



## Research Article

# EFL Teachers' Conceptions of Oral Output in English Class: High school EFL Teachers in East Wollega Zone in Focus

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### Article Information

Received: 21 June 2022

Revised version received: 22 August 2022

Accepted: 25 August 2022

Published: 31 August 2022

#### Cite this article as:

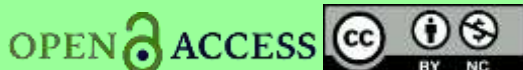
E. Alemayehu et al. (2022) *Int. J. Grad. Res. Rev.* Vol 8(3): 57-66.

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Peer reviewed under authority of IJGRR

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate EFL teachers' conceptions of oral output in English class: East Wollega zone high school teachers in focus. The study was conducted in 2020/21 academic year. The research design employed for this study case is the descriptive survey. The researcher used different sampling techniques as random sampling technique to select the schools, purposive sampling for the grade levels and availability and random sampling techniques were used respectively to select the sample teachers for questionnaire and interview. The researcher employed questionnaire for 30 EFL teachers (which is close-ended) and Oral interview (semi-structured) for 6 EFL teachers. The data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative method and the data from the tools were cross-checked. To this end, the findings of the study indicated that EFL teachers' conceptions of oral output were found to be below the average mean.

**Keywords:** Conception; oral output; oral interaction; oral output purpose.

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### Introduction

Oral interaction involves speaking and listening as a two-way process where responding is expected (Peña & Onatra, 2009; Byrne, 1991). According to Long (1981), Oral interaction is essential for enhancing comprehensible input and yielding desirable output. Similarly, Gass and Mackey (2007) point out that the interaction model is mainly synthesized from Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Swain's Output Hypothesis. Many authors agree that both input and output are very important in making oral interaction meaningful, yet the focus in this research case is oral output.

The introduction for Output Hypothesis has been proposed in the late 1980s by Canadian linguist, Merrill Swain. It was emerged criticizing Krashen's Input Hypothesis that claims language learning occurs only when comprehensible input is provided (Krashen, 1985). However, Swain (1985) argues that producing language enables learners to test hypotheses about comprehension of input and forces learners to process language forms and meanings more deeply than simply exposed to input. Besides, Long (1996) in his modified version of the interaction hypothesis reveals



that oral production is necessary for the meaningful implementation of the oral interaction.

Due to this and other similar facts, EFL teachers' conception of oral output is found important to improve students' oral interaction skills in many aspects. Conceptions consist of beliefs, attitudes and intentions which may significantly affect behavior (Ajzen, 2005; Brown, 2008). What teachers do in their classrooms is oriented by their conception of teaching which are derived from their beliefs including their prior experiences, school practices, and their individual personality (Shamsipour and Allami, 2012; Canbay and Beceren, 2012; Jia, 2013; Walsh, 2006). Further, teacher's conception is stated as cognition which comprises personalized and context-sensitive based knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs which are essential to govern variety of activities in teaching learning process (Borg, 2003; Shulman, 1987; Yue'e and Yunzhang, 2011).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Classroom oral interaction is very vital in making the teaching learning process meaningful and in enabling the speaker and listener understand each other. In English class, when the students respond to the teacher's or other students' questions, raise queries, and give comments, they are actively involved in the negotiation of comprehensible input and the formulation of comprehensible output, which are essential to the practice of oral interaction (Abebe and Deneke, 2015). However, the classroom oral interaction can be made ineffective and the two parties may fail to understand one another in some cases especially when their right is denied, and when the talk is dominated only by the speaker. In Ethiopian context, most of the time EFL teachers monopolize the process of teaching-learning and shape the lessons in the way they like.

This can be occurred as a result of EFL teacher's lack of understanding concerning what to teach, who to teach, how to teach and why to teach the subject. In similar manner, the researcher has the doubt that EFL teachers' conceptions match with the purpose that oral output is used for and individual learners' context to produce oral output. Nevertheless, teachers' conceptions of what they teach and how they professionally develop through their teaching roles are key to classroom practice and learner achievement as they influence teachers' pedagogic approaches and choice of materials, content, and learner activities (Mukeredzi, 2013). In the same way, the researcher believes that the response from the students' side to what is initiated is not to the level that the curriculum is demanding. However, authors like (Grenfell, 1991; Nunan, 1987; Panhwar, 2017) claimed that in classroom oral interaction, teachers need to involve learners in a personal way so as to give more freedom to actively take part in classroom oral interaction and make them achieve the desired level of Language proficiency through oral interaction practice.

