

Korean EFL Teachers' Beliefs of Cooperative Learning: With a Focus on Classroom Practice

Jung-Won Hahn (Mokpo National University)*

In-Jae Jeon (Mokpo National University)

Hahn, Jung-Won & Jeon, In-Jae. (2005). Korean EFL teachers' beliefs of cooperative learning: With a focus on classroom practice. *English Teaching*, 60(4), 87-108.

The purpose of this study is to provide some valuable insights for teachers and teacher trainers to construct and monitor effective cooperative learning (CL). For this purpose, Korean EFL teachers' beliefs of CL implementation were explored with a focus on classroom practice. The data for this study were collected through questionnaires from a total of 247 teachers at 13 elementary and 40 secondary schools in Jeollanamdo and Gwangju, Korea. The survey was conducted from May to July of 2005 academic year, and the data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The overall findings of the survey showed that the majority of respondents had a higher-level of understanding about CL's key concepts regardless of teaching levels or experiences, but that there existed some mixed responses concerning its classroom practice. Additionally, despite several educational benefits of adopting CL as an instructional method, quite a few teachers were revealed to avoid using CL techniques chiefly because they were not adequately prepared for using CL and therefore concerned over facing some disciplinary problems. To conclude, it is suggested that teachers have some positive views of implementing CL in terms of its beneficial traits and should be properly trained through teacher education programs, thus acquiring the knowledge necessary to use various CL techniques.

I. INTRODUCTION

With much emphasis on learners' communicative performance in second language learning over the last decade, cooperative learning (CL) as an instructional method has been increasingly focused on by ESL/EFL teachers because its basic principles fit well into the participatory learning environment to promote learners' actual language use. Unlike the

* co-authors

traditional classroom where students usually work individually or competitively under teacher-fronted instruction, CL classroom is characterized by student-centered learning, thus providing opportunities for learners to develop and improve academic performance in terms of comprehension, critical thinking, positive motivation, and social interaction (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Onwuegbuzie, 2001; Slavin, 2000; Woolfolk, 2001). In relation to second language acquisition (SLA), many researchers indicate several benefits of CL: increased learner talk, a more relaxed classroom atmosphere, more negotiation of meaning, a greater amount of comprehensible input, and greater motivation for learning (Cohen, Lotan, & Abram, 2002; Gabriele & Montecinos, 2001; Kagan, 1994; Liang, Mohan, & Early, 1998; Richards & Renandya, 2002). Thus, CL as an instructional model has been widely and enthusiastically adopted at all levels of education among teachers who are aware of its positive traits.

In Korea where the national curriculum controls the instructional procedure and the contents of general education in elementary and secondary schools (Kyung-eun Yoon, 2004), it is only natural that EFL education be influenced by the aspects of the national curriculum. For example, since the introduction of the 7th national curriculum for English in 2001 academic year, which is reportedly known to pursue the basic philosophy of learner-centered and activity-based approaches, group work, which is generally accepted as one of CL techniques, has been widely welcomed by educators. The fundamental characteristics of group work are that it engages learners actively in learning, allowing them to be less reliant on the teacher and more reliant on their own ability both as individuals and as members of a group, to think creatively, and to seek information from sources (Francesca, 2004). Given the fact that language acquisition is determined by the complex interactions of a number of critical input, output, and context variables, CL has a dramatic positive impact on these variables (Kagan, 1994). It implies that CL provides learners with natural sources of redundant communication as a comprehensible input, ideal situations for communicative output, and supportive context allowing much greater opportunities for language use.

Despite its pedagogical benefits mentioned above, CL in itself does not necessarily guarantee its successful implementation unless the teacher as a communicator and facilitator understands how CL actually works in classroom practice. It suggests that CL is more than just putting learners into groups and giving them something to do. More importantly, the teacher, who wants to try implementing CL successfully, is required to have sufficient knowledge about CL perspectives or techniques related to its plan and procedure, so that individual learners can be exposed to active participation of all group members and meaningful use of the target language. In light of this, this study aims to explore teachers' beliefs of CL implementation based on investigating Korean EFL teachers' understandings of CL concepts, teachers' positions on CL implementation, and

reasons teachers choose or avoid implementing CL in their classroom. It will provide an insight for teachers to design and implement any real communicative activities, which are critically important for EFL learners to experience meaningful language use. It will also contribute to facilitating teachers' practical use of CL techniques, thereby improving the learners' communicative abilities.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. CL as an Instructional Method

CL is not a new concept or idea in that it can be traced back as far as the early 1900s, when the history of its theory and research actually began, and that two major pedagogical perspectives including cognitive development¹ and social interdependence² have fueled its theoretical foundation to this day (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Slavin, 2000). A brief review of literature related to CL shows that there have been plenty of theoretical research and practical studies ranging from its basic principles to various teaching practices in terms of the effectiveness of CL implementation in different settings (Cohen, 1994; Gabriele & Montecinos, 2001; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991; Slavin, 1995). The overall findings of these studies indicate that, when compared to other instructional approaches, CL has much more educational benefits in both cognitive and affective domain. In the cognitive perspective, for example, CL is believed to promote higher-level reasoning, retention, and transfer of learning. For many of the affective traits, CL is considered to enhance positive learning attitude, self-esteem, social support, friendships, and many other intrinsic motivations. It suggests that CL can be incorporated into the conceptual framework of language teaching, which concerns an instructional use of group activities so that learners work together to maximize their own and each other's learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998). Furthermore, group activities are the major mode of learning and are part of a comprehensive theory and system for the use of group work in CL instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). As for the collaborative feature of CL instruction, Francesca (2004) indicates that group work should be a collaborative exercise, in which learners work together to achieve a common goal and interact with one another drawing on one another's

¹ The cognitive developmental perspective is grounded in the fact that when individuals work together, sociocognitive conflict occurs and creates cognitive disequilibrium that stimulates reasoning (for reviews, see Jean Piaget, 1926; Lev Vygotsky, 1978).

