

The Practices and Challenges in the Implementation of Participatory Teaching Strategies in English as a Foreign Language Large Classes in Ethiopia

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Research Article

Keywords: active learning, EFL large class, learning strategies, techniques of active teaching and learning

Posted Date: April 5th, 2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-1400991/v2>

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Abstract

This study is aimed at investigating the Practices and Challenges in the Implementation of Participatory Teaching Strategies in Ethiopian EFL Large Classes. Large class to the context of this study is a class with many students in one class. To achieve this objective a descriptive research design with quantitative and qualitative data-gathering instruments and analysis was applied. This means questionnaire, observation and interview were a data-gathering instruments used to collect relevant data from grade 12 English language teachers and students. Two teachers were selected using Comprehensive sampling techniques and exposed to classroom observation and interview, whereas 20 students were also selected using simple random sampling techniques and filled the questionnaire. The questionnaires collected from sample students were analyzed quantitatively by using a descriptive statistical method. Teachers' interviews were analyzed qualitatively. The findings of this study indicated that EFL teachers have a clear knowledge about the implementation of participatory teaching strategies in the classroom, yet they did not frequently use the diverse techniques. The most frequently used techniques of active learning strategies were pair and group work, question and answer, discussion method, and debating. Therefore, EFL teachers are limited to some techniques due to students' number in the class, and this prominently hampers them not to practice various techniques of active learning strategies. Thus, EFL teachers, administrators, and curriculum experts should develop a clear awareness of the educational benefit of active teaching strategies and act accordingly.

Introduction

According to Sanal (2017) in traditional language teaching and learning, teachers are regarded as a source of knowledge and information giver. This means teachers are the sole role player and active participants whereas students are flippant and passive participants. Nonetheless, this teaching and learning technique is ineffective, and researchers and curriculum designers proposed and discovered another teaching and learning style known as modern language teaching and learning, therefore this study is biased toward the latter (Kheladi, 2021). To fulfill the unique demands of learners, successful teaching and learning necessitates the employment of a variety of approaches and strategies. The challenge, on the other hand, is to come up with new ways and strategies to stimulate and motivate the creative abilities of learners with a variety of learning styles. Students build self-confidence and actively participate in the teaching and learning process when teaching and learning methodologies are focused on active learning (Marta, 2010).

Ndebele and Maphosa (2013) suggest that active learning should be used in EFL classes to help students improve their language abilities while also making them more engaged. Furthermore, learning is only effective if pupils can retain what they have learnt. By improving students' language use, active learning practices improve student retention. Large courses, as Ur (2000) and Hess (2001) argue, can give more human resources and chances for innovation than smaller classes. Xu (2001) also suggests that when there are more students in a class, there are more ideas and heterogeneous knowledge to share among them, and that this situation facilitates a variety of mechanisms for practicing what has been taught.

Therefore large classes bring not only challenges but also opportunities for teachers. It is the teaching methodology rather than class size that contributes best to the efficacy of teaching. Such views encourage teachers to take adaptive teaching strategies to cope with the problems arising from the environment.

Marta (2010) citing Qi Li and Wang Jiana (2009) also enlightened more advantages in detail about large classes contribution in bringing numerous experiences, skills, and as well as learning strategies to one context. It can also deliver more opportunities for co-students collaboration, foster an atmosphere of cooperation, and inspire creativity and improvement. However, besides its worthiness, there are also several challenges encountering students and teachers so as to practice various techniques employed to teach language in a large class.

Statement of the Problem

Marta (2010) Citing Ministry of Education (Ethiopia) (1994) notes that document claimed that: in the Ethiopian context, active learning strategies are given emphasis as the strategies that encourage students to involve in their own learning and make the teacher facilitator of the teaching and learning process. This strategy is aimed at producing intelligent, responsible, and well-informed citizens who would take an active interest in the world around them.

