Socio-cultural Factors Challenging Classroom Interaction in Multilingual EFL Classrooms and Instructional Strategies for Overcoming the Challenges

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Abstract

Key Words: Socio-cultural factors, EFL, multilingual classroom setting, instructional strategies.

The purpose of this study was to explore the socio-cultural factors challenging classroom interaction in multilingual English classroom and to suggest possible instructional strategies for overcoming those challenges. The subjects used for the study were all (16) EFL teachers and 93 (20%) of their English students (from 1st to 3rd year) selected by stratified random sampling from Awassa and Hossana Colleges of Teachers' Education, SNNPR. The descriptive research design was used to conduct this study using both the quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaire which was administered to both students and teachers, reflection checklist which was administered only to teachers and by using direct classroom observation checklist. On the other hand, the qualitative data were collected through face-to-face interview to teachers and with the qualitative parts of the questionnaire. The result indicated that there were socio-cultural factors challenging EFL classroom interaction in multilingual English classroom that emanate from the social, cultural and linguistic diversity of students. These challenge include students' incapability to use English for delivering conversation, asking questions, making presentation…in English and their EFL teachers' ineffectiveness to overcome the challenges. The challenges exert negative impacts on English language teaching/learning process in those classrooms such as students' lack of communicative English competence, lower academic achievement and impediment in cooperative learning that call for appropriate instructional strategies. Based on the findings, therefore, effective instructional strategies such as using the content familiar to diverse students' backgrounds, creating situations and motivating students to use English, assigning students in groups from heterogeneous backgrounds (for cooperative learning), using visuals and multiple mode of assessment were recommended as solutions to overcome the challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia has more than 75 ethnic groups with their distinct languages, cultures, beliefs, traditions, rituals and social identities. It is a multicultural and multilingual country characterized by cultural complexes and diversified language groups, categorized under the four language families: Omotic, Cushitic, Semitic and Nilo-Saharan (CSA, 2005). This diversity of language has been considered as a good asset or value for the country, even though sometimes the diversity creates problem when an individual, a group or a party wants to choose one language for a specific purpose. Due to this reason, in 1994 the current Ethiopian government declared that all languages of the country have equal recognition and are to be used as media of instruction at the primary level of education. English language was given recognition as a medium of instruction at secondary and tertiary levels of education (Getachew and Derib, 2006).

Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) is one of the regional states of Ethiopia comprising as many as 56 different ethnic groups with their distinct languages, cultures and other social identities. The languages of the region are categorized under the four language families of the country mentioned above (CSA, 2005). Because of its linguistic variety and coverage, Swift-Morgan (2006) and Smith (2008) consider the region as the linguistic home of the country.

Teaching English in such diversified context (i.e. SNNPR) is not a simple task. This may be because, as Johnson and Johnson (1989) state, if it is presented with inappropriate instructional strategies that do not give attention to the social context, diversity and students' backgrounds, English language education would result in negative outcomes (Yu, 2006; Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Mckay, 1997). These negative outcomes may include lower academic achievement, close-minded rejection of new information, increased egocentrism and negative relationship characterized by hostility, stereotyping, rejection and prejudices (Christopher, 1993; Johnson and Johnson, 1989).

Further more, as Johnson and Johnson (1989) argue, EFL education does not only target to achieve linguistic competence. It targets to achieve successful communication which depends on overall language competence that may include sociolinguistic competence, grammar (linguistic) competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. Hence, teaching English language in isolation from students' cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds may make students unproductive in terms of overall English language competence and other academic and social benefits of their EFL education (Cai, 2002; Christopher, 1993; Banks, 1993).

Therefore, the current study attempts to identify the socio-cultural factors challenging classroom interaction and to suggest possible instructional strategies for appropriate implementation of EFL classroom interaction in diversely populated classrooms of teachers' education colleges.

Objectives of the Study

This study was designed to identify the socio-cultural factors challenging classroom interaction in diversified EFL classroom in teachers' education colleges and suggest instructional strategies that may help to overcome the challenges. The specific objectives of the study are to:
- point out the socio-cultural factors challenging EFL classroom interaction in diversified classrooms of teachers' education colleges.
- suggest instructional strategies that may be used to foster positive classroom interaction for EFL education in multilingual classroom setting.

2. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

2.1. Setting and Subjects of the Study

This research was conducted in two selected Teachers' Education Colleges of Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional government (SNNPR). The researcher purposively selected the two colleges named Awassa and Hossana with the reason that they enroll students from many of the ethnic groups of the region, every year; hence they are populated with students of diverse ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds.

Regarding the subjects of this study, the researcher used English language students (from first to third year) and their teachers of the two selected colleges as major subjects of the study.

2.3. Sampling Procedure

For this study the researcher used a stratified random sampling procedure to come up with more proportional and representative sample. All (16) English language teachers and 93 (20%) of the department students were selected for collecting data through questionnaire, 6 (37.5%) of English language teachers for interview, all of them (16) were used for the data collected by reflection checklist and 7 sections (60% of the sections) were observed for the data collected through observation checklist. Because of the heterogeneity of student population understudy, sex, age, year level and mother tongue were used as the stratifying factors.

