

EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Relation to Peer-Assisted Learning in University English Classes: The Case of Debre Birhan University

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Abstract	Article Information
<p>This study examined EFL teachers' beliefs about instructional roles of peer-assisted learning and their classroom practices at Debre Birhan University (DBU) where such a learning scheme has been introduced as a classroom instructional strategy. The study involved 16 English language teachers, and employed questionnaire and interview to elicit the teachers' beliefs and practices related to PAL. Descriptive and inferential statistics such as one sample t-test and Pearson's Correlation Coefficient were utilized for analyses. The one sample t-test revealed that the teachers had significantly high belief about the importance of PAL in relation to enhancing student learning, self-confidence, and achievement in English. The result also indicated that the teachers employed PAL in the classrooms. However, the Pearson's Correlation (r) analysis indicated that there was no significant relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices of PAL. The results also showed that most of the teachers did not put PAL into practice in their English classes. Finally, it was unraveled that the majority participant teachers practiced peer-assisted learning differently than DBU expected it to be. Based on the findings and the conclusions made, it was recommended that training be given to teachers on the structure, implementation and benefits of peer-assisted learning to improve instructional practices in PAL.</p>	<p>Article History: Received : 16-09-2015 Revised : 19-11-2015 Accepted : 02-12-2015</p> <p>Keywords: Peer-Assisted Learning EFL Teachers Beliefs Practices English Classes</p> <p>*Corresponding Author: Abiy Yigzaw E-mail: yigzawabiy2014@gmail.com</p>

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary views of learning and their pedagogical applications have begun to change traditional classroom interactional patterns, shaping the communicative roles of teachers and students as active participants in the learning process as communities of practice (Kumpulainen and Wray, 2004). The concept of *community of practice* is described as a learner-centered environment in which students help each other learn, and the teachers' role is more focused on facilitating student learning than dominating in the teaching task (Watkins, 2005). Therefore, from this perspective, the issue of student-centered learning is of paramount importance and remains central to teachers' pedagogical practices. Powell and Powell (2010) point out that effective teachers use student-centered learning methods that engage students actively in the learning process and encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning through guided instruction and self-management. In this regard, educational theory has proposed a teaching approach, which is called *cooperative learning* and is entirely built on the concept of peer collaboration (Dörnyei, 2001). Cooperative learning identified as a student-centered instructional approach allows students to work together in small peer groups where group members have specific

roles and responsibilities to support each other as they practice group-based activities (Richards and Schmidt, 2002). Thus, according to Benard *et al.* (2007), current pedagogical practices emphasize that making learning more hands-on, involving students in peer-group learning provide them with opportunities for participating actively in their learning, interacting and supporting with one another.

Furthermore, it is important to note that although teacher-student interaction also plays an important role in cooperative learning, cooperative student-student interaction is of considerable importance in many classrooms as a result of the new conceptions (views) of learning and their pedagogical implications (Kumpulainen and Wray, 2004). These beliefs are linked to a view of pedagogy which assumes that learners bring new experiences to their existing understandings and, thus, learning is a process of adaptation based on and constantly modified by their experiences of the world via group interactions (Watkins, 2005). As Williams and Burden (1997) note, these beliefs pertaining to second/foreign language learning stem from social interactionism, a theory which underpins *communicative approach* to language teaching, and maintain that a

language is learned through using the language to interact meaningfully with others.

The contemporary learning beliefs, therefore, subscribe to the notion that organizing students into peer-learning group is an important instructional practice that can facilitate the students' interactions on task performance through peer assistance, leading to academic, social and cognitive benefits (Ashman and Gillies, 2003). Literature in this area has documented that learning together through cooperation and peer assistance is broadly used in today's higher education colleges and universities to help students learn a great deal about all fields of knowledge, including language (Falchikov, 2002; McWhaw *et al.*, 2003). Research evidence especially in the English as a Foreign Language Learning (EFL) setting, where the L2 is available to a great degree in the classroom, suggests that EFL teachers implement peer collaboration in their classes to provide students with opportunities to interact with and learn one another (Kobayashi and Kobayashi, 2004; De Bot *et al.* 2005; Ortega, 2007).

