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# Exploring factors affecting peer-led team learning in EFL classes: A case of secondary schools in Ethiopia

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**ABSTRACT**

Peer-led team learning (PLTL) has become common in ESL classrooms across Ethiopia. This study explores factors affecting PLTL in students' verbal participation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). A descriptive survey was employed as a research method, and mixed approach data collection methods were used. Twenty-four EFL teachers and 114 students of three secondary schools in Ethiopia were taken as the research participants by systematic random sampling. The data collected from questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observation were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively using a statistical tool in frequency, percentages, ANOVA and multiple regression. The findings indicated that students differ significantly in their level of verbal participation in PLTL groups. Of the twenty-two expected factors, no single factor predicted whether students would participate in PLTL groups. More than one factor was usually working together, or one factor led onto another to affect students' participation. Personality characteristics, motivational factors, and group situation factors were significant to student participation in PLTL. Not every student could get the opportunities to become a group leader, and the groups were static. Since there was an absence of active monitoring, most groups drifted away from tasks and were involved in noisy chat in their mother tongue. Few students in a group dominated others who persevered at group activities. The qualitative findings are consistent with the quantitative ones.

**Keywords:** EFL; group discussion; PLTL; verbal participation

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## INTRODUCTION

English language teaching has undergone a number of changes in approaches and methods due to the continuous development of knowledge in the world (Freeman, 2002). The shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning pedagogies has gained increasing theoretical and empirical support (Mascolo, 2009; Neumann, 2013; Osborne, 2002; Venville & Dawson, 2010). Constructivist learning theories established by Piaget (1952) and Vygotsky (1978) have influenced this shift in language learning.

The Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) and constructivism theory are interrelated. According to social constructivism, learning occurs when students actively construct basic knowledge via inquiry and discovery. Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) emphasizes interaction, collaboration, and group work for optimal learning. They consider knowledge as something students generate in collaboration with their peers, teachers, and other students. It stresses the collaborative nature of learning with a facilitator or other students (Kalina & Powell, 2009; Schreiber & Valle, 2013). Students can complete all learning

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activities (regardless of complexity) with adult supervision or peer collaboration.

Classroom interaction research, according to Allwright et al. (1991), focuses on circumstances when language is both taught and learned. Given these findings, the reason for doing language-learning research in specific classroom educational settings, "The classroom is the crucible – the place where teachers and learners come together and language learning… But no matter how they all bring, everything still depends on how they react to each other." This vividly indicates that managing classroom interaction is a team effort, not just the teachers.

Larsen (2000) and Zhang (2010) support peer-led small group work. Its benefits appear well known and partially accepted (Gillies, 2006). It allows students to utilize the language they are learning to communicate. Implementing this learning strategy encourages students to dig deeper into topics, enhancing their meaning and relevance. Besides, PLTL increases student interaction, subject matter knowledge, problem-solving abilities, and attitudes (Tien et al., 2002).

The students in this study characterized verbal participation as being verbally engaged and initiating contributions rather than passively listening and withholding self-initiated verbal responses (Kim, 2007). In other words, peer-led learning is an essential tool for implementing student-centered language instruction (Zohrabi et al., 2012). While PLTL is used to promote student-centered language learning, it must be effectively planned, know challenges, and require effective follow-up (Leighton, 1997; McDonough & Shaw, 2012).

**Statement of the Problem**

With this background, the statement of the problem is presented. Various research implies that students should actively form their understanding of ideas (Bada & Olusegun, 2015; Venville & Dawson, 2010). Peer-led learning groups were considerably more effective than competitive or individualistic goal structures (Johnson & Johnson,. 2013).

PLTL improves learning. Similar research in social and affective development substantially supports the use of group work in classrooms, enhancing interpersonal contact, student self-esteem, and social relations between students (Anwar, 2016; Slavin, 1996; Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2018). However, some scholars challenge the view that PLTL promotes student interaction. According to Dunne and Bennett (1990), there is a possibility of free riders (those who do not participate but take credit for group effort) and suckers (those who do extra work for other group members who do not work hard). When students exhibit these behaviors, they risk rejection, dominance, and group conflict.

There is some debate over the effectiveness of group work in language schools. The best group structure, task structure, and so forth are all controversial. What works in one context may not work in another. What works for one group of students may not work for another. Understanding the group work scenario being applied, how learners are doing, and ensuring the conditions are essential to facilitate group discussion (Wittenbaum & Moreland, 2008).

Students working in PLTL are not uncommon nowadays in EFL classes. The PLTL group formation has become one of the best practices in EFL classes in Ethiopia that may be adapted to meet the targeted objectives. The PLTL has been taken as a new strategy used in Ethiopian secondary schools to help students improve their performance (ANRSEB, 2010). Unlike typical grouping, the PLTL group design appears to be thoroughly thought out. Being useful in and out of the classroom is a distinct element of group organization. The ideal group size is six students, one as a leader and the rest as members. This size can be manageable and productive and allow students to participate actively (Bejarano et al., 1997).