Thus, seeking strategies that enable to apply active learning is believed to help students learn more than just memorization of facts because the goal in active learning is how to find out and use information, understand what students learn, and make the world meaningful rather than just memorize facts that may have no connection with their lives (Leu, 2000). A large class is the one factor that makes it impossible to practice active learning in the classroom of teaching and learning process and a majority of the teachers face instructional, discipline, physical, and evaluation problems. However, to practice active learning in large classes, if the teachers use different techniques of active learning in the teaching and learning process, students develop positive knowledge and develop their language skills.

As to the researcher's observation and experience, there is a low practice of participatory or active learning strategies in the specified context of this study. This happens due to various factors. On this, local studies showed that the number of students in the class is the major factor that affects EFL teachers not to practice active learning in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, in the Ethiopian context, a large number of students (large class) could be the major factor that hinders teacher not to practice active learning and make them favor the traditional one. However, to practice active learning strategies in large classes there are different techniques that should be employed by EFL teachers. There are few studies conducted on the implementation of participatory or active learning strategies. For instance Marta (2010) has conducted on a similar area and recommended for further study to investigate more in this area. Therefore, this study is the replicable study of the one conducted by (Marta, 2010). This study is conducted in another place so as to assess Practices and Challenges in the Implementation of

Participatory Teaching Strategies in Ethiopian EFL Large Classes. Therefore this study is designed to answer the following leading research questions:

1. What are active teaching and learning strategies type employed by EFL teachers to teach English Language in EFL large classes?
2. What are the challenges that EFL teachers face to practice participatory or active learning strategies while teaching English in EFL large classes?

Theoretical Framework

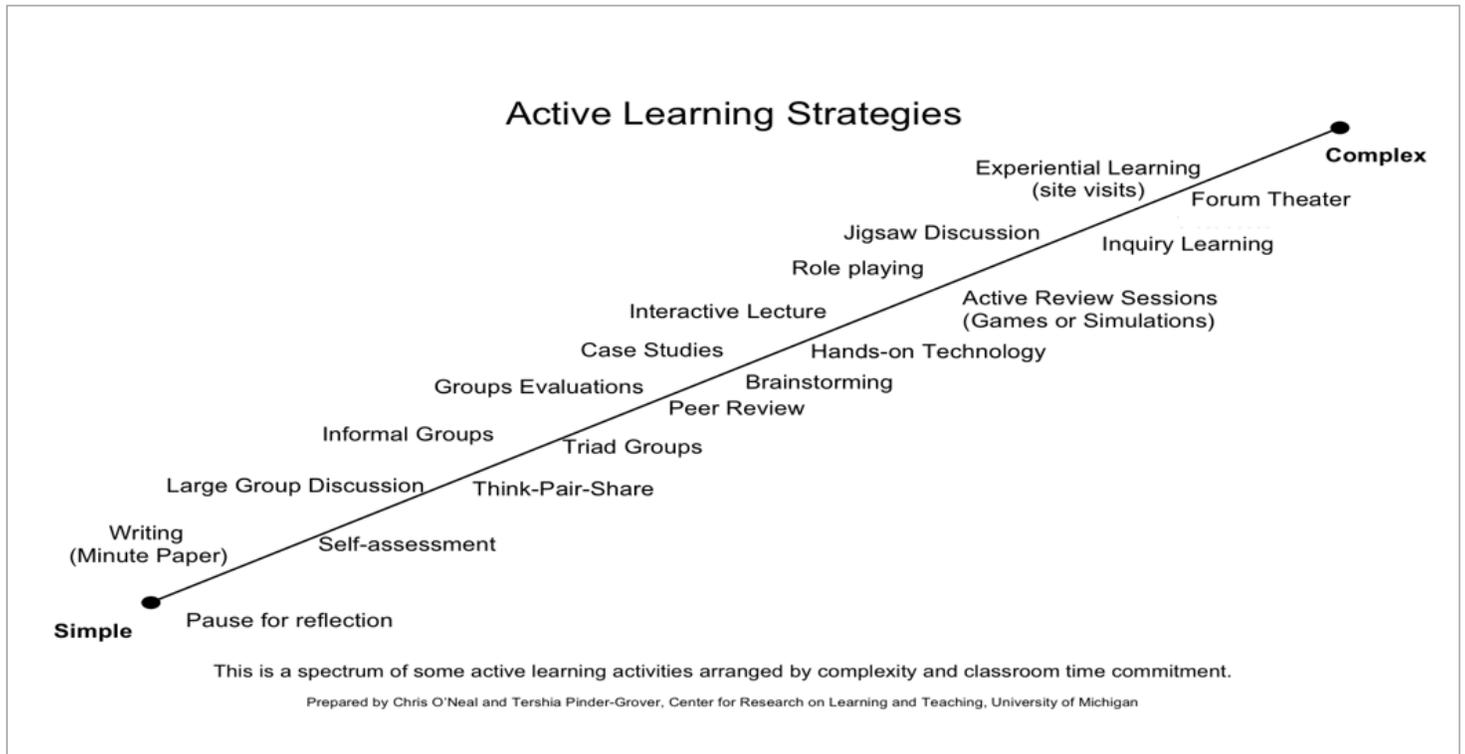
Participatory or Active Learning and teaching strategy

