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Strategies for Implementing Integrating Skills Approach in English Classroom at Mida-Kegn Secondary Schools: Teachers' Practice, Learners' Reaction and Challenges

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Abstract

The study assessed the strategies employed by EFL teachers to implement integrated skills approach in English classrooms at four Mida-kegn Secondary Schools. The study primarily focused on teachers' practice, learners' reactions, and the challenges faced during implementing an integrated skills approach in English classrooms. The study employed a descriptive survey research design to address these objectives. The researcher collected data from 41 English language teachers (100% response rate) and 252 students (20% response rate) who were selected using comprehensive and stratified sampling techniques, respectively. The data collection instruments include a questionnaire, lesson observation, and focus group discussion. The study analysed the data using descriptive (percentage, mean, weighted mean, rank order and standard deviation), and inferential (A Mann-Whitney U test) statistics. The result indicated that the teachers employed a more segregated teaching approach than an integrated skills approach. Constraints of material resources, teacher- and student-related challenges, and their perception of the demanding nature of the integrated skills approach significantly affected the implementation of the integrated skills approach. The study recommended that teachers enhance their skills to improve the implementation of an integrated language skills teaching approach. Learners should also play their roles in implementing an integrated skills teaching approach. Additionally, schools and relevant authorities should collaborate to facilitate the effective implementation of the integrated language skills teaching approach in the selected schools.

Key terms: CLT, Integrated, Language skills, Teaching, Strategies

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

In the history of language study, two contrasting approaches, segregated and integrated, have been influenced language teaching practices in the world. The Segregated Skills Approach (SSA), prevalent before 1970s, focused on teaching language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in isolation. This approach rooted in behavioral psychology and structural linguistics, utilized methods, such as grammar translation and the Audio-lingual Methods (Gautam, 2019; Pardede, 2019a). It aimed to help learners accumulate language knowledge, as an end, based on a “language-based approach” (Tajzad & Namagh, 2014). In the late 1970s, the Integrated Skills Approach (ISA) emerged as a response, aiming to develop students' communicative competence by integrating the four language skills. Modern pedagogy classifies these skills into receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) categories, reflecting their natural occurrence in real communication (Gautam, 2019; Hinkel, 2010; Pardede, 2019b). This ISA approach is grounded in cognitive psychology, critical pedagogy, and functional linguistics (Hinkel, 2010). The implementation of ISA can be realized through various flexible and innovative strategies that EFL teachers can employ.

Prompted by its advantages, Akram and Malik (2010) and Zuniga (2016) studied the transition from SSA to ISA, in language curriculum designing and teaching, addressing various issues and assumptions related to CLT approach. In this context, the design of the secondary school textbooks is believed to incorporate the principles of ISA, as EFL learners often lack exposure and opportunity to acquire in real life language (Christiana, 2019). Consequently, methods, such as content-based, task-based, text-based, technology-based, project-based, and competency-based approaches are found to be effective strategies for integrating receptive and productive skills in a language lesson (Amarech, 2019; Gautam, 2019; Motuma, 2022).

In the Ethiopian context, the Ethiopian educational and training policy (ETP) and the current educational reform emphasise the importance of CLT, which compresses the ISA. To this end, educational experts have frequently provided orientations and trainings on the CLT approach to secondary school teachers in Ethiopia (MOE, 2018). However, teachers in remote or peripheral areas particularly tend to continue using the SSA. Even, when some teachers attempt to implement some elements of CLT, students may not engage positively or willingly in these practices (Motuma & Chaka, 2023b). Thus, the current study is crucial for identifying support and newer strategies to enhance the implementation of ISA at the four government secondary schools: Balami, Kegni, Chukala-wenge, and Babo in the Mida-kegn District of the West Showa Zone, Oromia, Ethiopia. If not addressed, the continued use of a segregated skills teaching approach may lead to a frustrating teaching and learning environment at these remote areas.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Teachers' skill of teaching English effectively at secondary schools has been found deficient. In fact, it has been noted that the issue of quality of teaching English skills has become the concern of all stakeholders. EFL teachers at university level often complain about secondary school teachers, blaming them for their students' deficiency in English language skills. In turn, Secondary school teachers attribute these shortcomings to primary teachers, claiming that their students' English language is deficient (Motuma, 2022, 2023c). Similarly, the primary school teachers often point to their students' perceived inability to learn, suggesting that they are “uneducable”. This blame-shifting among teachers across different school levels indicates that teachers at all levels are not ready to be accountable within the education system. This cycle of blaming will continue if teachers are not willing to take responsibility for addressing this problem at the level they are teaching the language. This is because an output of one education system becomes an input of another (Motuma, 2018).

Furthermore, the situation in remote secondary schools appears to be worse than in the central and urban areas. Observations by the researcher indicate that students in these remote areas struggle with language tasks. Evidently, only four students passed grade 12 national examinations in the last three years; there was hardly a student who scored above 50% in English exam.

In addressing this problem of English language teaching, several studies indicate that the success of integrated skills teaching lies in students' ability to communicate effectively in English (Gautam, 2019; Hinkel, 2010; Pardede, 2019b). Pardede (2020) analysed teachers' lesson plans and test items to assess whether they employed integrated or segregated skills teaching. The study found that teachers prepared separate lesson plans for each skill and designed examinations focusing on individual skills, such as reading, grammar, vocabulary, or writing in that order. Gautam (2019) and Tajzad and Namaghi (2014) also identified that SSA is used predominantly and this contributed to a widening gap between classroom language and real-life language use. Hinkel (2010), who examined the current and historical perspectives on integrating the four language skills, concluded that teachers and students tend to prefer a segregated approach. A common finding among these studies is that the ISA encourages learners to use English language for real-life communication. This approach can enhance students' communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity, often referred to as the 4Cs. Unfortunately, this approach is less practiced particularly in the remote areas of Ethiopia. It is worth noting that, apart from Hinkel (2010), most of these studies primarily focused on conversation skills (listening and speaking). However, the current study focuses on the implementation of integrated skills teaching as well as grammar and vocabulary.

In Ethiopia, there is a dearth of empirical studies on the implementation of ISA, aside from these. These theses have examined teachers' lesson plans and assessments related to integrated skills teaching. For instance, Alemayehu (2008) studied the practice of integrated skills teaching at selected primary and secondary schools in Addis Ababa. Similarly, Amarech (2019) reviewed research works on the methods of ISA in actual classroom. Alemu (2015) assessed an integration of content-based instruction in teaching English Language skills at Haramaya University. The findings from these studies commonly indicate that teachers rarely implemented integrated language skills because their students' English was too poor to respond to the integrated skills approach. Consequently, they often resort to a SSA, focusing on teaching reading, grammar, or writing in isolation. Moreover, these studies primarily examined conversation skills rather than comprehensively analysing all four language skills, with grammar and vocabulary. This comprehensive analysis is the focus of the current research in the Meda-kegn district. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to investigate ways to enhance the implementation of ISA in English teaching at the selected secondary schools in West Showa Zone, Oromia. To address this important concern, the present study answers the following research questions:

1. To what extent do EFL teachers implement ISA in the peripheral secondary schools?
2. How do students respond to the implementation of ISA in the schools if teachers implement ISA?
3. What are the challenges that teachers face in the implementation of ISA at the schools?