On the other hand, the researcher found that most students struggle to communicate in English. Some PLTL members could not contribute or simply kept silent, while others did most of the talking or refused to even pause for breath. Group work is frequently used in Bahir Dar secondary schools where the study was conducted. It seemed to be the most common classroom setup. The teaching materials recently produced for EFL high school texts clearly show this. Students must form groups and actively participate in group assignments.

While many activities require students to work in groups, little study has been done to investigate factors influencing PLTL effectiveness. This study is an attempt to fulfill that demand. This research is founded on the idea that it is vital to explain the situation mainly from the learners' and teachers' perspectives in settings where PLTL is frequently used. Thus, it is critical to research the level of student verbal participation differences and factors affecting PLTL groups in EFL classrooms.

## METHODS

**Research Design**

Those research questions were investigated using a descriptive survey design combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The survey is selected as a research method because it enables the research to have a comprehensive image of the objectives. It can provide a broad capability, ensuring a more accurate sample to gather targeted results and draw conclusions. The mixed-methods approach counterbalances the shortcomings of using either

quantitative or qualitative one. It provides a well-rounded investigation that helps to answer questions by combining the qualities of both methods (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

**Sampling Techniques and Samples**

The study's target population was three public secondary schools, namely Tana, Ghion, and Fasilo Secondary school in Bahir Dar town in Bahir Dar town, Ethiopia. The secondary school was chosen because of its prior connection through community service in 2018. The current study focused on 9th graders. The participants were 24 EFL teachers and 120 students in the schools, with 42, 42, and 36 students in each school, respectively. Nevertheless, six students' questionnaires were discarded during the analysis stage as some of the papers were found incomplete while others filled carelessly. Since the number of teachers was manageable, comprehensive sampling was utilized to reach a valid conclusion. Systematic random sampling was used to select students from the schools since it ensures that every student has an equal chance of being chosen (Cohen et al., 2017).

In doing so, most of the EFL language teachers of the schools were participants of the study during questionnaire administration since the number of teachers was manageable. For the interview, the sample size of the students had to be reduced to a manageable level. Since it is believed that the sample size is determined by the purpose of the study and the nature of the population, this sample size could be enough to hold the idea forwarded by scholars (Cohen et al., 2017; Gray, 2013; Kothari, 2004).

**Research Instruments**

Three data collection instruments were employed: a questionnaire, an interview, and classroom observation. This study's primary data collection method was a questionnaire, and data were collected from September to January of 2019.

Twenty-six questions were developed for the teachers and forty-two for the students to meet the study's objective. They were designed in line with the literature review and familiar with the students' level. An attempt has also been made to achieve some form of methodological triangulation, where questionnaires are used in tandem with other methods to see how they corroborate each other (Hussein, 2009).

Interviews were done to gather more detailed information from the students. Interview, thus, was felt to be suitable for the study. A semi-structured interview for students, which focused on factors that affect their participation, was employed as it allowed wider freedom to ask further questions, and it helped control the direction of the interview to elicit the desired data. The transcribed data was textually presented, and the names of the participants were replaced with pseudo names to respect their interest in being anonymous (Cohen et al., 2017; Herbert et al., 1989; Kothari, 2004). Classroom observation was also used to obtain data for the study to cross-check information collected via questionnaire. Classroom observation is crucial in descriptive and qualitative research to acquire actual data about teachers' and students' behaviors in the actual setting. A semi-structured observation checklist with similar content to the questionnaire was employed. Six teachers selected in a random sampling in three secondary schools were observed, and the co-observer and the researcher together saw the speaking skills lessons and put their observation.

**Data Analysis**

The type of data collected determines the nature of the data analysis method (Cohen et al., 2017). Since the collected data were quantitative and qualitative, the analysis also used both techniques. Items constructed to explore PLTL for students' verbal participation were analyzed with a statistical package of frequency, percentage, and one-way ANOVA. The items of the questionnaire were first thematically grouped to analyze the data. Then, comparing the mean scores of those categories, the analysis was made to determine factors that can enhance or affect verbal participation in PLTL. Multiple regression was used to determine whether there is a statistically significant factor(s). A certain stage occurred immediately after the interview to analyze the data. Finally, the data were coded and grouped into themes. Multiple regression was used to find statistically significant factors. During and immediately after the interview, a certain stage was completed to analyze the data gathered. Finally, the data was coded and categorized into themes.

## RESULTS

**Verbal Participation of EFL Students in PLTL Groups**

To begin with, it was one of the major purposes of the study to investigate the extent to which students differ in their amount of verbal participation in peer-led group discussion. This section includes findings made with various instruments (self-ratings, teachers-rating, questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations).

As seen in Table 1, most students identify with the middle categories in the verbal participation continuum. 2.8% and 16.7% of the students perceived themselves as extremely silent and silent, respectively. 28% of students thought their participation was average. Students preferred to avoid extreme categories. As a result, no one assessed themselves as extremely active.

