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The disparity between attitudes towards oral interaction and classroom performances: The case of senior secondary school EFL teachers in Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

Purpose — This study investigates the contradiction between senior secondary school EFL teachers' attitudes on the significance of oral interaction in promoting students' language proficiency and their classroom performances. It also aims to identify the challenges that prevent teachers from engaging in oral interaction as they perceive it should be.

Design/methodology/approach — To do so, a qualitative approach, case study design was used. Data were gathered from six purposefully selected teachers through observations and interviews.

Findings — The results show that senior secondary school EFL teachers have a positive attitude towards oral interaction in EFL teaching and recognize its significance. However, they do not use it during instruction due to obstructions caused by students, classroom facilities, instructional materials, and teachers.

Implications — It contributes to the emergent body of research on the deterioration of students' oral proficiency and teachers' methodological knowledge. Moreover, they justify the necessity of prerequisite actions worth taking to address the problems before assigning the entire responsibility to them for students' low English language proficiency.

Originality — Its novelty lies in its investigation of the gap between what English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers believe about the importance of oral interaction and what they actually do in their classrooms.

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Introduction

English language has academic, economic, social, and political influences due to its use as instructional media, as a means of communication in the globalizing economy and in electronic media, and for international relations (Harris, 2015). Therefore, English language

education is necessary for competence and success in these spheres. Similarly, it is emphasized in the Ethiopian education system due to its roles in the globalizing economy, political and diplomatic relations, its development as a language of science and technology, commerce, sport, internet, and industrial affairs (FDRE, 2020). Consequently, a good command of the English language is a demand for better communication and success.

English is used as a medium of instruction beginning from different levels in Ethiopia. For example, in Oromia Regional State, where this study was conducted, it is used from senior secondary school and upwards (FDRE, 2020), or *primary and secondary education is taught by the local/national language* (Tefera et al., 2018). Given its influence in academic spheres, it is undeniable that students should achieve a considerable level of the language to succeed. To achieve the goal of teaching EFL, teachers play a pivotal role in delivering instruction and guiding students in developing the expected skills. The methods and techniques they use in the classroom are influenced by their attitudes, which have a tremendous impact on students' learning. In EFL contexts where students have no environmental support, teachers play a crucial role as the primary source of input and methodological support. It has also been stated that lack of exposure outside the classroom is among the real problems in all contexts of language teaching (Long, 2016). Consequently, teachers' attitudes affect students' learning in EFL contexts.

Attitude highly correlates with performance. Teachers' attitudes concern the behaviors, outlooks, and inclinations they have toward the philosophical and methodological aspects of education: theories, methodologies, students, the educational arena, their profession, and so on. Teachers' attitudes, among other factors, shape their motivation to act in the classroom in particular ways (Sürücü & Ünal, 2018). In other words, teachers' views and behaviors unshakably impact students' mental, emotional, and social development (Kahveci, 2023**),** as well as how students perceive and relate to instructional content (Bodinga et al., 2025). Teachers' attitudes also have cascading effects on students' impulse and curiosity in learning, since a teacher with a positive attitude displays greater engagement, commitment, and persistence, which results in increased curiosity during implementation, increased motivation, the resolution of perceived potential classroom obstructions, and heightened rapport with students.

In contrast, a negative attitude leads to opposition, ineffectiveness, lack of motivation, disengagement, less interaction, and so on (ibid). In other words, teachers who are opponents, prejudiced, or apathetic towards a particular teaching and learning trend usually display resentment that, in turn, hampers their tendency to create a friendly learning arena and discourages learners' as well as their educational commitment (Oyekan, 2020). Therefore, teachers' attitudes serve as a background that guides their teaching and learning, and, in turn, students' learning.