2. Review of Related Literature

The ISA is an essential, dynamic, and effective language teaching practice in EFL contexts. Its primary goal is to develop students' overall communicative competence. The true success of ISA is realized when students can effectively communicate in the target language. To achieve this, ISA employs student-centered methods that integrate the four core language skills: receptive (listening and reading) or productive (speaking and writing) in real-life communication (Gautam, 2019; Hinkel, 2010; Pardede, 2019a). These skills can also be classified as spoken and written forms of communication (Rahman and Akhter, 2017). The ISA emphasizes

teaching these language skills in a holistic, interconnected manner, rather than in isolation. This approach better prepares students for real-world communication in the target language, as illustrated in Figure 1.

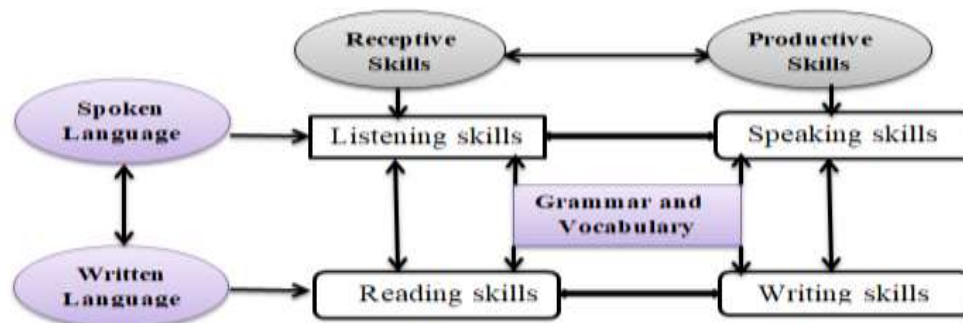


Figure 1: Matrix of integrated receptive and productive skills (Constructed by the researcher)

Figure 1 depicts the implementation of ISA functions as a “tapestry” from various inputs, such as teacher, learner, target language components, and contextual challenges. Teachers' practices include personality, teaching style, beliefs about language learning, and prior experience. Learners' characteristics involve personality, learning style, language learning beliefs, and prior experience. The target language components encompass the four core language skills, with grammar and vocabulary. The contextual challenges embrace available resources, institutional values, and cultural background to produce quality outputs. ISA aligns teaching and learning styles, motivates students, and creates optimal conditions for language acquisition, particularly for learners with limited exposure to real-life language use (Motuma, 2015; Parade 2019a). When these instructional elements are effectively interwoven, ISA creates a strong cohesive “tapestry” of language proficiency (Yassin, Razak & Maasum, 2019; Zuniga, 2019). This implies that learners need to develop language skills in an integrated manner to communicate effectively. Here, receptive skills (listening, reading) and productive skills (speaking, writing) are viewed as two sides of the same coin, reinforcing within and between each other. Consequently, secondary school English textbooks should incorporate elements of this tapestry. EFL teachers are expected to address any gaps to prevent a weak, unrecognisable output from the “instructional loom” if these crucial strands are not effectively combined in the textbooks,.

The study employed an integrated model combining three major learning theories: behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism to enhance the implementation of ISA in language teaching and learning. This integrated model has not been used in previous studies in ISA research. The author argues that this integrated model provides comprehensive framework to explain teachers' practices, students' reactions, and the challenges of integrated language skills in teaching, leveraging the strengths of each theory while addressing their limitations (Yassin, Razak and Maasum 2019). Behaviourism focuses on observable changes in behaviour, while cognitivism examines the internal mental processes, such as memory and motivation that drive learning. Constructivism emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing meaning, and complements the other theories. Therefore, the integrated model aligns with cognitive and social constructivism, promoting the “4Cs” of communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity in language learning (Gautam, 2019; Pardede, 2020). This integration is primarily realized through a combination of content-based instruction (CBI) and task-based language teaching (TBLT) as portrayed in Figure 2.

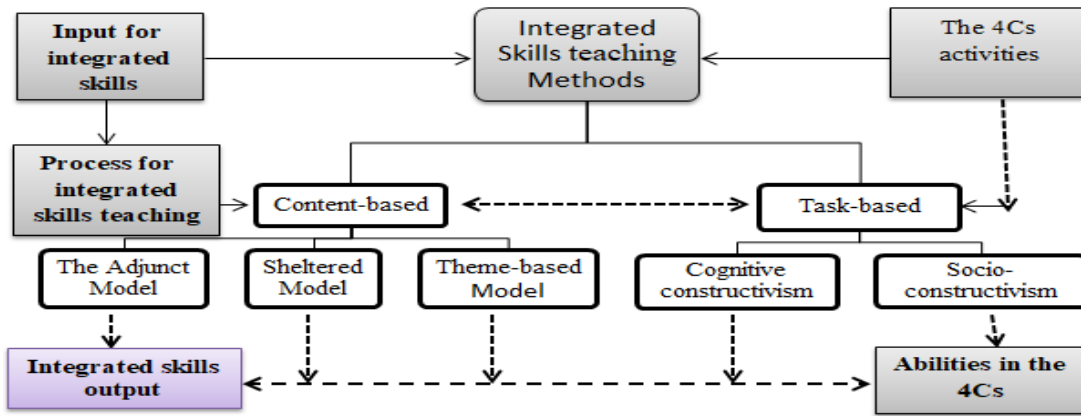


Figure 2: Conceptual framework of the study (constructed by the researcher)

Figure 2 presents an integrated instructional model that combines various models and approaches to enhance the results of integrated language skills and the "4Cs" in language teaching. This model includes CBI (adjunct, sheltered & theme-based models), TBLT (cognitive and socio-constructivism), text-based (genre-based), discourse-based, and technology-based approaches. The 4Cs are considered inputs and outputs in implementing ISA in language instruction (Gautam, 2019). To naturally integrate receptive and productive skills, strategies aligned with CBI and TBLT may include seminars and workshops, pair/group work, cooperative and communicative activities, collaborative, and problem-solving activities (Naire & Alwee, 2012). EFL teachers in secondary schools, including those in remote areas, are encouraged to employ a variety of strategies. Some of these strategies are brainstorming and comprehension activities, question-answer techniques, defensive and reflections, presentations, problem-solving and analysis, note-making and summarising, note-taking and interviewing. Self-introduction and greeting, comparing and contrasting, picture labelling, likes and dislikes, debating, orally acting, speeches and storytelling activities are other types of strategies. There are also other strategies, such as completing stories, written stories, episodes, news, as well as various discussion formats like jigsaw, pyramid, and crossover discussions to facilitate ISA implementation.

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Design and the Setting of the Study

The study employed a descriptive research design to identify the strategies used by EFL teachers for the implementation of ISA at secondary schools of Meda-kegn District. Meda-kegn District, which was established in 2006 after separating from Chalia Wareda, is located in West Showa Zone. Its capital, 'Ballami', is situated 236 kilometres west of Addis Ababa and 124 kilometres northwest of Ambo, the capital of West Show Zone. The district is bordered by Gindeberet District to the north, Horo-guduru Wallaga to the West, Tokke kutaye District to the east, and Challia District to the south. One-third of the district is covered by the desert 'Gnaber' which currently has no permanent habitant. Prior to 2006, there was no secondary school in the district. However, today, there are four secondary schools: Balami, Kegni, Chukala Wangie and Babo in the district. Nevertheless, it is concerning that only four students passed grade 12 national examinations in the last three years.