**Table 1**
*Student Perception of Their Participation Rate, Group Work, and Teacher Rate*

| Ratings | Self-rate | | Teachers' rate | | Students' Average rate | | Both Teachers & Students average | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | % | | % | | % | | % |
| 1. Extremely Silent | 1 | 2.8 | 3 | 8.4 | 0.67 | 1.86 | 1.83 | 5.13 |
| 2. Silent | 6 | 16.7 | 6 | 16.7 | 3.5 | 9.73 | 4.75 | 13.3 |
| 3. On the silent side | 7 | 19.4 | 6 | 16.7 | 9.83 | 27.33 | 7.92 | 22.16 |
| 4. On a moderate amount | 10 | 28 | 8 | 22.2 | 9.67 | 26.87 | 8.83 | 24.74 |
| 5. On the participant side | 9 | 25.2 | 8 | 22.2 | 7.17 | 19.91 | 7.58 | 21.24 |
| 6. High participators | 2 | 5.6 | 3 | 8.4 | 4 | 11.12 | 3. | 9.8 |
| 7.Very high participators | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2.8 | 1.17 | 3.27 | 1.09 | 3.04 |
| **Total** | **36** | **100** | **36** | **100** | **36** | **100** | **36** | **100** |

Likewise, students' perceptions about their peers show 1.86% fall under the extremely silent categories while 9.73% and 27.33% were categorized as silent and on the silent side, respectively. About half of the students were perceived their participation on a moderate amount.

Similarly, teachers' evaluation of the students' participation shows that some students fall under the extreme categories. 8.4% of the students were categorized as extremely silent, and 2.8% of students were seen as very high participants. In comparison, 61.1% of the students are roughly in the middle categories, some (16.7%) as silent others (8.4%) on the high participants.

As seen in Table 2, another way to look at students' perception of verbal participation is to divide them into three groups: quiet (19.5%), average (37.4%), and high participants (30.8%). On the other hand, the teachers' assessment of student participation in group work differs little from the students'. Teachers claim 25.1% of pupils are silent, 38.9% are average, and 33.4% are high participants.

**Table 2**
*ANOVA of Verbal Participation*

| | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Verbal participation | Between Groups | 26.217 | 5 | 5.243 | 4.563 | .003 |
| | Within Groups | 34.474 | 30 | 1.149 | | |
| | Total | 60.692 | 35 | | | |

P<0.05

The groups reliably predicted the dependent variable (verbal participation) (F=4.563, df=35, and p<0.05). Therefore, the influence of the PLTL groups for verbal participation within and among the groups was significant. The group of independent variables collectively predicted verbal participation.

In the study's interview, students were asked three types of questions. These were students about themselves, the silent students, and the high participants. When asked if he knew any silent students, Assefa said, "I knew two or three. I am one of these students." Another student, Fikadie said, "He was the most silent student in one of his groups." Muluye noted, "Some students were quite silent. For instance, I keep quiet most of the time. Although I may know the answer, I prefer to keep quiet. I rarely participate." However, Mulugeta says he doesn't keep quiet or hesitate to speak his thoughts. Students named a few when asked if they knew any group mates that talked more than others. "The group leader participates a lot, and they are very critical about things and dominate other group members."

In short, some students perceived they were among the silent students. Others perceived themselves as belonging to the participants, although not as clearly as the silent do.

Factors accounting for the differences in the amount of verbal participation in PLTL

Many factors came into play to determine the situations that account for the difference in the verbal participation of students. Students perceived twenty-two different factors to affect their verbal involvement. Based on multiple regression output, factors were thematically classified as personality, motivation, language, students' background, group settings, teachers and evaluation system, orientations, and tasks.

**Personality**

Five factors had been picked out which were related to personality. These were shyness, courage or self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, inferiority complex, and self-concept. This section discussed these factors using extracts from the questionnaire and interviews where necessary. Five personality-related criteria were chosen. These were shyness, courage or self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, inferiority complex, and self-concept that can be seen in Table 3.

**Table 3**
*Students' Response About Factors Related to Personality*

| Factors related to personality | Strongly Disagree | | Disagree | | Slightly Agree | | Agree | | Strongly Agree | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % |
| Shyness | 2 | 1.8 | 14 | 12.3 | 26 | 22.8 | 35 | 30.7 | 37 | 32.5 |
| Fear of making mistakes | 8 | 7 | 9 | 7.9 | 20 | 17.5 | 30 | 26.3 | 47 | 41.2 |
| Not adjusted with the new environment | 5 | 4.4 | 17 | 14.9 | 36 | 28 | 28 | 24.6 | 23 | 20.2 |
| *Self-confidence:* attitude about others performance | 9 | 7.9 | 24 | 21.1 | 38 | 33.3 | 28 | 24.6 | 15 | 13.2 |
| Perception of others attitudes towards them | 26 | 22.8 | 23 | 20.2 | 17 | 14.9 | 32 | 28.1 | 16 | 14 |

Almost 63% of the participants agreed that being shy or not having confidence affects their verbal participation on PLTL in EFL classes. However, 12.3% and 1.8% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Similarly, 41.2% strongly agreed, and 26.3% agreed that they were afraid of making mistakes that negatively influenced verbal participation. Likewise, 17.5% of people agreed slightly, while 19.3% disagreed.