The current English language teaching and learning curriculum for Ethiopian secondary schools is assumed to adopt Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and so are the textbooks. The communicative functions of language, as the core notion in CLT, emphasize learner-centered, collaborative, and interactive learning, as well as task-based activities. This approach is rooted in Sociocultural Theory (SCT), which holds that cognitive development results from the interaction between social and physical environments (Ellis, 2019). It underlines realistic, interactive, student-centered, task-based, and expressive and purposeful

exchange in learning (Qasserras, 2023; Srinath, 2024; Surkamp & Viebrock, 2018) that develops students' communicative skills.

Learning a language, whether second or foreign, is then targeted at developing functional English communication skills. Likewise, it has been stated that learning a foreign language focuses on developing effective speaking skills (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Surkamp & Viebrock, 2018; Ur, 2012). Oral proficiency is achieved through interaction and exercise (Abdu & Rosmaladewi, 2016). This implies that interaction is at the heart of the contemporary language-learning model and a key characteristic of the constructivist approach. By adhering to the principles of the constructivist approach, teachers reinforce a student-centered educational system (Akdemir & Özçelik, 2019). However, acting in that way is principally related to teachers' attitudes towards it.

From these ideas, it is evident that teachers' attitudes towards the role of interaction in advancing students' oral proficiency influence their classroom performance. Teachers with a positive attitude towards the role of interaction in promoting students' oral proficiency skills align their classroom actions with their expected roles. In contrast, those with a negative attitude are likely to set it aside. Interaction is the organizing notion in contemporary theories of communicative competence; it is defined by how well conversers negotiate meaning during communication (Brown, 2000). Therefore, interaction helps language learning through the negotiation of meaning. Furthermore, interaction is central to modern language learning theory, as it generally transforms and promotes students' language system (Walsh, 2011).

Though the central idea remains the same, scholars define interaction differently. To illustrate, it is labeled as verbal communication consisting of input and output that takes place between learners (Ellis, 2015), mutual exchange between conversers (Surkamp & Viebrock, 2018). In short, interaction is a collaborative give-and-take between interlocutors whose goal is to establish shared insight into feelings or ideas through the negotiation of meaning, or a joint pursuit in head-on interpersonal exchange.

Despite the importance of oral proficiency in foreign language learning, there has been growing concern about students' ability to express their thoughts in English across different educational levels in Ethiopia. For example, the deterioration in English language proficiency at senior secondary schools is a problem for both students and teachers (Deressa & Getachew, 2025); students cannot express their thoughts in English (Desalegn, 2020; Zeleke & Alemtsehay, 2015). Not only in senior secondary schools but also at the tertiary level, students' willingness to communicate (WTC) is hindered by poor EFL competence (Dereje, 2024).

There are various factors that challenge the proper application of oral interaction in EFL classrooms. These factors relate to the students, the learning environment, teachers/pedagogy, and the instructional materials. Similarly, it has been concluded that these factors are related to learners, teachers, instructional materials, and the classrooms (Bahiru, 2023; Minwuyelet, 2019). In addition, Destaw (2021) found that the factors that impede oral interaction in EFL classrooms are related to students and the teaching materials. The teacher-related factors in the above studies are, of course, not about their attitudes towards the significance of oral interaction in developing students' language learning. For

instance, it has been stated that teachers have a positive attitude towards oral proficiency/speaking skills (Eyasu et al., 2023; Minwuyelet, 2019).

There are studies of oral interaction in both wider and local contexts. However, they differ from this study in scope, focus, and methodology. For instance, it has been said that interaction in a foreign language classroom at the secondary school level, particularly from teachers' perspectives, appears to be ignored (Sundari, 2017). In other words, numerous studies on interaction are conducted in L2 settings and focus on learners (Walsh, 2011), or in second-language and/or Western cultural settings (Hall, 2011). Moreover, studies comparing teachers' attitudes with their classroom performances are scarce in the local context. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the disparity between teachers' attitudes toward the significance of oral interaction in advancing students' language proficiency and their classroom performance. It also examines whether senior secondary school EFL teachers align with their beliefs about the significance of oral interaction in promoting students' language proficiency, and the challenges that hinder them from doing so. To accomplish these aims, the following question is posed: What are senior secondary school EFL teachers' attitudes towards the significance of oral interaction in promoting students' communicative competence and performance? Do senior secondary school EFL teachers perform in line with their beliefs? What are the challenges that obstruct senior secondary school EFL teachers from conducting oral interaction according to their beliefs?