3.2. Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Data were gathered from 41 (100%) (34 male and 7 female) English teachers teaching grades 9 and 10 students, who were selected using comprehensive sampling techniques. Among them, two held a master degree

in TEFL, 27 had a bachelor degree in English, and the remaining 12 graduated from regional teachers' colleges with a language stream. About work experience, 34 teachers (82.9%) had less than 10 years of experience in teaching English. Eleven (41%) of the first degree graduates were teaching English without pedagogical skills training.

Additionally, the study proportionally selected 252 (20%) students from 1,255 grades 9 and 10 students across four secondary schools using stratified sampling techniques based on the suggestion of Shannon-Baker (2016). The study applied a constant factor, $c = 0.20$ to proportionally select students from grades 9 and 10, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1:

Student Population and sample for the Current Study

Schools	Population						Sample Size						
	Grade 9			Grade 10			Grade 9			Grade 10			9+10
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	
Balami	149	82	231	141	69	210	30	17	47	28	14	42	89
Kagni	81	36	117	91	36	127	16	7	23	18	7	25	49
Chu. Wangie	68	37	105	71	41	112	14	8	22	14	8	22	44
Babo	112	71	183	101	67	168	23	14	37	20	14	34	71
Total	410	226	636	404	213	617	83	46	129	80	43	123	252

Table 1 illustrates the population and sample size of the study participants of the four selected schools. Accordingly, while 129 students (83 male and 46 female) were selected from 636 grades 9, 123 students (80 male and 43 female) were selected from 617 grade 10.

3.3. Data Gathering Methods

The study employed questionnaire, lesson observation, and focused group discussion to collect data. The study adapted two sets of the questionnaire, for teacher and students, from Rahman and Akhter (2017), Motuma (2022), and Gautam (2019). The questionnaire has included 77 closed-ended and five open-ended items, regarding teachers' practice, learners' reaction and challenges of ISA, following a five level Likert scale. The teachers and the students responded to the close-ended questions by making a (✓) tick mark in the box provided against each statement and by writing short responses for the open-ended items. The students' questionnaire was translated into Afan Oromo, allowing them to easily express their perceptions, attitudes, opinions and experiences regarding the practices and challenges of learning English language skills. The English version of the questionnaire was presented to the teachers; however, some teachers chose to respond to the open-ended items of the questionnaire in Afan Oromo.

Additionally, the study adapted a three-dimensional lesson observation protocol (3-D-LOP) from Matz (2014) and implemented to validate the data collected through questionnaires and to collect additional data. The researcher selected two teachers from each school (one from grade 9 and one from grade 10) randomly and observed three times each. The 3D-LOP enabled formal and informal assessment of the three dimensions under the study: EFL teachers' practices, students' reaction, and the challenges faced by teachers and students in using ISA. Each classroom observation, which lasted 40 minutes, was purposely conducted while each teacher taught different language domains in their actual classrooms.

Moreover, the study involved eight (four teachers and four students) FGDs. Each FGD involved 5-6 teachers and students. The researcher conducted the FGD, using a self-developed FGD guideline with ten items, separately at different times at each school. The students' FGDs were conducted before the teachers' FGDs to validate the students' opinions later during the teachers' discussions. The purpose of using the FGD

was to refine and to supplement the data collected through the questionnaires and classroom observations, as suggested in Creswell and Creswell (2018).

3.4. Procedure of Data Collection

The data gathering procedure involved several steps. Firstly, the researcher observed classrooms to collect baseline data before informing the teachers and the students about the study through questionnaire. Secondly, the instructors and students completed questionnaires designed to gather their evaluations, experiences, and opinions on the practices and challenges of implementing ISA. Thirdly, the researcher conducted a second round of classroom observations to validate data obtained through questionnaires and to gather additional information as needed. Simultaneously, he reviewed teaching and assessment documents. Fourthly, he held FGDs with the teachers and students at the selected schools to substantiate and further validate the data collected, following a convergent mixed research design. Finally, he run a third round of classroom observations to refine and consolidate all data collected during the previous classroom observations.

3.5. Reliability and Validity

The researcher employed various techniques to sustain the validity and reliability of the findings from this study. These included a combination of multiple verified methods, measures, theories, and perspectives and expert judgments (researcher), as recommended by Shannon-Baker (2016). The study also employed a triangulated data gathering instruments, which included questionnaires, classroom observation, and FGD, to enhance the trustworthiness of the data. Collection and analyzing data from teachers and students contributed to the reliability and soundness of the study's findings, allowing for the identification of challenges they face in utilizing the ISA. The involvement of multiple research assistants further strengthened the study's trustworthiness. Three EFL teachers assisted in designing of data collection instruments and analyzing data from various sources to minimize individual researcher bias.

The application of multiple theories and/or perspectives, such as task-based and content-based instruction, facilitated appropriate data interpretation, as noted by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Pilot study was another technique used to determine the validity and reliability of this study. The pilot testing assessed the internal consistency of 77 items of the questionnaire using Cronbach's Alpha. The assessment generally resulted in a coefficient of 0.818 indicating very good reliability of the questionnaire items (Shannon-Baker, 2016). The researcher also computed Cronbach's Alpha for the sub-units of the questionnaire: teachers' practices (30 items), students' reactions (21 items), and the challenges teachers faced in implementing ISA (26 items). The sub-questionnaire obtained Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.841, 0.816, and 0.812 for teachers' practices, students' reactions, and the challenges faced in implementing ISA, respectively, indicating that the items in the questionnaire were reliable.

3.6. Data Analysis Methods

The study employed quantitative and qualitative data analyses. The statistical methods employed percentage, mean, median, rank order, standard deviation, and the Mann-Whitney U Test, following the guideline outlined by Christiana (2019). It is obvious that the Mann-Whitney U test considers median. However, some researchers (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, Darge, 2002; Motuma & Chaka, 2023a) recommend using the mean score instead of median for the Mann-Whitney U test. This recommendation applies for the normally distributed ordinal data, which aligns with the nature of this study.

The mean score is more sensitive to measure differences between two independents respondents, as is the case in this study. However, this study employed median to compute the Mann-Whitney U test to assess the significance of the differences among teachers' and students' responses, given the large difference in sample

sizes between the two groups (Darge, 2002; Motuma & Chaka, 2023a). In fact the computed results of the mean and the median for each item of the questionnaire were almost equivalent. For all statistical tests, the significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Additionally, the thematically analysed results of the instructional materials (lesson plans and assessment documents) were integrated into the study's findings to enhance the discussion, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The instructional materials used by the teachers were classified as either task-based or content-based. These materials were categorized into productive skills or receptive skills and segregated or integrated approaches.

3.7. Ethical Clearance

A research proposal was initially created and submitted to the Department of English Language and Literature at Ambo University to address the ethical consideration. Ambo University then provided a support letter to the Mida-kegn District Education Office, requesting consent for the study. The head of the District Education Office communicated the request with the four secondary schools through formal letter, expressing willingness to assist with data collection. The researcher subsequently met with the school directors and teachers to discuss the study's purpose. The researcher proceeded with data collection after obtaining ethical clearance and informed verbal consent from participants. The school heads and EFL teachers provided full support throughout this process.