² The social interdependence perspective presupposes that cooperation results in promotive interaction as group members encourage and ease each other's efforts to learn (for reviews, see Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998).

knowledge and skills. Thus, it would seem that teachers who want to seek a highly interactive learning environment could positively consider the use of CL as an instructional method in language classroom. CL can also be embraced as an extension of the principles of communicative language teaching and therefore used in collaboration with other current communicative approaches including content-based instruction and task-based language teaching, both of which have formed a mainstream since the advent of communicative methodologies in the 1980s.

Despite widespread use and many benefits resulting from the adoption of CL instruction, it is true that there are some obstacles that teachers face in using CL techniques. First of all, one of the biggest difficulties involves teachers' lack of practical understanding of CL concepts (McManus & Gettinger, 1996), which in turn negatively affects learners' activities. Other difficulties may regard large classes and insufficient face-to-face class time (Peek, Winking, & Peek, 1995). In addition, teachers may be reluctant to use CL techniques because they have some fear of creating too many disciplinary problems: difficulty in assessing students' performance, high noise level, taking too much time on tasks, students of different language proficiency levels, students tending to avoid tasks, and so on. In fact, many researchers have extensively explored possible solutions to these problems, yet many still remain as challenges.

2. Combining CL with Second Language Learning

With the increasing concern over communicative activities in the second language classroom since the 1980s, a great deal of work has gone into CL research and methodology in order to develop some efficient techniques and provide students with real opportunities to use the target language in meaningful situations. Here, four considerations of CL implementation, which include the basic principles of group-based learning, several major activity types, learner and teacher roles, and instructional materials, will be briefly reviewed with reference to combining CL with second language learning.

Although different researchers have taken different CL principles to be central, Kagan's (1994) basic principles of group-based learning, which include positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal participation, and simultaneous interaction, are adopted in this article. Briefly, *positive interdependence* means that students help one another in working together to accomplish a learning task based on the belief that no one can go it alone. *Individual accountability* refers to the environment in which students realize that the group's success depends on the individual learning of all group members, thus feeling they are all responsible to understand the information or questions posed by the teacher. *Equal participation* is closely related to the kind of instructional strategy in which all students are included in the interactive response to the teacher's questions. *Simultaneous interaction* is

considered to create a participatory culture in which students in each group have the opportunity to respond individually at the same time, thus resulting in increasing the amount of student talking. For the successful implementation of CL, Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1994) maintain that the four principles of group-based learning mentioned above should be structured in CL instruction, and Kagan and High (2002) indicate that the principles play a key role in making a shift from lecture-oriented to activity-based language classroom.

In an effort to seek efficient activity types of CL, Coelho (1992) describes three major kinds of CL tasks such as team practice, jigsaw activities, and cooperative projects. *Team practice*, in which all students work on the common input, is to make sure that everyone in the group knows the answer to a question and therefore is believed to be good for review and for practice tests. *Jigsaw*, on the other hand, refers to a kind of information-gap activity where each group member receives a differentiated but predetermined input, thus allowing for both homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping in terms of language proficiency. *Cooperative projects* are characterized with so-called discovery learning where topics may be different for each group according to students' interests. Students are expected to research the information using a variety of resources such as library reference, interview, and visual media in order to perform a group presentation. For more specific types of CL activities, Olsen and Kagan (1992) suggest the following examples³: three-step interview, roundtable, think-pair-share, solve-pair-share, and numbered heads.

For learner and teacher roles in CL implementation, Richards and Rodgers (2001) suggest that students learn teamwork skills so that they can be directors of their own learning and the teacher carries out the role of a facilitator and monitor, moving around the class helping students and groups as needs arise. More importantly, in order to encourage students' direct and active involvement, the teacher has to create a highly structured and well-organized classroom environment, setting goals, planning and structuring tasks, establishing the physical arrangement of the classroom, assigning students to groups and roles, and selecting materials (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994). In other words, for any real communicative language activity to succeed, the teacher is required to carry out several roles such as provider, communicator, collaborator, and facilitator, which are quite different from traditional language teacher (Hae-Ri Kim, 2004).

Finally, instructional materials are believed to occupy an important part in implementing CL in language classroom. Materials may be specially designed for a particular kind of activity, modified from existing materials, or borrowed from other disciplines (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Whatever kinds of materials they may be, the teacher is required to consider them carefully with reference to the difficulty level, the aspects of promoting

³ For reviews of the examples, see Olsen and Kagan (1992, p. 88).

interaction, and time given for task.

3. Previous Findings of CL Implementation

A review of literature related to CL shows that much research has been placed on investigating the relationship between CL and learners' academic performance and that the findings are divided into two facets including either a positive or negative perspective. In the positive view, Johnson, Johnson, and Scott (1978) found that students working cooperatively completed tasks more accurately and quickly than individuals working alone. Spurlin, Dansereau, Larson, and Brooks (1984) discovered that CL groups used higher level thinking strategies more often to achieve greater learning than those working individually or competitively. In supporting the effectiveness of a group approach to learning, Johnson and Johnson (1994) argued that the majority of current research indicated that group work strategies promoted greater academic success through strengthened social interaction because students were placed in situations where they must cooperate with one another. In a more recent study, Singhanayok and Hooper (1998) concluded that CL groups spent more time engaged in the task, checked their concept learning more often and scored higher on post tests than students working individually.

In contrast, there are researchers that have not found CL to be as beneficial as many have reported. In the survey of students' perceptions of CL upon completion of a group project, Phipps, Phipps, Kask and Higgins (2001) found several instances in which students did not favor CL because of increased time on task and too much depending on others for test grades. For CL environment, Onwuegbuzie (2001) indicated that peer-oriented students, who exert less effort and depend upon the more competent colleagues for a good group project grade, were less motivated and responsible, thus having a negative impact on higher achieving students. Burdett (2003) indicated that there were several reasons group work could result in less than positive participation and outcomes for the participants. Among them were concerns about assessment of group tasks, competition for high grades, and coping with the complexities of group dynamics.

