



## English teachers' beliefs about active learning and classroom practices in secondary schools: The case of Grades 11 and 12 in North Shoa Zone (Salale), Oromia students

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### Abstract

The Ethiopian Education Policy introduced a new education policy from objective-based learning to competency-based learning to recognize the implementation of active learning. However, as a practitioner in the field of English language teaching, the researcher observed that teachers still experience dominant roles to guide and control the learning process. Hence, this study aimed to investigate secondary school EFL teachers' beliefs about active learning and classroom practices in North Shoa Zone (Salale). The researcher used a mixed-method approach to collect data. The study used a simple random sampling technique to select the schools. Data were collected from 72 EFL teachers who teach in grades 11 and 12 in 15 government schools using census/complete enumeration and purposive sampling techniques. The data were collected via questionnaire, interview, and classroom observation. Then, the data were analyzed both quantitatively by using descriptive statistical tools such as mean and standard deviation and qualitatively through descriptive methods with brief reports following a grounded theory model and teachers' instructional patterns and students' behaviors. The findings from the questionnaire and interview revealed that teachers hold strong positive beliefs regarding the contribution of implementing active learning to the students' learning. Conversely, the results of classroom observation data indicated that teachers predominantly use a teacher-centered approach. This discrepancy is attributed to constraints such as teachers in favor of teacher-centered practice, students' poor backgrounds, and a lack of support from stakeholders. These factors hinder the effective implementation of innovative teaching strategies. To overcome these challenges, increasing collaboration among teachers, educators, and stakeholders is important. The findings can be helpful for EFL teachers, supervisors, and educators.

*Keywords:* Active learning approach, Beliefs, EFL teachers, Practice, Secondary schools

### 1. Introduction

Nowadays, there is a tremendous emphasis on the English language among the Ethiopian societies. This is because the language is used as a means of communication to maintain international relationships in politics, business, education, diplomacy, science, technology, tourism, and other areas at both national and international levels (Parupalli, 2019). "The significance of the language is regarded as a vital means of communication to facilitate the country's success in economic interest and

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to gain access to information and knowledge that serve as a foundation for social and economic development" (Kitaw, 2017, p. 1). Likewise, the language mostly serves as a crucial means of communication not only in government organizations such as telecommunication, airlines, banks, education, publication and research but also in film industries, media, commerce, and other areas (Telore & Damtew, 2023). Therefore, since English is a significant medium of communication in both national and international settings, there is a need to improve language education to equip individuals with effective language skills.

In relation to the introduction of the English language into the modern Ethiopian education system, various sources state that the language was introduced as a foreign language for educational purposes in the early 20th century after the Menelik II School in 1908 (Berhane, 2019; Pankhurst, 1976). It is taught as a subject area starting from primary school and serves as the medium of instruction for subjects such as biology, chemistry, economics, history, and others from the secondary school and tertiary levels (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2002 & Meseret, 2012). Moreover, students are required to be proficient in speaking, reading, and writing the English language effectively after completing their higher education to use the language effectively and have broader access to be employed in different fields. Students are also required to have more practical knowledge of the communicative skills rather than the mere knowledge of structural rules and vocabulary (MoE, 2003).

Considering the importance of the English language in both domestic and global affairs, there has been a notable change from the conventional teacher-centered method of teaching to an active learning (student-centered) approach since the new education policy was introduced in 2002 (Yonas, 2003). The main objective of this change was to make learners the center of learning, to maximize their learning, and to extend their understanding through constructing their own knowledge (MoE, 2007; Tesfaye, 2015). Furthermore, because the English language is used as a medium of instruction starting from elementary school to tertiary levels in Ethiopia, it is significant to address the quality of the language (MoE, 2002). The Ministry of Education indicated that the insufficient English proficiency throughout educational systems is a critical problem, which the government is dedicated to resolving.

Before the introduction of the new policy in 2002, the active learning approach, the method of teaching was the teacher-centered approach. Teachers transmit their knowledge of the language to the students, and the students attain what they hear from their teachers (Napoli, 2004; O'Neill, & McMahon, 2005). Teachers were considered all-knowing and a source of knowledge, whereas students were seen as passive receivers of information. Students were believed to be empty vessels, which could be filled by all-knowing teachers (Crosby, 2000). The only thing that students did was to answer a single word or phrase to their teachers when they were asked to answer. This method of teaching can be the cause that affects the students' learning with interest and responsibility. Our teaching approach ultimately determines the "what" and "how" of language teaching, and it can be the reason for either success or failure in the process (Mulatu & Bezabih, 2018).

Progressively, many developments and improvements in the process of language pedagogy have been introduced, and there has been a continuous change in the ways of building teaching and learning methods (Gamage, 2020). Thus, the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (EETP) have been working effectively to make new changes in education policy. For example, Tesfay (2015) reported that one of the changes was to shift from the traditional teacher-centered method of teaching

to the active learning (student-centered) method of teaching. This change was required because the teacher-centered approach did not make learners comprehend their environments and take part in complex contexts.

