



Efl Teachers’ Implementations of Strategies of Contemporary Theories of Language Teaching and Its Challenges: The Case of Grade 12 English Teacher in Selected Secondary Schools in Ambo

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate EFL teachers’ practices of strategies of contemporary theories of language teaching and its challenges in the case of grade 12 secondary schools of in Ambo town in 2023. The subjects of the study were 15 English language teachers. The data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The schools were included based on convenience sampling techniques. Three (3) secondary schools were selected using a simple random sampling technique out of 5 secondary schools, and the subjects were selected in a comprehensive sampling technique since they are manageable. Quantitative data were analyzed through SPSS Version 20, whereas the interview was analyzed qualitatively. The findings of this study indicated that the teachers sometimes practiced: inquiry-based learning, culturally responsive teaching, mindfulness and social-emotional learning, differentiated instructions, student-centered learning, metacognitive strategies, and adapting the existing materials as strategies of implementing current theories of language teaching. However, the teachers rarely practiced other strategies like personalized learning, blended learning, flipped classroom, project-based learning, gamification and game-based learning, and technology integration. The study also identified that institutional constraints, large class sizes, time constraints, limited training, professional development, language context, and, teacher knowledge of subject matter and beliefs, resources, and lack of technical skills affected the implementation of contemporary theory in the EFL classroom. Therefore, teachers should integrate different modern theories and theorize based on their students' needs, goals, and the specific learning context. Finally, addressing the identified challenges requires a collective effort from educators, policymakers, administrators, and stakeholders in education. Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, recommendations are forwarded.

Keywords: practices, and challenges, contemporary theories, English Language teaching

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Different theories introduced over several decades contributed to the teaching and learning of English. Theories of language teaching and learning are conceptual frameworks that seek to explain the underlying principles and processes involved in language acquisition and instruction. These theories are based on research, empirical evidence, and scholarly discourse in the field of language education. Theories help educators understand how languages are learned, how learners acquire linguistic competence, and how instructional practices can effectively support language development. Examples of language teaching and learning theories include behaviorism, constructivism, sociocultural theory, and Krashen's input hypothesis, communicative language teaching (CLT), cognitive theory of language learning, information processing theory, social learning theory, multiple intelligences theory, connectionism, task-based language teaching (TBLT), dynamic systems theory, etc. (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). These theories have emerged in response to changing social, cultural, technological, and educational contexts (Bertrand, 2003).

To begin with, behaviorism focuses on observable behavior and the role of stimuli and reinforcement in learning. In language teaching, behaviorism led to methods that emphasized repetition, habit formation, and reinforcement of correct responses (Budiman, 2017). Constructivism theory emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing their knowledge. Learners build new understandings based on their prior knowledge, experiences, and interactions with the environment. In language teaching, constructivism promotes learner-centered approaches that encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and the creation of meaning through authentic tasks and social interaction (Alanazi, 2016).

Sociocultural theory emphasizes the social and cultural dimensions of learning. It emphasizes the role of social interaction, collaborative activities, and cultural contexts in language development. In language teaching, sociocultural theory highlights the importance of meaningful communication, negotiation of meaning, and creating a supportive learning environment (Holbrook & Vera, 2012). The other theory, Krashen's input hypothesis posits that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input that is slightly beyond their current level of proficiency. It suggests that learners acquire language naturally through exposure to meaningful language input,

rather than through explicit instruction or correction (Krashen, 2003). In addition, CLT focuses on developing students' communicative competence through meaningful and authentic language use (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The multimodal theory also recognizes that communication involves various modes beyond just spoken or written language, such as visuals, gestures, and body language. It emphasizes the use of multiple modes to enhance language learning and communication skills, integrating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements in instructional activities (Anis & Khan, 2023). Translanguaging theory challenges traditional views of language separation and promotes the use of learners' entire linguistic repertoires to support language learning. It recognizes the fluidity and interconnectedness of languages and encourages the strategic use of multiple languages for communication and learning purposes (Yang & Fan, 2022).

Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory posited that individuals possess different forms of intelligence. This theory influenced language teaching by encouraging a more personalized approach that addresses diverse learner strengths and preferences (Gardner, 2011). Multiple intelligences theory suggests that intelligence is not a single, unitary concept but a combination of different types of intelligence. Gardner identified several intelligences, such as linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. This theory encourages educators to consider diverse forms of intelligence and adapt teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles (Gardner, 2011). TBLT also emphasizes the use of meaningful tasks as the central unit of instruction to develop language skills (Willis & Willis, 2007). Cooperative learning also promotes collaborative learning and interaction among students to enhance language skills (Johnson & Johnson, 2014).

Generally, these methods and approaches have contributed to the evolution of language teaching and learning, shaping the field and offering valuable insights into effective instructional practices. With the advent of technology, theories of computer-assisted language learning and mobile-assisted language learning have emerged. These theories explore the integration of technology in language teaching and learning by emphasizing the potential of digital tools and applications to enhance language acquisition (Walker & White, 2013). Technology-enhanced learning theories explore the potential of digital tools, online platforms, and multimedia resources to enhance engagement, collaboration, and personalized learning experiences (Haleem, 2022).

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Cognitive theories highlight the role of mental processes, memory, and problem-solving in language learning. This perspective emphasizes the importance of learners actively constructing knowledge and making connections (Kaya, 2011). Experiential learning theories also emphasize the importance of active, hands-on experiences in the learning process. These theories propose that learning is enhanced when students engage in direct experiences, reflect on those experiences, and apply their knowledge in real-world contexts. Experiential learning often involves activities such as field trips, simulations, problem-solving, and project-based learning (Verónica et al., 2020). Critical pedagogy focuses on addressing social injustices and empowering learners through education. It aims to develop critical consciousness among students, encouraging them to question and challenge oppressive structures and systems. Critical pedagogy emphasizes dialogue, critical thinking, and transformative actions to create more equitable and just societies (Chalaune, 2021).

It is important to note that modern education theories are not mutually exclusive, and educators often integrate multiple perspectives to inform their practices and even theorize based on their daily activities and their students' needs. These theories provide frameworks and insights for designing curriculum, instructional strategies, assessment methods, and creating inclusive and engaging learning environments (Nassaji & Bloomsbury, 2015).

EFL teachers may face several challenges when they try to practice contemporary theories of language teaching. Despite these challenges, EFL teachers can find ways to address them by seeking professional development opportunities, collaborating with colleagues, adapting teaching materials, advocating for change within their institutions, and gradually implementing new strategies and approaches in their classrooms (Illeris, 2018).

It is essential to consider the specific context, resources, and needs of the students when applying or theorizing contemporary theories of language teaching. Therefore, it is important to note that teachers practice multiple theories and approaches based on their context, students' needs, and their teaching style. Teachers adapt and modify these theories to suit their classroom dynamics, curriculum requirements, and available resources (Collie et al., 2020). Having these in mind, it is important to study EFL teachers' practices of contemporary theory strategy implementations and its challenges.

1.2 . Statements of the Problem

Contemporary theories help students to develop proficiencies in English. Proficiency in English is referred to as 'global literacy skills' (Tsiu & Tolefosn, 2006, p.3). Welch and Welch (2007) considered these literacy skills as 'knowledge transfer', and Crystal (2003) referred to it as a 'commodity for communication'. Apadura (1996) referred to this as 'technoscape', the flow of peoples' ideas, and the flow of communication media. English continued to be seen as the language of economic opportunity. This is why Crosby (1966) argues that English instruction should give much emphasize on practical aspects that include all learners since the idea that students are passive recipients of knowledge and that teachers are the transmitters of that knowledge is giving way to the notion that students learn better when they are involved in the process of creating knowledge for themselves. Moreover, the goals of education encompass not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the guidance of individuals to their fullest potential (Clark et al., 2008). To this end, nowadays, the psychology of learning has been moved from a behavioral perspective to a cognitive development perspective. The paradigm shift in learner-centered learning demands teachers to use active learning methods, which in turn develops learners' cognitive ability and problem-solving abilities. This is one of the major goals of Ethiopian education policy (Kafialew, 2021). Students' cognitive and problem-solving abilities are these abilities and skills that can be achieved through the implementation of contemporary theories (Mebratu & Woldemariam, 2018).