2.4. Tools of Data Collection

In order to achieve the intended research objectives by gathering valid, relevant and reliable information from the pertinent sample of the target population, the researcher selected and used four tools of data collection: **Observation, Interview, Questionnaire** and **Reflection.** From the selected tools, interview and reflection got lion's share in collecting data from teachers regarding all variables treated in the current study. The questionnaire also was used as the important tool in this study, next to the two aforementioned tools to triangulate the data gathered by those tools where as observation was used to supplement the triangulation regarding certain variables of this study.

2.5. Data Analysis

For this study both quantitative and qualitative approaches of data analysis were used. The data collected through reflection, observation and close-ended parts of the questionnaire were tabulated, interpreted and analyzed by using descriptive statistics such as frequency counting, percentage and mean value calculation where as those collected through interview and the open-ended parts of the questionnaire were treated by using narration, in a qualitative approach. Then, the analysis was presented in an integrated manner. That is, first the quantitative part was presented in tables, interpreted and then discussed supported by the qualitative part of the data.

3.1. Students' Diversity as Socio-cultural Factor Challenging Classroom Interaction

In the following section, there presented the ethno-linguistic challenges of classroom interaction and their sources in multilingual English classroom as well as the impacts of these challenges on EFL teaching/learning process in diversely Populated English classroom.

3.1.1. The ethno-linguistic challenges of classroom interaction and their sources in multilingual English classroom

According to the results in the following tables (Table 1, 2 & 3), majority of students and teachers stated that accomplishing activities of classroom interaction in multilingual EFL classrooms is a challenging task. Thus, they become troubled to manipulate interactive EFL classroom tasks such as delivering conversation, asking questions, making presentation, conducting debate…in English. In addition, the teachers also indicated with their interview that the aforementioned tasks are troublesome, because of the diverse nature of their students' background. For the challenges, the teachers and their students indicated the possible sources, which are precisely discussed in following sections; preceded by the three tables below.

Table 1. Students' responses to the questions of their diversity as a challenge of classroom interaction in multilingual EFL classroom

No	Items	Yes f %	No f %	SA f %	Ag f %	Ds f %	SD f %	Eng f %	Amh f %	MT f %	Pos f %	Neg f %
1	Accomplishing activities of English language classroom interaction in a linguistically and culturally diverse classroom is a challenging task.			25 27	54 58	10 11	4 5					
2	Does your English teacher give equal treatment to all of your languages and cultures when manipulating English language classroom interaction?	20 21	73 79									
3	Does your teacher translate the content of English language teaching to any local language?	70 75	23 25									
4	To which local language?								70 75			
5	Do you get disappointed when your teacher's translation is in a local language other than your native language?	63 68	30 32									
6	Do you use your own (native)/national language during English language classroom interaction?	81 87	12 13									
7	If yes, which language?								72 77	9 10		
8	What is your teacher's response if you use your own or national language during EFL classroom interaction?										13 14	68 73

*f=frequency   %=percentage   **SA**=Strongly Agree   **Ag**= Agree   **Ds**=Disagree*
***SD**=Strongly Disagree*

Eng=English **Amh**=Amharic **MT**=Mother Tongue **Pos**=Positive **Neg**=Negative
Percentage for each item in Table 1 was calculated and rounded off to the nearest whole number

Table 2. Teachers' responses to the questions of students' diversity as a challenge of classroom interaction in multilingual EFL classroom

No	Items	Yes f %	No f %	SA f %	Ag f %	Ds f %	SD f %	Rhl f %	Etl f %	Sic f %	Ees
1	Do you think the social, cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of students in EFL classroom as a challenge to manipulate classroom interaction?	12 75	4 25								
2	Language teaching is interwoven with multiple social and cultural contexts.			6 38	8 50	2 12	- -				
3	Do you think that there is any socio-cultural factor (like factors related to students' native languages, cultures and identities) challenging EFL teaching in multilingual EFL classroom?	12 75	4 25								
4	If yes, what are these socio-cultural factors?							3 19	11 69	- -	5 31

f=frequency %=percentage SA=Strongly Agree Ag= Agree Ds=Disagree SD=Strongly Disagree Rhl=Not respecting every student's right to use his/her native language during EFL classroom Interaction. Etl=Not making English language teaching interrelated to the real lives and desires of diversified students. Sic= Not making all students inclusive in the classroom interaction.

Table 3. Teachers' reflection on the questions of the challenges of classroom interaction and their sources in multilingual EFL classroom

No	Items	SA f %	Ag f %	Ds f %	SD f %	Mv
1	Manipulating English language classroom interaction in diversely populated EFL classroom is a challenging task.	4 25	10 63	2 12	- -	3.12
2	The challenge is due to students' diverse social backgrounds.	6 38	9 56	1 6	- -	3.12
3	The challenge is due to students' diversity in their cultural backgrounds.	5 31	8 50	3 19	- -	3.12
4	The challenge is due to students' diverse linguistic backgrounds.	8 50	7 44	1 6	- -	3.44
5	The challenge is because of students' cultural influences in expressing ideas confidently during classroom interaction.	5 31	10 63	1 6	- -	3.25
6	It is due to teachers' use of ineffective instructional strategies which do not give attention to the diversity of students for EFL teaching.	3 19	10 63	2 12	1 6	2.94

f=frequency %=percentage SA=Strongly Agree=4 Ag_Agree=3 Ds= Disagree=2 SD=Strongly Disagree=1Mv=Mean value
Percentage for each item in Table 3 was calculated and rounded off to the nearest whole number.