Following the introduction of the new policy, some forms of curriculum modifications have been made, focusing on a problem-solving approach that engages learners at the center of learning by making the curriculum more appropriate and adapting suitable pedagogical practices (MOE, 2002). Moreover, a new education and training policy has been offered for teachers at various levels, such as pre-service and in-service, and a Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) program in Ethiopian educational training institutions (Abebe, 2013; Geberew, 2017; MOE, 2003). One of the main objectives of this training was to qualify teachers in the English Language Teaching (ELT) field and make them more proficient in implementing the active learning approach (Mekonnen, 2008). The revised new students' textbook for grades 11 and 12 is also developed based on the practical implementation of active learning and a competency-based approach so that students can practice the different types of learning strategies, such as pair work and group work, discussion, role play, presentation and others.

Active learning is described as an instructional approach or method that focuses on “how the students learn” rather than “what they learn” and engages them in the learning process (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Here, the emphasis is on what students are doing in the classroom learning activities, but not only on the teachers. It is a process that provides opportunities for the students to analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and communicate on the presented information (Machemer & Crawford, 2007). That is, learning means engaging actively and students can learn through different means of learning processes. Students are actively involved in the lesson, i.e., they do things by themselves, such as discovering, processing, and applying knowledge. According to (Bonwell & Eison, 1991), active learning is any instructional activity that engages learners in doing things and thinking about what they are doing.

The theory that supports an active learning approach is drawn from the constructivist theories of learning. This theory was developed by Dewey (1937), Piaget (1973) and Vygotsky (1978), suggesting that students construct their own knowledge by interacting with their environment, prior knowledge and experiences to form new understanding. The approach that promotes active learning asks students to make connections between new information and the world around them to extend their understanding (Milkesa, 2019). The approach requires students to construct their knowledge. Teachers may design learning materials that help students conceptualize their mental models based on their understanding and skills. Thus, considering the pedagogical benefit of active learning for the students' learning, teachers have to practice the approach in their ELT classes.

## 2. Literature Review

The Ethiopian education policy has introduced a significant change into the education system, shifting from an objective-based curriculum to a competency-based. This was to emphasize active learning approach as a key tool for attaining the desired educational outcomes (General Education Curriculum Framework (GECF, 2020). The main objective of this educational paradigm was to transform students from mere passive recipients of information into active participants in their own learning under the guidance of their teachers. It was also designed to foster the students' cognitive abilities, creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills by using the target language

practically (Mekonnen, 2008). Based on this premise, the active learning approach was incorporated into the newer teaching methods, emphasizing that teacher-centered approaches could inhibit the students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Telore & Damtew, 2023).

However, as a practitioner in the field of English language teaching, the researcher observed that most of the EFL teachers were not seen implementing active learning properly in ELT classrooms. They still play a dominant role in guiding and controlling the teaching and learning process. As Rahman et al. (2022) stated, although active learning has been practiced for decades in the education system and has produced positive effects, many teachers are still dominantly practicing the traditional teacher-centered approach. Moreover, during the departmental meetings, the departmental heads and supervisors complained that the active learning approach could not be practiced in ELT classrooms as intended in the curriculum. That means what has been incorporated into the curriculum could not be practiced in the actual classrooms. In relation to this idea, Tesfaye (2015) stated that there is a discrepancy between theory and practice in the Ethiopian teaching and learning context. Therefore, teachers could be exposed to the lack of the necessary knowledge, beliefs, or skills in implementing the approach. Teachers' beliefs act as an influence on what they feel, know, and practice (Johnson, 1992). Thus, teachers' beliefs should be viewed as one of the factors to realize the subject matter properly.

It is widely acknowledged that education is a complex psychological process, and teachers' beliefs shape their instructional choices in the teaching halls (Serbessa, 2006). Teachers' classroom instructions could be influenced by different factors, such as their beliefs, educational background, learning environments, curriculum, practical training, and personal dispositions (Li, 2012). Hence, the inconsistency between the theoretical framework and the practical application of the active learning approach prompted the researcher to investigate teachers' beliefs regarding the approach and their actual classroom practices.

Several studies have been conducted on related issues both at national and international contexts at different grade levels, from upper primary to tertiary educations (Kitaw, 2017; Mulatu & Bezabih, 2018; Telore & Damtew, 2023; Teshome, 2017; Zewdu, 2017). However, the concern of practicing active learning approach is still poor. For example, Zewdu (2017) carried out research to explore teachers' practices and challenges in implementing an active learning approach at Wolaita Sodo University, Ethiopia. The findings of the study revealed that the interaction between the teacher and students in English class was not based on the principles of active learning. Kitaw (2017) also conducted research to assess the implementation of the active learning approach in the teaching of English language support courses to first-year university students. The result of the study revealed that the techniques that the teachers used were limited to pair work, group work, and individual presentation.

Likewise, Tadesse et al. (2024) conducted research to assess challenges EFL teachers face in implementing an active learning approach in Sidama Region. Classroom conditions, material, and teacher related challenges are the major factors for ineffective implementation of the approach. Furthermore, other related studies have been conducted around this area and revealed that teachers failed to practice active learning properly although they perceived the approach positively (Alemu, 2020; Fasil, 2020; Mulatu & Bezabih, 2018).