English teachers are expected to practice modern language teaching theories in the classroom in various ways. For instance, they need to facilitate meaningful communication in the target language by using authentic materials, real-life scenarios, and tasks that promote interactions to develop their students' fluencies and communicative competencies rather than solely on grammar or vocabulary instruction (Lavadenz, 2010). Additionally, EFL teachers need to design tasks that require students to use the target language to accomplish specific goals or solve problems (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Many teacher education researchers agree with Darling-Hammond that "Teacher educators must worry about not only what to teach but also how to teach so that knowledge for teaching shapes teachers' practice and enables them to become adaptive experts who can continue to learn" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 305).

Language teachers are expected to combine elements from various theories to create a comprehensive and effective teaching approach (Newby, 2003). Additionally, the field of language

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teaching continues to evolve, and new theories and approaches may emerge over time. The field of language teaching is dynamic and constantly evolving. New theories, approaches, and methodologies continue to emerge as researchers and educators explore innovative ways to optimize language learning and teaching (Johnson, 1996). Additionally, the increasing recognition of the importance of multilingualism and the diverse linguistic backgrounds of learners has sparked interest in approaches that promote multilingualism and language transfer. These approaches acknowledge and leverage the strengths of learners' existing languages and aim to create positive learning environments that value linguistic diversity (Ahmed, 2012). Language teaching is a field that thrives on innovation and adaptation. Educators and researchers continually explore new ideas, experiment with different techniques, and refine existing approaches to enhance language teaching practices. Staying updated with current research, attending professional development opportunities, and engaging in continuous professional learning are essential for language teachers to stay abreast of new theories and approaches that may emerge over time (Pritchard, 2009).

In short, it is important to note that the selection and integration of theories and approaches should be based on the specific context, learner characteristics, and learning goals. Teachers are expected to consider their expertise, the available resources, and the unique needs of their students when designing their teaching approach since implementing contemporary theories requires a flexible and learner-centered approach, where teachers adapt and select strategies based on their students' needs, goals, and the specific learning context. By incorporating these strategies, teachers can create engaging and effective language learning experiences that promote authentic language use, critical thinking, and intercultural competence.

Several studies were conducted in Ethiopian contexts, and many of them were concerned mainly with CLT and active learning methods of teaching English. Tilahun (2023) carried out the practices and challenges to implement active learning methods in the north and reported that almost all teachers have positively perceived active learning. Similarly, Michael et al. (2023) conducted their study on the understanding and practice of active learning among upper primary school science and mathematics teachers. Their study indicated that teachers lacked an appropriate understanding of active learning methods. Their study also identified that upper primary school science and mathematics teachers differed in the understanding, practice, and efficacy of active learning methods. Further, Asrat (2023) studied on the implementation of active learning strategies in high

schools in Bahir Dar town. He collected data from school principals and supervisors. School principals and supervisors perceived active learning strategies positively. However, his study revealed that the support for the implementation of an active learning strategy was low. Beyene's (2008) research on CLT perception and classroom practice in EFL classes revealed a mismatch between teachers' perceptions and actual practice. Beyene's study revealed that learners were not given opportunities for effective language use during communicative lessons, and their language ability was lower than expected. Teachers also adapted traditional teaching methods, focusing on structure rather than language use. As far as the researcher of this study's knowledge, there is no research conducted on strategies of contemporary theories implementation in the EFL classes. In other words, unlike previously conducted studies, the current study deals with the EFL teachers' practice of contemporary theories and strategies in English language teaching.

Most previously conducted studies in EFL were concerned with CLT, which is one of the contemporary theory language teachings. Moreover, as far as the researcher's knowledge is concerned, there is a lack of research conducted on the opportunities of implementing active learning methods. Furthermore, most conducted studies are concerned with practices and challenges of active learning method implementation in colleges, on other subjects rather than the English language. Therefore, the current study focuses on the practices of strategies of contemporary theories of language teaching implementations and its challenges in teaching English grade 12 students at governmental secondary schools. Thus, the objective of the study was to assess EFL teachers' practices of strategies of contemporary theories of English language teaching and its challenges: Grade 12 students at three selected secondary schools in Ambo Town in focus.