Likewise, about 44.8% of the participants agreed that not adjusting to the new environment impacts PLTL verbal participation; others 28% of the students chose to agree slightly, and just 19.3% disagreed. Concerning self-confidence, 37.8% of individuals agreed, while 33% agreed somewhat. Of the students, 21% disagreed, and 7.9% strongly disagreed with this assertion. In a similar vein, regarding the perception of others' attitudes, they are negatively seen by the group members, and 42.1% of students agree. 14.9% of participants agreed slightly, while 43% expressed their disagreement.

The interview results were closely interrelated with the questionnaire output. Interviewees were asked why some EFL students kept quiet in PLTL groups. Fear or shyness was cited as a contributing cause to their silence. According to Endalkachew, "Students tend to be low participation as they are shy or afraid. I'm aware that some students have the ability. They do not speak even when we work in a group because they are terrified." Firew was one of the class's silent students. He mentioned he was shy, especially if the discussion was in English.

Fear of making mistakes was another element associated with shyness. The interview with students revealed that they were sometimes afraid of making mistakes. Students who were not scared of making mistakes tended to be more active, whereas those fearful of breaking language rules preferred to be silent. "We keep silent because we worry we would break language conventions," Assefa, one of the silent students, explained. Mulugeta, the top participant, believed that making mistakes was vital for progress. He added that "I don't care what students think of me. I won't be able to develop unless I do this."

Self-confidence affected both low and high participants. Their confidence often developed students' active participation in group work. Self-confidence was crucial to Assefa. He claimed that "confidence has great value for participation. The main issue with silent students is a lack of self-esteem. If I get confidence, I can talk natively."

**Motivation**

Motivation is a psychological trait, inner drive, impulse emotion to achieve a goal, combined with the energy to work towards that goal. In other words, motivation increase students' determination in language learning (Alizadeh, 2016; Woodrow, 2017). Those who are highly motivated will enjoy learning the language and seek to learn it. Intrinsic motivation is evident when we perform something because we enjoy it. They are motivated by their sense of achievement, self-esteem, pleasure in solving a problem, enjoyment of the class, and ability to utilize language as desired that can be seen in Table 4.

**Table 4**
*Learners' Responses to Motivational Factors*

| Factors related to motivation | Strongly Disagree | | Disagree | | Slightly Agree | | Agree | | Strongly Agree | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % |
| The desire of improving their English | 2 | 1.8 | 14 | 12.3 | 26 | 22.8 | 35 | 30.7 | 37 | 32.5 |
| Interest or motivation to speak | 8 | 7 | 13 | 11.4 | 31 | 27.2 | 33 | 28.9 | 29 | 25.4 |
| Preparation to do assignments | 18 | 15.8 | 14 | 12.3 | 30 | 26.3 | 25 | 21.9 | 27 | 23.7 |
| Enjoy talking /interacting with others | 35 | 30.7 | 22 | 19.3 | 28 | 24.6 | 14 | 12.3 | 15 | 13.2 |

As the data portrayed, most participants agreed that the desire to improve English benefits verbal participation. Similarly, 22.8% of students agreed, while 12.3% disagreed. Likewise, over half of the students (54.3%) thought that having a desire to speak is a beneficial effect on student involvement, whereas 27.2% slightly disagreed.

The interview results showed that students believe motivation influenced their verbal engagement behavior. Motivation was felt to boost verbal involvement, whereas demotivation diminishes it. Endalkachew, a high participant, stated that motivation was one of the essential aspects contributing to students' active or passive engagement in PLTL. When asked why he was actively participating, Endalkachew responded, "I have a lot of curiosity." Endalkachew added, "I want to be a fluent speaker. Thus, I'm keen to enhance my English."

**Background**

Language acquisition research has long emphasized the significance of social background in affecting individual differences (Pourkalhor & Esfandiari, 2017). Prior knowledge may affect language learning. As shown in the table 5, 34.2% of students agreed and strongly agreed that school background influences students' verbal involvement in PLTL. Others chose slightly agreed, while 41.1% disagreed. Furthermore, about half of the participants said their families encouraged them to speak English in class. Similarly, 23.7% of students agreed slightly, while 38.6 percent disagreed with the issue.

**Table 5**

*Factors Related to Students' Background*

| **Factors related to background** | **Strongly Disagree** | | **Disagree** | | **Slightly Agree** | | **Agree** | | **Strongly Agree** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **No** | **%** | **No** | **%** | **No** | **%** | **No** | **%** | **No** | **%** |
| Elementary school backgrounds | 20 | 17.5 | 27 | 23.7 | 25 | 21.9 | 16 | 14 | 23 | 20.2 |
| Family background | 16 | 14 | 28 | 24.6 | 27 | 23.7 | 18 | 15.8 | 25 | 21.9 |

The interview outcomes revealed that family and elementary school background played a role in students' silence or high participation. Most students acknowledged their elementary school experience since it has had positive and negative effects on their engagement. Students who participated in group discussions in elementary school were likely to be active participants in high school. Moreover, family background affected verbal participation in group discussions.

**Group Situations**

Forming and developing group cohesiveness is essential for learning and teaching foreign languages (Chang, 2010). An endeavor was made to explore factors like group cohesiveness and group norms that may influence language classroom environment the data can be seen in Table 6. As seen in the Table 6, 18.4% of participants agreed, and 15.8% strongly agreed that student relationships influenced their participation.

