).

Raising class size and reading club as pressing problems by the respondents were somehow unexpected. As to class size, the minimum class size is 15 and the maximum is 40, and compared to other schools, it is not a serious problem. Teachers can comfortably apply different active techniques

in class. Similarly, the Academy has Reading Clubs at its different schools, and it is the English teachers themselves who are responsible in helping, organizing the events and promoting readerships by using print and digital sources, and it is unclear why it got the highest rating.

Better access to print materials (M=1.41), receiving training (M=1.18) and improving one’s own English and using English in the compound (M=1.14) were the factors which got the lowest means. The Academy presents different language related materials and offer various pedagogical training at the beginning of the academic year. Similarly, the Academy’s English guideline dictates students and staff members to use English as medium of communication and instruction which led to the lowest means of the above three factors. All in all, the respondents gave too much emphasis to external factors than internal factors. They also gave the least attention to the use of English in the schools’ compounds.

### 3.1.3. Skills or sub-skills that need improvement

Table 3  
*Skills or Sub-skills that Need Improvement*

Items	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Rank	Std. Deviation
Writing	21	6	1	7	3.57	8	2.135
Pronunciation	21	7	1	8	4.90	5	2.071
Reading	21	7	1	8	5.10	4	1.998
Grammar	21	5	3	8	5.81	2	1.601
Speaking	21	5	3	8	5.67	3	1.798
Vocabulary	21	6	1	7	4.29	7	1.875
Listening	21	8	2	10	6.14	1	2.032
Culture	20	9	1	10	4.85	6	2.815

English teachers were asked to rank skills and sub-skills which required improvement from the most important to the least important to make learners proficient in the English language. As can be seen from Table 3 above, listening skills (M=6.14) got the highest rank, followed by grammar (M=5.81), speaking (M=5.67) and reading (M=5.10). Respondents assumed that culture (M=4.85), vocabulary (M=4.29) and writing (3.57) required the least attention compared to other skills and sub-skills. Thus, teacher respondents felt that listening, grammar and speaking skills and sub-skill should be emphasized to develop the language competence of students effectively.

Students at BetSeb Academy require improvement in their writing skill, but they are reasonably proficient in their speaking skill which can be witnessed by their presentation skills and speaking scores. The respondents, however, claimed that writing skill of students did not require attention like other skills which is at odds with the students' skill proficiency. This requires further studies.

Besides, it is surprising for the respondents to view culture as less important. English serves as a global language. People around the world use it for cross-cultural communication, coming from different cultures and having multicultural identities. Thus, English teachers should not focus on teaching the linguistic competence alone. They should incorporate the teaching of culture which is one aspects of the sociolinguistics competence of communicative approach. Sociolinguistics competence helps students to use the target language effectively and appropriately (Wolfson, 1989; Kim & Elder, 2002).

### 3.2. Findings of classroom observation

To know whether English teachers in BetSeb Academy use active techniques or not while teaching English language, the following checklist was used by the researcher. And the findings are presented below.

#### 3.2.1. An observation of teachers' use of active learning techniques in EFL classrooms

Table 4  
Classroom observation results

Active learning techniques	Teacher 1			Teacher 2			Teacher 3			Teacher 4			Teacher 5		
	D1	D2	D3	D1	D2	D3	D1	D2	D3	D1	D2	D3	D1	D2	D3
Observation Days	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Arts and crafts	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Problem solving method	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Role-playing	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Pairs Work	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Brainstorming	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Peer Teaching	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Cooperative learning	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Groups work	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Simulations	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Debates	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Demonstration	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Inquiry method															

Case study	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Discovery method	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Educational field trip	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Story telling	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Interviewing	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Conversation	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Drama	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Oral Report	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Games	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Jigsaw	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Others	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

As shown in Table 4 above, twenty-one indicators were used to examine if English teachers applied active techniques while teaching the English skills and sub-skills. As shown in the Table, group work and brainstorming were the most frequently applied techniques followed by pairs work, conversation, cooperative learning and oral report. And this finding supported the results of the questionnaire since groups work got the highest rating. Demonstration, inquiry method, discovery method, arts and crafts were observed being used sometimes. On the other hand, problem solving method, role playing, simulations, debates, interviewing and games were observed being used rarely. The remaining four techniques such as drama, storytelling, case study and peer teaching were not used in class while teaching the English lessons at the time of observations.

The teachers used active techniques such as pairs work, conversation, cooperative learning and oral report frequently. Compared to other active techniques, they are simple to use which do not require advanced preparation on the part of teachers and the use of higher order skills on the part of students. The change and transformation from traditional class into student centered approach should be recognized, however.

Teachers also used demonstration, inquiry method, discovery method, arts and craft. These techniques require critical thinking, communication and collaboration skills. The remaining techniques which are highly useful to improve the fluency of students' English language skills such as problem solving method, role playing, simulations, debates, interviewing, games, drama, storytelling, case study and peer teaching were observed being used rarely or never. The techniques necessitate detailed preparation in selecting or producing tasks and strategies, determining the number of students to take part in the task and identifying their roles, deciding the time they take to do the task and finally offering appropriate feedback, make the application of the active techniques, challenging for English teachers since they need professional and pedagogical preparations, adequate time, metacognitive skills, resources, capable and energetic students.