As mentioned above, the overall findings of many studies indicate that there exist mixed findings regarding the effectiveness of CL in classroom practice. In short, while some researchers found that CL led to more positive attitudes, promoted greater self-esteem, and enhanced academic achievement, others discovered that for many high achieving learners, CL was often perceived as ineffective in terms of motivation and study time.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

1. The Research Questions

In an attempt to investigate Korean EFL teachers' perceptions of CL, the present study examined three related factors including teachers' understandings of CL concepts, teachers' positions on CL implementation, and practical reasons teachers choose or avoid implementing CL in classroom. In light of the goal of the study, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the teachers' practical understandings of CL concepts?
2. What are the aspects of teachers' views of CL implementation?
3. What are the benefits teachers see in using CL techniques?
4. What are the practical reasons teachers choose or avoid implementing CL?

2. The Survey Instrument

The survey instrument, a three-paged questionnaire, was devised to measure Korean EFL teachers' perceptions of CL implementation in classroom settings. The questionnaire, composed of fifteen Likert-type items and two open-ended items, was divided into four sections. The first section contained demographic questions to gain information about the teacher's teaching level, gender, age, and teaching experience. The second section (items 1-5) dealt with some basic principles of CL indicated in Kagan's (1994) research in order to review teachers' practical understandings of CL conception. The third section (items 6-15), related to teachers' positions on CL implementation, was partly adapted and modified from the cooperative learning implementation questionnaire (CLIQ)⁴ framework. Out of ten statements in the third section, the first five statements (items 6-10) addressed teacher-related and the rest (items 11-15) concerned student-related ones. In the second and third section, teachers were asked to answer each question using five-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Finally, in the fourth section, teachers were asked to rate their own reasons they choose or avoid implementing CL with reference to a total of fourteen qualitative statements.

⁴ CLIQ was designed and conducted by the Center for the Study of Learning and Performance (CSLP) at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. One of the goals of CSLP is to study and promote effective classroom processes through an active association with schools, administrators, and teachers.

3. The Participants

As Table 1 shows, the population for this study was Korean EFL teachers working in elementary and secondary settings. From the 53 different schools, a total of 247 teachers participated in this survey. Specifically, the 247 participants were composed of 68 elementary school teachers (27.5%), 96 middle school teachers (38.9%), and 83 high school teachers (33.6%). Since the elementary school teachers were chosen from more than the third grade of the national curriculum for English, all of the participants were considered to have had common experience of teaching English as a foreign language. 154 teachers were female (62.3%) and 37.7% were male. The teachers ranged in age from their twenties to fifties and 66.8% of them were in their thirties and forties. The number of years they had taught English varied ranging from less than 5 years (18.2%), 6 to 10 years (25.5%), 11 to 19 years (39.7%), and more than 20 years (16.6%).

TABLE 1
Participants' Demographic Information (N=247)

Gender	N (%)	Teaching level	N (%)	Age	N (%)	Total number of years teaching English	N (%)
Male	93(37.7)	Elementary	68(27.5)	20-29	51(20.6)	Less than 5 years	45(18.2)
Female	154(62.3)	Middle	96(38.9)	30-39	86(34.8)	6 to 10 years	63(25.5)
		High	83(33.6)	40-49	79(32.0)	11 to 19 years	98(39.7)
				50+	31(12.6)	More than 20 years	41(16.6)

4. Data Collection and Analysis

Two different methods were used for data collection. First, while visiting 13 different elementary schools for six weeks in May and June of 2005, the researcher contacted 78 elementary school teachers who have taught English, explained the pedagogical goal of the survey, and asked them to answer the questionnaire. A total of 68 teachers completed the survey giving a response rate of 87.2%. Next, written questionnaires were mailed to 250 middle and 250 high school English teachers. Out of 500 questionnaires, a total of 179 were returned, giving a response rate of 35.8%. The large gap of response rates between elementary and secondary teachers may result from the two different approaches for gathering data, namely visiting or mailing.

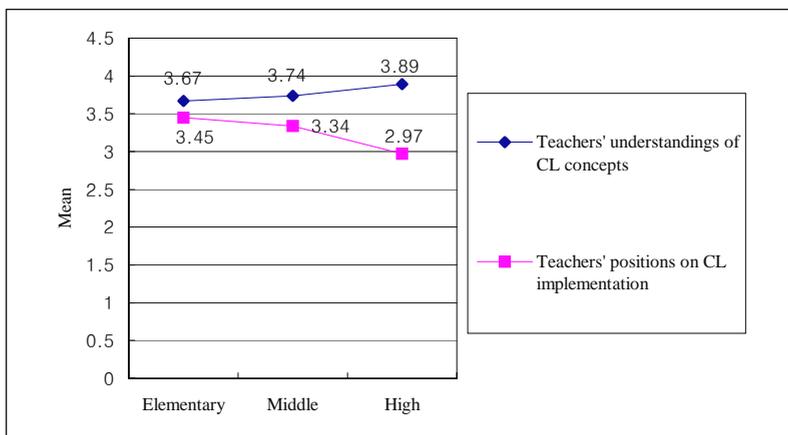
The data analysis process consisted of two parts, Likert-type and open-ended item analysis. The Likert-type items, which were designed to identify teachers' understandings of CL conception and teachers' positions on CL implementation, were given a score in numbers (i.e., strongly disagree =1, disagree =2, neutral=3, agree=4, and strongly agree=5).

Open-ended items, which were constructed to capture some reasons teacher choose to implement CL or avoid implementing CL in their classrooms, were first categorized and then coded by the researcher in terms of the teachers' responding rates. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 11.0 for Windows package was used to analyze the data.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results through the data analysis revealed that there exists some meaningful difference between the level of teachers' understandings about CL concepts and the teachers' positions about CL implementation in classroom practice. Figure 1, for one thing, shows a noticeable comparison of mean score in relation to teachers' perceptions of CL. More specifically, for the conception of CL, high school teachers (M=3.89) had a better understanding than elementary (M=3.67) and middle school teachers (M=3.74). In the view of CL implementation, in contrast, elementary school teachers (M=3.45) possessed more positive positions compared to those of middle (M=3.34) and high school teachers (M=2.97). In relation to the difference between teachers' understandings of CL concepts and positions on CL implementation, while elementary school teachers revealed an extremely small gap between the two, high school teachers showed a comparatively large one. Thus, this result has an interesting implication concerning CL's classroom practice: the higher level teachers indicated a larger discrepancy between their conception of CL and views on CL implementation.