4. The Results

4.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

This section presents an analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire. This analysis is structured around the research questions and aims to identify the strategies used in the implementation of ISA.

4.1.1. Strategies Used to Implement ISA

All 41 teachers and 252 students responded to the questionnaire. Their perceptions, attitudes, opinions, and experiences regarding integrated skills practices and the associated challenges were analysed. The data is categorised into 3P (PPP) stages: lesson presentation, practice, and production stages. Table 2 demonstrates the standards for the interpreting median values.

Table 2:

Interpreting criteria for the significance level of medians

S/N	Criteria in median	Interpretation of the mean score
1	1.000 – 2.499	<i>EFL teachers were trapped in SSA</i>
2	2.500 – 3.499	<i>EFL teachers were stuck between SSA and ISA</i>
3	3.500 – 4. 499	<i>EFL teachers were implementing ISA</i>
4	4.499 – 5.000	<i>EFL teachers were easily implementing ISA</i>

Table 3 presents the strategies used during lesson presentation. An asterisk (*) in the subsequent tables stands for the significant level of the data it represents.

Table 3:
Strategies employed during lesson presentation

S/ N	strategies for implementing ISA:	Respondents (n ¹ = 41; n ² = 252)					U-test	P-value
		Teachers ¹		Students ²		Overall Median		
		SD	Median	SD	Median			
1	Analysing existing situations	1.01	3.31	0.82	1.19	2.44	1.28*	0.163
2	Engaging students in ISA	1.10	3.23	0.61	1.36	2.65	1.34*	0.214
3	Involving students in instructional material selection	0.91	3.13	0.97	1.11	2.25	1.62*	0.427
4	Motivating students for ISA	1.21	4.34	0.96	2.46	3.16	1.93*	0.238
5	Brainstorming	1.41	4.05	0.94	2.53	2.80	1.45*	0.901
6	Introducing	1.23	4.28	0.83	2.47	3.34	0.73	0.981
7	Revising the previous lesson	1.04	4.67	1.09	4.58	4.62	0.36	1.023
Weighted Mean and SD		1.21	4.0	0.84	2.31	3.00	0.67	1.097

Source: Authors' work

Table 3 shows that teachers and students reported similar opinions. However, students disagree with teachers' claims regarding the analysis of existing situations as the basics for teaching (1.19), encouragement of learner participation in selecting teaching materials (1.11), engagement in integrated skills approach (1.36), and in brainstorming activities (2.53). The weighted median value 3.00 implies that EFL teachers' practices in implementing ISA during lesson are stuck between SSA and ISA. However, the median value of 4.0 indicates that teachers believe that they were implementing ISA in their English classrooms. The Mann-Whitney U test of 0.67 indicates that there was no significant difference between the responses of the teachers and students. Table 4 also illustrates the strategies employed during the practice stage.

Table 4:
Strategies employed during practice stage

S/N	Strategies for implementing ISA:	Respondents (n ¹ = 41; n ² = 252)					U-test	P-value
		Teachers ¹		Students ²		Overall Median		
		SD	Median	SD	Median			
1	Inviting: accepting and rejecting	1.25	3.31	0.69	2.18	2.31	0.91	1.412
2	Greeting	1.52	3.42	0.92	2.15	2.21	0.72	1.097
1	Reading and debate	1.41	3.05	0.94	1.18	2.85	1.97*	1.079
2	Reading and playing the role	1.01	3.27	0.82	1.63	2.93	0.74	1.086
3	Listening and playing the role	1.10	3.21	0.61	1.90	2.82	0.38	2.013
4	Reading and simulating	1.21	4.31	0.94	2.26	2.59	1.74*	0.913
5	Note-taking/making	1.41	4.05	0.96	3.53	3.70	0.92	1.940
6	Listening and simulating	1.23	1.35	0.83	1.07	1.09	0.47	1.982
7	Interviewing and writing report	1.25	1.51	0.69	1.78	1.61	0.39	1.463
8	Listening and explain meaning	1.21	3.31	0.96	1.50	2.68	2.14*	0.586
9	Listening and summarising texts	1.41	3.05	0.91	1.30	1.41	0.79	1.901
10	Questioning and answering	1.23	4.35	0.73	4.78	4.09	0.12	2.091
11	Reading and summarising	1.25	3.51	0.70	3.35	3.41	0.31	2.901
11	Lecture and gaped lecture	1.32	4.42	0.92	4.85	4.14	0.04	2.968
12	Listening to and commenting	1.07	2.32	0.21	1.19	1.72	0.41	2.904
Weighted Mean		1.25	3.62	0.83	2.79	3.08	0.96	1.094

Source: Authors' work

The median results in Table 4 indicate that teachers frequently used lecture methods (4.42), question-answer techniques (4.35), note-taking (4.05), summary from reading texts (3.05) listed in descending order. In contrast, they rarely used listening and simulation strategies (1.35). Nonetheless they did not use several other strategies

indicated in the table. The Mann Whitney U Test results highlighted that students disputed teachers claims regarding the frequent use of debate (1.97) and simulation (1.74) strategies derived from reading. They were also uncertain that the teachers were implementing meaning explaining (2.14) strategies based on listening. The overall weighted median of 3.08 implies that EFL teachers at the schools positioned between SSA and ISA. Additionally, the Mann-Whitney U test result of 0.96 at $P = 1.094$ indicates no significant difference between the responses of the teachers and students.

Likewise, Table 5 illustrates the strategies employed during the production to integrate language skills.

Table 5:

Strategies employed during the production stage

S/N	Strategies used for implementing ISA	Respondents (n ¹ = 41; n ² = 252)				Overall median	U-test	P-value
		Teachers ¹		Students ²				
		SD	Median	SD	Median			
1	Drawing map by reading texts	1.32	4.38	0.84	4.47	4.43	0.07	1.709
2	Pair and/or group assignments	1.52	3.51	0.96	2.87	3.15	1.86*	1.081
3	Writing commentary report	1.25	1.12	0.92	0.45	0.72	0.01	2.313
4	identifying differences of texts	1.12	1.19	0.84	1.15	1.19	0.04	2.913
5	Model listening texts	1.34	4.35	0.94	1.35	2.80	2.41*	1.109
6	Writing conclusions	1.23	4.15	0.83	4.04	4.07	0.18	1.982
7	Writing similar story	1.25	4.51	0.69	2.78	3.58	1.96*	1.346
8	Simulated conversations	1.52	1.21	0.92	0.45	0.78	0.05	2.586
9	Translation	1.02	4.01	0.29	2.95	3.78	1.55*	1.019
10	Filling formats from reading texts	1.62	4.61	0.52	4.45	4.51	0.45	2.091
11	Labelling diagrams from texts	1.22	1.71	0.12	1.54	1.62	0.65	2.801
Weighted Mean		1.28	3.32	0.89	2.50	2.55	0.72	1.793

Source: Authors' work

Table 5 shows the strategies teachers and students employed during the production stage. Accordingly, the teachers often used filling-gaps formats (0.45), drawing map (0.07) from reading texts, and writing conclusions to open texts (0.18) and other strategies. However, students indicated a lack of engagement with translation (1.55), assignments (1.86), modelling listening text (2.41), and writing similar stories (1.96) in the context of integrating skills teaching. The students' responses indicate a perception that EFL teachers are primarily using SSA in their classrooms while the weighted median score of the teachers' responses (3.32) suggests that they believe they are implementing ISA. The weighted median score of 2.50 reveals that EFL teachers are struggling to implement ISA. The Mann-Whitney U Test result of 0.72 at $P = 1.793$, as illustrated in Table 4, indicates that teachers and students expressed similar perceptions on the implementation of ISA during the production stage. The following section will discuss students' reactions to the implementation of ISA.