The researcher's experience and observation together with previous local researchers (Berhanu, 2000; Habtamu, 2017; Mebratu, 2018; Melaku, 2005; Meseret, 2007) indicated that the students' oral interaction skills in English class is becoming deteriorated from time to time and is not practiced as the purpose of practicing speaking skills is demanding. Consequently, the researcher was initiated to investigate if the source for the decline of students' oral interaction is EFL teachers' conceptions of oral output. To this end, the study was planned to achieve the following research objectives.

### **Objectives**

The main objective of the study was to investigate EFL teachers' Conceptions of oral output.

Based up on the above objective, the following specific objectives were set.

- 1) To find out learners' status of oral output production;
- 2) To assess the purposes oral output is used for in oral interaction;
- 3) To differentiate the inputs used to increase learners' oral output production;
- 4) To find out the ways EFL teachers participate learners in oral interaction

### **Materials and Methods**

The study was conducted in 2020/21 academic year on selected public high schools in East Wollega zone, Oromia regional state in Ethiopia. The zone is located to West of Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia at the distance of 328 km. The Zone has 17 woredas, and six public high schools from six woredas were randomly selected for the study. The study mainly emphasized public high schools as some private high schools have their own curriculum which is different from that of the ministry of education in some aspects.

### **Population and Sample**

The population of this research was East Wollega high schools' English language teachers of 2020/21 academic year. According to Salaria (2012), population of the study refers to all the individuals of a particular type or a more restricted part of that group. In total, there were about 17 woredas in East Wollega zone from which the sample high schools were randomly selected. As involving all the EFL teachers from the entire woredas of the zone was tiresome, the researcher randomly selected EFL teachers from Dalo, Gute, Jimma Arjo, Sire, Getema and Diga high schools for the study. Supporting this, Neuman (1992) suggests a ratio of 30% for small population (which is under 1000). Further, involving all the subjects from all the school of the woredas in the study is unlikely for there can be diminishing returns



associated with adding elements to a sample (Dattalo, 2008). Accordingly, six woredas, namely Guto Gida, Wayu Tuka, Sibru Sire, Diga, Leka Dulacha and Jima Arjo were randomly selected woredas from the total of 17 woredas that means it is about 35% which is more than what is suggested.

Consequently, the six high school listed above were randomly selected, the grade levels were purposively selected thinking that students at this level can conduct oral interaction in English. Besides, availability sampling technique was administered to select 30 EFL teachers to fill questionnaire. Accordingly, from Dalo and Sire 5 teachers per school, from Gute and Arjo 6 teachers per school and for Diga and Getema 4 teachers per school were selected. Further, purposive sampling was used to select the six EFL teachers for interview as it was conducted mostly on the basis of the teacher's willingness.

### **Data Gathering Instruments**

Data gathering is the process through which the accumulations of specific evidences are collected using different instruments. Accordingly, the researcher used questionnaire and interview for the sample high school EFL teachers. Fife-Schaw (2006) suggests gathering data using questionnaire is important for it is: cost-efficient, for its practicality, its speedy result and for its convenience to collect large amount of data. To this end, the researcher set a close ended questionnaire with 25 items for EFL teachers. The items are designed in to four themes as learners' oral output production status (4 items), uses of oral output in oral interaction (8 items), varying inputs to increase learners' oral output production (8 items) and the ways EFL teachers participate learners in oral interaction (5 items). All the items under the four themes were prepared on a five-point Likert-scale which is extended from 1 to 5 where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree.

In similar manner, the researcher used interview for it is useful to gather detailed information as it is flexible in its nature to modify one's idea or the situation to make the conversation understandable (Gratton & Jones, 2010). The researcher prepared a semi-structured interview of 9 items which were used in line the items from the teachers' questionnaire to cross check the data from the two data gathering instruments and so as to substantiate one another. In line with this, Kumar (2011) states that there is no argument among researchers on employing varied instruments to secure more reliable and valid information. Sharing this idea, Anderson and Garrod (1987) points out that the application of multiple data sources and approaches lets the researchers develop in depth knowledge on the topic that is going to be surveyed. Hence, the researcher in this case prepared these data gathering instruments in line with the review of related literature and adapted from previous

researchers in similar area (Mebratu, 2018; Mouhoub, 2016; Sultana, 2015; Wright, 1987).