FIGURE 1
Mean Score Differences between Teachers' Understandings and Positions on CL



1. Teachers' Understandings of CL Concepts

Table 2 presents a percentage comparison of teacher responses to each of the five items on the concepts of CL. For the convenience of comparison, the five-point scale responses were merged into a three-point simplified scale (strongly disagree/disagree, neutral, agree/strongly agree). In response to item 1, which asked for a definition of CL, the vast majority (ET 77.7%, MT 79.5%, HT 74.1%) of respondents understood CL as a kind of learning in which students work in groups toward a common academic goal. This definition matches the core notions of CL perspectives discussed in the section of theoretical backgrounds. In response to item 2, most teachers (ET 62.4%, MT 61.8%, HT 67.3%) reported that they believed the relevance between cooperative learning and communicative language teaching (CLT). This partially indicates that teachers approving of the theory behind CLT are likely to adopt the basic nature of CL while implementing the communicative approach in their own language classrooms. The findings of item 3, related to CL's instructional approach, suggest that a clear majority (ET 77.9%, MT 75.4%, HT 80.0%) of teachers had a conviction of student-centeredness. Item 4 explored teachers' beliefs of peer interaction and social skills located in the heart of CL principles. The result showed most teachers' strong endorsement (ET 75.7%, MT 69.7%, HT 77.8%) of CL's promoting peer interaction and enhancing social skills. The findings of item 5 revealed that the notion of CL materials is widely recognized among teachers (ET 77.7%, MT 79.5%,

TABLE 2
Teachers' Understandings of CL Concepts (N=247)

Questionnaire Items		Strongly disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	M	SD
		/ Disagree (%)	(%)	/ Agree (%)		
1. CL refers to a kind of learning in which students work in groups toward a common academic goal.	ET	2.8	19.5	77.7	3.80	0.35
	MT	3.3	17.2	79.5	3.92	0.23
	HT	5.5	20.4	74.1	3.89	0.31
2. CL is consistent with the principles of communicative language teaching.	ET	8.2	29.4	62.4	3.52	0.53
	MT	6.7	31.5	61.8	3.46	0.57
	HT	2.8	29.9	67.3	3.78	0.55
3. CL is based on the student-centered instructional approach.	ET	1.6	20.5	77.9	3.79	0.33
	MT	2.9	21.7	75.4	3.75	0.31
	HT	1.4	18.6	80.0	3.81	0.34
4. CL promotes peer interaction and enhances social skills.	ET	1.8	22.5	75.7	3.64	0.45
	MT	3.1	27.2	69.7	3.73	0.52
	HT	2.3	19.9	77.8	3.93	0.56
5. CL materials should be meaningful and purposeful based on real-world context.	ET	4.5	17.8	77.7	3.61	0.69
	MT	6.1	14.4	79.5	3.87	0.63
	HT	3.9	12.8	83.3	3.95	0.68

Note: ET=elementary school teacher, MT=middle school teacher, HT=high school teacher, M=mean score, SD=standard deviation

HT 83.3%) as the necessity of authentic materials based on meaningful and purposeful context of the real world situation.

The overall findings of the five items generally indicate a clear understanding of what CL is and a positive commitment of CL's key concepts. More importantly, it is believed that teachers, regardless of teaching levels and experiences, convey a considerable amount of practical understanding about CL concepts.

2. Teachers' Positions on CL Implementation

Table 3 presents the aspects of teachers' positions toward implementing CL in their language classrooms. First, in response to item 6, less than half of the teachers (ET 46.4%, MT 42.4%, HT 40.3%) expressed having much interest in implementing CL in the classroom. This indicates that teachers' understandings of CL concepts do not necessarily lead to the actual implementation of CL. For item 7 and 8, related to teachers' beliefs of CL instruction, while more than half of the elementary school teachers responded that CL is consistent with their teaching philosophy (51.2%) and therefore a valuable instructional approach (53.0%), the middle and high school teachers showed the slightly lower responses (45.2/46.3%, 42.4/41.0% respectively). The finding of item 9, which explored teachers' preference of the CL method over traditional approaches, revealed a conspicuous discrepancy according to teaching level: elementary school teachers preferred CL method the most (59.7%), middle school teachers (48.3%) the next, and high school teachers (36.9%) the least. This could result from the fact that group work and discussion learning are actively encouraged in elementary school compared to that of middle and high school where lecture-oriented techniques are mainly streamed. For item 10, asking teachers' psychological burden accompanied with implementing CL, most teachers (ET 66.4%, MT 67.8%, HT 62.4%) answered that implementing CL required a great deal of effort. This suggests that teachers are forced to devote a considerable amount of time and consideration in order to change from the traditional passive lecture to the more active group learning so that students can be exposed to a collaborative learning environment. As mentioned earlier, item 6 through 10 belong to teacher-related statements. Their overall findings indicated that despite the comparatively higher-level understanding of CL concepts, teachers actually avoided using CL techniques in classroom practice. This may result from the fact that most teachers still use the traditional lecture-oriented methods, which they are accustomed to, and more than that, they have the psychological pressure of facing some disciplinary problems.