Other extended researchers like Melese et al. (2009) carried out a study to investigate the practice of an active learning approach in upper primary schools in Ethiopia. The result of the study revealed that although the teachers try to implement the approach, it is not adequate due to large class sizes, constraints of time, and lack of resources. Menistie (2023), in North Wollo, Woldia Town, primary schools, conducted research to investigate the practice and challenges of implementing an active learning approach between the old curriculum-trained teachers and the new curriculum-trained teachers. The findings of the study revealed that there was a difference in the perception of the utilization of the approach by the old curriculum-trained teachers and the new curriculum-trained teachers. Teachers and students preferring the lecture method, lack of teaching materials, and shortage of time were among the identified challenges to implementing the approach

Another researcher, Yenyet (2021) conducted research to assess challenges to implementing active learning at Amhara Region Police College. The findings of the study indicated that the teaching and learning process between the teacher and the students in the English class was not aligned with the principles of the active learning approach. It was more of teacher-centered method of teaching. At Guder Secondary School, Oromia, Milkesa (2019), similarly conducted research to investigate challenges EFL teachers face in implementing active learning. The result of the study portrayed that classroom conditions, resources, and teacher-related factors are the major challenges responsible for the ineffective practice of the active learning approach.

However, the current study is different from the previous study in several ways. First, many of the previous studies have been conducted at the university and college levels. However, the use of English in secondary schools within the Ethiopian context is slightly distinct from the first one. Second, none of the previous studies, particularly those focusing on secondary school levels, were conducted within the specific setting of the present study, which investigates the EFL teachers' beliefs and practices about active learning and their classroom practices. Thus, this shows a gap in the research, as a study in the current setting has not yet been done. Third, in conducting the current study, a large number of participants, schools, and data-gathering instruments were used to obtain potential and detailed data. Moreover, the previously reviewed studies tended to employ either quantitative or qualitative method, not mixed methods. As a result, they lack the necessary corresponding data needed to address the variables under the research investigation.

Finally, though there have been some research attempts on related issues, the researcher believes that further investigation is needed regarding teachers' pedagogical beliefs about the active learning approach and how these beliefs are practiced in EFL classroom within local contexts. Therefore, the present study aimed to address the following specific questions:

### **3. Research Questions**

The study aimed to investigate secondary school EFL teachers' beliefs about active learning approaches and their actual classroom practices. The following research questions were raised by the researchers:

1. How do secondary school English language teachers perceive active learning approaches?
2. To what extent is the active learning approach practiced by the teachers?

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Research Design

The study employed a mixed-method research design to gain significant insights into teachers' beliefs regarding the active learning approach and their corresponding classroom practices. It was also employed to complement the weakness of one method with the strength of the other method and to triangulate the quantitative figures with the qualitative data. As a result, combinations of quantitative and qualitative procedures were used. A mixed-method research design integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to extract comprehensive evidence of the research topics (Creswell et al., 2003).

### 4.2. Participants and Sample Size

The participants of the study were 72 (58 male and 14 female) EFL teachers of grades 11 and 12 in fifteen selected secondary schools in the North Shoa Zone of the Oromia Regional State. The schools were selected using a random sampling technique. This technique was chosen because it would provide every school an equal chance of being chosen. According to the statistical data obtained from the North Shoa Zone Educational Office in the fall of the 2024/5 academic year, there are about 298 (240 male and 58 female) teachers teaching English in 62 public secondary schools at grades 11 and 12 levels. There could actually be a slight deviation as a result of teachers leaving the schools or newly joining them because of transfer or assignment. Among these, the researcher recruited a sample of 72 EFL teachers from fifteen selected secondary schools using a complete enumeration technique. That means the teachers were included by the census or complete enumeration technique, in which all the teachers were required to be included in the study since their number is manageable for the questionnaire data.

Furthermore, six teachers for an interview and five teachers for classroom observation were chosen from those who participated in filling out the questionnaire using purposive sampling techniques based on their qualifications and teaching experience. The researcher selected grades 11 and 12 EFL teachers because he had been teaching at these grade levels for about twelve years and observed teachers' problems in implementing the active learning approach. Moreover, he aimed to obtain rich and detailed information, assuming that one teacher could teach the two grades, 11 and 12.

### 4.3. Data Collection Instruments

The research used three data gathering instruments: questionnaire, interview and classroom observation.

#### 4.3.1. Questionnaire

In this study, questionnaires were served as primary data gathering tool for getting potential information. The questionnaire was chosen because it helps to collect a substantial amount of information within a limited time and also helps to access a large group of research subjects (Kothari, 2004). Therefore, a closed-ended questionnaire was used for the study because it helps to minimize respondents' reluctance to respond to all items in writing and to manage the subsequent interviews if

there is the chance of missing pertinent information under the questionnaire. Moreover, a questionnaire was utilized to gather information regarding teachers' beliefs, feelings, and responsibilities related to the implementation of the active learning approach, and their classroom practices of the approach, allowing the researcher to collect data from a large number of participants.

To develop the questionnaires, previously used national and international questionnaires like Horwitz (1988) were reviewed. Most items and ideas were modified to align with the objective and context of the current study. The questionnaires were analyzed using a five-option "Likert scale." The coding of the items was organized in the following two ways. The statements that directly address teachers' beliefs about the importance of active learning and their academic roles in active learning classes were coded as 'strongly agree' = 5; 'agree' = 4; 'undecided' = 3; 'disagree' = 2; and 'strongly disagree' = 1. On the other hand, the items of the questionnaires for teachers' classroom practice of active learning were coded as 'very frequently' = 5; 'frequently' = 4; 'sometimes' = 3; 'rarely' = 2; and 'not at all' = 1.