Method

Research design

In this study, a qualitative approach was adopted. Qualitative approach produces an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon in an actual setting, allows flexibility and rounded investigation, and supports greater interaction between the researcher and participants (Wojcik, 2024). It allows combining various methods (e.g., observations with interviews) to obtain in-depth insight into a given problem. It is also used to directly access actual interactions (Mackey & Gass, 2022). Moreover, a study in the Sociocultural Approach is primarily qualitative, as it allows a thorough examination of real-time interactions (Ellis, 2015). To exhaustively examine the research questions, a case study design was used. A case study obviously accentuates specific groups or parts of it and helps to find meaning, scrutinize processes, and provide an informed understanding of the issue under question (Mackey & Gass, 2022). Therefore, to obtain rich data on the research questions, a qualitative approach, a case study design was employed in this study.

Setting and participants

Data were gathered from six senior secondary school EFL teachers in Bishoftu city administration, Ethiopia. Ten of the teachers hold an MA in TEFL, while two hold a BA in English language and literature. Among the MA holders, four were selected based on their experience with the purposive sampling technique; one of the merits of a case study is its tendency to allow purposive sampling based on desired traits (Mackey & Gass, 2022). However, those with a BA were selected comprehensively. Including teachers with varying experiences and professional levels helps determine whether differences exist based on these

qualities, examines the research questions from different perspectives, and identifies causal findings.

Data collection

To obtain data, frequent unstructured observations were used. The classrooms were observed three times until data were saturated. Observation helps obtain first-hand data on the challenges that obstruct senior secondary school EFL teachers from conducting oral interaction during instruction. During the observations, audio recordings were made to capture the overall processes of oral interaction and/or to prevent data leakage while the researcher was taking notes on non-recordable data, such as teachers' and students' movements, misbehavior, what teachers write on the blackboard, and non-verbal information that affects oral interaction.

To gather data on attitudes and personal experiences regarding the challenges teachers anticipate when applying oral interaction during instruction, interviews were conducted. Moreover, interviews allow the researcher to obtain sensitive data on teachers' emotions and administratively sensitive issues that hinder oral interaction, to uncover casual information, and to triangulate their personal feelings and actual performance as observed. It comprised five general questions, both open- and closed-ended, composed based on the research questions, the literature review, the researcher's own experiences, and classroom observations. The interviews were also audio-recorded.

To obtain adequate and relevant data, the classrooms were first observed, and the audio-recorded data were transcribed before the interviews were conducted. Since points such as teachers' and students' movements in the classroom, gestures, and what teachers write on the blackboard could not be recorded, the researcher was taking notes to avoid data leakage. Next, interviews were conducted with the sample teachers. This helped the researcher make potential adjustments to the interview questions, arbitrate between conflicting data from the tools (if any), seek further explanations and clarifications, triangulate data obtained through observations, and avoid the task-order effect. During the interviews, the respondents were also asked questions about their teaching related to the particular observation.

Data analysis

In this study, data from observations were first analyzed to identify the challenges teachers encountered during classroom instruction, thematically, and to determine whether the challenges were connected to students, the classroom, the textbook, or the teachers. Following this, the interview results were analyzed alongside those from the observations. Next, the results were interpreted in light of the research questions and prior insights from the literature. Finally, conclusions were drawn, and recommendations were made.

Findings and discussion

This study aims to investigate the discrepancy between senior secondary school EFL teachers' attitudes towards the significance of oral interaction in promoting students' oral proficiency and their actual classroom performances. To justify this, the challenges that

prevent them from performing in accordance with their beliefs are also examined. In the following sections, these are presented with the empirical evidence.