Now let's turn to the student-related statements. The findings of item 11, 12, and 13 indicated that a clear majority of elementary school teachers (70% or so) and more than half the middle and high school teachers (55% or so) had positive perceptions of CL

instruction as a motivator for language learning. Given the importance of the positive interdependence, which is believed to encourage individual accountability in group work, it is required that teachers consider the instructional use of CL so that learners can promote friendship, obtain a deeper understanding of the material through peer interaction, and foster positive student attitudes towards language learning. It is noticeable that the findings of item 11 through 13 are consistent with Felder and Brent's (1996) findings, which mentioned that CL approach enhances motivation to learn, retention of knowledge, depth of understanding, and appreciation of the subject being taught. The results of item 14, which explored teachers' perceptions of the relevance between CL instruction and students' academic progress, showed some mixed responses according to teaching level: 55.9% of

TABLE 3
Teachers' Positions on CL Implementation (N=247)

Questionnaire Items		Strongly disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	M	SD
		/ Disagree (%)	(%)	/ Agree (%)		
6. I have much interest in implementing CL in the classroom.	ET	23.2	30.4	46.4	3.38	1.03
	MT	17.8	39.8	42.4	3.25	0.85
	HT	15.5	44.2	40.3	3.32	0.93
7. CL is consistent with my teaching philosophy.	ET	17.4	31.4	51.2	3.44	1.28
	MT	20.7	34.1	45.2	3.27	0.74
	HT	18.5	39.1	42.4	3.14	0.58
8. CL is a valuable instructional approach.	ET	20.3	26.7	53.0	3.53	1.16
	MT	17.5	36.2	46.3	3.41	1.25
	HT	31.2	27.8	41.0	2.98	0.85
9. I prefer CL method to using traditional approaches.	ET	11.4	28.9	59.7	3.58	0.64
	MT	15.1	36.6	48.3	3.42	0.75
	HT	20.4	42.7	36.9	3.15	0.79
10. Implementing CL requires a great deal of effort.	ET	8.7	24.9	66.4	3.64	1.23
	MT	12.5	19.7	67.8	3.67	0.98
	HT	9.8	27.8	62.4	3.51	1.14
11. Using CL promotes friendship among students.	ET	5.3	25.6	69.1	3.61	0.87
	MT	13.3	27.9	58.8	3.43	0.76
	HT	9.3	33.2	57.5	3.16	1.02
12. Peer interaction helps students obtain a deeper understanding of the material.	ET	7.8	21.4	70.8	3.78	0.83
	MT	21.3	23.6	55.1	3.36	0.92
	HT	19.4	28.8	51.8	3.35	0.89
13. Using CL fosters positive student attitudes towards learning.	ET	9.3	18.5	72.2	3.72	0.69
	MT	13.3	28.4	58.3	3.39	0.74
	HT	18.2	27.1	54.7	3.27	0.86
14. Engaging in CL promotes students' academic progress.	ET	10.3	33.8	55.9	3.43	0.91
	MT	18.6	40.1	41.3	3.34	0.88
	HT	25.9	39.8	34.3	2.81	1.05
15. It is possible to evaluate fairly when using CL.	ET	34.3	38.4	27.3	2.83	0.46
	MT	38.1	30.7	31.2	2.74	0.52
	HT	42.7	34.3	23.0	2.69	0.38

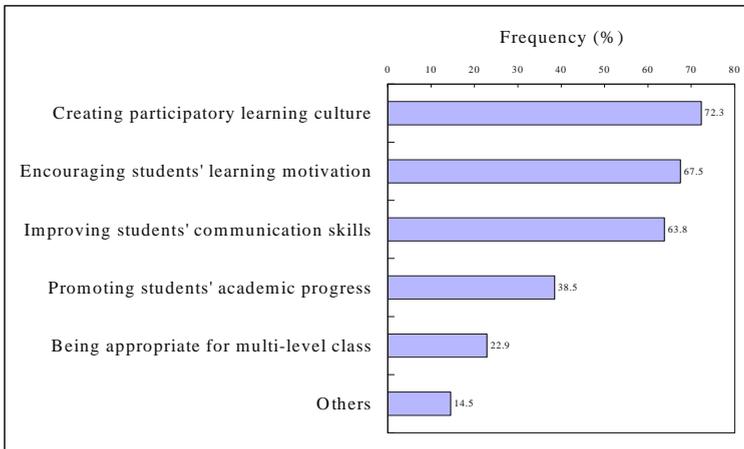
Note: ET=elementary school teacher, MT=middle school teacher, HT=high school teacher, M=mean score, SD=standard deviation

ET, 41.3% of MT, and 34.3% of HT believed that engaging in CL promotes students' academic progress. For item 15, while only a small number of teachers (ET 27.3%, MT 31.2%, HT 23.0%) showed a positive response to the possibility of CL as a proper evaluation tool, most teachers revealed neutral or rather negative reactions.

3. Reasons Teachers Use CL Techniques

In response to whether or not teachers implement CL methods in the classroom, while 83 teachers (33.6%) among a total of 247 respondents answered they were currently using CL methods or techniques in their classrooms, 164 teachers (66.4%) responded negatively. Figure 2 presents the aspects of teachers' responses to the open-ended question asking them to identify some reasons why they decide to use CL techniques in classroom practice. Data analysis revealed that the three major reasons teachers used CL methods concerned creating participatory learning culture (72.3%), encouraging students' learning motivation (67.5%), and improving students' communication skills (63.8%). In contrast, a comparatively low portion of response was allotted to promoting students' academic progress (38.5%) and appropriateness to multi-level class (22.9%). Others (14.5%) contained ease in implementing pair or group work, performing activity-based tasks, controlling collaborative work, and so on.