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

To achieve the main objective of this study, the researcher used questionnaire and interview to gather data. Accordingly, the researcher designed a 5- point Likert scale questionnaires for high school English language teachers which were analyzed quantitatively. The researcher believes that besides checking the reliability and validity of the items, making the bench mark for interpreting the points from the Likert scale is important. Although there is a debate among researchers on using the midpoint likert scale, Raaijmakers *et al.* (2000) argued that clear statement of the mid-point scale is essential because it avoids forcing respondents to choose agree or disagree options, that may evoke misleading conclusion. Many scholars agreed that midpoints may have many different meanings such as "neither agree nor disagree", "undecided", "don't know", and "no opinion" (Raaijmakers *et al.*, 2000). Thus, giving the clear definition of the midpoints is very much important for the researchers to minimize ambiguity during data gathering and interpretation of data (Kulas, *et al.*, 2008). Respondents selected the "agree" or "disagree" continuum when they are capable of reasoning out why they agree or disagree, yet they chose "undecided" when they fail to justify the reason and when their level of understanding is low (Krosnick. *et al.*, 2002), Accordingly, the current researcher defined the middle point scale (3 = undecided) as "low understanding or below average". In addition to questionnaire, the researcher used interview which was analyzed qualitatively as the other means of data gathering tool.

Thus, items under each objective or research question were thematically analyzed, and what was obtained through teachers' questionnaire and interview were cross-checked. Therefore, the data gathered via questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive analysis specifically (frequency and mean), and the analysis were made using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Kothari (2004) suggests that "Descriptive analysis is largely the study of distributions of one variable. This study provides us with profiles of different subjects on any of a multiple of characteristics such as size, composition, efficiency, preferences, etc." On the other hand, the data collected by interview were analyzed qualitatively.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher gave ethically considerations for many things. First, before conducting this research at the selected schools, the researcher addressed legal letters from Wollega University research director office to the school principals. Next to this, the objective of the research was made clear for the school principals and then to the subjects of the study. Besides, discussions were held with EFL teachers to



adjust the schedule for data gathering, and the data were gathered next. The researcher also acknowledged authors or sources for the ideas directly or indirectly used for the success of the study. Furthermore, the researcher trusted and kept the originality of the data gathered from the participants. In line with this, Krefting (1991) points out that research project are trustworthy when it reflects the reality and ideas of the participants.

## Results

Identifying English Language teachers' Conceptions of oral output in English class was the main objective of this study. Thus, looking at the term conception from different scholars' point of view is very important before directly coming to the analysis of the data. Accordingly, Pehkonen (2001) define conception as conscious belief which is based on reasoning processes which are at least justified and accepted by the individual himself. Brown *et al.* (2009) define conception as ecological and rational representations of thought and traditional practices an individual experience within a culture. This refers to individual's opinions, view, believe and presupposition which is limited to the context that the person is in. In general, all the above scholars explain the term conception in the same way, and this enables the current researcher to consider the scope of the items in teachers' questionnaire (EFL teachers' conceptions of oral output) in line it (Gorodetsky *et al.*, 1997).

On the basis of the above scholarly provided concepts, the researcher prepared a questionnaire with 25 items to measure EFL teachers' conceptions of oral output. The questionnaire was designed with five-point Likert scale that is extended from 1(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to let the respondents express their feelings either by agreeing or disagreeing to the items. To measure the reliability of the items the researcher used Alpha measure (Cronbach's alpha), and checked the alpha measure of the items thematically and put in the table below. An acceptable level of reliability coefficients specifically for tests of cognitive ability should not be below 0.7 (Heale & Twycross, 2015; Muijs, 2004). Thus, the alpha result of the items is presented as to the theme in Table 1.