4.1.2. Students' Reaction towards ISA

Learners' participation is very crucial for facilitating the implementation of ISA. Figuratively speaking, students should be the players rather than passive spectators to enhance the effectiveness of language skills teaching. This concept is illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6:
Students' Reaction towards the implementation of ISA

S/N	I think students often participate in:	Respondents (n ¹ = 41; n ² = 252)					U-test	P-Value
		Teachers ¹		Students ²		Overall Median		
		SD	Median	SD	Median			
1	Note-making	1.32	3.03	0.97	2.87	2.56	0.96	1.608
2	Group and pair discussions	0.91	4.31	1.06	4.46	4.35	0.69	2.103
3	Listening and playing roles	1.11	1.15	0.49	2.35	2.21	1.02*	0.391
4	Summary writing from reading	1.32	4.71	0.38	4.47	4.56	0.27	1.490
5	Note-taking	1.52	4.81	0.96	4.78	4.79	0.00	3.982
6	Reading and debating	0.92	1.62	1.29	2.45	2.31	1.72*	1,346
7	Writing sample news	2.11	2.91	1.48	2.15	2.16	0.09	2.586
8	Simulated conversations	1.10	1.27	0.28	1.17	1.21	0.00	3.901
9	Translation	0.90	4.21	0.16	4.32	4.27	0.81	2.091
10	Writing conclusions to open texts	0.81	4.33	0.97	4.41	4.35	0.01	2.910
11	Questioning and answering	1.11	4.41	0.69	4.46	4.44	0.13	2.896
12	Listening and explaining	1.14	1.05	0.94	2.35	2.08	1.73*	1.094
13	Writing commentary report	1.03	3.35	0.38	3.47	3.44	0.36	1.608
14	Conducting interview	1.52	1.51	0.96	2.78	2.27	1.62*	1.013
15	Drawing and labelling diagrams	1.32	2.62	0.72	3.45	3.11	1.96*	0.913
16	Filling formats from reading texts	1.12	4.91	0.48	4.85	4.90	0.27	1.940
17	Reading and playing roles	1.01	4.27	0.68	4.17	4.21	0.19	1.982
18	Modelling	1.10	2.51	0.61	3.32	3.13	0,75	1,463
19	Comparing and contrasting	0.81	3.03	0.79	4.01	3.65	1.89*	0.586
20	Storytelling	1.41	1.31	0.95	3.43	2.15	2.17*	1.901
21	Interviewing strategies	1.45	1.41	1.92	2.54	1.99	0.97	2.091
Weighted Mean		1.12	3.07	0.88	3.31	3.36	1.03	1.961

Source: Authors' work

Table 6 illustrates the summary results of the result of the Mann-Whitney U test in which teachers and students commonly reported a lack of engagement in various activities. These include filling out formats (0.17), group and pair discussions (0.69), note-taking (0.00), summary writing (0.27), question and answer sessions (0.13), writing conclusions (0.01), and translation strategies (0.81). Conversely, teachers disputed students' claims about their participations in storytelling (2.17), drawing and labelling (1.96), comparing and contrasting (1.89), explaining what they listened to (1.73), interviewing (1.62), debating (1.72) and role play (1.02) strategies. The median value of 3.36 suggests that EFL teachers at the four secondary schools were trapped between ISA and ISA. The overall result of Mann-Whitney U Test (1.03) further indicates a shared dissatisfaction among instructors and students regarding the implementation of ISA. This dissatisfaction seems to stem from teachers predominantly assigning tasks focused on single language skills, thereby neglecting activities aligned with the Integrated Skills Approach (ISA) outlined in the textbooks. The next section will discuss the challenges faced in implementing the ISA.

4.1.3. Challenges of ISA in EFL Classrooms

The challenges of the ISA in teaching-learning English were classified into four major themes: the demanding nature of ISA, teacher character, student, and resource related challenges. These four major themes of the challenges were further divided into 30 sub-themes, as portrayed in Tables 7

Table 7:

Summary of the challenges in implementing CLA in CESC

N0	Main challenges	Sub-challenges teachers)	Teachers (41)		Students (252)		Overall Median	U-test	P-value
			Median	SD	Median	SD			
1	Demanding nature of integrated vs., segregated skills approach	o Task-based instruction	4.71	0.31	4.79	1.191.	4.76	1.39	1.85
		o Content-based instruction	4.88	0.04	4.89	45	4.89	1.29	1.81
		o Communicativeness,	4.81	1.11	4.86	1.41	4.85	1.18	1.69
		o Collaboration,	4.88	0.19	4.90	2.10	4.89	1.84	1.79
		o Critical thinking,	4.79	0.29	4.87	0.82	4.84	0.96	1.97
		o Creativity	4.74	0.43	4.79	0.91	4.77	1.12	1.54
		o Practicality	4.76	0.31	4.81	0.71	4.79	1.09	1.99
		o Demanding activities	4.82	0.32	4.78	0.49	4.79	1.25	2.09
	o Endless paper work handling	4.81	0.43	4.91	1.90	4.87	0.98	2.31	
	o Complexity of integrating skills	4.69	0.98	4.76	0.98	4.74	1.21	2.71	
Weighted mean for the demanding nature of integration			4.79	0.44	4.84	1.16	4.83	1.23	1.98
2	Constraints of instructional materials and poor classroom	o Unavailability of technology	4.81	1.28	4.86	1.10	4.85	1.09	1.17
		o Shortage of stationery	4.73	1.46	4.61	1.72	4.68	0.79	1.35
		o Textbooks	4.81	0.33	4.96	1.38	4.89	0.89	1.71
		o Teacher's guide	4.87	1.39	4.91	1.16	4.90	0.48	1.69
		o Large class size	4.89	0.26	4.89	1.19	4.89	0.96	1.29
		o Time constraints	4.91	0.63	4.76	0.58	4.81	1.26	1.97
	o Lack of additional materials	4.85	0.91	4.99	0.97	4.94	0.99	1.54	
Weighted mean for resource constraints			4.84	0.89	4.85	1.15	4.85	0.92	1.53
3	Teachers' character	o Poor pedagogical skills	4.83	0.18.	4.81	0.79	4.82	0.94	1.28
		o Language deficiency	4.91	1.44	4.85	0.91	4.89	0.90	1.71
		o Previous teaching culture	4.19	1.41	4.47	0.83	4.64	2.17*	1.41
		o Lack of Commitment/interest	4.85	2.10	4.86	0.92	4.74	1.89*	1.09
		o Alternative sources of income	4.51	0.92	4.69	0.79	4.71	0.74	1.90
		o Heavy workload	4.67	0.90	4.42	0.61	4.47	0.29	1.73
		o Improper perception	4.61	0.61	4.35	0.49	4.38	0.28	1.49
	o Low motivation in teaching	4.45	0.49	4.85	0.72	4.71	0.95	1.64	
Weighted mean for teachers' character			4.64	1.07	4.66	0.76	4.65	0.68	1.53
4	Students Character	o Disciplinary problems	4.57	2.02	4.47	1.20	4.49	0.24	1.07
		o Language deficiency	4.91	1.30	4.73	1.70	4.79	0.69	1.45
		o Motivation and interest	4.71	1.09	4.56	1.18	4.65	0.37	1.91
		o Perceptions for future job	4.53	1.33	4.78	1.06	4.32	1.51*	1.49
		o Learning culture and life style	4.65	1.01	4.53	1.09	4.53	0.27	1.19
Weighted mean for students' character			4.67	1.35	4.64	1.246	4.64	0.392	1.42
Overall mean			4.74	0.95	4.75	1.07	4.73	0.80	1.61