3.1.1.1. Linguistic, social and cultural diversity of students

Most of the students (79 out of 93 students, see Table 1 item no1) claimed that their linguistic, social and cultural diversity is one of the sources of challenges for classroom interaction. As they indicated, many of them (73 students out of 93 or 79%, see Table 1 item no 2), in such diversified classroom situation, want their languages and cultures equally-treated, unless and otherwise they become disappointed (see the same Table, item no 5). This, as Byram (1990) states, may be because the diverse students' background is the intrinsic part of language teaching/learning and should be given due attention during the process. In support of this idea, Christopher (1993) suggests that in multicultural classroom it needs a positive response and affirmation towards the differences. This may be due to in such classrooms the learners bring with them different experiences, needs, background knowledge and varied preferences (Allison and Rehm, 2007).

On the other hand, as indicated in Table 2, item nos 1 and 3, three-fourth of the teachers stated that students' diversity in social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds is the source of challenges of classroom interaction in diversely populated EFL classrooms. They also addressed that due to the diversity, students develop negative self-image when their languages and cultures are unequally treated (see Table 1, item no 5). In support of this idea, Johnson (2005) states that FL teaching is relevant when it validates students' cultures, languages and communities equally. In his part, Banks (1997) suggests that it needs culturally appropriate pedagogy for diverse EFL classroom, which is sensitive and responsive to the differences of students' backgrounds.

With face-to-face interview administered to some selected teachers in the two colleges, one teacher states, "*The challenges of EFL classroom interaction that my students and I myself face in my context emerge from different sources but mainly from the diversity of my students' native cultures and languages.*" Similarly, another teacher believes that students' linguistic and cultural diversity is a source of challenges for classroom interaction, because, as she stated, it troubles a teacher with questions of which language and culture to use as the resource for classroom interaction. She states, "*If you are not careful in treating of their languages and cultures during EFL classroom, it would be dangerous, because language and culture of an individual are considered as his/her own identities. So I always try to learn their languages and cultures and my students become happy when I ask them about their languages and cultures. But if you down look or ignore their languages and cultures, you would face serious challenge during classroom interaction.*"

Another teacher indicated that even though he believes that it is a good opportunity to deal with language teaching in such situations, there are some challenges in classroom interaction. According to him these challenges emanate from the diversity of students' native cultures as well as their whole background including their languages. In support of this teacher's idea, another teacher stresses students' language diversity as a source of challenge by stating, "*Sometimes we are enforced to translate some concepts or aspects of EFL teaching to mother tongues of students. In this time the problem occurs as a question of translating to which local language. This is due to the diversity in students' native languages.*"

From the above data, one may conclude that students and teachers in multilingual EFL classrooms face challenges during EFL classroom interaction. These challenges may include students' incapability to use English for delivering conversation, asking questions, making presentation…in English and their EFL teachers' ineffectiveness to overcome the challenges. The challenges partly stem from diversity in students' social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

3.1.1.2. Students' mother tongues interference and lack of prior experience in using the target language

Majority of the students (81 out of 93 or 87%) stated that there are challenges in their EFL classroom interaction due to their mother tongue influences (see Table 3, item no 5). According to almost all teaches indicated in the qualitative part of the questionnaire, this challenge may be

related to lack of students' prior experience of using English interactively in their previous school levels. Mulugeta (2008) elaborates this by stating that if students are taught in the target language medium without taking into account their diverse linguistic backgrounds, they may feel that they have no sufficient words to express such a complex and alien themes during interaction. This may make students easily shifted to their mother tongues, because many of them stated in their questionnaire (in the qualitative part) that they believe their mother tongues are at the tip-of-their tongues to express their ideas easily.

With face-to-face interview, one teacher claims that the source of challenges of classroom interaction is partly due to diversified students' mother tongues interference. As he states," *Large proportions of students in my classroom always shift to their mother tongues during EFL classroom interaction, which troubles me to run my classroom appropriately in English."* According to this teacher, a true teaching and acquisition of a FL should be impractical if there is no interaction in that language, which may create a challenge for EFL teachers. Thus, Liu (2007) affirms that during an EFL lesson, the learners are expected to use the target language interactively.

Similarly, one more teacher claims that the challenges of classroom interaction emerge from students' lack of prior experience in using English interactively. He stated: *"The challenges stem from students' lack of prior experience in using English interactively in different situations. Most of the students in my classroom become fearful when they want to use English by thinking that they would make some errors and prefer reservation or use their mother tongues for EFL classroom interaction. This is, I think, due to lack of their prior experience"* As this teacher elaborates, most of his students prefer their mother tongues for classroom interaction, because, as they indicated in their questionnaire, they believe that they have lots of experience, prior knowledge and background information on their mother tongues. As the teacher claims "*My students shift to their mother tongues when they face problems in expressing their ideas in Engli*sh," which is a big challenge to teach English interactively.