As cooperative learning is not a new idea in educational practices (Stevens, 2008), and so is in the Ethiopian university education, especially in the English courses in which student learning via working in pairs and/or groups is one of the major prescribed modes of teaching to be used by the class teacher (MoE, 2009; Atkins, *et al.*, 1996). Yet, research studies call on English instructors for more efforts to increased use of cooperative learning in the Ethiopian universities than their current practices in order to improve students' English communication skills and confidence to use the language in social interaction (Anto *et al.*, 2012; Tessema *et al.*, 2012). While such practice is reasonably important for student language development, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (2014) has recently embarked on a new teaching-learning process in which students at all education levels in the country should be structured as a "cooperative learning team" so that students can work together in peer learning groups and assist one another. For this purpose, the Ministry has issued a guideline for structuring cooperative peer groups in all educational institutions, including colleges and universities. The organization of a team constitutes five students (commonly called "one-to-five" peer grouping) in which high, medium and low achievers learn together being led and assisted by high-achieving students (MoE, 2014). For Wilkinson and Fung (2003), instructional practice in heterogeneous teams allows higher-ability peers to be a resource to students with lower and medium ability. Especially, such heterogeneous mix of students as high, medium and low achievers in the language classroom promotes peer-led learning among students of different language abilities toward wearing down barriers and encouraging on-task behaviour (Dunlap and Weisman, 2007; Richards, 2002).

At DBU, which is one of the higher public educational institutions in Ethiopia and the focus of this study, EFL teachers are required to conduct classroom instructional processes based on "cooperative team learning" in which high, medium and low achieving students work together being led and assisted by a high achieving student (DBU, 2014). Such a learning process is synonymously recognized as Peer Learning, Peer-Assisted Learning, or Peer Tutoring (Topping, 2005), Peer-Led Team Learning

(Gafney and Varma-Nelson, 2008), or Peer Mediation (Ashman and Gillies, 2003) as all these terms have in common the roles that students can play as a resource to each other via cooperative learning (Topping, 2005; Watkins, 2005). There is an extensive review of research evidence that with appropriate implementation such forms of cooperative learning can be of great value to all parties involved in terms of developing their interpersonal, thinking, conversational and comprehension skills (Falchikov, 2002; Ashman and Gillies, 2003; Watkins, 2005). In light of this, the term 'Peer-Assisted Learning' is used in this study to refer to the "cooperative team learning" which has been launched in all academic programmes at DBU. In addition, as the above mentioned forms of cooperative learning are synonymous with peer-assisted learning (PAL), they are interchangeably used hereafter.

Therefore, the rationales for this study are the PAL programme recently launched by DBU across all academic programmes, including English courses, the above-mentioned studies with a more call to employ cooperative learning in Ethiopian universities, and the assessment report on the current implementation status of PAL at Debre-Berhan University (2014). According to this report, although the cooperative team learning has been implemented since 2013 as a new university-wide programme of student-centered learning, the result achieved remains unsatisfactory. The report indicated that teachers did not implement the programme based on clarity beyond structuring students in "one-to-five" cooperative learning teams and, thus, stressing the need for more efforts to improve the teachers' attitudes, beliefs and skills relevant to the programme. In connection to this, Falchikov (2002) opines that lecturers need to be convinced of the benefits of educational practices such as cooperative peer learning and teaching before they introduce it into their own teaching programmes in the classroom. In keeping with the teaching of English, it has been argued that although the literature in language teaching emphasizes a shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches, in reality, many EFL classes are still teacher-centered perhaps due to teachers' dispositions and values about teaching approaches (Tutunis, 2011).