Teachers' attitudes towards the significance of oral interaction

What teachers believe about a given issue directly shapes their classroom performances. Accordingly, the data gathered through interviews show that most senior secondary school EFL teachers have a positive attitude towards using oral interaction as a methodological tool during instruction to advance students' linguistic competences and performances. Specifically, three out of four respondents stressed the importance of oral interaction in foreign language learning. However, one believes its significance depends on preconditions, such as the type of topic being taught and the purpose of teaching a language. To make it clear, these are summarized in the following table.

Table 1

Teachers' Beliefs on the Significance of Oral Interaction

Teacher belief		T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	*f*	%
Do you believe that oral interaction affects students' linguistic competences and communicative performances?	Yes	√	√	-	√	√	√	5	83
	Depends	-	√	-	-	-	-	1	17
	No								0

Informed in Table 1, it is evident that almost all teachers believe that oral interaction enhances students' communicative competence and performance, but T2 believes this depends on the type of topic taught and the purpose of teaching the language. This teacher stated that oral interaction is significant when teaching speaking, especially in language schools rather than in formal EFL classrooms. He further added that its significance depends on students' linguistic backgrounds, the topic being taught, the purpose of teaching the language, and familiarity with the method. Similarly, EFL teachers have a positive attitude towards oral proficiency/speaking skills (Eyasu et al., 2023; Minwuyelet, 2019).

Teachers' beliefs on the significance of oral interaction

Furthermore, the teachers were asked to specify how oral interaction helps to promote students' linguistic competencies and performances. To this end, they posed different functions summarized in the following table.

Table 2

Teachers' Assumptions on the Significance of Oral Interaction

Oral interaction	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	*f*	%
Enhancing fluency	√	√	√	√	√	√	6	100
Giving practice opportunities	√	√	√	√	√	√	6	100
Developing confidence	√	√	√	√	√	√	6	100
Motivating language learning	x	√	√	√	√	√	5	83
Enhancing accuracy	√	x	√	√	√	x	4	67

Table 2 shows that senior secondary school EFL teachers consider oral interaction significant for various purposes. All respondents (100%) believe that oral interaction is significant for promoting students' linguistic performance/fluency, providing practice opportunities, and developing their confidence. Furthermore, many teachers (83%) believe that it motivates students to learn the language, while 67% believe that it advances students' linguistic competence/accuracy. However, T2 and T6 did not mention that oral interaction advances students' communicative competence/accuracy, while T1 did not mention the role of oral interaction in fostering students' motivation. Therefore, it is found that senior secondary school EFL teachers believe that oral interaction advances language learning, though the extent to which this occurs differs among them.

Different authors also claim that oral interaction has various significances in modern language teaching and learning. For example, it is believed that oral interaction instigates learners' participation in the instructional process and develops their oral performance or language (Bonavetti, 2015), their oral performance or communication (Mede et al., 2019), and their processing of linguistic information (Alahmadi, 2019; Duff, 2019). Moreover, it helps students to exchange experiences, develop learning autonomy, build a sense of cooperation, progress linguistic competence, provide practice opportunities, and allow meaningful negotiation (Badash, 2024; Braden, 2018; Liu, 2022; Martin & Bolliger, 2018; Surkamp & Viebrock, 2018; Teng, 2019). Oral interaction is also believed to ease anxiety (Kruk, 2021), stemming from fear of errors and/or fear of interacting with others, as well as from the process of constructing their own knowledge (Lennon, 2021).

However, teachers' beliefs about the significance of oral interaction do not translate into their classroom performance. That is, senior secondary school EFL teachers do not allow students to interact orally during instruction. Similarly, Adaba (2017) and Zeleke and Alemtsehay (2015) found that teachers hardly accomplish their roles during oral interactions. Therefore, teachers' classroom performances do not match their beliefs. It is necessary, then, to identify what impedes them from acting according to their beliefs. To this end, teachers identified various challenges related to students, classroom infrastructure, the textbook, and the teachers themselves.