The method like active learning and teaching strategy and participatory learning strategy when compared to lecture method of teaching is quite different. One reason is that lecture method follows a top down teaching method and put learners as a passive participant in the actual teaching and learning; however, participatory or active learning methods give much time for learners self-learning and increase learners active involvement in the teaching and learning, and it also develop learners metacognitive and creativity skills. Regarding this, Eison (2010) asserts that active learning is a technique that helps learners to be involved in developing critical thinking and creativity, inter and intra communication skills, advanced writing skills, readiness for offering and gaining feedback, and becoming self-explanatory on their learning.

Edwards, 2001, P37 noted that:

'Placing learners at the heart of the learning process and meeting their needs, is taken to a progressive step in which active learning approaches mean that persons are able to learn what is relevant for them in ways that are appropriate. Waste in human and educational resources is reduced as it suggested learners no longer have to learn what they already know or can do, nor what they are uninterested in. (Edwards 2001:37).

Moreover, Center for Educational Innovation (2021), University of Michigan developed the following spectrum on how active learning strategy develops learner's active involvement in teaching and learning.



As it can be seen on the above spectrum active or participatory teaching and learning strategies unlike that of lecture and traditional method of teaching and learning strategies, it goes from simple to complex by employing various techniques. Students can be engaged in different teaching and learning outcomes and actively involve themselves in collaborative learning in order to develop their critical and metacognitive skills.

The Concept of Large Class

Even though there is no clear cut and singular definition of what constitutes a large class, different scholars and researchers describe it differently depending on a country's exposure to sophisticated classrooms and technology. For example, Hayes (1997) claims that "there is no numerical determination of what shapes a huge class because teachers' judgments of large classes vary from one situation to the next." Furthermore, Ur (2000) believed that a class is considered large if it contains 30 or more students. A class of 45 students is regarded to be large in Saudi Arabia. A class of 80 students or more is considered a large class in Far Eastern countries such as Japan, China, Pakistan, and India. A class of more than 75 pupils can be called a large class in Ethiopian context, similar to that of a Far East country.

As Bahanshal (2013) states that:

Regardless of the number of students in a class, it is teachers' perceptions towards the class size in a certain context with particular tools and facilities that are provided that make classes either small or large. Hence, we can say that large classes are those with a specific number of students that teachers cannot handle and resources are not enough to facilitate the teaching and learning process and that pose insurmountable problems for both teachers and students.

Techniques of Active Learning Strategies in Large Class

Teachers should use different strategies of active learning strategy in their class to successfully develop learners' critical thinking and creativity, inter and intra communication skills, advanced writing skills, readiness for offering and receiving feedback, and becoming self-explanatory on their learning and other attainable skills. There are several other active learning approaches that can be used in a big class, according to Haddad (2015). In the practice of active learning in a large class, the following strategies are frequently recommended. Here are a few examples:

Pair and Group Work

In the educational context, pair and group work is a component of collaborative teaching and learning practices. It is one of the most effective techniques to encourage active learning by structuring the students' exposure in such a way that they can collaborate in a group. Pair and group work can take numerous forms, including students working in pairs or students working independently and then coming together in groups to compare and discuss their group's results. While placing learners in pairs and groups for work, we must do it at random, taking into account issues such as gender, interest, and ability of each individual in one group (Haddad, 2015) & (Kyriacou, 1998).