Peer-Assisted Learning

Peer-assisted learning is defined as a cooperative learning situation where learners are acculturated into knowledge communities through engagement with 'more capable others' such as peers who provide assistance and guidance to enhance their partners' confidence and academic performance (Topping, 2005). For Exley and Dennick (2004), adopting such a learning approach is important as it strongly encourages students to learn from each other, and the more able students assist less able ones to learn. The notion of learning through peer cooperation and assistance derives its conceptual foundation largely from the social interactional perspective developed by Vygotsky (Ashman and Gillies, 2003).

From the Vygotskian perspective of social interactionism (constructivism), peer interaction and support is a natural part of the social classroom in which more capable peers scaffold or mediate learning by providing the language and strategies necessary for problem-solving so that students stuck for learning are able to complete tasks they could not do alone (Ashman

and Gillies, 2003; Pritchard and Woollard, 2010). Given this, Ashman and Gillies (2003) point out that practice shows that there will always be a number of students in every class who learn very quickly and some who do not and, thus, to maximize the learning of the latter, peer mediation, in which a student assists a group of peers on difficult tasks, is found as an effective way. Overall, peer-assisted learning has been adopted by many institutes of higher learning worldwide (Dobbie and Joyce, 2008), and has been increasingly implemented with success and verifiable benefits to students in a wide range of course areas taught in higher learning institutions (Falchikov, 2002; Topping, 2005; Gafney and Varma-Nelson, 2008).

Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Peer-Assisted Learning

Teaching is a complex process influenced by a range of factors, one of which has to do with beliefs that underlie teachers' classroom practices (Richards and Lockhart, 2007). The concept of belief is generally defined as a self-evaluative thought which has as its content a proposition that is accepted as true by the individual holding it (Borg, 2001). In Borg's view, beliefs play an important role in many aspects of teaching in that they serve as major factors in guiding and influencing teachers' thoughts relevant to their classroom practices, especially in relation to English language teaching. For Richards and Lockhart (2007), understanding teachers' beliefs concerning their teaching practices provides an opportunity for the teachers themselves the means to better understand their own classroom practices, and enables them to arrange professional development trainings to improve their teaching skills. Given these descriptions of beliefs, and that peer-assisted learning is one the learning strategies (Topping, 2005), it is noted that teaching practices in peer-led learning as a strategy for the enhancement of student learning rely greatly on teachers' beliefs in relation to peer-assisted learning (Gafney and Varma-Nelson, 2008). Beliefs related specifically to language teaching are defined as ideas and theories that teachers hold about teaching, language, learning and their students (Richards and Schmidt, 2002). Such beliefs are worth explaining in light of the purposes of the present study. From the social constructivism perspective, beliefs about teaching include philosophies such as the principles of CLT (that is, cooperative learning and classroom communicative practice), the use of instructional strategies, and active student engagement in the lessons (Richards and Lockhart, 2007). As for this perspective and, in particular, Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, language is the key to all development, and learning and development are a social and collaborative activity so that cognitive development and language are shaped by a student's interaction with others (Pritchard and Woollard, 2010).

Social constructivism, with its view of language learning as a social construction and the belief that learners are active meaning makers and problem solvers, postulates that learners are socially competent in task performance in ways that are meaningful and personal to them as individuals (William and Burden, 1997). In line with this theory is the belief that learning should take place in peer collaboration to promote students' interpersonal and language skills, confidence in language use, and the achievement of other students' goal in their charge (Pritchard and Woollard, 2010). Therefore, the point here is that teachers working in the domain of social

constructivism should assume that students have the potential to interact with and assist one another to lean language skills on their own. This does not mean, however, as described in social constructivism, that students accomplish tasks on themselves entirely, but rather they do so with the class teacher's guidance and facilitation in supporting them as individuals (Pritchard and Woollard, 2010). While this is noteworthy, such a learning process is closely tied to teachers' beliefs about language teaching in general and the implementation in the classroom mainly relies on the their beliefs about how students learn best when interacting with others (Richards and Lockhart, 2007). In this connection, drawing on the perspective of social learning theories, Watkins (2005) notes that teachers' beliefs associated with their assumptions about instructional goals, and with their values and perceptions of students' abilities play a large role in the implementation of peer learning in the classroom. Such beliefs can be explored through classroom observations and/or using self-report strategies such as questionnaires and interviews (Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012).