Challenges that obstruct teachers from conducting oral interaction

Despite their beliefs regarding the significance of oral interaction in developing students' linguistic competences and communicative performances, senior secondary school EFL teachers do not use oral interaction during instruction. Only T3 allowed students to complete a task in groups of three (according to their desk numbers) for six minutes during three rounds of observation. As a result, it was necessary to identify why they do not use it, despite their belief in the contribution of oral interaction to fostering students' linguistic competences and communicative performance. To this end, they were asked to justify the discrepancy between their beliefs and their actions, and they raised the challenges that prevent them from engaging in oral interaction during instructions. These challenges relate to students, classroom facilities, instructional materials, and teachers, as summarized in the following tables.

Table 3

Students-related Challenges

Students-related challenges	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	*f*	%
Poor linguistic background	√	√	√	√	√	√	6	100
Unwillingness	√	x	√	√	√	√	5	83
Fear of errors	√	√	√	√	x	√	5	83
Shyness	x	√	√	√	√	√	5	83
Shortage of vocabulary	√	√	√	√	√	x	5	83
Lack of familiarity with it	x	√	x	√	√	√	4	67
Lack of practice outside the classroom	√	√	√	x	x	√	4	67
Focus on passing national exam	√	√	√	x	√	x	4	67
The use of L1	x	√	√	√	x	√	4	67

Table 3 shows that the primary obstacle for senior secondary school EFL teachers in conducting oral interaction during instruction related to students is a poor linguistic background (100%). The senior secondary school EFL teachers stated that, due to students' poor linguistic backgrounds from previous levels, they find it difficult to engage in oral interaction. Moreover, many respondents (83%) pointed out that students' unwillingness, fear of errors, shortage of vocabulary, and shyness are the other main impediments. Of course, students with poor proficiency in a target language may become unwilling, fear errors, be shy, and lack adequate vocabulary to interact. The third category of challenges senior secondary school teachers encounter in conducting oral interaction during instruction is related to students' unfamiliarity with oral interaction, lack of practice outside the classroom, a focus on passing the national examination, and the use of L1. Regarding the lack of practice outside the classroom, the teachers stated that students' reluctance, uneducated family background, and/or English being taught as a foreign language contribute to the problem. Nevertheless, all challenges, except those related to family backgrounds and the context of English instruction (foreign), can be addressed through teachers' genuine commitment and skills. In short, the fundamental student-related challenges that impede senior secondary school EFL teachers are a poor linguistic background, followed by unwillingness to interact, fear of errors, shyness, and a shortage of vocabulary. The next challenges are students' lack of familiarity with oral interaction, insufficient practice outside the classroom, a focus on passing the national exam, and the use of L1 during interactions.

Table 4

Classroom-related Challenges

Classroom-related challenges	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	*f*	%
Large class size	√	√	√	√	√	√	6	100
Inconvenient seats	√	√	√	√	x	√	5	83

Table 4 illustrates that a large class size is the major challenge impeding senior secondary school EFL teachers from conducting oral interaction. The teachers complained that there are about 60 – 70 students in each classroom. Moreover, since students sit on desks that

accommodate three students each, it is inconvenient to make groups of different students and visit each group during interactions. In fact, these problems were witnessed during the observations.

Generally speaking, among factors related to classroom infrastructure, large class size is the principal obstacle to teachers' oral interaction, followed by limited seating opportunities. In Ethiopian senior secondary schools, the number of students is a nuisance. The other factor inhibiting senior secondary school EFL teachers from engaging in oral interaction during instruction concerns the teaching materials. This study found that the average number of students per classroom is 60-70; the available textbooks in the classrooms do not match the number of students, with one textbook given to four students. Moreover, the seating arrangements do not allow for flexible group formation, since students sit on desks that accommodate three students each. Shortages of material resources and large class sizes are among the factors impeding teachers from applying pedagogical teaching methods in Ethiopia and most Sub-Saharan countries (Rijkhoek, 2016), as well as in Kenya (Atieno, 2022).