The overall median values in Table 7 reveals that the students and the teachers generally reported their perceptions regarding task-based (4.76) and content-based (4.89) instruction as key challenges of ISA implementation. The teachers and the students also recognized the 4Cs nature of ISA: communicativeness

(4.85), collaboration (4.89), critical thinking (4.84) and creativity (4.77). Other significant challenges associated to their perceptions included practicality (4.79), the demanding nature of activities (4.79), such as extensive work handling (4.87) and complexity of integrating skills (4.74).

Further, both noticed that constraints related to instructional resource and poor classroom facilities (4.85) negatively impacted the implementation of ISA. Respondents highlighted several specific challenges: unavailability of instructional technology (4.85), shortage of stationery (4.68), lack of textbooks (4.89) and teacher's guide (4.90), large class size (4.89), time constraints (4.81), and lack of additional materials (4.94). Additionally, teacher-related challenges (4.65) were found to hinder the integration of English skills at the secondary schools.

Further, there was inconsistency between teachers' and students' responses regarding teachers' commitment (4.74), prior learning and teaching culture (4.64) and language deficiency (4.89) in implementing the ISA.

Student-related challenges (4.64) also impacted students' participation in the ISA. The data implied that issues, such as learners' disciplinary problems (4.49), language deficiency (4.79), lack of motivation and interest (4.65), perceptions for future job (4.32) and learning culture and life style (4.53) were significant barriers to the implementation of ISA.

In summary, the overall weighted median score in Table 7 indicates the most significant challenges to implementing ISA in English classroom in the remote district. These were the constraints of resources and poor classroom conditions (4.85), instructors' and students' perceptions of the demanding nature of ISA (4.83), teacher character (4.65), and students-related (4.64) challenges. Furthermore, the results of the Mann-Whitney U test imply that there was no a significant difference between the most responses of teachers and students. However, teachers disagreed with students' opinions regarding the previous teachers' teaching culture (2.17) and the lack of teachers' commitment/interest (1.89) in implementing ISA. These findings imply that ISA was not effectively implemented in the schools due to these factors.

Table 8:

The difference among the categories of challenges by rank order

Themes of Challenges	N	Teacher		Student		Overall Median	U-test	P-value	Rank order
		Median	SD	Median	SD				
Demanding nature of ISA	293	4.79	0.44	4.84	1.16	4.83	1.23	1.96	2
Teacher-related	293	4.64	1.07	4.66	0.76	4.65	0.68	1.78	3
Student-related	293	4.67	1.35	4.46	1.24	4.64	0.80	1.84	4
Resource-related	293	4.84	0.89	4.85	1.15	4.85	0.92	1.89	1
Weighted mean	293	4.74	0.95	0.85	4.63	4.73	0.49	1.87	

The results of Mann Whitney U test presented in Table 8 indicate that there is no a significance difference between the perceptions of teachers and the students regarding several challenges. These include teacher-related factors (0.68), student-characteristics (0.80), material resource constraints (0.92), and the demanding nature of ISA (1.23). These factors are identified as essential hindrance to the implementation of ISA at the secondary schools. Additionally, the summary of rank order, of the overall median, reveals that resource-related challenges are the leading among the four sets of challenges affecting ISA implementing. The following section will present the summary results obtained from classroom observation and FGD.

4.2. Summary Results of Classroom Observation

The study analysed the data obtained through 18 classroom observations of the eight teachers using three themes to substantiate the previous findings. The themes included teachers' practices, students' reaction, and

challenges of implementing the ISA. The observations considered students' exercise books, teachers' lesson plans, and assessment documents.

To begin with teachers' practices, the summary of classroom observations in grades 9 and 10 indicated that most observed teachers struggled to demonstrate effective integrated skills teaching. For instance, despite the objectives outlined in the textbooks, only two of the eight teachers attempted to integrate two language skills. Teachers typically began their lesson with "what" questions and focused on a single language domain although each unit in the textbooks presented a variety of task-based and content-based activities. During the observations, their emphasis was on teaching and assessing the forms, definitions and theories of language, rather than on the practical usage of language itself. The following excerpt summarizes the lectures of six teachers:

What is reading? What is listening? What is writing? What is grammar? What is reported speech? Can you tell us the process of reading? What is debate? What are the parts of a job application letter? What is a descriptive paragraph? Who can tell us punctuation marks? What are other writing mechanics? What is passive voice? What is active voice? What are prepositions? What are conjunctions and disjunctions? What are articles? ... (A summarized teachers' lecture as observation results)

The results of classroom observations also identified that teachers frequently answered their own questions and relied on lecture-based and gapped lecture methods. Instruction predominantly occurred in Afan Oromo, covering explanations of grammar, vocabulary, and the four major skills. The following excerpts illustrate their lectures:

... Reading is a silent activity. We should read passages silently. We do not point the lines in passage text with our finger or pen. ... Listening is a receptive skill helps us gather information... Writing is a process of putting the idea in our mind onto paper. It is a productive skill. ... Punctuation marks are placed at the end of sentence in English language. These include full stop (.), question mark (?), exclamatory mark (!), comma (,) and colon (:), among others (A summarized lecture of the teachers during observation).

The excerpt shows the questions and their answers teachers wrote on the corrugated blackboard, and explained them in detail. Eventually, they often assigned homework, including reading comprehension tasks, despite lacking textbooks. For further exploration, presenting the results of FGDs would be valuable in systematically connecting the perspectives of teachers and students with the findings from the data collected through questionnaires and classroom observations.

4.3. Summary Results of FGD

The researcher presented the summary findings from FGDs with teachers and students separately. He presented the students' FGDs before the teachers', as their opinions were validated later by the teachers' discussions. In this context, the following quote highlights why most of the students were reluctant in learning English:

We want to participate in learning. We want to do tasks with our colleagues. However, some of us are also householders, so we are sometimes absent from school for agricultural purposes. When we return the following day, we feel anxious about the activities, homework and assignments we missed. Additionally, we receive assignments and homework from other subject teachers, which we must complete in insufficient time and without learning materials and resources, such as textbooks and references, internet access. When we fail to meet our teachers' requirements, we become demotivated (FGD results translated from Afan Oromo).