An issue related to teachers' beliefs about language teaching and learning is that of their classroom practice embedded in their beliefs. In language instruction, as Williams and Burden (1997) note, teachers' beliefs about language learning relate closely to their practices in such a way that their views and values of language and learning underlie their classroom actions or instructional processes. This means that beliefs serve as the background to much of the teachers' actions with regard to their language classroom instructional practices (Richards and Lockhart, 2007), which, in turn, affect the ways in which students engage in classroom interaction and learning (Williams and Burden, 1997). In line with this, for instance, Dunlap and Weisman (2007) point out that teachers holding assumptions consistent with social constructivists' belief that language learning takes place in a social environment tend to use cooperative learning instructional strategies in ESL/EFL classes that allow students to work in small groups and assist one another as they practice language skills. Drawing on research and practical experiences, Benard *et al.* (2007) point out that implementation of peer learning as a instructional strategy in language classroom is determined by teachers' beliefs about students' abilities to learn a language in small groups and their expectations for peers to guide each other's learning. This is in keeping with, for example, a more recent study of EFL teachers at a university, which revealed, based on the teachers' beliefs and reported practices, that their beliefs had an influence on how they taught English in the classroom using group learning strategies (Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012). The study indicated that English teachers were, in theory, positively disposed to toward students' independent and individual learning, but they had less optimistic views about the feasibility of promoting in practice. In what follows, essential features of instructional practices associated with peer-assisted learning are explained.

According to scholars interested in cooperative learning, peer-assisted learning is typically an instructional strategy which makes use of learners working together in small groups of 3-6 members to allow them to assist each other to learn by themselves (Dörnyei, 2001; Richards and Schmidt, 2002; Topping, 2005). Such a learning process is characterized by heterogeneous groups in that

the goal in the formation of mixed-ability groups is to have a wide diversity of knowledge and skills that can be communicated within group members and shared via feedback and explanation to one another as they practice learning activities (Topping, 2005; Stevens, 2008). Furthermore, Dörnyei (2001) describes peer-assisted learning in relation to its motivational importance, which is the need for teachers to establish constructive group norms in the classroom to help groups adopt effective learning-oriented norms that promote group motivation and assistance one another in the learning process. Practice with regard to transferring responsibility for learning from the teacher to the students toward promoting students' independent problem-solving skills is the other core feature of PAL (Stevens, 2008). Other important features of PAL include practices on the part of teachers to align activities with students' abilities, maintain positive relationships with students by acting as a role-model, and communicate a sense of future to students to set goals for their own learning (Benard *et al.*, 2007).

This study, therefore, aimed at examining EFL teachers' beliefs and practices related to PAL in English classes at Debre-Berhan University. By so doing, it attempts to provide suggestions and implications for improving the PAL programme being implemented in the University. To this end, the researchers formulated the following research questions:

1. What are EFL Teachers' beliefs about the benefits of PAL?
2. What are the current practices of EFL teachers in relation to PAL? and
3. Is there a relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices of PAL?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is a correlational study and has employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore EFL teachers' beliefs and practices of PAL in English classes. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data about teachers' beliefs and practices of PAL. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was computed to examine the relationships between beliefs and practices.

Participants of the Study

Sixteen EFL teachers at DBU who are currently teaching different common and major area English courses were involved in this study. The study site was selected for propinquity to the researchers both in space and relationship with the instructors, and the researchers deemed that the teaching staff of the University was assumed appropriate to provide accurate information about their beliefs and practices of PAL since they are the practitioners.

Instruments

The instruments used in this study were questionnaire and interviews, and they are explained as follows.

Questionnaire

To elicit teachers' beliefs and practices about PAL in English classes, this study slightly adapted, combined and employed two self-report questionnaires. The adapted questionnaires were put together as parts (Part A, beliefs; and Part B, practices) that help collect information about English language teachers' beliefs and practices of PAL.