Haddad (2015) further points out that group work allows each student to contribute personal perspectives while also honing the skill of collaborating with others. The interaction of learners is harmed when the group is too large. As a result, based on the nature of the tasks and activities, the group size is determined in order to carry out the work properly.

Role Playing

According to Gower, Phillips, and Walters (1995), role playing is a technique in which students act out the part of a certain individual in a fictitious situation in class. Role playing allows students to participate in a situation and act out a discourse. Role-playing is a teaching approach that belongs to the social family of models since it gives students in the class a social action role. These tactics emphasize the social dimension of learning and consider cooperative behavior as both social and academically rewarding for students.

As a teaching and learning approach, role-playing has various advantages for both teachers and students. Students' interest in the topic is piqued first, and then they act as they would in that situation. 'Incorporating experiential learning activities in the classroom boosts interest in the subject matter and understanding of course content,' according to research (Poorman, 2002). Secondly, when students participate in a role-playing lesson, they are more engaged. Students are not passive consumers of the teacher's knowledge; rather, they participate actively in the learning process and respond to what they learn. A third benefit of role-playing as a teaching approach is that it teaches students how to critically assess and apply what they learn in real life (Kothari, 2004). A typical role-playing activity would allow pupils to take on the role of a specific character in society, learning and acting as that person would in the real world (Rozali, Sitasari, Rahmat & Rahman, nd).Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study has employed a Descriptive research design. This type of design is used in this study because it helps the researcher to describe the actual classroom practice of the phenomenon under investigation in its natural context. Additionally, Singh (2006) states that, descriptive research design is focused on describing the traits of a specific individual, or group as whole. Therefore, the aim and nature of this study are in line with what is mentioned by Kothari, and it helped the researcher to seek relevant data for the successful accomplishment of premeditated objectives.

Participants of the Study

This study was conducted in one public Preparatory School which is named as Bishaw W/Yohanis Preparatory School and it is located in Kafa Zone (South West Ethiopia) particularly on grade twelve students. The proximity of the school to the researchers was a reason for the purposive selection of the study area. In this study, grade twelve students and their English language teachers were participated to provide data about the practical implementation of participatory or active learning strategies in EFL large classes.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Bishaw W/Yohanis Preparatory School was purposively selected because the researcher has knowledge about the existence of the problem under investigation in the study area. The total numbers of teachers who teach the English language in grade twelve in this school were only 2, and all of them were selected for this study by using a comprehensive sampling technique. They were interviewed and also their respective classes were observed to achieve the intended objectives. Whereas the total number of grade 12 students in the school was 200 and they were arranged in 4 sections. As Singh (2006) states using 10–20 percent as a sample out of the total population is sufficient, and there were four sections of grade twelve students at Bishaw W/Yohanis preparatory school; there are fifty students in each section with a total population of 200 students. In this case out of 200 students, 20 (10%) of the students were selected as samples (which means 5 students from each section) by using simple random sampling techniques.

Instruments of Data Collection

The pertinent data required for the study were collected through classroom observation, questionnaires, and interviews.

Procedure of Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher has used different steps while collecting the data for this study: Firstly, actual classroom observations were conducted during the teaching-learning process by using an observation guiding checklist. Then, questionnaires were administered to 20 sample students, and finally, interviews were also conducted with 2 grade 12 English language teachers so as to get deep and relevant qualitative information in order to achieve the intended objectives.

Method of Data Analysis

As a method of data analysis, mixed-method data analysis was applied to this study. This means data that were collected from all English language teachers and sample students were analyzed by using both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. The data which were gathered through observation and interview were analyzed by using the qualitative (description or interpretive) method. The data from the questionnaire was entered into the computer software SPSS version 21 and presented qualitatively by using mean values and standard deviation.

Results

This section presents and analyses of the data gathered from the target population as follows:

Participatory Learning Strategies Type Employed by EFL Teachers to Teach English

Table one

Presentation of data from student's questionnaire.