Therefore, one can generalize a conclusion that students' lack of prior experience in using English in interactive situations and their mother tongue interferences are considered as one of the sources of challenges for manipulating EFL classroom interaction.

3.1.1.3. Foreignness of the interactive classroom tasks to the backgrounds of students

Majority of students indicated in their questionnaire (in the qualitative part) that there was problem in the tasks offered for their interactive classroom activities. As they depicted, most of the tasks given to their classroom interaction were alien or foreign to their overall backgrounds. For this, Post and Rathet (1996) claim that students face problem in English language learning when it is presented in alien or in unfamiliar content. The authors also believe that using the content familiar to students' backgrounds in FL teaching facilitates SL acquisition and enhances overall academic achievements.

On the other hand, one teacher indicated, with interview, that to make interactive classroom tasks familiar to students' backgrounds, it needs background assessment of students. As he affirmed, an EFL teacher should take time and assess his/her students' linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds before starting his/her teaching. This may be due to the interrelation of language teaching to culture and society. In support of this idea, another teacher states, "*One thing you have to know when you teach language is, you teach it in context and that context is directly related to the students' lives and their lives is their cultures. So when we teach language in context, directly or indirectly we teach the socio-cultural aspects of our students*."

Still another teacher claims that it needs familiarizing or interrelating of the interactive classroom tasks to students' diverse backgrounds. As he affirms, "*I first let my students to elicit what kind of backgrounds that they have and then tell them the contribution of their languages and cultures in*

target language (English) teaching/learning. Then I just mobilize or initiate them to begin with their linguistic and cultural backgrounds to learn English. I give them these kinds of tasks for their classroom interaction." Supporting this reflection, Mulugeta (2008) states that deriving EFL content from students' cultures in studying English increases the learners' ability of self-expression.

Therefore, one can generalize a conclusion that the foreignness of the tasks offered to the classroom interaction is considered as the sources of challenges for manipulating interaction in multilingual English classroom.

3.1.1.4. Ineffectiveness of the instructional strategies in ML classroom Context

Most of the students (more than two-third in each case) stated that their teachers use ineffective instructional strategies for their EFL classrooms interaction (see Table 3, item nos 2, 3, 4 & 8). They claimed that their teachers do not consider their diversity when they deliver EFL classroom interaction. As the students indicated, majority of their EFL teachers use Amharic translation for English classroom interaction (see the same table item nos 3 & 4). They also affirmed that almost all of their EFL teachers do not use their heterogeneous backgrounds as criteria for grouping them to accomplish interactive classroom tasks. As some of them state, "*Sometimes some of our English teachers use random grouping and other times grouping only based on sex differences.*" Again, according to these students, their teachers do not relate the content of EFL teaching to the diversified students' backgrounds and do not treat their languages and cultures equally. However, according to Lengkanawati (2003), instructional strategies for FL teaching are effective when they are tied to the needs and desires of students. Berlin (2006) also claims that instructional strategies for multilingual classrooms are effective when they are socially constructed through interactive dialogues.

One of the teachers interviewed indicated that the manipulation of EFL classroom interaction in diversely populated EFL classroom is a challenging task when it is accompanied by the translation of it to any local language. As he suggests: "*The question is translating it to which language, because my students are so much diversified in their native languages and I cannot be able to help them by translating it to all their native languages.*" So, linguistic diversity is taken as one of the sources of challenges for classroom interaction in this context if it is accompanied by biased translation. This is because biased translation brings the differences in dignity among languages (i.e. it may make some languages dominant and others dominated). In support of this idea, Breidback (2003) states that any form of linguistic dominance through negligence of one's own language obstructs paths of integrating multilingualism.

Another teacher affirms that grouping is an effective instructional strategy in her context. However, her grouping is not by taking into consideration the cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of her students. She thus states: "*I commonly use grouping as an effective instructional strategy in my context, because…my students are so much different in their backgrounds which needs grouping for classroom interaction. Therefore, I group them by giving numbers for each of them or according to their seats or sometimes according to their interests.* This is considered as ineffective instructional strategy, because according to some authors like Willis (2007) and Crandall (1999) to be effective instructional strategy in multilingual context, grouping should be made by using students' heterogeneous ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds as criteria.

From the above reflections, one may state a conclusion that students and teachers in multilingual EFL classrooms face challenges of different types during their classroom interaction due to the use of ineffective instructional strategies that do not consider the diversity of students.

3.2. Effective Instructional Strategies to Overcome the Challenges of Classroom Interaction in Diversely Populated English Classroom

In the following sections, there presented instructional strategies as possible measures to overcome the challenges of classroom interaction in diversely populated EFL classroom. First the data, both from students and their EFL teachers, are presented in tabular form and then interpreted and discussed in an integrated manner in thematic sub-titles supported by the interview responses of the teachers and direct classroom observation results.