#### **4.3.2. Interviews**

An interview is a qualitative research method that allows a researcher to obtain data that cannot be acquired through other data collection instruments (Best & Kahn, 2003). It also increases the potential to explore and obtain additional information from the participants, which is beneficial. An interview has the advantage of getting data in a natural setting to increase adaptability, and enhance the ability to regulate the setting in which the interview takes place (Grinnell & Unraru, 2005).

Thus, semi-structured interviews were used to elicit additional data to complement the questionnaire and to set classroom observation question notes based on the information obtained through an interview. The semi-structured interview was used to better understand about teachers' beliefs regarding active learning approach for the students' academic achievements in English language and their professional roles in practicing the approach. It was also used to give freedom to the interviewer to raise new questions during the interview and also enabling participants to express their feelings freely. In doing so, six EFL teachers were designated for the interview from those who had participated in questionnaires using purposive sampling techniques. The interview was audio recorded with the consent of the interviewees. In analyzing the generated data, the teachers were nominated with pseudonyms (Teacher-01, Teacher-02, Teacher-03...), grounded on their turn of interviews.

#### **4.3.3. Observation**

Observation is a crucial tool that can be used in descriptive and other qualitative research because of the richness and credibility of information it can provide (Hancock 1998: 89). Therefore, classroom observation was held to complement the data generated through the questionnaire and interview regarding the teachers' beliefs about active learning and their classroom practices. The data were also valued to see some related issues that had been elucidated during the questionnaire and interview for further clarification. In this process, five English teachers were selected through purposive sampling technique from those who had participated in filling out the questionnaire and interview. Each teacher was observed twice in different consecutive periods based on their willingness and availability during the data generation process. Ten classroom observations were conducted in total.

During the classroom observations, the researcher tried to focus on some elements of instructional events going on, such as classroom conditions and facilities, teachers' and students' interaction, and classroom management (individual exercise, pair or group work, and instructional activities). To validate the pertinence of the observation data, observation notes and video recordings were used thoroughly.

#### **4.4. Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher followed the following procedures while conducting the study. First, he made formal discussions with the schools' principals and department heads of the fifteen selected secondary schools before disseminating the questionnaires. Then, he discussed the research process and its purpose with the participants of the study, a total of 72 teachers (58 male and 14 female). Next, the researcher distributed and gathered the questionnaire via various means, including the school principals, friends, department heads, and directly from the participants.

Regarding the interview and classroom observation data, the researcher designed questions in line with the questionnaire data Richards (2009) to ensure their reliability and validity. In doing so, he spoke with the study participants who were selected from the questionnaire respondents based on purposive sampling techniques for the interview purpose. Accordingly, the participants agreed on a convenient day for both the interview and classroom observation. After that he conducted the interview and classroom observation smoothly and carefully with the individuals, using a phone recorder device to capture their voice in addition to notes. Lastly, he analyzed, discussed, concluded, and reported the results.

#### **4.5. Data Analysis Techniques**

##### ***4.5.1. Quantitative Data Analysis***

The initial data processing phase includes translating subjective data to numerical values through coding techniques. Thus, since most parts of the questionnaires were in Likert scale form, descriptive statistical tools, such as mean and standard deviation, with the help of SPSS software, version 26, were used. However, only one measure of central tendency (mean) was used in the results and discussion parts. As Dornyei (2007) stated, the most common reported statistics are mean (M), standard deviation (St. D), and sample size (n). While mean values signify information about the respondents' scores, standard deviation (St. D.) represents an index of the average difference among the scores to designate the average space of the scores from the mean values. On the other hand, the respondents' numbers (n) represent the total number of participants in the study.

##### ***4.5.2. Qualitative Data Analysis***

The qualitative analysis was employed to investigate the interview and classroom observation data. Therefore, the interview data were analyzed in three stages. First, to explore teachers' beliefs regarding the benefit of implementing an active learning in ELT classes for enhancing the students' academic achievement. Second, to examine their professional roles within ELT classes, and their practice of the approach, and third to assess their practical application of the approach beside with the challenges they face. Next, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed, coded thematically using a priori codes based on the research questions, and transformed into forms for ease of triangulation. Data obtained via classroom observations also analyzed aligning with questionnaire and interview.

Finally, representative data for the findings and discussion sections were chosen and analyzed with brief reports based on the situation called for each. In the process of analyzing and discussing, there was a mixing of results and validating the data through employing the instruments.

## 5. Results

This section summarizes data collected through questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and classroom observation, which were analyzed, interpreted, and presented briefly.

### 5.1. Teachers' Beliefs about the Active Learning Approaches (ALA)

In this section, ten items were designed to capture teachers' perspectives on the significance of implementing an ALA for enhancing students' achievements in English language learning.