In order to assess the teachers' beliefs, the study used 4 items on a five-point Likert scale originally designed by Fuchs *et al.* (1997) to explore teachers' beliefs about the benefits of PAL in language learning. The scales of the responses to each item ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree); while their practices, the study used 10 items on a five-point Likert scale originally developed by Benard *et al.* (2007). The scales of teachers' responses on their practices of PAL were frequency scales that ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

The adapted version of the questionnaire was first given to four EFL teachers who did not take part in the actual study for the clarity of items in the questionnaire, their content validity and applicability to the context of the study. By so doing, some minor revisions were made thereto, and then administered to the participant teachers.

Interview

Four EFL teachers were interviewed to get additional information about their beliefs and practices regarding the importance of using PAL in English classes. The interview constituted seven structured questions which were developed based on the literature. After data was gathered through questionnaire about teachers' beliefs, one of the researchers interviewed four teachers who were selected using simple random sampling among the total participant EFL teachers. The interview questions included PAL's implementation related issues in addition to their beliefs about benefits of PAL in English classes.

Methods of Data Analysis

The findings obtained using questionnaire were analyzed using percentage, one-sample t-test, and Pearson's Product Correlation; while the interview results were analyzed using verbal descriptions. The expected mean determined for the one sample t-test was the middle (average) value 3; therefore, a mean above the expected mean was taken as significant.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The English language teachers at DBU were asked to express their beliefs about the importance of using peer-assisted learning in English classes. Accordingly, 43.75% of the participant teachers agreed and 6.25% of them strongly agreed that PAL has significance in increasing students' learning. 37.5% of the respondents were not sure about this, while 12.5% of them dissented (disagreed). Teachers' belief concerning PAL's use in increasing students' language learning seems to be high, and this is also confirmed by comparing the mean (3.44) against the expected mean (3). The mean value is greater than the expected mean, which means teachers' have acceded that PAL is significant to increase students' language learning. Teachers' responses correspond with the theory and research evidences on PAL. For instance, regarding PAL's significance in students' language learning, Powell and Powell (2010) argue that PAL allows students, with different levels of competencies and experiences to interact with peers, to learn from and help one another in language classes. Such interactive practice among peers, as Ortega (2007) suggests, plays a central role in formal L2 instructional contexts in which students' exposure and involvement with L2 is often limited to classroom practice. Research evidences also testify the role of PAL in L2 development; that is, PAL improves students' academic engagement, reading and

comprehension skills (Fuchs *et al.* 1997; Abbott *et al.* 2011), and speaking skills (Ortega, 2007).

Table 1: Teachers' Beliefs about the Importance of PAL in English Classes (Expected mean= 3)

Items		SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	
PAL is significant to:								
1	increase student language learning.	F	1	7	6	2	-	3.44
		%	6.25	43.75	37.5	12.5	-	
2	increase student social skills.	F	5	8	3	-	-	4.13
		%	31.25	50	18.75			
3	increase student self-confidence in language learning.	F	1	6	9	-	-	3.5
		%	6.25	37.5	56.25			
4	improve student achievement in language learning.	F	1	4	10	1	-	3.31
		%	6.25	25	62.5	6.25	-	

SA (Strongly Agree) =5; A (Agree) =4; N (Neutral)=3; D (Disagree)=2; SD (Strongly Disagree= 1) and F= Frequency

The participants of the study were also asked if PAL could increase students' social skills. Their responses disclosed that quite the majority (81.25%) have fallen in with its significance, while none of them disagreed. The minority (18.75%) were not able to decide. The teachers' responses concerning PAL's importance in developing students' social skills go consonant with the literature. As Dörnyei (1997) wrote, students develop social skills when they work in peer groups since they interact with one another for support and encouragement in a less threatening environment. The other items in the questionnaire wanted the participants to express if PAL could increase students' self-confidence and improve their achievement. The majority of the teachers seemed not to be sure about the role of PAL in increasing students' confidence and improving their achievement. The means of teachers' responses are greater than the expected mean in both cases; and this means the teachers agree that PAL contributes to the development of students' self-confidence and increase of their achievement. A closer scrutiny of teachers' responses, however, unravels that the majority of the respondents were not able to decide. The interview results also confirm this. For example, one of the interviewees said: "I cannot be sure whether students develop their self-confidence or not". The other