No	Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Pair and group work	20	1	5	3.75	1.682
2	Role-Playing	20	1	3	2.25	.786
3	Question and answer	20	1	5	1.90	1.071
4	Problem-solving	20	1	5	2.10	1.483
5	Debating	20	2	4	2.40	.598
6	Peer teaching	20	1	4	2.05	1.234
7	Think-pair-sharing	20	1	5	2.15	1.226
8	Discussion method	20	3	5	3.65	.587
9	Brainstorming	20	1	5	3.50	.946
10	Collaborative learning	20	1	3	2.20	.834
11	Technology-based learning	20	1	1	1.00	.000
Valid N (listwise)		20				

The above table (table one) revealed that the type of participatory or active learning strategy employed by EFL teachers in EFL large classes. As to the respondents response pair and group work with the mean value of 3.75 (1.682), discussion method 3.65 (.587), brainstorming 3.5 (.946), and as well as debating 2.40 (.598), collaborative learning 2.20 (.834) respectively practiced by EFL teachers. The data also indicated that the most rarely employed types of active or participatory learning strategies in EFL classes

by EFL teachers were technology-based learning with the mean score of 1.00 (.000) and also followed by Question and Answer, with the mean score of 1.90 (1.071)

The above graph (figure one) clearly illustrates how often pairs and groups were dominant active learning teaching strategies employed by EFL teachers in EFL Large classes. EFL teachers put into practice this strategy always. The qualitative data from teachers interview also confirmed that teachers arranged students in their prearranged group, and then gave a practical task for them to practice together. Then after learners or students do the tasks in a group they (teachers) facilitate the classroom activity and order learners to exchange ideas on the task given and also invite groups to react to it. When the mean value of the pair and group work is compared to the other mean value its result is dominant and high than the other. Therefore pair and group works were always used by EFL teachers than another type.

The above four pie chart (figure two) illustrates the frequency of active learning strategies employed by EFL teachers. As to the classroom observation results, Pair and group works are always put into practice and the Discussion methods were also usually put into practice by EFL teachers. Brainstorming was practiced usually and Debating was rarely put into practice by EFL teachers in a large classes.

The Following Pie Charts Illustrates How Often the Other Active Learning Strategies Are Put in to Practice

The above two pie chart (figure three) also indicates that Technology-based learning strategies were never practiced or used by EFL teachers as one strategy of implementing active learning. Moreover, Question and answer were also rarely practiced as a technique of implementing active learning in EFL classes. In their interview teachers forwarded that employing technology-based strategies was difficult to apply because of the absence of technology-based teaching and learning material. This means Classes are not equipped with e-learning and other technology based learning.

Challenges EFL Teacher Face to Practice Participatory or Active Learning Strategies While Teaching English

The major challenges that EFL teachers faced while trying to implement various or typical strategies to implement active or Participatory learning strategies were: the way texts are designed and the time given to teaching one lesson. This means EFL teachers forwarded that they always struggle to complete the content of the subject or the textbook not to really acquaint the learners with various skills. The reason they forwarded for this was that student texts are too long and difficult to entertain several active learning strategies, so teachers are forced to dominantly practice one or two types of active learning strategies.

Moreover, as to EFL teachers, resources in the class and as well as linguistic and academic competence of the students are not in line with the grade level they are. This means students in large classes are composed of low achiever students and the efforts made by teachers to entertain heterogeneous skills and knowledge of the student impede them not to practice various strategies. Lack of learners' interest to

do activities given, and attitude of learners was also another challenges. Moreover, students, when given a task and asked to reflect their answer on it, shift the code to their L1 or mother tongue and it blocks teachers not to use various active learning strategies. Learners were not interested to participate in English in the class and it was also the most common challenge that EFL teachers face while implementing active learning.

