Teachers' Conceptions of Teaching English: Implications and Applications for EFL Policy and Practice

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Abstract: The study was conducted to explore EFL teachers' conceptions of teaching English in secondary schools in eastern Hararghe, Ethiopia. Adopting phenomenological research approach, in-depth interview was conducted with nineteen purposively selected teachers from five schools. The analysis followed grounded approach to emerge categories from the data. In the findings, four categories of conceptions of teaching and two higher-order orientations were identified. Transmission of specific knowledge of language elements and exam-preparation are identified as the most predominant categories of conceptions and indicators of good teaching and success. Conversely, the two facilitative orientations to teaching and learning English language were the least reported categories. Hence, teachers' conceptions of teaching are predominately teacher-centered/exam-focused than student-centered/meaning-making-focused. Unless their conceptions are changed, teachers in the traditional approach are unlikely to adopt active learning methods in English classroom which is against the EFL policy claims. In such context, as part of continuous professional development, constant reflective practices in which teachers reconceptualise and change their conceptions of teaching is a necessity.

Keywords: Conceptions of teaching; EFL teachers; English language teaching; Policy claims

1. Introduction

Most of the recently emerging developments in the literature advocate the need for changing conceptions of teaching towards interactive and active construction of meanings for these are claimed effective in boosting quality and outcome of students' learning (Canbay and Beceren, 2012; Devlin, 2006; Watkins, 1998). Mainly, in EFL context, such paradigm shift is pivotal to empower learners to learn the language by doing, and to enable students construct knowledge actively interacting with their peers and teachers using English. As underpinned in social constructivists' view, learning is thus all about constructing ideas rather than passively absorbing information (Dewey, 1933; Freire, 2000; Kohn, 2015; Swain, 2005). And hence, EFL teacher's role is to facilitate such learning and enable students enhance their language ability in an interactive, holistic and contextualized fashion.

For decades, despite these innovative practices, in the secondary education of Ethiopia, English classroom practices have been claimed to characterize traditional/banking approaches, where students are mainly addressed through knowledge transmission, teacher-centered, passive and rote-learning approaches (Jha, 2016; Terfa, 2008). These approaches do not seem to benefit students beyond enabling them pass exams and achieve certificates. Yet, the approaches are criticised for "they do not necessarily lead to understanding and the ability to apply knowledge to meet the challenges of modern society" (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2009: 1). There is a growing consensus that with this mode of instruction, it is unlikely to narrow the gap between what the policy expects and the actual level of students' English proficiency. In effect, the country would suffer from lack of competent students who have reflective, critical and creative thinking abilities to solve problems using English, and would eventually encounter shortage of qualified professionals who can use the English language effectively to access knowledge, commerce, science, and technology in the global world at ease.

In response, Ethiopia has over the years come across a number of curriculum policy reforms with the intention to cope with the country's demand for change in various spheres. As one mandatory feature, the reform undertakes in its endeavors to improve the quality of English as a foreign language teaching by incorporating current trends to language teaching and learning (MOE, 2009). With this, it is meant to alleviate the current unanimous and central concern of Ethiopian students, pertaining to the low English language proficiency (Birbirso, 2014; Eshetie, 2010). Hence, for the need to address this goal, the initiated restructuration has paid considerable emphasis on constructivists' pedagogy as underpinnings of the mode of instruction which permits to undertake the teaching and learning of English language in competence-based, learner-centered and interactive classroom practices. Effective facilitation and execution of these new innovation, thus, highly require EFL teachers to enable students to take charge of their own learning rather than mere recipients of what a teacher deposits into their mind.

In view of this, the researchers felt that research is needed to investigate the conceptions that EFL teachers' hold about the teaching English as a foreign language, as it is a critical factor to determine what teachers adopt for their actual classroom practice in terms of the teaching approaches, methods or tasks. Evidently, teachers' conceptions significantly shape teachers' own teaching practice (Ajzen, 1991), and "what teachers do in their classroom is oriented by their conception of teaching."(Canbay and Beceren, 2012: 71). Accordingly, this research is premised up on the assumption that EFL teachers' efforts would positively influence the execution of the policy claims and lead to quality teaching and learning outcomes providing that they hold the facilitative conception of teaching English as a foreign language. This implies that an endeavour to challenge the traditional views and change teachers' view of the nature of teaching and learning improve quality teaching and bring about the envisioned outcomes (Gao and Watkins, 2002; Liu, 1995). It is from this viewpoint that the researchers were interested in exploring the conception of teaching English held by secondary school EFL teachers.