FIGURE 2
Reasons Teachers Use CL Techniques in Classroom (N=83)



In response to the specific reasons teachers use CL techniques in the classroom, there were some meaningful differences according to the teaching level. While 71.4% of elementary school teachers, for instance, valued creating participatory learning culture and

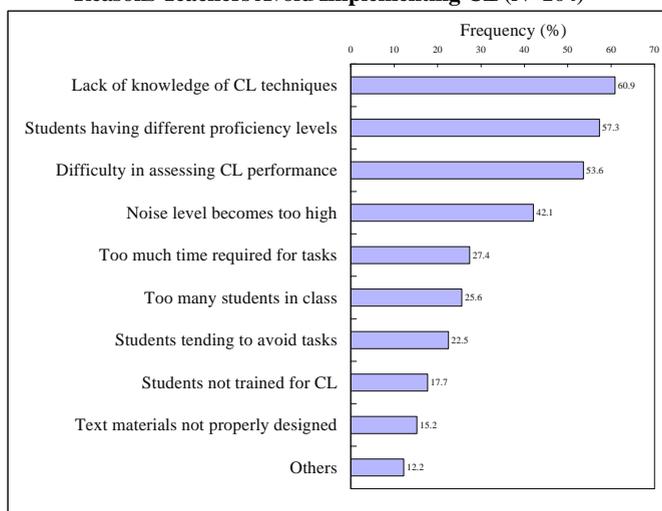
encouraging students' learning motivation most, 73.5% of middle and high school teachers placed an importance on improving students' communication skills. This partially implies that CL as an instructional method is currently preferred with its collaborative basis in elementary settings and its communicative traits in secondary settings. For promoting students' academic progress, on the other hand, middle and high school teachers (33.6% & 28.4%, respectively) had a weaker commitment than elementary school teachers (53.9%).

The overall findings mentioned above indicate that teachers who decide to implement CL techniques have a clear tendency to place a higher priority on a collaborative learning environment and learning motivation in terms of improving students' communication skills rather than students' academic achievement and students' different levels of language proficiency. It is noticeable that some of the results may be compatible with the previous research findings concerning CL benefits such as greater motivation for learning, a more relaxed classroom atmosphere, and increased social skills.

4. Reasons Teachers Avoid Implementing CL

Figure 3 presents the aspects of teachers' responses to the open-ended question that asked teachers to pick out their own reasons they avoid implementing CL in their classrooms. Data analysis showed that lack of knowledge of CL techniques (60.9%), among a total of nine plausible reasons, was the biggest reason teachers are reluctant to implement CL. Students having different proficiency levels (57.3%) was the second major reason, followed by difficulty in assessing students' performance (53.6%) and finally, the

FIGURE 3
Reasons Teachers Avoid Implementing CL (N=164)



problem of noise level becoming too high (42.1%). In addition, it revealed that teachers had some fear in implementing CL because of the amount of time required for tasks (27.4%), too many students in class (25.6%), and students tending to avoid tasks (22.5%). Students not trained for CL and text materials not properly designed were minor reasons (17.7% & 15.2%, respectively). Others (12.2%) contained holding bright students back, poor physical set-up of classroom, taking too much preparation time, ineffectiveness in grammar instruction, and so on.

In response to the specific reasons teachers avoid implementing CL techniques in the classroom, it is noticeable that there existed a clear feature regardless of teaching level: more than half of the respondents in each teaching level (64.5% of ET, 61.4% of MT, and 56.8% of HT) believed that they had little knowledge of CL techniques and thus feeling some fear of encountering many disciplinary problems in their classroom.

These findings indicate that despite the higher-level understanding of CL conceptions or principles, many teachers have some fear of being confronted with problems when using CL techniques, thus resulting in a negative attitude toward implementing CL. Yet many problems that teachers face in implementing CL can be overcome by teachers' making efforts to understand CL's positive traits and attempting to use different techniques in different settings. For example, in a multi-level classroom where students have different proficiency levels, it is suggested that the teacher consider providing different leveled tasks for different leveled groups so that each student could become familiar with his or her own role and thus have confidence to produce specific outcomes. More specifically, when it comes to introducing CL to low proficiency students, the teacher needs to provide students with ample preparation time and language support such as model dialogues, vocabulary work, and thorough explanation of given materials. In fact, lower achievers in mixed proficiency groups can benefit both academically and socially from collaborative interaction with high achievers if teachers encourage the high achievers to get involved in peer motivation. Another big obstacle perceived by teachers in implementing CL lies in the difficulty in evaluating students' performance. Given the fact that the participation of students in CL is quite different from one another, awarding equal grades to all members of the group may serve as one of the crucial weaknesses for ensuring a level of fairness in assessment, particularly in high achieving student groups. In solution to this problem, Lourdasamy and Divaharan (2002) suggest that peer assessment, which includes both inter-group and intra-group evaluations, should be considered as a means to enhancing the participation and quality of involvement in cooperative work. While the inter-group assessment represents using the group's products as part of the course evaluation and thus giving equal grades to all members of the group, the intra-group assessment involves individual assessment. As a result, a carefully designed peer assessment is believed to develop students' communication skills with their group members by providing support as

well as challenging their group members to realize their potential (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

Unlike the traditional classroom where the teacher firmly controls the noise level and time spent on tasks, it is true that CL classroom has a tendency to incur much noise and take more time for tasks on account of its student-centered atmosphere. However, the teacher is required to understand that students need time to learn to collaborate and become familiar with various CL activities. Once students get used to the collaborative skills and structured activities, they become more successful and enthusiastic about performing task, thus resulting in a more controlled level of noise and a reduction in the amount of time spent on tasks. If the noise level becomes too high in the classroom, the teacher can either nominate a student in each group as the noise monitor or use signals such as stoplight cards⁵ (Olsen & Kagan, 1992).

For large classes, which have often been considered to bring about some disciplinary problems in CL work, the teacher needs to take group formation and presentation procedure into consideration. For example, Johnson and Johnson (1994) suggest that students be divided into base groups, which stay together for a whole term or year, so that students do not feel lost in a large class. Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1994) assert that base group members are expected to foster friendship by meeting regularly to see how each other is doing in school and thus facilitating participation in temporary group working. Kagan (1994) also proposes that the teacher divide the whole class in half or thirds for activities such as jigsaw activities and team practice, encouraging all students to feel the responsibility to participate in group activities. In order to save presentation time in a large class, the teacher may allow representatives of each group to present their outcomes, instead of making each student come to the front of the class to do a presentation. Basically CL techniques can be used the same way in large classes as in small ones except that large classes need more preparation.