Table 5

Instructional Materials-related Challenges

Instructional materials-related challenges	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	*f*	%
Inadequacy of student textbook	√	√	√	√	√	√	6	100
Bulky content	√	√	x	√	√	√	5	83
Unfamiliar topics	x	√	x	√	x	√	4	67

Table 5 demonstrates that the key challenge for senior secondary school teachers in conducting oral interaction in the classroom is the inadequate student textbooks. The respondents stated that the textbook-student ratio in the classrooms is 1-4. They added that students are careless about bringing even those few textbooks to class despite their efforts to make them do so. The second severe problem, according to the respondents, is the amount of content stuffed into the textbook (83%). They further stated that the weekly allotment for English is 4 hours for grades 9 and 10, and 5 hours for grades 11 and 12. This implies that the period (40 minutes) is reduced at each grade level compared to the previous year. Consequently, the teachers intend to cover the course within the given time, and this is one of the criteria used to evaluate them. Third, the unfamiliarity and complexity of some of the topics pose another challenge. According to the data, 67% of respondents stated that some topics are so unauthentic and intricate that they are neither applicable nor understandable in students' real situations. These include, according to the respondents, topics in the reading passages, listening texts, and speaking exercises.

Table 6

Teacher-related Challenges

Teacher-related challenges	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	*f*	%
Pursuing exam-oriented teaching	√	√	√	√	√	√	6	100
Teachers' lack of familiarity with it	x	√	x	x	√	√	3	50
Anger with students' failure to interact	x	√	x	x	√	x	2	33

Table 6 portrays that the other factor hindering senior secondary school EFL teachers from conducting oral interaction in EFL classrooms concerns the teachers themselves. All the teachers confessed that their sole focus in teaching the language is to prepare students for the summative national examination. As a result, they try to give many explanations of grammatical points and vocabulary rather than helping students express their ideas fluently in the language. This means that senior secondary school EFL teachers prioritize linguistic form/usage over its use in real communication. This can also be seen in Table 3 (H), which shows that students' main target for learning EFL is to succeed in the national examination rather than communicating in the language. Of course, in the Ethiopian context, English is not used for communication anywhere outside the classroom, and this can direct students' attention or purpose towards success in the national examination. According to the above analysis, problems that hinder the use of oral interaction in senior secondary schools also emanate from the teachers themselves. All of the teachers reported that their main target of teaching EFL is to prepare students for the national examination, which makes them focus on linguistic competencies rather than performance. This is related to Vroom's Expectancy Theory. This theory states that people behave in ways that lead to the best possible outcome or reward (Sutton, 2024). In addition, some teachers admit they are unfamiliar with the processes and procedures of oral interaction and other contemporary methods in EFL teaching and learning.

In general, this study found that the challenges that obstruct senior secondary school EFL teachers are related to students, classroom infrastructure, teaching materials, and teachers. In the same vein, different prior findings suggest these problems. For instance, it has been concluded that the factors that hinder oral interaction are related to learners, teachers, instructional materials, and the classrooms (Bahiru, 2023; Minwuyelet, 2019), students and the teaching materials (Destaw, 2021), and class size, lack of resources, teachers, etc (Dewan & Sherma, 2025). The study's findings are helpful because they contribute to the emergent body of research on the deterioration of students' oral proficiency and teachers' methodological knowledge. Second, they justify the need for prerequisite actions worth taking to address the problems before assigning the entire responsibility to them due to students' low English language proficiency. Moreover, the findings can help curriculum designers focus on oral interaction as a methodological tool in EFL teaching and learning. Course and material writers can also use the results of this study to design and write authentic materials and tasks that enable oral interaction during EFL instruction. Teacher training institutions can also use the results of this study to train competent teachers who understand the methodological advantages of oral interaction in EFL teaching and learning. Teachers and students can also use the insights from the current study to blend their overall endeavors in their march towards successful interactions. Lastly, interested bodies conducting future research in related areas can use this study as a stepping stone.