As can be noticed from Table 1, the teachers' mean responses to four items (2, 4, 7, and 10) indicated strongly agree with mean scores (4.20, 4.24, 4.22, and 4.29), respectively. That is, the teachers acknowledged the significance of implementing an active learning approach in fostering students' engagement and their skills of lifelong learning in the English language. For example, the teachers strongly agreed with the statements highlighting that students' cultures of working together and experience-sharing are improved when they learn through active learning ( $M = 4.24$ ), and the overall quality of education is improved ( $M = 4.29$ ). The data tell us that the participants perceived positive active learning, as it is a significant approach for enhancing the students' learning of the language and improving the quality of education. The practice of active learning not only enhances the students' critical thinking and problem-solving ability but also improves the quality of education (Harrie et al., 2014).

Likewise, the teachers' mean responses to four additional items: increasing the students' English language for communicative competence ( $M = 4.17$ ), valuing student-centeredness and responsibility for their own learning ( $M = 4.03$ ), contributing to better success of students' language skills than teacher-centered approach ( $M = 4.15$ ), and encouraging learning with real-life settings ( $M = 4.14$ ) revealed agreement. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that teachers understand the significance of using an active learning approach for the students' successful English language learning. On the other hand, for items six and eight, which express that using active learning in ELT classes takes much time, so that it is difficult to cover the portion in a given semester, and it places a significant burden on teachers to manage the teaching-learning process, the teachers expressed their disagreement, with mean values of 2.50 and 2.57, respectively.

That is, the teachers believe that practicing active learning does not make difficulty for them to cover the portion within the allotted semester. Moreover, they believe that practicing active learning in ELT classes does not add burden of facilitating student participation. Therefore, it can be concluded that practicing active learning in ELT classrooms helps teachers cover the portion within the allotted semester and minimizes their workload since students share the teacher's work for their learning.

The result that emerged from the teachers' interview also indicated that teachers perceive the active learning approach positively in terms of contributing to the students' practical learning of the language. They confirmed that implementing the approach in EFL classes engages students in activities with a sense of responsibility and encourages them to reflect on their actions. It also enhances their cognitive abilities in critical thinking, fostering a culture of collaboration and problem-

solving skills. For example, according to responses given by Teacher-01, active learning promotes students' long-term retention of knowledge and builds the skills needed for self-directed learning. Teacher-01 further added as follows:

*Implementing an active learning approach in ELT classes is very significant for the students' learning of the English language. This is because it fosters the students' learning confidentiality and develops their culture of working together. They become critical thinkers and problem-solvers, while a teacher is a facilitator of the teaching and learning environments. (Teacher-01)*

Likewise, Teacher-03 and Teacher-04 stated that practicing active learning in English classrooms places students on the correct path for learning the language effectively and fosters a culture of cooperative learning. Students can accomplish the given class activities much more accurately and quickly than individuals working because they share individual experiences for common benefits. Students could read and discuss, write and report, and share their individual understandings.

However, these convictions were not consistently demonstrated in the classroom practices observed during the study. Their teaching styles were more teacher-centered, based on the activities provided in the students' textbook. Students were not encouraged to participate in the instruction and were not provided with adequate time to think or discuss the new subject with their partners. The only things they did were copy notes from the blackboard and discuss some class activities in pairs or groups at their desks. This result aligns with the previous study by Mulatu and Bezabih (2018), who conducted research and concluded that although teachers perceive the active learning approach positively, they still practice the teacher-centered method of teaching dominantly.

**Table 1**

*Teachers' Beliefs about the Importance of an Active Learning Approach*

No.	Items	N	M	SD
1	The students' English for communicative competence is increased when they learn through active learning.	72	4.17	1.904
2	I know that active learning enhances students' self-confidence for participation.	72	4.20	0.894
3	Active learning values student-centeredness and makes them more responsible for their own learning.	72	4.03	1.021
4	The students' cultures of working together and sharing. experiences are improved when they learn by active learning	72	4.24	0.927
5	Active learning contributes to better success of students' English language skills than teacher- centered method.	72	4.15	1.122
6	Using active learning in ELT class takes much class time so that it is difficult to cover the portion in a given semester.	72	2.50	1.267
7	Active learning makes learners understand ways of critical thinking and problem-solving ability.	72	4.22	0.953
8	I know that active learning places a significant burden on teachers to manage the teaching- learning process.	72	2.57	1.207
9	Active learning encourages learning with real-life settings, as activities make students use language in an authentic context.	72	4.14	0.939
10	The quality of education can be improved if teachers implement an active learning approach in their ELT classes.	72	4.29	1.027
Grand Mean			3.85	1.126

Source: Authors' Work (2024/25)

N =Number of respondents



Table 2 presents seven items that were intended to collect data regarding teachers' beliefs about their professional roles in active learning classes in EFL classrooms. These beliefs are critical for understanding how teachers perceive their responsibilities in facilitating effective learning environments. As noticed, the teachers' responses to the majority of items (six items) portrayed agreement, with mean scores ranging from 3.50 to 4.14. These mean values revealed that the teachers seemed to be aware of the pedagogical roles they play in active learning classrooms. For instance, the teachers agreed that one of the teacher's roles in the active learning class is differentiating instructions to meet an individual student's needs ( $M = 4.22$ ). Moreover, they agreed with the statement emphasizing that one of the teacher's roles in an active learning class is providing feedback to the students to check their progress ( $M = 3.99$ ). That means the teachers recognized their pivotal role in the teaching and learning process within EFL classrooms. Likewise, during the interview sessions, the teachers stated that the successful implementation of active learning is contingent upon the teachers' classroom actions. This confirms the belief that teachers are expected to possess experience in the principles of active learning strategies to effectively support students.