Recently, this topic is scarcely an area of research in secondary school of Ethiopian context despite its potential to predetermine teachers' classroom practices and adoption of teaching strategies, which would in turn influence the quality and outcome of student learning. The existing local studies, which

are claimed to have examined conceptions of teaching, have been conducted in the context of university, broadly emphasizing education in general, and thus considered instructors of different subjects. Here (Degago and Kaino, 2015; Zerihun, Beishuizen and Van Os, 2011) are cases in point.

Similarly, most of the existing international studies that examined EFL teachers' conception of teaching English have been conducted at primary through tertiary levels in Western and Asian educational contexts (Canbay and Beceren, 2012; Chan, 2014; Farrell and Lim, 2005; Li and Shi, 2012). Since teachers' conceptions of teaching vary based on the context (Marton, 1981), generalizing the findings of these studies to the Ethiopian context is questionable. Hence, as exploring teachers' conceptions of teaching from various cultural and educational contexts and at different levels of education is meaningful (Gao and Watkins, 2002), empirical evidences on this topic, particularly, across secondary educational contexts of the country is needed. With this, the study is believed to create a clear picture about the teaching orientations EFL teachers in secondary school in Ethiopia hold. Hence, the study intended to address the following research questions:

1. What conceptions do secondary school EFL teachers in Ethiopia hold about teaching English?
2. Are their conceptions of teaching English consistent with the EFL teaching policy claims of the government?

Conceptualisations of the conceptions of teaching

Despite the highly emerging number of research, literature fails to come up with a clear, agreed up on terminology to refer to the conception of teaching. Hence, various researches have been noticed while using terms such as conceptions, orientations, beliefs, attitudes, approaches, views and intentions to describe the conceptions of teaching. Among these, the term conception of teaching is commonly utilized (Canbay and Beceren, 2012). Though it is implicit, Pratt's (1992) description of the term is worth-considering that conceptions reflect one's own understanding of the world around, and specific meanings or interpretations she/he attaches to it. In this sense, conceptions of teaching are specific meanings and interpretations teachers hold and attach to their own teaching. Accordingly, views of teaching can be examined and interpreted based on teachers' own context-based meanings and experiences, which are claimed to affect or determine the actions of these teachers (Chan, 2014).

So far, a number of researches have been conducted to explore conceptions of teaching. For instance, in his review of 13 articles, Kember (1997) created a framework as category schemes which comprises two higher-order orientations. For Kember, the models range from the 'teacher-centred/content-orientated' orientation which involves 'imparting information' and 'transmitting structured knowledge' conceptions to the 'student-centred/learning focused' orientation which is concerned with 'facilitating understanding' and 'conceptual change/intellectual development' conceptions. Besides, Kember considered 'student-teacher interaction/apprenticeship' conception as a bridge conception between the two conflicting orientations.

Similarly, exploring secondary school physics teachers' conceptions of teaching, Gao and Watkins (2001) identified two orientations, namely moulding(teacher-centered) which involves knowledge delivery and Exam preparation, and cultivating(student-centered), which involves ability development, attitude promotion, and conduct guidance. Again, in describing Taiwanese EFL student-teachers change of conceptions of English language-teaching, Chan (2014) identified four categories such as facilitating students' ability to learn and understand, facilitating students' ability to apply learnt knowledge, promoting attitude, and facilitating students' ability for examinations. However, Chan is different in categorizing exam preparation under the orientation of cultivating, and this notion is inconsistent and conflicting with the afore-reviewed scholars' categorization of the conceptions.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Research Design

The study utilized a phenomenographic approach to address the research questions. A phenomenographic research is an approach that is used to explore "qualitatively different ways in

which people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomenon in, the world around them" (Marton, 1986: 31). As the aim was to consider the second-order perspective (Marton, 1981), the description of the phenomenon focuses on the participants of the study, not on that of the researchers (Trigwell, 2000). This way, it has a paramount role in studying qualitative variations in participants' understanding about their experiences of various phenomena such as teaching and learning. Accordingly, phenomenographic tradition was used to explore the various conceptions EFL teachers hold about teaching English.

2.2. Participants
In this study, participants were nineteen EFL teachers from five government secondary schools in eastern Hararghe. As a setting of this research, these schools were purposively considered from 24 secondary schools. Since maintaining variations among participants is mandatory (Berglund, 2006), EFL teachers who teach in grade eleven and twelve were selected through purposive sampling technique. These participants vary in terms of the grade level they teach, level of education, working experience, academic ranks, and educational program they attended for upgrading their education. Accordingly, nineteen EFL teachers were considered as a sample size for the current study. Trigwell (2006) also suggests the practical sample size in many phenomenographic studies is between 10 and 30 people.