1.3. Limitation of study

The study might have been more reliable if it had been possible to increase the size of the sample population and the number of schools since the larger size is better for reliability (Creswell & Clark, 2017). However, due to time constraints and financial problems, the study was limited to grade 12 English language teachers of Ambo, Liben Mecha, and Bakalcha Bari Secondary Schools, in West Shoa Zone. It is unquestionable that the inclusion of additional secondary schools to increase the population size in the study could help to get more relevant, broader, and comprehensive information. The finding in such a narrow context may not represent all secondary schools found in Ethiopia.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

The study was aimed at investigating the implementation of contemporary Language teaching theories and their challenges at the high school level. A descriptive research design was used in this study. According to Creswell and Clark (2017), the descriptive survey research type is particularly used when one needs to understand some particular information and describe the characteristics of a particular individual, group, or situation. In this study, EFL teachers' practice of strategies of contemporary theories of language teaching and its challenges were investigated.

2.2 Research Setting

The purpose of this study was to investigate EFL Teachers' practices, and challenges in implementing contemporary theories of language teaching in the case of grade 12 students at some selected secondary schools. The study was conducted at Ambo town in West Shoa Zone, Oromia, Ethiopia.

2.3 Subjects of the Study

Fifteen English teachers were selected from three secondary schools: Ambo, Liben Mecha, and Bakalcha Bari Secondary Schools. Fifteen English language teachers were the research participants of the study.

2.4 Sampling Techniques

The study site was selected using convenience sampling. The convenient sampling technique was chosen because the researcher could easily select participants of this study based on their relative ease of access (Koul, 1996). It is where the researcher lives. This means the secondary school's geographical nearness and accessibility to the researcher were considered in choosing the study area (Kothari, 2007). Out of 5 grade 12 secondary schools in Ambo town, three secondary schools were selected through a simple random sampling technique. The selected schools were Ambo Secondary School, Liben Mecha Secondary School, and Bakalcha Bari Secondary School. There were 15 English teachers in the schools, and all of them were selected based on a comprehensive sampling technique. Among 15 teachers, 6 of them participated in the interview.

2.5 Methods of Data Collection

Two types of data gathering instruments were used in this study: questionnaire and interview. Questionnaires were used to gather data about EFL teachers' practices of contemporary theories and challenges that hinder the implementation of these theories whereas interview was used to support the data collected via the questionnaires. Eighteen items of practice survey questions, which was answered within the interval of never to always. Likert scale was prepared and distributed to the selected teachers. Additionally, sixteen items of the questions were prepared to collect data about challenges that hinder the implementation of contemporary theories of Language teaching.

2.6 Methods of Data Analyses

A mixed research method was used to collect the data to achieve the objectives of this study. Quantitative data were analyzed by using SPSS Version 20 while interview results were analyzed qualitatively. Descriptive statistics helps us to describe, classify, and summarize numerical data in a meaningful way (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Measures of central tendency such as mean and standard deviation were used in this study.

3. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

3.1 Analyses of strategies that EFL teachers use in implementing contemporary theories of language teaching

In the table given below, 1 is equal to never; 2 is equal to rarely; 3 is equal to sometimes, and 4 is equal to always in investigating the strategies that EFL teachers used to implement contemporary theories of language teaching. Accordingly, the highest mean values were item numbers 6, 10, and 16, with 3.89, 3.75, and 3.88, respectively. These imply that EFL teachers always practice collaborative learning, authentic assessment, and reflective practice as strategies to implement contemporary theories of language teaching.

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Table 1. The strategies EFL teachers use in implementing contemporary theories of language teaching

	Strategies to implement contemporary language teaching theories	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Personalized learning	1.70	.650
2	Blended learning	1.87	.488
3	Flipped classroom	2.57	.689
4	Project-based learning	2.00	.457
5	Gamification and game-based learning	1.44	.608
6	Collaborative learning	3.89	.465
7	Inquiry-based learning	3.22	.484
8	Culturally responsive teaching	3.21	.407
9	Mindfulness and social-emotional learning	3.12	.533
10	Authentic assessment	3.75	.498
11	Technology integration	1.93	.434
12	Differentiated instruction	3.24	.427
13	Student-centered Learning	2.91	.448
14	Usage of metacognitive strategies	3.15	.653
15	Adaption of the existing materials	2.85	.629
16	Reflective practice	3.88	.490
17	Integration of different theories	2.83	.484
18	Going beyond the theory	1.54	.568