The teachers' mean responses to one item, facilitating the way to impart activities and lead the overall teaching-learning process, revealed strong agreement ( $M = 4.22$ ). This indicates that the participants possess the professional roles that teachers need to play in an active learning classroom.

The results of the interview also support the above survey's results. The teachers confirmed that the role of the teacher is facilitating favorable classroom conditions, getting the students to learn through means of collaboration, and orienting the mode of teaching and learning, and promoting social interaction among the students. As a result, students actively participate, think critically, and cultivate a collaborative learning culture under the teacher's facilitation. In relation to this, Teacher-02 explained that the role of the teacher in active learning classrooms goes beyond planning and delivering lessons. It involves creating a relaxed environment and being a model on how to utilize and apply knowledge in the students' lives. Similarly, Teacher-03 stated that teachers are expected to design methods that can positively influence students' learning and motivate them to achieve more. Likewise, Teacher-05 explained that one of the teacher's roles in an active learning class is to assign responsibilities to students, allowing them adequate time to complete tasks. Finally, Teacher-06 elaborated on the same teacher's role as follows:

*Teachers have many professional roles in active learning classes. This includes understanding the students' learning backgrounds and designing lessons based on their learning abilities. Teachers are also expected to encourage students to check each other's work and engage in peer assessment. Furthermore, teachers need to evaluate the students' progress and provide constructive feedback. (Teacher-06)*

The other participants further elaborated on similar ideas, emphasizing that the role of the teachers is to create favorable learning atmospheres and present lessons in a way that is interesting to the students.

Generally, this result revealed that the participants perceive their role as extending beyond merely delivering routine lessons. Instead, they cite their roles as encompassing the design, delivery, organization, assessment, and evaluation of individual students' progress. In relation to teachers' classroom roles, Murphy (1993) stated that the role of the teacher is guiding, developing comfortable

contexts for the students to discover and evaluate the progress of their learning, and promoting social interaction among the students.

**Table 2**

*Teachers' Beliefs about their Role in Active Learning Classes (ALCs)*

No.	Items	N	M	SD
1	I facilitate the way to impart activities and lead the overall teaching-learning process through interesting and challenging activities.	72	4.22	0.996
2	It is my role to give clear directions to the students on how to advance their use of the English language.	72	3.74	1.278
3	I monitor the level of my students' understanding and involve them in problem-solving activities	72	4.07	1.214
4	As an EFL teacher, I should understand the basic principles of active learning and know how to implement it.	72	3.99	1.216
5	I encourage my students to practice learning through various methods with their peers.	72	4.03	1.210
6	I differentiate instructions in order to meet an individual student's needs in active learning classes	72	4.14	1.092
7	I provide extended feedback to my student to check their progress in learning the language	72	3.50	1.148
Grand Mean			3.96	1.165

Source: Authors' Work (2024/25)

N = Number of respondents

The following table summarizes the extent to which the active learning approach is practiced by EFL teachers. Thus, the teachers' responses to eight items are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 presents teachers' practice of the active learning approach in their ELT classrooms. The teachers' mean responses to five items revealed infrequent classroom practices, with mean scores of ( $M = 2.19, 2.27, 2.41, 2.49$  &  $2.57$ ), respectively. That is, the teachers reported that they rarely practice the active learning approach in their ELT classes. From this, it can be said that teachers mainly practice the traditional teacher-centered method of teaching. For example, the participating teachers reported that they rarely provide students with activities that encourage them to interact with each other (mean = 2.41) and create relaxing classroom settings to foster students' learning (mean = 2.52). Thus, this practice could hinder students' opportunities for collaborative learning and a deeper understanding of the given materials. As a result of a teacher's ineffective instructional methods, students could fail to acquire the necessary knowledge, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving ability (Martha, 2017).

On the other hand, the teachers' mean responses to three items: encouraging students to develop responsibility for their learning ( $M = 2.63$ ), practicing the given activities in sharing of individual experiences ( $M = 3.09$ ), and helping the individual students to engage in and practice the given activities in pairs ( $M = 2.64$ ), demonstrate this sometimes. That is, the teachers reported that they sometimes encourage students to devote themselves to their learning, do it collaboratively, and couch the individual activities and practice in pairs. From this, it can be concluded that most of the instructional time is covered by the teachers.