2.3. Data Collection
In this phenomenographic study, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. These interviews allow participants to discuss their interpretations and to describe how they conceptualize situations from their own point of view (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007). Hence, EFL teachers freely expressed their conceptions of the teaching they undertake in English classroom. The interview questions were set based on Gao and Watkins' (2001) and Kember's (1997) established dimensions for defining the conceptions of teaching. These dimensions are: the nature of learning and the roles of students, the nature of teaching, the roles of teachers, the aims and expected outcomes of teaching, the content of teaching, and the methods of teaching. Different questions were posed in between the main questions to obtain additional perspectives and further clarifications. On their consent, each of the participants was audio-recorded at least for 30-35 minutes.

2.4. Data Analysis
At first, the data analysis process started with verbatim transcription and then translation of the interview data based on Marton's (1986) advice. Accordingly, the interview transcripts were read multiple times from different views and various ways of experiencing the phenomenon under the course of study. In our case, EFL teachers' descriptions of the conceptions of teaching English were identified. Once these are identified, the researchers organized the categories of description iteratively throughout till the entire categories and themes emerge. Hence, the analysis followed grounded approach to emerge categories from the data (Glaser and Strauss, 2017). The transcribed interviews were coded for each interviewee as (I-T1… I-Tn; where I=Interview, T= Teacher, n= the number assigned to the interviewee (participant/EFL teacher) to maintain anonymity. The variation that exists between the EFL teachers in terms of the conceptions and experience they hold about teaching English as a foreign language were systematically identified, and by this means, the researchers labelled the respondents under each predefined categories of conceptions.

3. Results
3.1. Categories of Conceptions of Teaching English
Four major categories of EFL teachers' teaching conceptions were identified from the interview data, such as: i) Transmitting specific knowledge of English language elements/items, ii) Exam preparation, iii) Facilitating students' ability to learn and understand English language skills, and iv) Facilitating

students' ability to apply learned knowledge/skills or enabling students to use the language. The descriptions of these conceptions are depicted in Table 1 below. In the Table, 'C' stands for '*Category*', each of which is presented in detail next.

Table 1. Conceptions of teaching English identified in this research

Nature of English language (EL) teaching	Key factors in English language-teaching				
	Role of teacher	Nature of learning, role of students	Expected outcomes	EL teaching contents	Methods in EL teaching
1st-C: Transmitting specific knowledge of EL elements	Transmitting knowledge of language items (deliverer)	Passive receiver Receiving knowledge	Accumulation of the knowledge Covering portions	Based on the textbook and syllabus	More of teacher-talk, lecturing
2nd-C: Exam preparation	Transmitting exam related contents Trainer	Achieving exam requirements	Great achievement on exams	Textbook and syllabus, previous worksheets	Lecturing, doing sample exams
3rd-C: Facilitating students' ability to learn and understand EL	Facilitator: facilitates students' ability	Attempts to make meaning, construct knowledge	Enhancing students 'learning	-Textbook and syllabus, -can adapt outside the predetermined	Lecture plus active participation
4th-C: Facilitating students ability to apply learned knowledge	Facilitator: enable students use the target language	use English relating to: past experience, real-life	Helping students to use the target language	-Textbook and syllabus, -Teacher can be flexible and adapt	Actively engaging in interactions

1st-C: Transmitting specific knowledge of English language elements/items

During the interviews, EFL teachers described the teaching that they undertake in English classroom as transferring or delivering the knowledge of English language elements to the students. As indicated in Table 1, teachers in the 1st category act as depositors or deliverers of knowledge into students mind and they believe this as good teaching. In line with this, a participant stated that "In my opinion..., teaching is sharing or giving the knowledge I have, regarding English language aspects, for the students. Thus, it is transferring everything I know concerning English language skills without any restriction" (I-T2).

Nearly in the same way, another EFL teacher reported the following:

> Based on… English subject, teaching is sharing or transferring knowledge from the experience you gained so far to your students. These could be regarding communication of the target language, vocabulary or grammar aspects. For me here, I say my teaching is effective when I, for example, create knowledge in students' mind (I-T15).

Likewise, a respondent said that "Just to explain shortly, teaching is when a teacher prepares himself and gives knowledge for the students" (I-T16).

As these quotes uncover, English language teaching is viewed as depositing knowledge of the language aspects into students' mind. Here, teachers assume active role in classrooms and deliver knowledge to the students as the only knowers or sources of knowledge while students are considered as passive receivers of knowledge. This implies that students have no chance to be in charge of their own learning, except listening and copying the language structures that the teacher delivers. As the class time is dominated by teacher-talk, explanations, and lecture, there is no room for students to

learn English language by interacting and constructing ideas in contexts. For teachers in this category, the practice of employing transmission-methods concurrently focusing on language aspects is an easy way out to consider students interest and to cover portions on time. In support of this, an interviewee explained that "I usually focus on language aspects because they are easy to deliver and students have experienced this. …and English language is also difficult for students to interact. That is why I usually prepare brief notes and lecture on language items…" (I-T1).