**Table 6**

Students' Responses to Group-Related Issues

| **Factors related to *the group*** | **Strongly Disagree** | | **Disagree** | | **Slightly Agree** | | **Agree** | | **Strongly Agree** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % |
| Cohesion of the group | 24 | 21.1 | 26 | 22.8 | 25 | 21.9 | 21 | 18.4 | 18 | 15.8 |
| Dominating students | 14 | 12.3 | 20 | 17.5 | 32 | 28.1 | 29 | 25.4 | 19 | 16.7 |

Similarly, 21.9% of students agreed, while the rest disagreed. 42.1% of students felt that others dominated the group, whereas 28.1% slightly agreed. Nonetheless, 29.8% disagreed with the assertion. Likewise, interviewees noted that knowing each other well affects students' verbal participation in PLTL groups. Some students believe that students should help their group members participate in discussions by inviting them.

**Teachers' Monitoring and System of Evaluation**

Results from questionnaire of monitoring activities and evaluation from the teacher can be seen in Table 7. In a like manner, most participants agreed that the teachers should have a welcome atmosphere. Likewise, 20.2% of students slightly agreed. However, only 11.4% of participants disagreed. Similarly, 23.9% of learners agreed with the system of points given for participation, which has a determinant effect of being silent and high participants.

**Table 7**
Teacher Monitoring Activities and Evaluation Related Factors

| Factors related to teachers and system of evaluation | Strongly Disagree | | Disagree | | Slightly Agree | | Agree | | Strongly Agree | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % |
| Welcoming atmosphere from the teachers | 4 | 3.5 | 9 | 7.9 | 23 | 20.2 | 41 | 36 | 37 | 32.5 |
| System of evaluation or Points for participation | 26 | 22.8 | 37 | 32.5 | 26 | 22.8 | 16 | 14 | 9 | 7.9 |

Likewise, teachers as interviewees should stimulate students' interest in and engagement in group discussions, and students should be informed of the benefits of active participation in group discussions.

**Factor(s) Influencing Students' Verbal Participation in PLTL Groups**

Of the objectives, this paper was to identify factors that account for the difference in the amount of verbal participation in PLTL groups. The model summary of factors of verbal participation can be seen in Table 8.

**Table 8.**
*Model Summary of Factors of Verbal Participation*

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .551[a] | .304 | .291 |
| 2 | .490[b] | .240 | .233 |
| 3 | .588[c] | .345 | .327 |

Predictors (factor 1, 7, and 8) and verbal involvement (the predicted) on PLTL groups had a correlation of 0.551, 0.480, and 0.58. The independent factors can predict the dependent variable (verbal participation). These variables were the interest in learning, adjusting to the new environment, knowing each other, not being shy (Factor 1), the desire to improve their English (Factor 7), and not being afraid of making mistakes (Factor 8). This result did not measure how well the independent variables in each factor predict the dependent variable (verbal participation in PLTL). This outcome was an overall measure of the strength of association; neither did it reflect how well the independent variables in each factor predict the dependent variable (verbal participation in PLTL) that can be seen in Table 9.

**Table 9**
*ANOVA Table of Factors of Verbal Participation*

| | Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 33.690 | 2 | 16.845 | 24.191 | .000[a] |
| | Residual | 77.294 | 111 | .696 | | |
| | Total | 110.984 | 113 | | | |
| 2 | Regression | 26.651 | 1 | 26.651 | 35.394 | .000[b] |
| | Residual | 84.333 | 112 | .753 | | |
| | Total | 110.984 | 113 | | | |
| 3 | Regression | 38.325 | 3 | 12.775 | 19.341 | .000[c] |
| | Residual | 72.659 | 110 | .661 | | |
| | Total | 110.984 | 113 | | | |

The p-value (sig.) associated with these F-values of each factor (24.191, 35.394, and 19.341) is small ($p<0.001$). Did these eight independent variables reliably predict verbal participation in PLTL? And it was found they reliably predicted the dependent variable (Verbal participation) ($F=1:24.191$, $7:35.394$, and $8: 19.341$; $df =113$, $p=0.001$). Therefore, the influence of the groups of each factor was significant.

According to the regression coefficients, three factors significantly contributed to the criterion variable that can be seen in Table 10.

**Table 10**
*Parameter Estimates of Factors of Verbal Participation*

| | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 3 | (Constant) | 3.972 | .076 | | 52.175 | .000 |
| | REGR factor 1 | .250 | .076 | .252 | 3.265 | .001 |
| | REGR factor 7 | .486 | .076 | .490 | 6.352 | .000 |
| | REGR factor 8 | .203 | .076 | .204 | 2.649 | .009 |

a. Dependent Variable: verbal participation

The independent variables in factor 1 could significantly predict verbal participation in PLTL (β=0.250, t=3.265, p<0.01). It revealed that while factors seven and eight hold constant, verbal participation changed by 0.252. Likewise, factor 7 (β=0.490, t=6.325, p<0.001) and factor 8 (β=0.204, t=2.649, p<0.01) were also found to be significant factors of verbal participation in peer-led EFL classes. To summarize, among the eight factors of verbal participation, they were only three factors (factor 1: motivation, factor 7: Personality, and factor 8: group situations), which showed a significant power in influencing students' verbal participation.