Table 4. Teachers' reflection on the questions of effective instructional strategies to overcome the challenges of classroom interaction in diversely populated English classroom

No	Items	SA f %	Ag f %	Ds f %	SD f %	Mv
1	Pairing/grouping students from heterogeneous social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.	7 44	9 56	- -	- -	3.44
2	Interrelating the content of EFL teaching to all students' social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.	7 44	8 50	- -	1 6	3.31
3	Treating all students' languages and cultures equally.	8 50	6 37	2 13	- -	3.37
4	Creating situation and motivating students to use the target language frequently.	6 37	10 63	- -	- -	3.37
5	Avoiding on-spot correction when students make errors during EFL classroom interaction.	4 25	9 56	2 13	1 6	3.00
6	Using visuals like maps, charts, tables…to present the content of EFL teaching precisely.	4 25	4 25	7 44	1 6	2.69
7	Assessing students by using multiple modes of assessment.	6 37	8 50	2 13	- -	3.25

f=frequency   *%=percentage*
SA=Strongly Agree=4 + **Ag=**Agree=3 **Ds=** Disagree=2 **SD=**Strongly Disagree=1
Mv=Mean v.
*Percentage for each item in Table 4 was calculated and rounded off to the nearest whole number.

Table 5. Students' responses to the questions of effective instructional strategies to overcome he challenges of classroom interaction in diversely populated English classroom

No	Items	Yes f %	No f %	SA f %	Ag f %	Ds f %	SD f %	PD f %	GD f %	UM f %	UV f %
1	What type of instructional strategies does your English teacher often use for your English class?							45 48	75 81	61 66	10 11
2	The content of English language learning in your classroom encompass within it culture, norm, tradition, identity and styles of your people's life.			6 6	10 11	55 59	22 24				
3	Does your English teacher give equal treatment to all of your languages and cultures when manipulating English language classroom interaction?	20 21	73 79								
4	Does your English teacher consider the diversity of your languages and cultures during classroom interaction?	20 21	73 79								

f=*frequency*   **%**=***percentage*** **SA**=*Strongly Agree*   **Ag**= *Agree*   **Ds**=*Disagree*
SD=*Strongly Disagree*   **PD=***Pair discussion*   **GD**=*Group discussion*   **UM**=*Using multiple modes of assessment*   **UV**= *Using visuals like maps, tables, charts, etc.*
*Percentage for each item in Table 5 was calculated and rounded off to the nearest whole number.

Table 6. Teachers' responses to the questions of effective instructional strategies to overcome the challenges of classroom interaction in diversely populated EFL classroom

No	Items	Yes f %	No f %	Al f %	Sm f %	R f %	Nev f %	Ps f %	Gs f %	Uv f %	Um f %
1	Do you think that an English language teacher who teaches in multilingual and multicultural classroom should devise any instructional strategy to accommodate all students' social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds equally?	13 81	3 19								
2	If yes, what instructional strategies do you think are appropriate in your context?							6 38	9 56	5 31	2 13
3	Do you give any opportunity for your students to discuss about their native languages, cultures and identities during EFL classroom interaction?	12 75	4 25								
4	Do you give equal treatment to all native languages and cultures of your students?	10 62	6 38								
5	Do you translate the content of EFL teaching to any local language?	11 69	5 31								
6	Do you relate the content of EFL classroom interaction to social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all your students?	10 62	6 38								
7	If yes, how often?			7 43	3 19	- -	6 38				

*f=frequency %=percentage **AI**=Always **Sm**= Sometimes **R**=Rarely **Nev**=Never **Um**=Using multipl modes of assessment   **Uv**=Using visuals like pictures, maps tables… to present ideas precisely in EFL teaching. **Ps**=Pairing two students from different backgrounds and helping them to learn from each other.*
***Gs**=Grouping students from heterogeneous linguistic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds and help them to learn.*

3.2.1. Pairing/grouping students from heterogeneous backgrounds

Majority of the teachers (all 16 teachers, see Table 4, item no 1) with their reflection indicated that pairing/grouping students from heterogeneous social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds is one of the effective instructional strategies that is used to overcome the challenges of classroom interaction in multilingual EFL classrooms. This might be due to, as Saunders and Kardi (1997) states, students (from diverse backgrounds) learn more when they come together and work cooperatively. Thirteen out of 16 teachers (see Table 6 item no 1) also indicated with their questionnaire responses that pairing/grouping students from different social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds is a special strategy which should be designed to accommodate all students' backgrounds equally, which is suggested by scholars like Greenwood *et al* (1988) and Johnson and Johnson (1989).

However, most of the teachers indicated with face-to-face interview that practically they do not pair/group their students based on their students' social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds (diversity). For instance, one teacher supports the idea of pairing/grouping students, but his grouping is not in consideration to the students' backgrounds (diversity). This might be because of his belief that there is no need of designing any special strategy to accommodate the students' diversified backgrounds equally, as he states, "…*as it is EFL classroom, you do not have to give any attention to any local language…your attention must be on any problem related to English pronunciation, grammar, …*"

Similarly, another teacher believes that pairing/grouping students in multilingual EFL classroom is important, as she states, "*We usually engage students to work in groups, in pairs…*" But she does not use her students' diverse backgrounds as a base when she groups her students. As she explained, she only uses numbering, nearest seats and students' interest for grouping her students even though she has a good awareness about her students' backgrounds (diversity) and she believes that it is dangerous if the backgrounds of the students are ignored.