For students not trained for CL, one of the biggest reasons they avoid participating in group work may be related to a lack of confidence in performing tasks. This is why it is necessary for the teacher to help students to build confidence by encouraging students to learn how to share group tasks and use collaborative skills in group activities. Once students realize that learning in group is only one of several ways of learning in the class, they will be able to overcome group work challenges such as fear of assessment, competition, and the complexities of group dynamics (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Thus, the improved confidence of less assertive students may lead to more equal participation and sharing of the workload (Burdett, 2003).

⁵ For example, a green card goes on a group's desk if they are working together quietly. A yellow card indicates they need to quiet down a bit. When a red card is put on their desk, the group should become completely silent, and all should silently count to ten before starting to work again.

Finally, poor organization or design of text materials was one of the minor reasons teachers do not use CL techniques in their classrooms. This partially indicates that the current EFL textbooks of elementary and secondary school settings, all of which allegedly follow the principles of the communicative theory of language learning, properly reflect the so-called activity-oriented model which chiefly concerns collaborative skills and social interaction. In short, the overall results reveal that teachers who do not implement CL have an extremely small amount of knowledge of CL methods or techniques and thus feel CL creates quite a few disciplinary problems in classroom practice. Yet it is true that these problems can be successfully reduced with teachers' increasing positive attitudes toward CL as an instructional method with educational benefits. In light of this, it is first of all necessary for teachers to have the opportunity to learn both the advantages and disadvantages of CL methodologies ranging from basic techniques to various activity types.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In the Korean EFL context, in which national curricular have recently developed communicative objectives for language learners, the focus of language teaching has been placed on improving students' communicative performance. Furthermore, many teachers have had an increasing amount of interest in using CL as an instructional method chiefly because they believe CL has quite a few benefits for increasing students' communication skills. Yet teachers' perspectives regarding CL principles and implementation, which are deeply related to successful classroom practice, have not been sufficiently examined. In light of this, this study has explored Korean EFL teachers' beliefs of CL implementation with a focus on classroom practice in order to provide teachers and teacher trainers with some valuable insights in constructing and monitoring CL activities.

The overall findings of the study revealed that the majority of respondents had a higher-level of understanding about CL's central concepts regardless of teaching levels or experiences, but there existed some mixed responses concerning CL implementation in classroom practice. For example, while many teachers showed a positive view toward a participatory learning environment and increased motivation for learning, others revealed rather negative views regarding students' academic progress and the fairness of performance assessment. In addition, despite several benefits of adopting CL as an instructional method in the EFL classroom, quite a few teachers were revealed to avoid using CL techniques because they were concerned about facing such problems as different levels of student proficiency, difficulty in assessing student performance, a high noise level, too much time required for tasks, too many students in class, students tending to avoid tasks, text materials not properly designed, poor physical set-up of classroom, and so on.

The findings from the study also reveal three important implications for teachers and teacher trainers regarding CL as an instructional method. First, since teachers' views regarding instructional approach have a great impact on classroom practice, it is necessary for the teacher, as a practical controller and facilitator of students' activities in the classroom, to have a positive attitude toward CL in order for it to be successfully implemented. Second, given the research finding that teachers lack knowledge of CL methods, teachers should be given the opportunity to acquire knowledge about using various CL techniques related to planning, implementing, and assessing. To this end, it is suggested that teacher education programs, which aim at in-depth training about language teaching methodologies, should properly deal with both the strengths and weaknesses of CL as an instructional method ranging from basic principles to specific techniques. Third, when taking into account that one of the major reasons teachers avoid implementing CL was revealed to be their fear of being confronted with quite a few disciplinary problems, much consideration should be given to potential obstacles teachers may come across in a CL classroom. It is also required that teachers consider alternative solutions for classroom management such as base group formation, leveled tasks, and peer assessment based on their own reflective teaching experiences.

REFERENCES

- Burdett, J. (2003). Making groups work: University students' perceptions. *International Education Journal*, 4(3), 177-191.
- Center for the Study of Learning and Performance. (2004). *Cooperative learning implementation questionnaire*. Retrieved April 15, 2005, from the world wide web://doe.concordia.ca/cslp/Downloads/PDF/CLIQ.pdf
- Coelho, E. (1992). Jigsaw: Integrating language and content. In C. Kessler (Ed.), *Cooperative language learning: A teacher's resource book* (pp. 129-152). New York: Prentice Hall.
- Cohen, E. G. (1994). *Designing groupwork: Strategies for the heterogeneous classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cohen, E. G., Lotan, R. A., & Abram, P. L. (2002). Can groups learn? *Teachers College Record*, 104(6), 1045-1068.
- Felder, M., & Brent, R. (1996). Navigating the bumpy road to student-centered instruction. *College Teaching*, 44(2), 43-47.
- Francesca, B. (2004). Group work as a creative learning process: An example from a French classroom. *Journal for Language Teaching*, 38(1), 101-115.
- Gabriele, A. J., & Montecinos, C. (2001). Collaborating with a skilled peer: The influence