interviewee also expressed her uncertainty about the contribution of PAL in enhancing students' achievement as: "PAL may help improve their marks in group tasks, but I doubt if it helps them to achieve more in individual assignments." This finding seems a little different from the claims of scholars in the field; that is, students' interaction with peers in the classroom enhances their self-confidence and achievement in L2 (Dörnyei, 1997; Williams and Burden, 1997; De Bot and Verspoor, 2005).

To see whether or not teachers accede about the importance of PAL to increase students' language learning, social skills, self-confidence and achievement, the mean of teachers' responses to each item was compared with the expected mean (3). The result indicated that the means of their responses to the items exceeded the expected mean; and this can be interpreted as that the teachers have the belief that PAL significantly enables the students to increase their language learning, social skills, self-confidence and achievement. Further computation of significance level has asserted this.

In addition to their beliefs about the importance of PAL, they were asked if they apply it in their classrooms. Their responses are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Teachers' Practices of PAL (Expected mean=3)

Items		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean
1	Working with small group on a regular basis	F	5	3	7	1	3.75
		%	31.25	18.75	43.75	6.25	
2	Engaging students in small group conversations	F	6	5	3	2	3.94
		%	37.5	31.25	18.75	12.5	
3	Varying student grouping	F	4	2	8	2	3.50
		%	25	12.5	50	12.5	
4	Acting as a role-model and mentor for positive relationships	F	9	5	2	-	4.44
		%	56.25	31.25	12.5	-	
5	Aligning instructional activities with students' experiences and abilities	F	7	8	1	-	4.38
		%	43.75	50	6.25	-	
6	Promoting student problem-solving skills	F	6	7	2	1	4.13
		%	37.5	43.75	12.5	6.25	
7	Providing opportunities for independent learning	F	5	6	5	1	3.88
		%	31.25	37.5	31.25	6.25	
8	Helping students set goals for their own learning	F	4	9	3	-	4.13
		%	25	56.25	18.75	-	
9	Developing activities to build supportive relationships	F	3	4	7	2	3.50
		%	18.75	25	43.75	6.25	
10	Helping students develop interpersonal behaviour	F	4	6	5	1	3.81
		%	25	37.5	31.25	6.25	

Values given to each scale: Always=5; Often =4; Sometimes=3; Rarely=2; Never=1

As indicated in Table 2, all the participants professed that they practice PAL in their classes, but with varying degrees. For instance, 50% of the participants allow students to work in small groups 'often' and 'always'. The other 43.75% practice it 'sometimes', while only 6.25% of them used it 'rarely'. Quite the majority (68.75%) engage students in small group conversations 'often' and 'always', while 18.75% and 12.5% apply it 'sometimes' and 'rarely', respectively. The teachers' responses comply with what experts suggest. Doernyei (2001), for instance, advocates that L2 teachers should regularly use small group learning in their classes because this allows students to interact with one another in a less threatening environment, and motivates them to learn as they know that they have their peers working toward the same goals. The use of small group peer interaction as an instructional strategy in L2 classes is mainly emphasized from the social interactionists' perspective on SL/FL learning (Williams & Burden, 1997). This perspective sees language as a social process and that the key element of language learning resides in social interactions within a supportive environment in which students of different language ability levels can learn from each other (Dunlap & Weisman, 2007).