Still another teacher, also uses pairing/grouping as a teaching strategy but the techniques he uses for his pairing/grouping is the random one. As he states: "*Students learn much from their varied backgrounds and their life experiences if they are grouped from different backgrounds, but for me grouping students in such a way practically is difficult, because it needs preliminary background study of students.*"

Similar to other teachers mentioned above, one teacher also uses pairing/grouping as a teaching strategy in his context with his belief that they are useful in a communicative language teaching. Even though he uses different techniques (numbering, nearest seats, students interests etc) for pairing/grouping his students, he does not give any credit to the advantages of pairing/grouping students from different backgrounds in diversely populated EFL classrooms. This might be because he believes that it is difficult as there is no calculated quota for each ethnic or cultural groups in the classroom (i.e. there are large number of students from some ethnic groups and small number from others in a given classroom).

On his part, another teacher also uses pairing/grouping as an instructional strategy. He assigns his students in pairs/groups and gives them tasks to accomplish. For pairing/grouping, he uses different methods: fast learners with slow learners, fast learners with fast learners, slow with slow, lottery method and numbering. However, he does not use students' diverse backgrounds as criteria for his grouping, because he believes that it is not that much important. Again, he believes

that he was not adequately trained or prepared to cope up the challenges of diversity in EFL classrooms.

Still another teacher assigns his students in pairs or in small groups to make them learn the target language cooperatively (collaboratively). Although he believes that pairing/grouping students from heterogeneous backgrounds is essential, practically he would not do it. It might be due to giving little attention to the strategy or lack of training on the areas of teaching EFL in diversely populated classrooms.

On the other hand, large proportion of students (see Table 5, item no 1) indicated that their teachers use pair and group discussions. But in the qualitative item of their questionnaire, most of them indicated that almost all their teachers use random pairing/grouping with out giving due attention to their diversity. Small number of the students said that some of their teachers sometimes use sex differences as the base for pairing/ grouping. In support of this idea, the researcher's direct classroom observation result shows that in majority of the sessions observed, almost all of the teachers use random pairing/grouping or by using techniques like numbering and the nearest seats, but not the diverse background of the students.

From the whole discussion in section 3.2.1., it can be stated a conclusion that pairing/grouping students from heterogeneous backgrounds in a diversely populated EFL classroom is essential type of instructional strategy to overcome the challenges of classroom interaction, but practically it was not yet implemented and made to be one of the sources of the stated challenges in diversely populated EFL classroom.

3.2.2. Interrelating the content of EFL teaching to diverse backgrounds of all students and treating them equally

Large proportion of teachers (15 out of 16, see Table 4, item no 2) reflected that the content of EFL teaching should be interrelated to the diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students. It might be because of their belief that language, in one way or another, should be thought in context. Most of these teachers indicated that care should be taken when interrelating the content to students' diverse backgrounds, because in those so much diversified classrooms, they believe that all students' languages and cultures should be equally treated (see Table 6, item no 4) , if the interrelation is intended to overcome the challenges of classroom interaction. Mckay (1997) claims that if instructional strategy fails to take into account the diverse backgrounds of students in multilingual English classroom, it should be considered as ineffective. This may be due to the assumption that social life or context of classroom in FL is primarily generated from the students' backgrounds (Berlin, 2006; Lengkanawati, 2003).

Similarly, majority of teachers (all 16 teachers, see Table 6, item no 6) as indicated in their questionnaire responses, believe that interrelating the content of EFL teaching to the diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their students has great essence or value. Three-fourth of these teachers (see the same table, item no 1 & 2) responded that they give equal chances for their students to talk about their backgrounds, because it is a means to treat students' diverse backgrounds equally. In support of this idea, Kern and Warschuaer (2000) state that FL teaching is a way of helping learners enter into authentic social discourse situations and communities.

However, as indicated in their responses to questionnaire, many of teachers translate the content of their teaching to one local language only, i.e. to Amharic (see Table 6, item no 5). Again in their interview responses they indicated that translating EFL content into Amharic is a means to make their students understand them better. For instance, one teacher translates the content of his EFL teaching to Amharic by considering his students understand him better in Amharic than in English, and also he believes that Amharic is a common language for all his students and serves all his students equally. This teacher claims the equality of students' native languages as, "*All languages and cultures of my students' are equal and treated equally,*" but the biasness comes

when he states*, "…Amharic is a lingua-franca for my students and serves them equally".* This, the teacher's biased evaluation of a local language, may create inequality in dignity of students' languages.

On the other hand, another teacher, even if he believes that language is a manifestation of society, tradition, culture and practices of a given group, he does not often give his students an equal opportunity to discuss about their native languages, cultures and traditions. Even if he says, "*I really treat all my students' languages and cultures equally. Even I have exposure to two regional languages; Wolaitigna and Sidamigna.*" But this is somewhat over generalized statement, because having an exposure to two local languages, does not assure the equal treatment of 15 and more languages and cultures in a classroom. Moreover, this teacher translates the content of his teaching to Amharic with the assumption that Amharic is common to all his students. He also believes that it is difficult for him to treat EFL teaching in favor of each and every student's language and culture. His reason for this is that his students are composed of from more than 15 or 16 different backgrounds and have got different social, cultural and linguistic practices.