Discussion

Bahansha (2013) and Kyriacou (1998) mentioned that there are several serious problems that are bumped into in the implementation of active learning such as the number of students in the classroom, lack of strong leadership, and insufficiencies of equipment. Marta (2010) also found that the attitudes of teachers towards participatory teaching and learning strategies, and students' lack of self-efficacy and lack of facilities, resistance, and previous training orientation, problems of coordination, delays, confusion, and too rapid implementation to cover the textbook are some common problems EFL teachers are encountering. Most of the finding in this study is also similar to Marta (2010), Bahansha (2013) and Kyriacou (1998) finding. Moreover on their research Dereje Asfaw Bulbula et al. (2021) indicated that teachers should carefully identify the need of their students and approach the need in order to bring successful teaching; as a result, in relation to points asserted by Dereje Asfaw Bulbula et al., (2021), the current study found that EFL teachers face a challenge in addressing their students need and adjusting their actual classroom practice due to a large number of students in one class. Kheladi (2021) emphasized that active learning promotes good culture of learning and both teachers and students should involve themselves in this strategy carefully; according the present study the claim by Kheladi (2021) is degraded because EFL teachers in the context of the current study do not give much emphasis on active learning rather give focus on how to complete or cover the students textbook on time. This indicated that EFL teachers in Ethiopian high schools are text oriented than equipping learners with necessary competence by promoting active or participatory teaching and learning strategies. A claim by Kovács (2018), Alptekin (2002) and Kramsch (2017) indicated that the role of EFL teacher is to develop learners linguistic competence, they should effectively employ a best teaching and learning strategies like active teaching and learning strategies to meet the standard. Because English Language is a language that is most dominantly used as a language of education, media, medium of instruction from primary school up to higher education level, and technology transfer for Africa and as well as for Ethiopia also. The primary use of language in society is to build and sustain meaningful relationships among people. EFL teachers need to have sociolinguistic and cultural awareness of the target language and as well as the awareness of the target language they are teaching. Therefore they need to develop all cultural and socio-linguistic competence which includes different competence. Cultural competence includes linguistics competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and sociolinguistics competence. As the English Language plays a paramount role in Ethiopia, EFL teachers should entertain all competence levels in their actual classroom teaching and learning practice and should teach the target language with the aforementioned level of competence. EFL teachers in Ethiopian high schools

should adjust their teaching style and must follow a claim by (Kovács, 2018; Alptekin, 2002; Kramsch, 2017).

Conclusion

Focusing on the role of active teaching and learning strategies in the modern education, the present study investigated the Practices and Challenges in the Implementation of Participatory Teaching Strategies in Ethiopian EFL Large Classes. In general, the major challenges that impeded EFL teachers, to practice different techniques of practicing active learning strategies in teaching English in large classes were: the shortage of time to cover the textbook within the allotted period; students disturb their friends and talk out of the topic; try to use their mother tongue languages like Kafañono and Amharic languages than practicing by English; lack of sufficient teaching materials such as textbooks and teaching aids; a large number of the students in the classroom and organization of the textbook is not suitable for practice active learning strategies; students do not have a positive attitude towards active learning, and finally the classroom is also not comfortable so as to practice active learning strategies. Learners in EFL large class were also seen as passive participants in the accrual classroom teaching and learning. They were not actively involved themselves in some techniques of teaching and learning active or participatory strategies unless they were forced.

Declarations

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethical issues and Consent to participate

The study was approved by Bonga University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The data was collected after taking written informed consent form participants. Personal identifiers like name were not recorded to maintain confidentiality of the study participants

Consent to publish

Not applicable

Funding

The authors received no specific fund from any organizations.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Authors' contribution

Dereje Asfaw Bulbula and Fedila Abazinab Abajobir developed the proposal and designed the data gathering instruments of the study. Tesfa Alemu Bulti and Damtew Bulbula Areda conducted the survey and feed the data to the SPSS. Dereje Asfaw Bulbula drafted the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Acknowledgments

The researchers would like to give special thanks to Bishaw W/Yohanis Preparatory School Teachers, the school principals, and as well as all stakeholders who took part in this study.