The questionnaire was filled by 30 high school EFL teachers, and the data was analyzed using descriptive statistics namely, mean value, frequency and percent, for standard deviation is not recommended for ordinal data. Supporting this Denscombe (2007, p.265) states that "It is meaningless to use standard deviation with nominal or even, strictly speaking, with ordinal data." With ordinal data we do not know the cause of the order, or by how much they

differ from each other. The analyses of the items were also indicated in the table as follows. Finally, the researcher analyzed the the items under the theme using SPSS and interpreted the results of the mean value in line with the views of different scholars. EFL teachers' conceptions of oral output is shown in Table 2.

**Table 1:** The alpha measures of the items as to their thematic group

N0	Items in theme	Alpha coefficient
1	Status of students' oral output production	.791
2	Using oral output for d/f purposes	.935
3	Varying inputs to increase students' OOP	.807
4	Ways EFLTs participate learners in OI	.843

Table 2 is concerned with items dealing with EFL teachers' Conceptions of Oral output. Totally it consists of 25 items which are grouped in to four themes as status of learners' oral output production, purposes OO is used for, Varying inputs to maximize students' OOP and the ways EFLTs participate learners in OI. Accordingly, the first group contains 4 items which deal with learners' oral output production status, and for the four items case the response was found to the disagreement continuum. Specifically, more than 85% of the respondents disagreed to the idea that the status of high school students' oral output production is as good as what the level demanding. The grand mean (1.80) of the group which is found to the disagreement side of the middle point scale (3.00) also confirmed the disagreement of the respondents to the idea. In similar manner, the result from the interview revealed that the oral output production level of the students were below what the high school level students demanding. Specifically, T<sub>3</sub> said that his students did not respond orally even when I want their oral output production for evaluation. Besides, T<sub>6</sub> claimed that the situation that we are in doesn't invite the students to produce oral output. For one thing the class size by itself doesn't allow me to push individual students to produce oral output. For the other thing, the credit given for the oral interaction by the curriculum and even by the students themselves is not something motivating.

**Table 2:** Description of EFL teachers' Conceptions of Oral output

Items under status of OOP	1		2		3		4		5		Mean
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
I believe learners provide OO meaningfully in English class.	7	23.3	20	66.7	3	10	-	-	-	-	1.87
Students actively participate in OIP in English class.	8	26.7	16	53.3	6	20	-	-	-	-	1.93
Learners use OO to improve their oral interaction skills.	10	33.3	16	53.3	3	10	1	3.3	-	-	1.83
Learners listen to what teacher initiates to produce oral output.	17	56.7	9	30	4	13.3	-	-	-	-	1.56
<b>Grand mean</b>											<b>1.80</b>
Items on purposes of oral output	1		2		3		4		5		Mean
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
OO is very important in improving oral interaction skills of learners.	4	13.3	19	63.3	5	16.7	2	6.7	-	-	2.20
OO is useful to generat better input	10	33.3	14	46.7	6	20.5	-	-	-	-	1.87
OO is useful in syntactic processing.	9	30.0	15	50.0	4	13.3	2	6.7	-	-	1.97
Oral output is important in hypotheses testing.	8	26.7	16	53.3	2	6.7	4	13.3	-	-	2.07
OO is used in developing learners' task processing automaticity.	7	23.3	18	60	4	13.3	1	3.3	-	-	1.97
Oral output is helpful in developing learners' discourse skills.	5	16.7	20	66.7	4	13.3	1	3.3	-	-	2.03
Oral output is useful to develop students' personal voices.	6	20.0	20	66.7	2	6.7	2	6.7	-	-	2.00
OO is used to adjust conversation.	10	33.3	16	53.3	2	6.7	2	6.7	-	-	1.87
<b>Grand Mean</b>											<b>1.99</b>