The EFL teachers used cooperative learning and group work activities to promote peer interactions, knowledge sharing, and collaborative problem-solving. The interview results also supported that they always encouraged their students to work together, discuss ideas, and learn from one another. The teachers were asked to check how they always used authentic assessment. They replied that they used performance-based assessments, presentations, and simulations to assess students'

understanding of lessons. They also reported that they regularly reflected on their teaching practices and then made adjustments as needed.

Table 1 also indicated that strategies like inquiry-based learning (3.22), culturally responsive teaching (3.21), mindfulness and social-emotional learning (3.12), differentiated instruction (3.24), student-centered Learning (2.91), usage of metacognitive strategies (3.15), integration of different theories (2.83) and adaption of the existing materials (2.85) were practiced sometimes. However, the teachers rarely practiced other strategies like personalized learning (1.70), blended learning (1.87), flipped classroom (2.57), project-based learning (2.00), gamification and game-based learning (1.44), and technology integration (1.93). However, these strategies had their contributions to the teaching of the English language. The last item, for Going beyond theory, with a mean score of 1.54 showed that the teachers never go beyond the theory. However, teachers can discover something beyond SLA theories and abstract something general from the theories. When teachers learn from their day-to-day teaching experience, they go beyond the theory and make different ideas, and apply them in different situations. We call this learning from experience ‘theorizing’ (Newby, 2003).

3.2 Analyses of challenges teachers face in implementing modern theories of English language teaching

In Table 2, 1 represents strongly disagree; 2 is equal to disagree; 3 is equal to neutral; 4 is equal to agree and 5 is equal to strongly agree. Accordingly, for item number 1, with a mean value of 4.66 and 0.48 standard deviation, item 3 with a mean and standard deviation of 3.4 and .80, and item 9 with a mean of 4.73 and 0.45 standard deviation, the respondents strongly agreed that institutional constraints, large class sizes and time constraints were challenges that hinder them from implementing contemporary English language teaching theories.

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Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of challenges teachers faced in implementing modern theories of English language teaching

	Challenges	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Institutional constraints	4.66	.487
2	Limited training and professional development	3.73	.457
3	Large class sizes	4.80	.414
4	Students' prior expectations	2.35	.457
5	Assessment and accountability	4.13	.351
6	Language context and exposure	4.14	.639
7	Teacher confidence and resistance	2.33	.487
8	Teacher knowledge and beliefs	4.13	.639
9	Time constraints	4.73	.457
10	Resources and materials	4.20	.676
11	Classroom dynamics	4.40	.632
12	Sociocultural and contextual factors	3.13	.351
13	Student readiness and engagement	2.66	.723
14	Parent and community support	2.49	.828
15	Limited access to technology resources	3.86	.833
16	Lack of technical skills	3.78	.767

In addition, the respondents agreed that limited training and professional development (3.73), assessment and accountability (4.13) language context and exposure (4.14), teacher knowledge and beliefs (4.13), resources and materials (4.20), classroom dynamics (4.40) and limited access to technology resources (3.86), lack of technical skills (3.78) affected the implementation of contemporary English language teaching theories in EFL classroom. However, the respondents disagreed on whether students' prior expectations (2.35), teacher confidence and resistance (2.33), and parent and community support (2.49) affected the implementation of contemporary English language teaching theories in EFL classrooms. They were neutral on whether or not sociocultural and contextual factors (3.13) and student readiness and engagement (2.66) affected the implementation of contemporary English language teaching theories.