The students also expressed concerns about their teachers' commitment and confidence in implementing the ISA. The students were provided 49 teaching-learning strategies, and they were asked to indicate which ones their teachers actually employed in the classrooms. The students commonly reported the following:

Most of our English teachers give us many homework and assignments without teaching us what they are. Some teachers do not use more than two or three out of five periods allotted per week for English subject. They do not have enough time to implement all these strategies in the class. We learn for one week and we do not learn for another week for lack of peace here. As a result, we cannot respond to the homework and assignments because the tasks are too demanding and rigorous to finish on our own within the given time. Additionally, some teachers have farmlands where they spend much of their time working on agriculture (FGD results translated from the Afan Oromo).

Following the students' complaints, teachers were asked to respond to some questions during the FGDs about the situation. The questions focused on why students felt that teachers were wasting teaching time and the extent they were committed in teaching English. One teacher among the FGD participants made the following point, which others agreed with:

We are committed to exerting our best efforts in teaching language skills in an integrated way. However, it is too difficult for us to implement ISA due to several challenges, including: students' reluctance and deficient English language skills, large class size (about 70-100 students in poorly equipped classroom), shortage of time, unavailable technological devices, inadequate classroom facilities, students' textbooks, reference books, and stationary. Moreover, we cannot fully utilize the teaching time because of conflict between government forces and armed groups. Critically, we experienced stress and frustration due to the devastating effects of the conflict that has resulted in the deaths of teachers and students. We are also pressured to complete the textbooks' contents within the expected time limit. Given these circumstances, how can we effectively implement the ISA? (A summarised FGD results)

The feedback from these teachers suggests that they were externalizing their complaints. They emphasized that the multiple language objectives in the ISA, along with time constraints, posed significant challenges in designing and implementing effective integrated skills teaching. The demanding nature of ISA activities required careful design and implementation, addressing many common difficulties faced by teachers, as expressed in the following excerpt:

It is [an] unbelievable challenge to incorporate all language domains into one activity. At a given time, we can effectively teach only one or two or at most three language domains. Our students' language skills are too limited for effective participation in integrated skills teaching. Additionally, we often skip listening and speaking activities due to lack of technological devices, materials and teacher's guides. We recognize that newly graduated teachers require support, especially in the absence of textbooks and teaching resources (A summarised FGD results).

The feedback from these teachers implies that they were unsuccessful in teaching and in assessing integrated skills. They encountered challenges in actively engaging their students in integrated skills lessons. Specifically, the results of FGDs reveal that less experienced, pedagogically untrained, and diploma holder teachers struggled with what and how to implement ISA. Eleven teachers with Bachelor's degree were employed to teach English at the four secondary schools without any pedagogical skills training. The following discussion section will systematically amalgamate the data obtained from various instruments and relate the findings of the current study to the theories presented in the literature review, illustrating the implications of each finding.

5. Discussion

This study was initiated by the trend of language study that reveals two contrasting approaches: segregated and integrated, influencing language teaching practices worldwide (Gautam, 2019; Pardede, 2019b). The tendency of language teaching in Ethiopian context has been rooted in a SSA, focusing on teaching language skills in isolation (Motuma, 2022, 2023c). English language teaching practices in these remote areas reveals the principles of behavioral psychology and structural linguistics, utilized methods, such as grammar translation and the Audio-lingual Methods, as noted by different sources (Darge, 2002; MOE, 2018; Motuma, 2015). It was supposed that conditions in remote secondary schools are worse than those in central and urban areas. This is supported by the researcher's observations, which indicate that students in remote areas struggled more with language tasks. In contrast, successful language user can integrate skills. In other words, ISA enhances students' ability to communicate effectively English (Gautam, 2019; Hinkel, 2010; Pardede, 2019b). Thus, the implementation of the ISA at the sample schools was evaluated in terms of teachers' practices, students' reactions, and the challenges faced during the presentation, practice, and production (PPP) stages.

To begin with teachers' practices, various flexible and innovative strategies used by EFL teachers can facilitate the implementation of ISA. To this end, the teachers were provided a list of 49 teaching strategies in their questionnaire and during their FGD. Then, they were asked to identify the integrated skills teaching strategies they actually employed in their regular English classrooms. In response to the questionnaire, teachers claimed to use most of the strategies for implementing ISA. However, during their FGDs, they acknowledged that many of their claims did not align with the principles of CLT. As the facilitator prompted a range of related questions, they identified a limited set of integrated skills teaching strategies that they employed in their actual classrooms. These include brainstorming, filling out gaps, drawing diagrams, assigning pair/group homework, translation, writing conclusions, modelling and transformative strategies, such as invitation, greeting and introduction to engage students in ISA.

The summary findings of classroom observation in grades 9 and 10 indicated that approximately 83% of the teachers' claim in their questionnaires contradicted their actual classroom practices. Most observed teachers

were unable to effectively implement the ISA, and used SSA instead, employing language-focused teaching and assessment strategies. They were observed focusing on the forms, the definitions and theories of language, rather than its practical language usage. Their emphasis was primarily on grammar, vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation and syntax, which align with a 'language-based' approach. This was contrary to the findings of Gautam (2019) and Pardede (2019a), where teachers implemented ISA using a task and content-based approach. This segregated teaching practice, as opposed to ISA, primarily aligns with the assumptions of behaviourist theory, as noted in Akram and Malik (2010), Gautam (2019), Motuma (2023), and Pardede (2019b). The teachers rarely utilized strategies, such as commentary report writing, comparing/contrasting, storytelling, debate, picture cues, simulation, labelling, as well as students' experiential learning, problem-solving activities, action research, peer-teaching, students' self- and peer-assessment to enhance integrated skills learning. They spoke much of the time in Afan Oromo, while explaining, lecturing or defining about grammar or vocabulary, and the four major skills. Consequently, this has limited students' opportunity to construct text, speech, and answer comprehension activities. Such practices reflect the principles of behavioral psychology and structural linguistics, relying on grammar translation and the Audio-lingual Methods (Gautam, 2019; Motuma, 2023; Pardede, 2020).

Although each unit in the textbooks presents a variety of task-based and content-based activities, teachers often began their lessons with 'what' questions, focusing on a single language domain. They frequently asked questions and answered them themselves. Additionally, they wrote questions and answers on a small corrugated blackboard, making it difficult for the students to read and copy notes into their exercise books. More critically, the teachers expressed frustration with teaching listening and speaking skills. Almost all concluded their lessons by assigning homework, including reading comprehension activities, despite the absence of textbooks. The predominant teaching methods they used were lecture-based, with minimal interactive strategies, such as brainstorming, class work, invitation, introduction, greeting and summary writing. The teachers relied exclusively on textbooks without evaluating or supplementing their weaknesses. Their lesson plans were often based solely on textbooks' contents, sometimes without aligning the objectives outlined in the textbooks. The teachers disproportionately focused on reading comprehension activities, neglecting listening and speaking. This disproportionate focus does not reflect the dynamic, integrated teaching-learning process advocated in the literature (Akram & Malik 2010; Pardede, 2020). This implies that they were unsuccessful in designing and implementing the ISA.

The teachers rarely considered students' learning preferences and motivation when attempting to integrate the language skills. Their teaching approach, which relied on SSA, was not grounded in the principles of cognitive psychology, critical pedagogy, and functional linguistics, as noted by Hinkel (2010), Gautam (2019), Tajzad and Namagh (2014), and Pardede (2020). However, the findings of these studies appear inconsistent with the current study, where learners in the observed sites were unable to construct knowledge and skills. The teachers in these schools failed to provoke students' communicative competence and integrate the four language skills. This finding contradicts with the findings of Gautam (2019) and Pardede (2020) because teachers in these studies focused on students' communicative competence to integrate ISA. Consequently, students in these schools remained silent throughout each lesson. As a result, teachers often answered their own questions in a lecture-based format, utilizing gapped lectures without motivating students to engage actively.