**Table 2:** Description of EFL teachers' Conceptions of Oral output (Contd.)

Input varying items	1		2		3		4		5		Mean
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Using d/f topics is important to make learners produce OO.	12	40	11	36.7	5	16.7	2	6.7	-	-	1.90
EFL teachers need to use d/f tasks to increase learners' OOP.	8	26.7	8	26.7	10	33.3	4	13.3	-	-	2.33
Adapting activities as to the learners' background can maximize their OOP.	8	26.7	8	26.7	13	43.3	1	3.3	-	-	2.23
Using minimal responses is useful in increasing learners' OOP.	6	20.0	14	46.7	9	30	1	3.3	-	-	2.17
Script based activity is more helpful to increase learners' OOP.	2	6.7	26	20.0	16	53.3	5	16.7	1	3.3	2.90
I believe the type of OI used in class is more of teacher-student.	6	20.0	13	43.3	10	33.3	1	3.3	-	-	2.20
Using d/f situations is important to increase learners' OOP.	7	23.3	13	43.3	6	20.0	3	10.0	1	3.3	2.27
Appropriateness of feedback determines learners' OOP.	6	20	10	33.3	10	33.3	3	10.0	1	3.3	2.43
<b>Grand mean</b>											<b>2.30</b>
Ways EFLTs participate learners in OI	1		2		3		4		5		Mean
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Following up individual students' attention in OI class is important to improve his/her OOP.	9	30.0	10	33.3	8	26.7	3	10.0	-	-	2.17
Limiting OI to certain group is an economized way to get OO from all .	8	26.7	13	43.3	5	16.7	4	13.3	-	-	2.17
My students feel happy when I orally interact individually.	10	33.3	12	40.0	7	23.3	1	3.3	-	-	1.97
EFL teachers need to take part in group discussions and interrupt individuals to promote their OOP.	9	30	13	43.3	8	26.7	-	-	-	-	1.97
The interaction b/n teachers & students is as important as the interaction among learners.	8	26.7	11	36.7	6	20.0	4	13.3	1	3.3	2.30
<b>Grand Mean</b>											<b>2.12</b>



For the case of the third thematic area, 8 items were grouped, and the responses showed the disagreement of the teachers to the concept using a variety of inputs is important to increase students' oral output production. Plus to this, the grand mean of the items (2.30) confirmed how much their response is closer to the disagreement continuum. Besides, the result from the interview revealed that different contents, topics, activities and situations were not used to improve students' oral output production. In particular, T<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>3</sub>, T<sub>4</sub> and T<sub>5</sub> claimed that varying the topics, activities and situations in line with individual students' interest and background is something challenging in our contexts where more than 75 students are assigned in one class in average. In similar case, T<sub>2</sub> & T<sub>6</sub> refused the usage of different inputs in EFL class as their intention is to cover what is in the textbook, for they are to be evaluated by the portion covered.

The fourth category comprises of 5 items which is concerned with the ways EFLTs participate learners in OI. The result revealed that most (nearly 70%) of the respondents' disagreement to the idea that EFLTs follow up individual students' attention, limiting OI to certain group, taking part in group discussion & conducting teacher-student interaction as a way to increase learners' involvement in oral interaction. Besides, the result from the interview pointed out that using different methods of teaching that meet individual students' learning preference is difficult. Particularly, T<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>4</sub> & T<sub>5</sub> stated that there is time limit to participate every student in oral interaction turn by turn. Similarly, they insisted that limiting the OI to certain group has also its own drawbacks. That means they agreed to neither of these ways to participate learners in oral interaction practice so as to increase their oral output production. In addition to this, T<sub>2</sub>, T<sub>3</sub> & T<sub>6</sub> pointed out that rather than limiting the ways of teaching to individual student and certain groups, they preferred the ways that engage the whole class in OIP in mass.

## **Discussion**

The researcher used 25 items to deal with EFL teachers' conceptions of oral output which were grouped to four themes as clearly indicated in Table 2. Accordingly, the first group is concerned with students' oral output production status, and the result showed that the EFL teachers believed that the students' status of oral output production was below what the level demanded. Plus to this, the result from the interview also revealed that the oral output production level of the students were below standard. The interviewees underlined that students did not respond orally even when their oral output production was required for evaluation purposes. Local studies by (Birhanu, 2000; Melaku, 2005; Meseret, 2007) and abroad (Shamsipour and Allami, 2012; Tuan & Nhu; 2010) also suggested the deterioration of learners' oral interaction level. Nevertheless, Swain (1985)

suggested that adequate output can let the students pay attention to the language, and activate their cognition.