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Figures

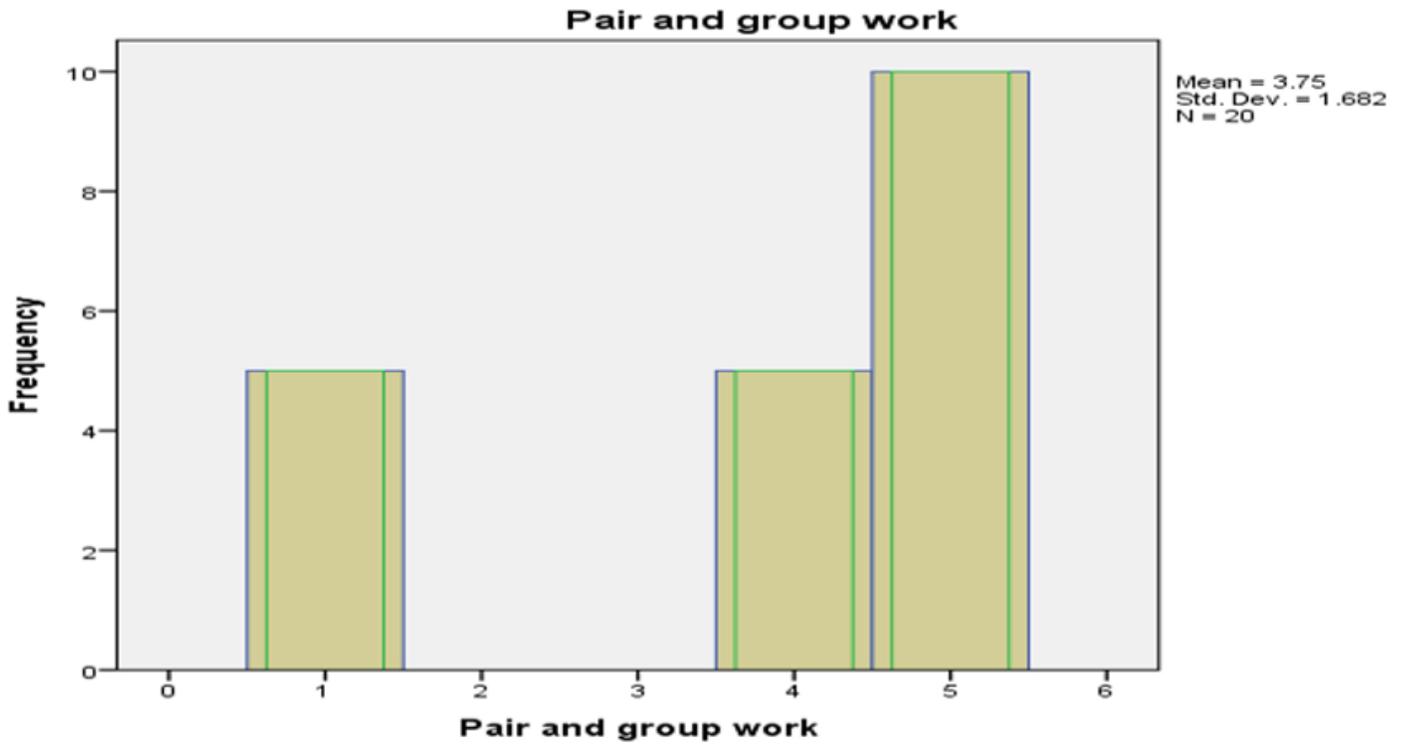


Figure 1

illustration of the extent at which pairs and groups as technique is employed by EFL teachers