**Do EFL Teachers Oversee Peer-Led Group Work? If So, How?**

While investigating how EFL teachers monitor PLTL, an attempt was made to categorize it into three sections. These are the moving into (the first), monitoring, and moving out stages.

**Moving into (First) Stage**

Seating arrangements for group work can hinder or facilitate student contact and teacher-student interaction (Tayeg, 2015). In peer-led group discussions, data were collected on the layout seat, group leader, and secretary orientation as shown in Table 11.

**Table 11**

*Seating Arrangement and Orientation of Group Leaders and Secretaries*

| | **Not at all** | | **Rarely** | | **Some times** | | **Often** | | **Almost Always** | | **X** | **SD** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % | | |
| While doing activities in group work: a. sit in a circle or horseshoe | 36 | 31.6 | 47 | 41.2 | 18 | 15.7 | 8 | 7 | 5 | 4.3 | 2.11 | 1.07 |
| b. sit a row | 11 | 9.6 | 10 | 8.7 | 22 | 19.2 | 28 | 24.5 | 43 | 37.7 | 3.72 | 1.31 |
| The students can talk to students in the adjacent groups | 9 | 7.8 | 22 | 19.2 | 32 | 28 | 28 | 24.6 | 23 | 20.1 | 3.3 | 1.22 |
| Briefing group leaders and secretaries about their roles | 39 | 34.2 | 56 | 49.1 | 12 | 10.5 | 3 | 2.6 | 4 | 3.5 | 1.92 | 0.93 |
| Rotating an opportunity for every student to be a group leader and secretary | 106 | 92.9 | 8 | 7% | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1.07 | 0.26 |

Students indicated that a horseshoe was used by 11.3% of students during group tasks. Most of the students (41.2%) and 31.6%) said they rarely or never sat in a circle. About half of students could almost always talk with students in adjacent groups during a group activity, and 28% could occasionally communicate to groups nearby. Furthermore, (6.1%) of students said they were usually briefed about their tasks as group leaders and secretaries. However, many students (83.3%) indicated that their lecturers never informed group leaders and secretaries on their tasks. Finally, almost all students (92.9%) showed they never had the chance to be a group leader or secretary. The most frequently practised activities in moving into stage are sitting in the row and talking with the adjacent groups with mean scores and standard deviation of M= 3.72, SD=1.31 and M=3.3, SD=1.22 respectively. The result of the classroom observations was almost consistent with students' reports, and it was noted that students experienced discomfort when participating in group activities due to their seating arrangement.

**Monitoring Stage**

Teachers are supposed to create encouraging environments for their students who are working (Farooq, 2015). During group activities, teachers have different roles to play, but they may impede or facilitate the completion of the task as seen in Table 12.

It is evident from the Table 12 that 12.3% and 22.8% of the students claimed that their teachers almost always and often sat back and observed them when doing group work, respectively, whereas 23.7% and 18.4% stated their teachers rarely sat back and observed them when doing group work. 53.5% of the participants said their teachers spent a lot of time with one group when monitoring.

Classroom observations revealed that teachers behaved differently while students worked in groups. Some stood up or walked in front of the class, glancing over the students. Others were seen moving around the whole group once and spent certain minutes with one group. Then, the teacher went around the class once and stood in front of them until the task was finished. Some of them were seen sitting or standing in front of the class without moving.

Of the students, 18.4% indicated that teachers sometimes interfered during group tasks. More than one-third of students (38.6%) said their teachers never interfered when they worked in groups. Moreover, 21.8% of respondents said they were almost always encouraged to express themselves in English when they overused L1, and 52% said their

teachers did not help them speak in English when they overused L1. Finally, a few group members may dominate the task when students work together. When a few students dominated the activities, teachers never ensured fair participation among group members, according to 41.2% of respondents.

**Table 12**
*Teachers' Interventions During Peer-Led Group Discussions*

| | Not at all | | Rarely | | Some times | | Often | | Almost Always | | X | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % | | |
| Sitting back and observing | 21 | 18.4 | 27 | 23.7 | 26 | 22.8 | 26 | 22.8 | 14 | 12.3 | 2.87 | 1.3 |
| Staying long with one group while monitoring | 34 | 29.8 | 27 | 23.7 | 35 | 30.7 | 8 | 7 | 10 | 8.8 | 2.41 | 1.23 |
| Interfering with groups at work | 44 | 38.6 | 31 | 27.2 | 21 | 18.4 | 11 | 9.6 | 7 | 6.1 | 2.18 | 1.22 |
| Being available for help to all groups when needed | 28 | 24.5 | 41 | 35.9 | 26 | 22.8 | 13 | 11.4 | 6 | 5.2 | 2.37 | 1.13 |
| The teachers intervene to: a. give instruction if learners are not clear with how to do the task | 21 | 18.4 | 38 | 33.3 | 26 | 22.8 | 19 | 16.7 | 12 | 10.5 | 2.7 | 1.25 |
| b. encourage the learners to talk in English when they resort to excessive use of L1 | 14 | 12.3 | 46 | 40.3 | 29 | 25.4 | 16 | 14 | 9 | 7.8 | 2.65 | 1.11 |

As can be observed, watching one group for a long time (M=2.41, SD=1.23), sitting back and observing learners doing tasks (M=2.87, SD=1.3), and encouraging learners to interact when they lose interest in the activity (M=2.87, SD=1.23) are slightly less frequent activities. Similarly, teachers might have made a purposeful intervention in most classroom observations. Observations in the classroom suggest that students frequently used L1, and a few members dominated some groups.