**Table 3***Teachers' Practice of Active Learning Approach in EFL Classrooms*

No.	Items	N	M	SD
1	I provide activities that encourage students to interact with each other.	72	2.41	1.182
2	I provide students adequate time to express their sights on the topic they have been taught.	72	2.27	1.113
3	I create relaxing classroom to foster students' learning.	72	2.52	1.165
4	I facilitate contexts for students so that they get the chance to reflect on their work.	72	2.19	1.158
5	I encourage students to develop responsibility for their learning.	72	2.63	1.122
6	I motivate students to present their classwork allied with their real-life experiences.	72	2.49	1.363
7	I encourage my students to practice the given activities in sharing of individual experiences.	72	3.09	1.272
8	I go around the class and encourage my students to engage in and practice the given activities in pair.	72	2.64	1.127
Grand Mean			2.53	1.188

Source: Authors' Work (2024/25)

N = Number of respondents

Furthermore, during the interview session, the teachers also confirmed that they infrequently practice the approach because of different barriers, such as large class size, a shortage of time and teaching materials, and fixed seating arrangements. Teacher-01, for example, explained as follows:

*Most of the time, I use the lecture method followed by giving some notes based on the activities in the students' textbook. I use this strategy frequently for two purposes. First, since most of the students do not have a textbook, I give them adequate notes that align with the topic in their textbook, and then I explain. Second, because of class sizes and a shortage of time, I use the lecture method to go with my annual plan. (Teacher-01)*

The other participants also explained that they use frequently teacher-centered method of teaching frequently because the volume of the textbook is huge with intensive contents, which makes it difficult to cover the portion in the allotted semester, or year, large class size, shortage of time and teaching materials. However, occasionally they practice the active learning strategies such as pair work, group work, and presentation and class discussions. Teacher-03 also elaborated the same ideas as follows:

*I teach a large number of students in one class. Besides, the classroom conditions, such as the students' seating arrangements, are not conducive to monitoring students for active learning. Further, most of the students do not have a textbook, and the contents of the book are too extensive to cover in the given time. Thus, the only option I have is to use the lecture method, but I sometimes try to practice approaches like pair work, group work, and class discussion. (Teacher-03)*

The classroom observation data also depicted the teacher's responses. That is, the researcher observed teachers' tendency to favor the traditional teacher-centered method of teaching. Most of the classroom time was covered by the teacher, revising the previous lesson, writing notes, and explaining with very few students' participation.

In general, the teachers' overall grand mean score is (2.53), indicating that teachers rarely practice the active learning approach in their ELT classes. Therefore, it can be said that most of the teachers occasionally practice the approach. This could affect the assumptions underlying the Ministry of Education's (MOE) (2003) policy, which implemented an active learning approach to foster students' learning by improving the quality of education. This result shows that although teachers perceive active learning positively, they frequently practice the traditional teacher-centered method of teaching because of various factors. These factors include large class size, unsuitable students' seating arrangements for active learning classes, lack of textbooks and teaching aids, and a shortage of time. In relation to this, Tadesse et al. (2024) conducted research on challenges English language teachers face in implementing active learning and concluded that various factors, such as large class size and shortage of teaching materials, hinder the implementation of the active learning approach.

In this subsection, ten items were designed to generate data on how often teachers practice the different types of active learning strategies in their ELT classes. The teachers' responses to each item are discussed and presented in the following table.

As indicated in Table 4, the teachers' mean responses to four items: exercises for individual students ( $M = 3.31$ ), group work ( $M = 3.43$ ), pair work ( $M = 3.49$ ), and lecture method ( $M = 3.49$ ) indicated frequent classroom practices. That is, the participants reported that they frequently undertake these strategies in their ELT classes, with pair work and the lecture method having the highest mean scores.

During the interview session, the teachers also confirmed that they frequently use pair and group work because the students share textbooks, which allow them to discuss the given topic together in their seating. Moreover, the students' seating arrangement, where two to three students sit on one desk, is conducive to practice such strategies. According to responses provided by Teacher-01, although he has an interest to practice the active learning approach, the students' lack of interest and motivation to take part in the instructional process, large class size and shortage of time, made him use the lecture method in most of his ELT classes.

*I know that students can learn more through active learning strategies than the teacher center method. This is because students are actively involved in the lesson, i.e., they do things by themselves by sharing their understanding. They ask each other questions without fear since they are friends and are responsible for their own learning. However, classroom conditions and lack of teaching materials, such as large class size, shortage of textbooks, large class sizes and other related problems, impede us to practice the approach meaningfully. (Teacher-01)*

Similarly, Teacher-02 replied that she uses the lecture method and pair work most of the time because of a shortage of time and teaching materials. Teacher-03 also explained that he commonly uses the teacher-centered method. He stated this is because of students' lack of experience learning through active learning from the lower grades, and their lack of skills and experiences in using the target language. As to the responses of teacher-04, students prefer to learn through the teacher's explanations rather than through active learn. Thus, he uses the teacher centered method to satisfy the students' interests. Following Teacher -04, Teacher -05 elaborated as follows:

*Most of the students and even the school administration perceives the teacher as being unprepared for the traditional teacher-centered method "chalk and talk" lessons, and, therefore, he uses active learning to hide his lack of preparation by keeping students too busy. (Teacher -04)*

Furthermore, the data obtained from classroom observation corroborated the results from the questionnaire and interviews. The teachers' primary method of teaching remains the lecture format, followed by giving notes on specific topics.

In general, from Table 4 analysis, it can be concluded that the teachers primarily use the lecture method. However, they practice pair work, group work, and questioning and answering occasionally rather than fully engaging students in the teaching learning process. The results obtained through interview items also support the survey results. Furthermore, classroom observation results suggest that most EFL teachers use a teacher-dominated approach, leaving students as passive receivers of information rather than active participants in the teaching and learning process. This finding was in line with Biruh (2018) and Taye (2008) who conducted studies on similar issues and concluded that teachers hardly practice the strategies of active learning.