Conclusion

This study aims to investigate the incongruence between senior secondary school EFL teachers' attitudes towards the significance of oral interaction in promoting students' oral proficiency and their actual classroom performances. In doing so, the challenges that obstruct them and prevent them from performing in line with their beliefs are also analyzed. In this section, the findings are discussed in light of prior insights from studies. Based on the

data obtained and analyzed, it is found that senior secondary school EFL teachers have a positive attitude towards the use of oral interaction as a pedagogical tool in teaching EFL. Second, it is found that senior secondary school EFL teachers acknowledge the significance of oral interaction in promoting students' communicative performances and linguistic competencies. They believe that oral interaction fundamentally enhances fluency/communicative performance, provides practice opportunities, builds confidence to perform in the language, motivates students to learn the language, and advances students' linguistic competence/accuracy. However, they do not perform in line with their beliefs during instruction – teachers' classroom performances do not align with their beliefs because they do not allow students to interact orally during instruction. Regarding the obstructions that affect senior secondary school EFL teachers in conducting oral interaction during instruction, they face challenges in aligning their performance with their beliefs. To this end, the teachers assume that the fundamental obstacle to oral interaction in EFL classrooms stems from students, classroom infrastructure, and the textbook. At the same time, they admit that they also contribute to the absence of oral interaction in the classroom. These findings imply that the problem of the absence of oral interaction does not emanate from teachers' attitudes and their assumed significance, but rather from multifaceted roots such as students, the classroom environment, instructional materials, and, of course, the teachers themselves. It is also important to note that senior secondary school EFL teachers attribute the challenges to external factors rather than taking primary responsibility. This study provides invaluable insights into how oral interaction occurs in senior secondary school EFL classrooms and the impediments that prevent teachers from conducting it effectively and efficiently.

However, this study has a limitation. Observation data were gathered using audio recording, but it would have been better to use video recording to capture the overall classroom scene, which the researcher compensated for with notes. This was done because the respondents were unwilling to be video-recorded but were willing to be audio-recorded. In addition, video recording was costly and could distract students' and teachers' attention, potentially undermining the authenticity of the data. Based on its limitation, it is suggested that future research in this area employ video recording with great care and strict confidentiality. Moreover, participants reported using oral interaction in accordance with what they consider significant. Therefore, research endeavors that investigate theory and practice should use observation rather than a questionnaire as the primary data-gathering tool. Finally, it is recommended that all stakeholders across different educational hierarchies strive to address the current deterioration in students' oral proficiency levels. The Ministry of Education and the Regional Education Bureau should: collaborate to prepare and disseminate English-language teaching methodology manuals for teachers and textbooks for students; address class size by allocating adequate budgets or fundraising; and enforce CPD and quality assurance exams. Teachers should also take the primary responsibility for improving their professional quality through available options, such as the internet; they must implement what they theoretically assume about oral interaction in their actual classroom performances to narrow the gap, rather than pushing the problem onto someone else.

Declaration of the use of AI assisted technologies

The authors of this article declare that they have not used AI-assisted technology during the entire process of the research and this article.

Credit authorship contribution statement

We would like to declare that this article is our original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university or published in any journal before, and that all sources of materials used for the dissertation have been duly acknowledged. Moreover, we would like to clarify that Tesfa Bella, the corresponding author who is a graduating PhD student at Addis Ababa University, has conducted this study for the last six years and Abebe Damte, who is an associate professor in the same institution, has been providing constructive comments as an advisor throughout.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors of this article would like to state that they have no known competing financial interests or relationships that could influence the work reported in this paper.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ethical approval for the current study was obtained from Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, Addis Ababa University, and it is one of the requirements for Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) in English Language Teaching (ELT). Furthermore, verbal informed consent was obtained from all of the participants ahead of data collection in line with the approved protocol of the study. That is, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their willingness to participate, and their right to withdraw at any time if they wanted.

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