**Moving Out Stage**

This stage is the last in the organization of group work, and teachers have crucial tasks to do (Jeon & Hahn, 2006). Among the activities, teachers are required to wind down the task at the 'right' time as seen in Table 13.

**Table 13**
*Teachers' Practices of Closing Group Tasks With a Time Limit*

| | Not at all | | Rarely | | Some times | | Often | | Almost Always | | X | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % | | |
| How often does your teacher set a time limit? | 11 | 9.6 | 18 | 15.8 | 25 | 21.9 | 30 | 26.3 | 30 | 26.3 | 3.44 | 1.3 |
| When does your teacher stop the activities? a. when the set time is over | 10 | 8.8 | 16 | 14 | 13 | 20.2 | 14 | 12.3 | 51 | 44.7 | 3.88 | 1.42 |
| b. while some of you are still enjoying | 32 | 28.1 | 40 | 35.1 | 20 | 17.5 | 14 | 11.3 | 8 | 6.5 | 2.35 | 1.21 |
| c. long after you have finished and got bored | 57 | 50 | 31 | 27.2 | 14 | 12.3 | 9 | 7.9 | 3 | 2.6 | 2.4 | 1.46 |

As seen in Table 13, 26.3% of the students said their teachers almost always set a time limit for group tasks, and 26.3% replied teachers often set a time limit. Similarly, about two-thirds of the teachers often drew group tasks when the time limit was up, whereas 20.2% claimed teachers occasionally ended group tasks. Some students (35.1%) said group assignments were rarely closed while others enjoyed them. However, 28.1% of participants stated that group work was never finished, despite some enjoying it.

Moreover, one-third of the students (27.2 %) replied group work was rarely long after it had finished. Finally, 50% of the participants showed that group work was not brought to a close long after completing group tasks and bored. No respondents made any mention of other ways of closing group tasks. In this moving out stage, the most widely practised activities were setting a time limit (M=3.44, SD=1.3) and stopping the activities when the time is over (M=3.88, SD=1.42).

Moreover, 27.2% of students said group work rarely lasted long. Half of the participants said that group work continued long after being bored. Setting a time limit (M=3.44, SD=1.3) and stopping activities after the time limit was over (M=3.88, SD=1.42) were the most often used activities in this stage. The results of classroom observations were consistent with the students' responses. The classroom observation revealed that teachers halted group assignments when the time limit was over.

## DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings, practical implications, and possible conclusions and recommendations. The discussion interwoven with the extant literature and the leading research questions raised earlier as thematic priorities.

### The Extent of Student Verbal Participation in PLTL Groups

Verbal output of students in group discussions varied to a significant extent, as found in earlier studies (Schmidt & Moust, 2000; Shaw, 1981; Stokoe, 2000). One of the main concerns was to investigate the students' verbal participation involvement in PLTL groups for language classes. It may appear straightforward to observe and level students as low or high participants, but this study's experience has shown that it is not. Hence, students can be roughly divided into three categories based on their verbal involvement perceptions: silent (19.5%), average (37.4%), and high participator (30.8 %).

Similarly, some students were viewed as the most active participants in one session, whereas others may be the most active participants in another discussion session. In other words, students in a group can be reliably labeled as high or low participants in a group discussion when observed on various activities over time (McGrath, 1984; Pollock et al., 2011). When students communicate in groups, they contribute verbally at a steady rate. They may contribute at a low, average, or high rate in group discussions (Liu & Littlewood, 1997).

The data showed students in PLTL groups differ substantially in their verbal output. Some students were very quiet, while others were very active and like to talk a lot. This finding was consistent with the findings obtained by Bogale (2000), who investigated verbal interaction at a university level in Ethiopia. Moreover, Fassinger (1995, p. 82), who studied verbal interaction at a college level, also claimed that "some students eagerly participate in class daily. Yet, most classes contain students who have not uttered a word since first-day introductions". Allwright (1984) and O'Connor and Michaels (1996) have also recognized an unbalanced distribution of participation among language learners; some students participate 'more than their fair share, and others' negotiate for less.'

### Factors Account for the Variation in Verbal Participation in PLTL groups

This study explored the main factors contributing to student participation in PLTL groups. According to the findings of this study, it is difficult to claim that students' verbal participation in a group discussion - whether low or high - could be determined by a single factor like personality, motivation, the group situation, language command, or any other (Fachtmann et al., 2001). Thus, language proficiency, school background, or teachers' encouragement as a single factor may not be enough to account for students' low or high participation in group discussions. They wanted to learn English to secure good jobs, pass the Ethiopian National Examinations, live abroad, and have a good English profession (Getie, 2020; Reda & Hagos, 2017).