Regarding the second group which is about the function that oral output from the students were used for. The result revealed EFL teachers' refusal of using oral output from the students for different functions. Similarly, the result from interview denoted that it is less likely to use the oral output from the students for different purposes where oral interaction is not meaningfully conducted. Besides, the interviewees claimed that in a few cases the students produced limited oral responses like 'Yes' or 'No' and 'Correct' or 'Wrong' yet they failed to reason it out. Further, they suggested that it is illogical to decide the function that such abstract responses were used for. This is emanated as a result of EFL teachers' conceptions of oral output being below average. Because knowing the purposes oral output is used for in oral interaction practice is one among many components of EFL teachers' conceptions of oral output (Shulman, 1987). Basically, oral output in oral interaction class is used for many purposes as asking for clarification, confirmation, repetition, giving comments, checking comprehension, recast and others Sundari (2018).

As indicated in Table 2 above, the third category of the items was concerned with using a variety of inputs to increase students' oral output production, and the result showed that the teachers claimed that using different inputs were not used in increasing students' oral output production. In the same way, the result from the interview denoted that using a variety of inputs as to the learners' preferences is challenging in contexts where more than 75 students were assigned in a class and where the aim of the teachers is on covering contents and tasks in a textbook in the form of dictation. This showed that how much the conceptions of EFL teachers were below what the level demanded. Student engagement in different activities is linked with his/her individual critical thinking (Kennedy, 2007). Similarly, Villalobos (2015) noted that degree of personalization in speaking activities is always important because it is an effective attention getter, so language teachers need to be clever enough to relate the content to students' interests and circumstances. Sanchez et.al (2016) also pointed out that the activities teachers choose to use reflect their beliefs about teaching and their teaching styles; deciding if the activity to be included in the lesson plan is useful, interesting, necessary or motivating depends on what the teacher thinks students should learn. That means EFL teachers' conceptions of oral output is broader term which is concerned with the knowledge of the teachers about the topics, contents, activities, tasks, situations and levels of the students. In similar manner, Leaver and Stryker (1989) noted that the topics, contents, materials and activities should correspond to the cognitive and affective needs of the students and should be appropriate to the level of the students.



The fourth group of the items is concerned with the ways EFL teachers engage students in oral interaction practice. As indicated in Table 2, the result denoted that the teachers disagreed to almost all the items case under this thematic area. Yet the respondents disagreed even to items which were contradicting one another. In particular, they disagreed to the item involving students individually in oral interaction is important to increase their oral output production. They also disagreed to the item EFL teachers participate students in oral interaction in group/the whole class to increase their oral output production. In similar manner the result from interview noted that there is time limit to engage every student in oral interaction. Likewise, the interviewees insisted that limiting the oral interaction to certain group is not good, for it may discourage the other groups. From the responses above, it is possible to deduce that the teacher respondents were not in a position of using one of the methods to participate the students in oral interaction practice. On the other hand, Saifi (2015) suggested that all the ways are important in improving students' interactive skills. Interaction can occur either collectively in whole class discussion or in pairs and small groups (Luu and Nguyen, 2010). Thus, it is possible to say EFL teachers conceptions of how to involve students in oral interaction so as increase their oral output production was below average.

## Conclusion

Mainly the objective of this study was investigating EFL teachers' conceptions of oral output. In particular the focus of the study was finding out the status of students' oral output production, identifying the purposes oral output is used for in EFL class, differentiating the types of inputs EFL teachers use in EFL class to maximize students' oral output production and finding out the ways EFL teachers use to engage students in oral interaction so as to increase students' oral output production. The finding indicated that the status of students' oral output production was below what the level demanded, and the EFL teachers' conceptions of oral output was found to be below average. Because teachers' conceptions is concerned with everything in teaching learning process as different scholars said. Similarly, the students didn't properly produce oral output; consequently, the purposes that the oral output used for was limited too. Because knowing the purposes oral output is used for in oral interaction practice is one among many components of EFL teachers' conceptions of oral output (Shulman, 1987). In similar manner, EFL teachers' conceptions of using a variety of inputs to increase students' oral output production was found below average as compared to the purposes it is used for as it is listed out by different scholars. Further, even though using different ways are recommended to involve students in oral interaction so as to increase their oral output production,

EFL teachers' conceptions of the ways was found contradicting what scholars suggested.

## Author Contribution Statement

Endalew Alemayehu: Identified the problem, set objective and design, analyzed data, interpreted data and compiled it.

## Competing interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## Acknowledges

The author forward special thanks for individuals who directly or indirectly contributed for the healthy completion of this study. In particular, the authors extend deepest credit for the administrative bodies of the target schools and students and teachers who took part in the study.

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