The majority of the participants vary student grouping only 'sometimes'; and the majority (87.5%) usually act as a model and mentor to create positive relationships with and among students. As scholars say, teachers' modeling is vitally important in an EFL context in which there is little opportunity for students to learn English outside the school (Dunlap and Weisman, 2007). Regarding varying student grouping, it seems that the finding in this study does not comply with the recommendations forwarded by experts such as Richards and Bohlke. Richards and Bohlke (2011) argue that English teachers should vary grouping arrangements to promote effective learning and to give them chance to interact with a range of classmates with different language ability levels. The majority of the teachers (93.75%) usually align instructional activities with students' experiences and abilities; and 81.25% of them endeavor to promote students problem-solving skills, which is one of the attributes of PAL. The alignment of instructional activities with students' experiences and abilities in the practice of PAL goes in line with the notion of Watkins (2005) which accentuates student experiences and understandings as a resource for learning from each other.

Instructional practices in terms of providing students with opportunities for independent learning, which is an attribute of PAL (Topping, 2005), was to a higher extent (68.75%). The results also revealed that teachers' practice in relation to helping students setting goals for their own learning was very frequent (81.25%); however, their practice in developing activities to build supportive relationships among students was less frequent (only 43.75%). Richards and Bohlke (2011) state that one of the main responsibilities of language teachers in promoting effective learning in their classes is to build good relationships among their students via encouraging them to work toward a sense of cooperation. The findings in this study also showed that 62.5% of the teachers regularly employ PAL to develop students' interpersonal behavior.

Besides, the percentage employed, a one sample t-test was also computed to see the significance level of teachers' practices concerning the activities related to PAL. Therefore, the mean score of teachers' responses to

each of the items was compared with the expected mean (3). The result indicated that the mean scores exceeded the expected mean; and this can be interpreted as teachers frequently practice PAL in their classes. This result was also supported by two of the interviewees; the other two have said that they employ it only 'sometimes'. Generally, it can be understood from the summary report that all the teachers' practice PAL although there is disparity in the frequency of use. The findings are, to a larger extent, consonant with expert recommendations. Van den Branden (2007) suggests that small group peer interaction should be on the menu of the SL/FL classrooms at regular intervals because it creates opportunities for context-embedded practice in which students can negotiate for meaningful learning, boost their self-confidence, and hold down their anxiety levels.

In this study, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was computed to see the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices of PAL in their classes. The result is summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Relationship between Teachers' Beliefs and Practices of PAL

Variables		Beliefs	Practices
Beliefs	Pearson Correlation	1	0.387
	Sig (2-tailed)		0.139
	N	16	16
Practices	Pearson Correlation	0.387	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	0.139	
	N	16	16

The Person's Correlation Coefficient indicates that teachers' beliefs and practices of PAL correlate 0.387 (R=0.387), and its significance is 0.139. The significance level is greater than the alpha level 0.05 ($p > 0.05$); and this, despite teachers' claim indicates that there was no significant relationship between teachers' beliefs in the significance of PAL and their practices. The result does not support the view that classroom teaching practices are often a reflection of beliefs about teaching and learning (Borg, 2001; Richards and Lockhart, 2007).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, it is possible to conclude that English language teachers at DBU have a strong belief in the importance of using PAL in their classes. They acceded that PAL in an EFL context plays a role in improving students' language learning, social skills, self-confidence, and achievement, which are all identified as the benefits of PAL in foreign language learning settings (Dörnyei, 1997; Williams and Burden, 1997). It is also possible to conclude that they more frequently practice the majority of the basic features of PAL (as espoused by Benard *et al.*, 2007) in their classes. Despite their strong belief and claim of frequent use of PAL, teachers' beliefs and practices did not significantly correspond. This might be due to their infrequent practice of some of the basic features. Generally, the findings of this study may imply that the teachers may not have had adequate training in PAL, particularly in the basic features, prior to its implementation as strategy for teaching and learning at the university. Such limitations can be nevertheless overcome by providing teacher training for effective classroom implementation of peer-assisted learning, along the lines of teacher training strategies suggested by Gafney *et al.* (2008), and Abbott *et al.* (2011) for peer-led or peer-mediated learning. Finally, this study suggests that in order to have a comprehensive understanding of

teachers' beliefs and practices related to PAL, classroom observation data, along with teacher reflections on their instructional practices, should be incorporated in further studies.

Conflict of Interest

Authors declared no conflict of interest.

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