In most cases, there could be other factors at work simultaneously. There were two students with equally good command of English, and one of them actively participated, the other passively. Another aspect at play in these instances could be their Personality (George, 1990; Woodrow, 2017). The silent could be shy, while the participant may be confident. Likewise, where two students came from a poor elementary school background, one active, the other passive. It could be the students' risk-taking level; the high-risk taker participated actively while the low-risk taker kept silent. Perhaps, it was the motivation that made the difference.

The findings show that verbal participation in a group discussion was determined by a chain of factors leading to or affecting the other, instead of just one factor functioning independently. For instance, the poor background may affect the desire to improve English; and loss of hope for improvement may lead to carelessness about assignments. Factors can act in isolation or combination. Thus, various factors can work together to silence or engage students. However, when it was seen singly, as students' rating, some factors appeared more significant in making students silent. The major factor, in this case, was related to the personality makeup of students: shyness, fear of making mistakes, and feeling inferior to others in the group. This finding indicated that personality factors influenced verbal participation in PLTL groups.

Similarly, Morell (2007) and Zhang (2010) linked these behaviors to students' personalities. The result of this study, which indicated the personality factors on verbal participation, was in line with Bogale's (2000) findings. Besides, chains of factors were more responsible for participating actively in the group discussion. However, when seen in isolation, the significant factors were personality, motivation, and group situation-related factors.

According to Getie (2020) and Reda and Hagos (2017), social factors affect students' attitudes positively. They had positive attitudes towards native English speakers; their peers encouraged them to study English. Students' parents had positive attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. On the other hand, factors such as a lack of a conducive learning environment, a lack of inspiration from English teachers, a fear of making mistakes and frustration, a lack of opportunities to practice English, a poor background, and a lack of resources have all had a negative impact on students' attitudes toward

learning English as a foreign language. Besides, educational factors were observed to be adversely influencing factors. More specifically, students had negative perspectives on the learning environment, teaching English, classroom sizes, and seating arrangement.

To summarise the study's findings, personality traits were the significant factors contributing to students' participation in PLTL groups. Similarly, motivational factors also determined students' verbal participation in group discussions. In the same way, group situation factors were also significant factors in how students participate in group discussions.

**Teachers' Monitoring of EFL Peer-Led Group Work**

Almost half of the work done in the classrooms required group leaders and secretaries to keep order. Teachers, however, did not usually brief group leaders and secretaries about their right roles, nor did they ensure that every student gets the opportunity to become group leaders and secretaries. Lack of oriented group leaders seemed to contribute to the disorder and disintegration of many groups since well-oriented group leaders could ensure order and keep the students on the tasks. Furthermore, students usually sat in rows, which contributed to group disorganization, communication inconvenience, and deafening classrooms noise. This type of seating arrangement appeared to hinder student interaction during peer-led group work. Students should sit in a circle and be grouped according to their ability to interact and assist one another comfortably (Farooq, 2015; Jeon & Hahn, 2006; McKay & Tom, 1999).

Besides, teachers did not actively monitor group tasks. Consequently, the tasks suffered from a lack of monitoring. Many students usually slipped away from the task and tacked in L1 because of a lack of monitoring. Few members frequently dominated others who persevered at group tasks. These findings are consistent with McDonough and Shaw's (2012) observations that few members dominated students in group tasks if the tasks were not monitored. Hence, the success of verbal participation in group work appears to be endangered due to this poor management (Ge & Land, 2003; Ur, 1996). Lack of effective organization and manipulation appeared to deny the learners a conducive atmosphere for completing group tasks successfully and thereby enhance their verbal participation.

## CONCLUSION

Students differ in their amount of verbal participation in peer-led EFL classes. Some are very quiet, while others are high participants and dominate others. Verbal participation is affected by a chain of factors, one leading to or affecting the other, instead of just one factor working alone. Therefore, no single factor predicted whether students would participate in PLTL groups.

Some factors appear more significant in making students silent and high participants. Personality traits such as shyness, fear of making a mistake, and feeling inferior to others were the significant factors determining verbal participation. Similarly, motivational factors were significant in making students active or low participants. Likewise, group situation factors were also significant in influencing student participation in group discussions. Thus, only the three factors were found significant of the twenty-two expected factors.

The group was the static that restricted the exposure of different language input and contexts for using what they learned. Not having a chance to be a group leader and a secretary for every student did not create opportunities to take responsibility for learning speaking skills. The seating arrangements also contributed to classroom noise since students in big rows had to speak loudly to be heard by their peers. Due to the absence of active monitoring, most groups usually drifted away from tasks and were involved in noisy chat in their mother tongue. Few group members dominated others who persevered at group tasks.

While conducting the activities, students should feel secure to take risks in Peer-led groups and realize that mistakes are not only okay but vital to the language learning process. Teachers should create opportunities for every student to be group leaders and secretaries and give brief orientation about their role to develop responsibility and commitment.

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