Another interviewed teacher emphasized that language and culture are inseparable. But in his class, because of some special reasons like the differences in development stages of local languages, he states that some of the languages of his students should not get equal treatment to others. As he states, "*Amharic is a common tongue for all my students in my classroom and all my students use it in a proper way because of its better development stage in reference to other local languages.*" According to him, all languages and cultures of his students are equal in their dignity but it is impractical to treat all of them equally in EFL classrooms.

Again what was narrated by other teachers during the interview is almost similar to the above teachers. This is because almost all of the teachers theoretically believe that EFL teaching should be in context and the content for it should be derived from the students' diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, they all agree in one point, i.e. they believe that it is practically difficult to derive the content of EFL teaching from 15 or more backgrounds of students in a given classroom. Again, as to them, it is also difficult to manipulate EFL classroom interaction in favor of each and every student's backgrounds.

Therefore, it can be possible to state a conclusion that EFL teaching in diversely populated classroom is based on context. Thus, the content for it is derived from the students' social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and the background of each and every student is treated equally.

3.2.3. Creating situations and motivating students to use the target language

As depicted in Table 4, item no 4, all teachers believe that creating situations and motivating students to use the target language frequently is an essential instructional strategy to overcome the challenges of classroom interaction in diversely populated EFL classroom. This is also suggested by Widdowson (1996) as meaningful situation is created out of classroom context to authenticate FL learning. During such classroom situations, as indicated by the majority of teachers (13 teachers out of 16, see Table 4, item no 5) that on-spot correction should be avoided when students make errors, to make them not be ashamed of their errors and encourage them to use the target language. Victoria-Rusina (2008) claims that there needs motivation of teachers for their students, in FL classroom, to help them to get opportunity to use English inside and outside the classroom.

On the other hand, almost all of the interviewed teachers indicated that they should not create such situations frequently, because of so much diversity of students' backgrounds and the nature of some of English courses. For instance, one teacher believes that first it needs an assessment of students' backgrounds to create appropriate situations for EFL teaching in diversely populated EFL classroom. His claim for this is that serious care should be taken when you create or derive

live situations during EFL classroom interactions from the diverse students' backgrounds, because they are so much diverse or different. In support of this teacher another teacher also states that EFL teaching would be conducted in context (situation) and the content is derived from the real lives of students which might be called their cultures. i.e., "…*and if you are not taking care when deriving the situations from the students' backgrounds, it would be a challenge*." To solve this problem, she suggests that an EFL teacher in diversely populated EFL classrooms has to know the backgrounds of all his/her students. But what is difficult for an EFL teacher, according to her, is that how can a teacher have the knowledge of all students' ethnic and linguistic backgrounds in a given course period of time. The other two interviewed teachers also have similar positions on the issue to those discussed above.

Regarding motivating students to use the target language, one teacher states that, "…*directly or indirectly, I try to encourage my students to use the target language*." Another teacher supports this idea by stating, "*I encourage them …to use only English in English classroom*." Besides this, another teacher states, "*I lead my students to use the target language…to make them master the communicative skills of English language*." On his part still another teacher forwards, "*During EFL classroom interaction, I urge my students to use the target language,*" which is a shared idea by other two teachers.

However, according to these teachers, there are problems to make students use the target language appropriately. For instance, as most of them forwarded, their students do not use English appropriately, even if they offer them continuous encouragement or motivation. One reason for this, according to them, is that students face a problem entirely related to their mother tongues. As many of these interviewed teachers indicated, students spent much of their times by using their mother tongues rather than using English which affects the use of English, directly or indirectly. In relation to this, students have little exposure or opportunities to use English inside or outside their classrooms as all of them are from non-English speaking society. Thirdly, students face problems to use the target language, because they have lack of English words to express their ideas in English easily and clearly. So they easily shift to their mother tongues when they face problems to express their ideas in English.
 Therefore, based on the above discussion, one can make a conclusion that it needs creating situations to teach EFL in diversely populated classroom, which is derived from diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all the students and there also needs the motivation of students to make them use the target language frequently.

3.2.4. Using visuals like maps, tables charts…

In response to the reflection item no 6 in Table 4, half of the teachers (8 or 50%) indicated that they use visuals like maps, tables and charts as the instructional strategy to present the content of EFL teaching precisely. Another half responded that they do not use it. But the calculated mean value of 2.69, which is closer to 3 than 2, indicates that the majority of teachers use visuals as instructional strategy to overcome the challenges of classroom interaction in diversely populated EFL classrooms.

On the other hand, only 5 teachers from 16 teachers (see Table 6, item no 2) responded in their questionnaire that they use visuals as the instructional strategies which contradict the result of their reflection. But in support of the teachers' questionnaire result, majority of students, except 10 or 11% (see Table 5, item no 1) indicated that their teachers do not use visuals as instructional strategy in EFL classroom. During direct classroom observation, it was also observed that none of the teachers was observed using visuals as the instructional strategy, rather they were observed using translation of English into Amharic to make their ideas more clear to their students. Again, during face-to-face interview with some selected teachers, only 1 instructor stated that he sometimes uses visuals in his EFL classrooms to overcome the challenges of classroom interaction in diversely populated EFL classroom.