- of achievement goals and perceptions of partners' competence on the participation and learning of low-achieving students. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 69(2), 152-178.
- Johnson, D., & Johnson, R. (1994). *Learning together and alone: Cooperative, competitive and individualistic learning*. Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon.
- Johnson, D., Johnson, R., & Holubec, E. (1994). *Cooperative learning in the classroom*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Johnson, D., Johnson, R., & Holubec, E. (1998). *Cooperation in the classroom*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Johnson, D., Johnson, R., & Scott, L. (1978). The effects of cooperative and individual instruction on student attitudes and achievement. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 104, 207-216.
- Johnson, D., Johnson, R., & Smith, K. (1991). *Active learning: Cooperation in the college classroom*. Edina, MN: Interaction Book.
- Kagan, S. (1994). *Cooperative learning*. San Juan Capistrano, CA: Kagan Cooperative Learning.
- Kagan, S., & High, J. (2002). Kagan structures for English language learners. *ESL Magazine*, July/August, 10-12.
- Kim, Hae-Ri. (2004). Exploring the role of a teacher in a literature-based EFL classroom through communicative language teaching. *English Teaching*, 59(3), 29-52.
- Liang, X., Mohan, B. A., & Early, M. (1998). Issues of cooperative learning in ESL classes: A literature review. *TESL Canada Journal*, 15(2), 13-23.
- Lourdusamy, A., & Divaharan, S. (2002). An attempt to enhance the quality of cooperative learning through peer assessment. *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, 3(2), 72-83.
- McManus, S. M., & Gettinger, M. (1996). Teacher and student evaluations of cooperative learning and observed interactive behaviors. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 90(1), 13-22.
- Olsen, R., & Kagan, S. (1992). About cooperative learning. In C. Kessler (Ed.), *Cooperative language learning: A teacher's resource book* (pp. 75-98). New York: Prentice Hall.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2001). Relationship between peer orientation and achievement in cooperative learning-based research methodology courses. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94, 164-171.
- Peek, L. E., Winking, C., & Peek, G. S. (1995). Cooperative learning activities: Managerial accounting. *Issues in Accounting Education*, 10(1), 111-126.
- Phipps, M., Phipps, C., Kask, S., & Higgins, S. (2001). University students' perceptions of cooperative learning: Implications for administrators and instructors. *The Journal of Experiential Education*, 24(1), 14-21.
- Piaget, J. (1926). *The language and thought of the child*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Reagan, T., & Osborn, T. (2002). *The foreign language educator in society: Toward a*

critical pedagogy. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Singhanayok, C., & Hooper, S. (1998). The effects of cooperative learning and learner control on students' achievement, option selections, and attitudes. *Educational Technology, Research and Development*, 46(2), 17-25.

Slavin, R. (1995). *Cooperative learning: Theory, research, and practice*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Slavin, R. (2000). *Educational psychology: theory and practice*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Spurlin, J., Dansereau, D., Larson, C., & Brooks, L. (1984). Cooperative learning strategies in processing descriptive text: Effects of role and activity level of the learner. *Cognition and Instruction*, 1(4), 451-463.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Williams, M., & Burden, R. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers: A social constructivist approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Woolfolk, A. (2001). *Educational psychology*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Yoon, Kyung-eun. (2004). CLT theories and practices in EFL curricula: A case study of Korea. *Asian EFL Journal*, 6(3), 1-16.

APPENDIX

Teacher Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to examine Korean EFL teachers' beliefs of cooperative learning with reference to classroom practice. Please answer all of the questions as best as you can. Your answers will be kept confidential. Thank you for your cooperation.

Section I. General and Demographic Information (please put √)

Teaching level	<input type="checkbox"/> elementary school	<input type="checkbox"/> middle school	<input type="checkbox"/> high school
Gender	<input type="checkbox"/> male	<input type="checkbox"/> female	
Age	<input type="checkbox"/> 20-29	<input type="checkbox"/> 30-39	<input type="checkbox"/> 40-49 <input type="checkbox"/> 50 +
Total number of years teaching English	<input type="checkbox"/> less than 5 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 6 to 10 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 11 to 19 years
	<input type="checkbox"/> more than 20 years		

Section II. Teachers' Understandings of CL Concepts

For each of the following statements, please answer by putting √ in a box, according to the following scale: SA (strongly agree), A (agree), U (undecided), D (disagree), SD (strongly disagree).

Questionnaire Items	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. CL refers to a kind of learning in which students work in groups toward a common academic goal.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

- | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2. CL is consistent with the principles of communicative language teaching. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. CL is based on the student-centered instructional approach. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. CL promotes peer interaction and enhances social skills. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. CL materials should be meaningful and purposeful based on the real-world context. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Section III. Teachers' Positions on CL Implementation

The following statements address teachers' positions on implementing CL in the classroom. Please answer by putting in a box that matches your opinion most, according to the following scale: SA (strongly agree), A (agree), U (Undecided), D (disagree), SD (strongly disagree).

Questionnaire Items	SA	A	U	D	SD
6. I have much interest in implementing CL in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. CL is consistent with my teaching philosophy.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8. CL is a valuable instructional approach.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9. I prefer using familiar teaching methods to trying new approaches.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10. Implementing CL requires a great deal of effort.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
11. Using CL promotes friendship among students.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
12. Peer interaction helps students obtain a deeper understanding of the material.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
13. Using CL fosters positive student attitudes towards learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
14. Engaging in CL interferes with students' academic progress.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
15. It is impossible to evaluate fairly when using CL.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Section IV. Reasons Teachers Choose or Avoid Implementing CL

Do you use cooperative learning (CL) in your teaching? YES NO

If yes, please put any reasons that you decide to implement CL.

- CL promotes students' academic progress.
- CL improves students' communication skills.
- CL encourages students' learning motivation.
- CL creates a participatory learning culture.
- CL is appropriate for multi-level class.

If you have other reasons, please write them down.

(_____)

If no, please put any reasons that you avoid implementing CL.

- Implementing CL takes too much time.
- Implementing CL creates too much noise in class.
- Students do not like participating in CL activities.
- Students have quite different levels of language proficiency.

- Students are not trained for this kind of learning.
- There are too many students in class to implement CL effectively.
- I have very little knowledge of CL methods or techniques.
- Text materials are not properly designed for implementing CL.
- It is very difficult for the teacher to assess students' CL performance.

If you have other reasons, please write them down.

(_____)

Applicable level: elementary and secondary education

Key words: cooperative learning (CL), teachers' beliefs of CL

Jung-Won Hahn

Dept. of English Language and Literature

Mokpo National University

534-729, Dorim-ri, Cheonggye-myeon, Muan-gun, Jeollanam-do, South Korea

Tel: (061) 450-2126 / C.P.: 016-9212-0941

Email: hahn2126@hanmail.net

In-Jae Jeon

Dept. of English Language and Literature

Mokpo National University

534-729, Dorim-ri, Cheonggye-myeon, Muan-gun, Jeollanam-do, South Korea

Tel: (061) 450-2120 / C.P.: 010-3161-8789

Email: jeon3294@hanmail.net

Received in August, 2005

Reviewed in September, 2005

Revised version received in November, 2005