#### 4. Discussion

The objective of this study was to examine the implementation of active techniques and the problems encountered in implementing them. English teachers of BetSeb Academy used active techniques during English language instruction. However, compared to the frequency of teacher-centered techniques, active techniques were less frequent. This finding was corroborated by Mebratu and Woldemariam (2018) and Fasil and Chombe (2020) who reported that some selected active techniques like small group discussion, lecture, questioning, group work, pair discussion were frequently used by teachers while teaching English language lessons. Similarly, Seid and Mohammed (2019) supported the above findings since they identified group work, demonstration and pair work as the most frequently used active techniques by teachers in primary schools. Further, Merga and Melka (2023) found out that teachers claimed that the widely used active techniques were lectures, question and answer, discussion, group work and cooperative work. Again, here group work and discussion were the frequently used methods probably because they did not demand much preparation on the part of teachers in designing tasks and deciding the roles of teachers and instructors, or they are simple to apply or familiar to the teachers.

As to the factors which impede BetSeb English teachers from using active techniques, facilities and class size were the major problems identified by the respondents which hindered the implementation of active techniques. These findings were supported by Ayele (2017). He concluded that lack of classroom facilities, lack of appropriate teaching materials, lack of awareness on how to implement active learning were some of the obstacles in implementing active learning methods. In the same vein, Tesfanesh and Abebe (2023) found out that school environment like number of students, fixed sitting arrangements, lack of textbooks and teaching aids affected the implementation of active learning negatively. Merga and Melka (2023) also reported that large class size was a serious challenge for the implementation of active learning methods. For Molla (2017), for instance, teachers did not apply active techniques in primary schools due to large class size, lack of time, lack of skills and interest. Large class is thus identified by three of the studies as the most serious factor which hindered the implementation of active learning methods.

While pointing out skills which required attention to make students more proficient, respondents pointed out that listening, grammar and speaking skills and sub skill should be thought in an intensive manner. They also concluded that writing did not require an effort like listening, grammar and speaking which is at odd with the reality of the students' English proficiency. Most students in the Academy are very good at speaking skills but less able at writing. This was attested by classroom tests, examinations, debates and presentations. It was not clear why the respondents did not feel that writing require additional effort to be thought to make students more proficient in their writing skills. Besides, as Arief (2016, n.p.) argued, "Good writing requires good working knowledge of grammar, and also the art of using rhetoric of arranging words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs as the way to get readers attention." He further concludes that grammar ability is essential to students' speaking and writing

proficiency, and it is conflicting for the respondents to claim that students who are rich in their word power and writing skill need intensive grammar lesson.

## **5. Conclusions**

According to the respondents, responses and classroom observation, both teacher-centered and student-centered techniques were used during instruction. However, the dominant teaching techniques used while teaching English were teacher-centered. English teachers reported that grammar exercises, memorizing words or phrases, fill in the blanks, studying grammar rules, children repeating after the teacher, reading aloud, spelling exercises and handwriting exercises were the most frequently used techniques in English classes which are examples of traditional-teaching techniques, followed by active techniques. The teacher-centered approach is not in line with the CLT which is the order of the day.

The unavailability of technology and large class size were the factors that affected the teaching-learning process of the English language negatively. Teachers said that new technologies are not available which are useful to use authentic materials in the form of video and audio sources. Besides, the class size was also reported to be large.

Respondents claimed that, compared to other skills and sub skills, listening skill is a neglected skill. It is not being taught like other skills, and it is an obstacle to the development of students' English language competence. Besides, they expressed their concern regarding students' grammar and speaking skills competence too.

## **6. Implications**

The prevalent approach these days is Communicative Language Teaching. It requires teacher-directed student-centered approach, not teacher-centered approach. Students are expected to construct knowledge, skills and know-how by engaging actively in various meaningful and communicative tasks, using authentic materials. Thus, English teachers should use different active techniques, helpful to facilitate the communication ability of the learners by minimizing the application of teacher-centered methods.

The role of technology in assisting the teaching-learning process of English is very immense, so there is a need to establish computer lab where students can access and practice listening, reading, grammar, vocabulary and writing exercises and activities. The lab also should allow learners to get different digital language resources in order to do either in lab or at home. Computer lab serves as an alternative to the conventional class.

Listening skill is one of the major skills. If students are not active listeners, they will face severe problems in taking lectures and understanding their study. As Guo and Wills (2005) state, "it is the medium through which people gain a large proportion of their education, their information, their understanding of the world and human affairs, their ideals, sense of values" (p. 3). According to Mendelson (1994), "of the total time spent on communicating, listening takes up 40-50 %; speaking 25-30 %; reading 11-16 %; and writing about 9 %" (p. 9) which shows the

significance of listening skill. Thus, students should learn how to listen effectively by using authentic listening materials with the help of technology, integrating with other skills.

#### **Author contribution statement:**

Atlabachew Getaye: He designed the study and wrote the research article.  
Sara Mesfin: She coded the data and carried out the statistical analysis of the article using SPSS.

Dawit Aleign: He initiated the investigation, led the data collection and imported the data into SPSS sheet.

**The usage of GenAI:** The researchers did not make use of GenAI at all.

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