**Table 4**

*How Often Teachers Use Active Learning Strategies in ELT Classrooms*

No.	Items	N	M	SD
1	Cooperative Learning	72	2.51	1.199
2	Role play	72	2.35	1.103
3	Project-based learning	72	2.25	1.184
4	Exercises for individual students	72	3.31	1.296
5	Group work	72	3.43	1.149
6	Pair work	72	3.49	1.267
7	Class discussion	72	2.82	1.282
8	Debate	72	1.78	0.826
9	Lecture method	72	3.97	1.061
10	Presentation	72	1.92	1.004
Mean			2.78	1.173

Source: Authors' Work (2024/25)

N = Number of respondents

## 6. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate EFL teachers' beliefs about the active learning approach and their classroom practices in North Shoa of the Oromia Regional State (Salale), Ethiopia. In order to address the intended research objective, a descriptive survey research design that encompassed both quantitative and qualitative methods was employed. Data were collected through a questionnaire, interviews, and classroom observations. The analysis of data collocation to answer the first research question, (How do secondary school English language teachers perceive active learning approaches?) indicated the same perceptions among the participants. Regarding teachers' beliefs about the active learning approach for the students' language learning, the results of the questionnaire and an interview revealed that teachers possess strong positive beliefs about the significance of implementing the approach. They explained that it enhances the students' learning of the language meaningfully because it holds students' responsibility for their own learning, inspires them to work in collaborative, and

endorses critical thinking and problem-solving ability. This finding is different from that of Telore and Anteneh (2023), who concluded that teachers lack an appropriate understanding of the active learning, practices, their roles and efficacy of the approach.

The results of the study related to teachers' beliefs about their role in active learning classes also indicated that teachers have role-focused expectations like facilitating, encouraging, providing feedback, and evaluating the students' learning progress. However, the interview results disclosed that teachers were not playing most of the roles that are expected of them in active learning classes. They reported that though they have an interest to implement the approach, classroom condition, teaching and learning materials and students' learning background and other factors impede them from accomplishing their professional roles.

On the other hand, the analysis of data collocation to answer the second research question (To what extent is the active learning approach practiced by the teachers?) revealed that teachers were not effectively practicing the approach as intended in the curriculum. The analysis of the data indicated that large class size, fixed seating arrangements, shortage of time, lack of students' motivation, and teaching materials impede teachers from practicing the approach effectively. However, some active learning strategies like pair work, group work, and presentations were practiced based on the activities provided in students' textbooks. This finding agrees with the findings of Kefialew (2021) and Teshome (2017) that studied the practice of active learning and concluded that the approach is not practiced effectively because of different contextual factors.

## **7. Conclusions and Implications**

The current study tried to investigate the secondary school English teachers' beliefs about the active learning approach and their classroom practices in the EFL context, the case of grades 11 and 12 in focus. Questionnaires, semi-structured interview and classroom observations were employed to collect data from the respondents. Based on the analysis and discussions, the findings from the questionnaires and interviews revealed that teachers possess a strong positive conviction regarding the significance of implementing an active learning approach for the students' English language learning. On the other hand, teachers were observed using a routine pattern of teacher-dominated methods of teaching with little practice of active learning strategies, such as pair work, group work, and presentation. Students were passive for the entire period, except for the reaction of a few students on the given homework or class activities. Teachers failed to have the theoretical and practical conceptions about the active learning approach for the students' academic achievements.

This discrepancy suggests that while teachers acknowledge the potential benefits of an active learning approach for the students' academic career, they may feel constrained by traditional teaching practices or lack the necessary support and training to fully integrate these methods into their classrooms.

Overall, although teachers perceive an active learning approach positively, they predominantly practice the traditional teacher-centered method of teaching. However, they sometimes incorporate pair and group work, and exercise for individuals. This was due to various factors, such as classroom conditions, fixed seating arrangements, large class sizes, and a shortage of time, resources and teachers' training gaps. Finally, it is recommended that teachers should examine their teaching methods. To support this, stakeholders such as the education experts should make classrooms more

conducive to implementing active learning by facilitating teaching materials. In addition, they should provide need-based training that facilitates a better implementation of the active learning approach and recommendations for future studies.

This study really drives home a frustrating reality all too common in education: even when teachers genuinely believe in a new approach, putting it into practice is another story. In Ethiopia's shift toward competency-based learning, the research found EFL teachers firmly support the idea of active learning. Yet, watching their classrooms tells a different tale, with traditional, teacher-led instruction still holding sway. This stubborn gap isn't about a lack of conviction. Instead, it refers to the powerful grip of old habits, the real challenges of diverse student backgrounds, and a feeling of being unsupported in making such a big change. The takeaway is clear. Simply changing the policy on paper isn't enough. If we want teaching to truly transform, there needs to be a much stronger, ongoing system of collaboration and practical support for teachers, helping them bridge the divide between what they believe and what they face every day in their classrooms.

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### **Authors' Contributions**

All authors have equally conducted the study, collected data, analyzed and interpreted the data, and written up the manuscript.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

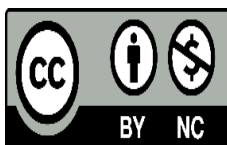
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