4. DISCUSSIONS

Contemporary English language teaching theories refer to theories and perspectives that are currently relevant and influential within a particular field or discipline. These theories are developed in response to the changing social, cultural, and intellectual contexts of the present time. They often build upon or challenge existing theories to provide new insights, explanations, or approaches to understanding phenomena. The findings of this study indicated that teachers sometimes practiced inquiry-based learning, culturally responsive teaching, mindfulness and social-emotional learning, differentiated instruction, student-centered learning, usage of metacognitive strategies, and adaption of the existing materials as strategies for implementing current theories of language teaching. But if they always practice these strategies, teachers can create learner-centered classrooms that foster communication, critical thinking, and meaningful language use (Nazmi, 2022). According to Wale and Bishaw (2020), inquiry-based learning promotes student curiosity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. In addition, culturally responsive teaching recognizes and values the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences of students (Kalantzis et al, 2012). The results of this study also showed that the teachers rarely practiced other strategies like personalized learning, blended learning, flipped classroom, project-based learning, gamification and game-based learning, and technology integration. However, project-based learning focuses on student-driven, authentic projects that require critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving. Implement this theory by designing and facilitating project-based units that integrate interdisciplinary skills and real-world connections (Issa & Khataibeh, 2021). Gamification involves incorporating game elements, such as rewards, challenges, and competition, into the learning process (Sandra, 2013).

The respondents strongly agreed that institutional constraints, large class sizes, and time constraints were challenges that hinder teachers from implementing contemporary English language teaching theories. In addition, the respondents agreed that limited training and professional development, assessment and accountability, language context and exposure, teacher knowledge and beliefs, resources and materials, classroom dynamics, and limited access to technology resources, lack of technical skills affected the implementation of contemporary English language teaching theories in EFL classroom. The level of support provided by the educational institution, including administrators, school leaders, and colleagues, can significantly impact the implementation of theory into practice. Supportive environments that value innovation and professional growth encourage teachers to experiment with new approaches and provide resources, time, and professional

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development opportunities. In addition, teachers' knowledge and beliefs about educational theories can influence their willingness and ability to implement them into practice.

The availability and suitability of resources and materials can impact the implementation of educational theories. Teachers need access to appropriate instructional materials, technology tools, and learning resources that align with the theory. Interview results also supported that a lack of resources or materials that support the theory can hinder successful implementation. The respondents reported the unique characteristics of the classroom, such as class size, student diversity, and classroom management challenges, can affect the implementation of theory into practice. That was why Johnson (1996) argues that theory often fails to inform practice because of teachers' lack of knowledge about theory. Instead, the problems that teachers face are generally caused by constraints imposed on them within the social, cultural, economic, and educational contexts in which their practices take place.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicated that teachers do not implement all strategies from contemporary theory practice. Most of the strategies for implementing contemporary theories were rarely practiced in EFL classrooms. Contemporary theories are perspectives that are currently relevant and influential within an EFL classroom. Therefore, teachers should consider strategies for teaching contemporary theories in Language teaching.

The results of this study showed that teachers sometimes integrated different modern theories of language teaching. Implementing contemporary theories requires a flexible and learner-centered approach, where teachers are expected to integrate different modern theories based on their students' needs, goals, and specific learning contexts. Therefore, teachers should consider their expertise, the available resources, and the unique needs of their students when trying to integrate different theories.

This study also identified that institutional constraints, limited training and professional development, large class sizes, students' prior expectations, assessment and accountability, language context and exposure, teacher confidence and resistance, teacher knowledge and beliefs, time constraints, resources and materials, classroom dynamics, sociocultural and contextual factors,

student readiness and engagement, parent and community support, limited access to technology resources, and lack of technical skills as challenges that hinder the implementation of current theories of language teaching.

Therefore, addressing these challenges requires a collective effort from educators, policymakers, administrators, and stakeholders in education. Providing adequate training and support for teachers, allocating resources, promoting a culture of innovation, and advocating for policy changes that align with modern theories can help overcome these challenges and foster the effective implementation of modern educational practices.

This study also identified that teachers never theorize theories and put the idea into practice, and they could not theorize another idea based on their previous theory. In this contrast, (Newby, 2003) says, “What is important about a particular theory is that it should encourage further theorizing, not that it should foreclose on further inquiry. Therefore, teachers should theorize based on their daily activities.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank some people who contributed to the completion of this paper. First of all, I would like to thank God who gave me health in my career development. Then, my thanks go to the English Language instructors of Ambo University who provided data and helped me in doing this research. Finally, I would like my wife Kuleni Dame who supported me morally and financially.

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