However, visuals are helpful instructional strategies in diversely populated EFL classroom with the assumption that it reduces the opportunity of biased translation of English into any local language in such a diversely populated EFL classroom. Supporting this idea Carrier (2005) suggests that visuals are universal or common language to all diverse students in multilingual EFL classroom and help them to understand ideas easily by boiling such ideas down into some key words.

So it is possible to infer a conclusion that visuals are neglected but effective instructional strategies in diversely populated EFL classroom to overcome the challenges of classroom interaction that emerge from biased translation of English into other local languages.

3.2.5. Using multiple modes of assessment

As revealed in teachers' reflection, more than three-fourth of the teachers (14 out of 16 or 87%) indicated that using multiple modes of assessment is one of the instructional strategies used to test students' communicative English competence in diversely populated EFL classrooms. The teachers suggested this with their assumption that offering various (oral and written) tasks which are worked in pairs, in groups or individually to test students' English proficiency progress may expose students to practice the target language, to learn cooperatively and to develop the spirit of working together with peers from different backgrounds and it is therefore, considered as a means to overcome the challenges of classroom interaction in diversely populated EFL classrooms.

On the other hand, large proportion of students (61 out of 93 or 66%, see Table 5, item no 1) indicated that their EFL teachers use multiple modes of assessment as an instructional strategy in their EFL classrooms. Besides this, in more than two-third or 71% of the sessions it was observed that teachers use multiple modes of assessment as an instructional strategy in their diversely populated EFL classrooms. But, as observed during such direct classroom observation, there is problem of implementing this strategy. Thus, the teachers do not give any attention to the diversity of their students when they develop tasks for those assessments. Whether their tasks were for the class activities or home activities, worked in pairs/groups, as some of them indicated with their interview, the teachers directly copy them from their manuals or from some books which do not consider their students' diversity. So the effectiveness of this instructional strategy as the measure to overcome the challenges of EFL classroom interaction should be questioned.

Moreover, as suggested by Saravia-Shore and Gracia (1995), Hodges (2001) and Steinberg (1981), appropriately developed multiple modes of assessment are helpful instructional strategies to ensure that all students have equal opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and their academic achievements in diverse classroom situations.

Therefore, from the above discussion, one can state a conclusion that multiple modes of assessment are used as effective instructional strategies in diversely populated EFL classroom, but its effectiveness is determined by the attention given to the students' diversity when developing the tasks.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusions

Based on the results and discussions of the current study, the following conclusions have been reached:

1. Students and teachers in multilingual EFL classrooms face challenges of different types when they are manipulating the activities of classroom interaction. These challenges may include students' incapability to use English for delivering conversation, asking questions, making presentation…in English and their EFL teachers' ineffectiveness to overcome the challenges. The challenges emerge from various sources such as students' diversity in social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, their mother tongue influences and the foreignness of the tasks offered to the classroom interaction. Besides this, use of ineffective instructional strategies is also considered as one of the sources of the challenges.

2. EFL teaching/learning in diversely populated classrooms is affected by the challenges of the classroom interaction. These impacts or effects might include the students' incapability to accomplish interactive English tasks due to their incompetence in communicative English ability, impediments in their cooperative learning situations, their loss of confidence in using English, and decrements in students' overall academic achievements. Besides these, it also has impact on students' spirit of working together with peers from different backgrounds by making students to develop the attitude of close-minded rejection of new information about other students' linguistic and cultural realities.

3. Effective instructional strategies that consider the backgrounds of students are used to overcome the challenges of classroom interaction in diversely populated EFL classroom, hence they are helpful to achieve the intended goals of EFL teaching in such classroom contexts.

4. EFL teaching in diversely populated classroom is based on context. Thus, the content for it is derived from the students' social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and the background of each and every student is treated equally. But, practically it was not yet implemented.

5. Pairing/grouping students from heterogeneous backgrounds in a diversely populated EFL classroom is essential type of instructional strategy to overcome the socio-cultural factors challenging classroom interaction, but practically it was not yet implemented and made to be one of the sources of the challenges.

6. It needs creating situations to teach EFL in diversely populated classroom, which is derived from diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all the students and there also needs the motivation of students to make them use the target language frequently.

7. Visuals are the neglected but effective instructional strategies in diversely populated EFL classroom to overcome the challenges that emerge from biased translation of English into other local languages.

8. Multiple modes of assessments are used as effective instructional strategies in diversely populated EFL classroom, but its effectiveness is determined by the attention given to students' diversity when developing the tasks.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the discussions and conclusions made above, the following recommendations are forwarded:

1. The EFL teachers should create situations and offer the interactive classroom tasks which are derived from the diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all the students and encourage their students to use the target language (English).
2. The EFL teachers should use effective instructional strategies that should accommodate the diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all the students equally.
3. The EFL teachers should use multiple modes of assessment in their diversely populated classroom context by giving due attention to the diversity when preparing these tasks for the interactive EFL classroom activities.
4. The EFL teaching in diversely populated classroom should be based on context. Thus, the contents for it should be derived from the students' social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and the background of each and every student should be treated equally.
5. The curriculum designers and coordinators should strive to integrate the diversity of students' backgrounds as major contents to the appropriate EFL teaching/learning activities while developing ELT materials.

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