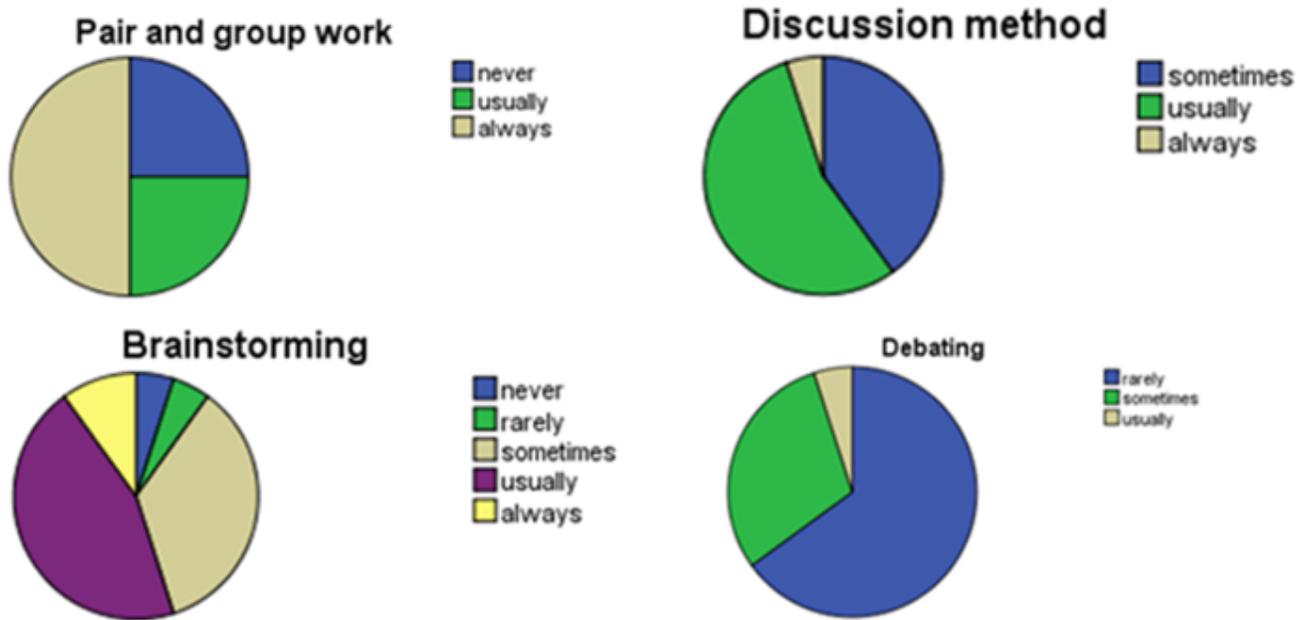


Figure 2

illustration of the extent at which pairs and groups, discussion method, brainstorming and debating as technique is employed by EFL teachers

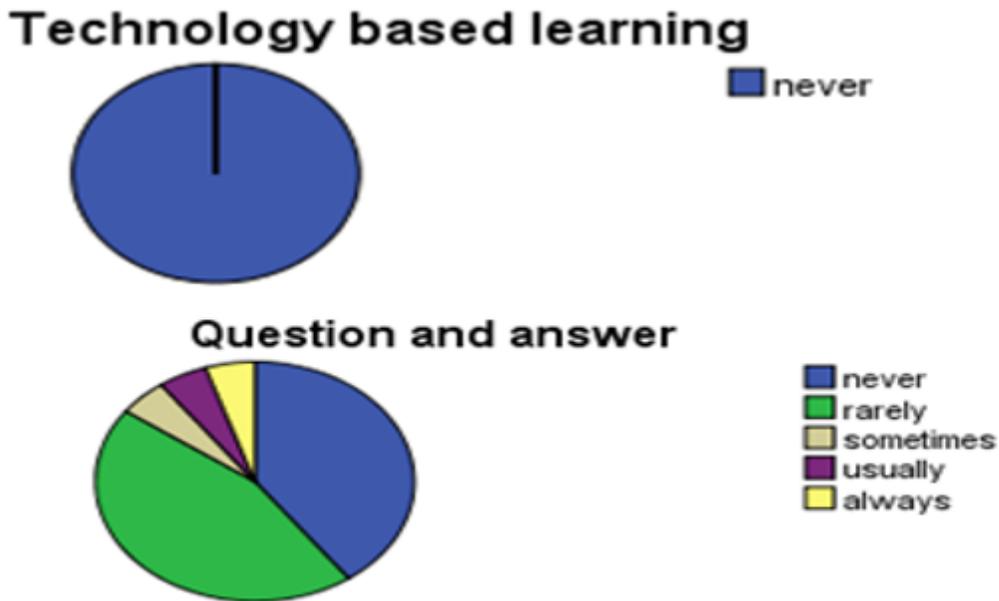


Figure 3

illustration of the extent at which technology based learning and question and answer as technique is employed by EFL teachers