Notably, very few pedagogically trained and experienced teachers implemented ISA at various stages of their lessons. Only two of the eight observed teachers had attempted to integrate only two language skills utilizing some principles of content-based and task-based instruction indicated in the textbooks. They primarily integrated reading with grammar, vocabulary, and writing, through transformative strategies. This engaged students in comprehension (note making and note taking), composition (summary writing), and conversation (introductions and greetings) activities. This approach aligns with the findings of Aydogan and Akbarov (2014) and Motuma and Chaka (2023a). The teachers who effectively implemented ISA began their lessons with brainstorming activities, linked initial tasks to the multifaceted learning objectives in the textbooks, and developed lessons accordingly. They assessed students using relevant strategies and concluded their lessons

with appropriate feedback and summary. Additionally, these teachers incorporated collaborative activities, including individual, pair and group work, to progressively integrate language skills. They could have made their activities more task-based and communicative and thereby integrate more language skills by helping their students read, explain, write and share their works with the class.

The second focus of this study focused on students' reactions to the implementation of the ISA. They were provided with a list of 49 teaching strategies (translated and explained in their mother tongue) through a questionnaire and FGD to assess students' perception, attitude, motivation and engagement. Additionally, they were asked to identify the strategies their teachers used in their English classrooms. They reported that their teachers used very limited number of strategies from the list. Similarly, they were asked to mention the strategies they actively engaged in during their regular English classrooms. They claimed involvement in activities such as making introduction, invitation, greeting, drawing and labelling, role play, debate, discussion strategies, and reading comprehension. Nevertheless, as the FGD facilitator prompted further questions, students expressed that their teachers did not encourage them to engage in most of the strategies. Many students indicated a preference for traditional lecture methods, gaped-lecture, and question and answer formats. They reported learning about direct and reported speech, comprehension, debate, job applications, and descriptive paragraphs. However, they gave less attention to the construction of descriptive texts, engagement in debating, writing of job application letters and text summaries. These findings were consistent with the previous studies by Akram and Malik (2010) and Motuma (2018), which highlighted how improper pedagogical practices limit students' participation in language learning.

The results of classroom observations revealed findings regarding students' reactions to the implementing of ISA, supporting the teachers' claims. During the observation period, students remained silent throughout every lesson, with very few students raising their hands to answer even objective questions. Most students who participated often used their mother tongue, Afan Oromo. When they attempted to speak English, their language was difficult to understand; their pronunciations were unclear; their speeches were ungrammatical, and their responses were often irrelevant to the questions posed. Consequently, teachers answered their own questions during the lesson, primarily relying on lecture and gapped lecture methods. However, in comparison to other classes, students taught by pedagogically trained and experienced teachers displayed greater motivation and engagement during the observation period. Most students were willing to raise their hands to answer and ask for clarification. This implies that teachers' qualifications, pedagogical skills, and experience play crucial roles in effectively implementing strategies for ISA. In general, the students and the teachers appeared uncommitted, reluctant, unconfident, and unmotivated regarding ISA.

Regarding the challenges of implementing the ISA, several factors related to teachers, students and school resource were identified as significant obstacles. Teachers' lack of pedagogical training, improper beliefs, low commitment, prior teaching culture, and workloads hindered effective implementation of ISA. Similarly, student-related challenges, particularly insufficient language ability and lack of motivation to engage in integrated skills activities affected the implementation of ISA. Students' excessive reliance on their mother tongue, life style, and disciplinary factors negatively impacted the implementation of ISA. Additionally, students often adhered to a prior learning and assessment culture focused on accumulating language knowledge for better grades, which negatively impacted ISA implementation. This contrasts with the findings of Zuniga (2016), which indicated that students focused on the communicative purposes of the language rather than mastering its forms.

Resource-related challenges including fixed seating in cramped classroom, corrugated blackboard, lack of textbooks and technological devices played a negative role in implementing ISA. Inadequate classroom facilities, limited stationery and reference materials also impeded the implementation of ISA. Besides, the large class sizes (on average, 70-100 students in a class) and time constraint (40 minutes per day) hindered the proper implementation of ISA. Furthermore, stress and frustration experienced by teachers and students due to the devastating effects of conflict in these remote areas negatively impacted the schooling system in general.

In summary, teachers' exclusive reliance on textbooks, teacher-centred methods, and SSA practice limited the implementation of ISA. In other words, lack of employment of a diverse range of strategies hindered the implementation of ISA, which contrasts with the recommendation of Nair and Alwee (2012), Gautam (2019), and Pardede (2019a).

Limitation of the study

This study has some limitations. It does not consider the assumption of normal data distribution and the representativeness of the sample size to the remote areas in Ethiopia. It used nonprobability sampling techniques to select the district and the schools. In addition, although the researcher had planned to conduct 48 classroom observations of 16 EFL teachers (two from grade 9 and two others from grade 10), only two of them were observed at each school because of the instability and insecurity in the study area during the classroom observation period. Furthermore, it was difficult for the researcher to reach about 10% of the students who had been expected to respond to the questionnaire. However, the inclusion of all the EFL teachers from each school can maximize the representativeness of the respondents. Besides, every observation was supplemented by pre- and post-observation conferences that were conducted with the observed instructors.

6. Conclusions and Recommendation

6.1. Conclusions

The main objective of this study was to investigate ways to enhance the implementation of ISA in teaching English language at peripheral District. The summary findings of the study have revealed major challenges that hinder teachers to integrate the language skills at these schools. Schooling in these remote areas is generally at risk due to lack of peace and stability, leading to feelings of insecurity among teachers and students. As a result, much schooling time is wasted. Teachers often rushed to cover the curriculum using a more SSA which is unfortunate in the context of 21st CLT area. Students' language deficiencies and lifestyle choices further hinder students and teachers from using English effectively and implement ISA. The teachers and students in these schools tended to externalize the problem instead of actively work to improve students' English skills. All in all, insecurity and instability, lack of attention, limited teachers' pedagogical skills, students' lifestyle factors and language deficiencies influenced the implementation of ISA. In summary, the current study addressed the gaps it intended to fill. It enabled the researcher to determine the issue of EFL teachers' practices, students' reaction, and the challenges teachers and students faced in using ISA.

6.2. Recommendations

The federal, regional, and local management bodies, particularly educational leaders should provide special support to these peripheral and remote area schools to help them function effectively. Authorities must ensure security and stability, assign qualified EFL teachers, provide necessary resources, and support the professional development of existing teachers through a variety of in-service trainings to enhance the quality of English language teaching. Teachers should also equip themselves with the guiding principles of ISA and utilise locally available authentic materials to facilitate the implementation of ISA. They are encouraged to employ various effective strategies, such as content-based, task-based, text-based, technology-based, project-based, and competency-based approaches to enhance students' language proficiency and thereby, integrate receptive and productive skills in a language lessons. Furthermore, learners should actively participate in ISA to achieve real success in developing their communicative English skills.

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Authors' Contributions

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