Similarly, another participant conveyed the following:

> My teaching is more of lecture-oriented and usually based on language focuses. If we…, proceed by actively involving students in the teaching and learning process, we cannot meet our annual lesson plan. …, students also like learning these language items and feel interested when you give brief explanations on these contents. Otherwise, how do you cover the topics included in this bulky text? (I-T19).

As these extracts unveil, for one thing, teachers are not motivated to engage students in learning language independently on their own or interacting with their peers, assuming that English language is difficult to the students. This way, teaching is viewed as, and limited merely to, an act of delivering and accumulating specific knowledge of language elements than a means of facilitating students' ability to learn; the language skills, by doing. What is more, profound overreliance on teaching and learning the language items would again seem to underrepresent other alternatives, in terms of the contents of teaching and the nature of teaching. As the data show, this seems to emanate from considering language elements as easy to deliver, and thus, this helps them cover portions on time. By implication, students have little chance to actively engage in their own learning, attempt to use English, learn language aspects in context, construct meanings, and interact with their peers.

2nd-C: Exam preparation

In this 2nd category, EFL teachers view teaching from the perspective of preparing students to achieve better marks/high grades in classroom tests, and most importantly in national examinations. EFL teachers in the 1st and 2nd category hold similar conceptions regarding the nature of teaching they undertake in English classroom although the latter category considerably emphasizes on achievements in examinations. In line with this, an interviewee explicated that "For me, good teaching in English classes is when students take something you taught them and score enough marks in exam, and increase their results. Teaching, for me here, is preparing students to be competent for the Ethiopian national entrance-exam" (I-T17).

Similarly, another EFL teacher stated the following:

> From the very beginning, teaching should be seen from making students competent in exams. Here, because my students are to take national-exam, my goal of teaching is mainly preparing students for this exam so that they could score good marks or high grades and join university. In doing so, first of all, I try to identify areas I should focus on (I-T2).

These data uncover that efforts on English language teaching do not seem to add value beyond preparing students for examinations. As can be deduced from the data, teaching has become a means through which students attain success on exam and achieve high marks/better grades on national-examinations. It seems that the focus of teaching is on minimizing students' tension about achievements in examinations than involving students in active learning so as to develop their English language skills from every aspect. These illustrations imply that the nature of the national examination dictates the contents to be taught, the purposes for which they are taught, the methods or the nature of teaching applied, and the way students learn. As a result, past exam papers predetermine the type of contents, questions and items that the teachers need to focus on during content delivery and worksheet exercises. Thus, it is unrealistic to expect something different from the students than listening, copying answers and practicing the questions. An EFL teacher's reflection on this during the interview is as follows:

> As we are experiencing it in English classroom, teaching means delivering contents which usually appear in exams, and training students and working out sample entrance-exams for them. Thus, my

> aim is not to focus on the entire contents of the textbook, but to put emphasis on contents that relate to exams, particularly language aspects (I-T18).

Similarly, another EFL teacher stated the following:

> So my goal of teaching is defined in terms of preparing students to be competent for entrance-exam. For me, what makes sense is giving lecture, explanations, and training students and working out as many exam papers as I can rather than spending time on textbook contents, which do not appear on exams. To my knowledge, what we always notice on exams are entirely multiple choices, and more of language aspects. Even if communication items are there, they appear on papers in a form of written dialogue (I-T19).

As revealed by the above data, the needs to emphasis merely on boosting students' achievement on exams, rather than on improving students' holistic ability in English language, have narrowed and diverted teachers' views of, and focuses on, teaching- in terms of contents to be taught and on the how of teaching. These extracts unveil that EFL teachers' typical concerns, in English classroom, are to transmit contents that are related to exams and to train the students for the entrance-exams. This implies that these teachers mostly engage in giving short notes and lectures on the assumed contents, and they spend most of their time on collecting and working out related past national examination questions. The only chance students have here is to listen to teachers' explanations, copy the notes or the answers forwarded by the teachers. As most of the contents and the type of items selected for exams are predetermined and predictable, there is no way to give much emphasis on the major skills and engage students in learning the language skills in context and an interactive way. According to these extracts, the teaching of English language seems to be limited merely to drilling past exam papers, and the contents are also narrowed to exam-related contents, among which grammar is the most referred content.

3rd-C: Facilitating students' ability to learn and understand English language skills

In this 3rd category, EFL teachers' views of teaching rely on the assumption that effective teaching of the target language can be realized through engaging students to take charge of their own learning in English classroom. These teachers assume that the practice of reducing teachers role to facilitator would have a better chance for students to actively participate in their English classroom learning as it in turns discourage the practice of passive listening, copying and drilling of past exam papers on the part of the students. Unlike the previous categories, teaching, in this category, is viewed from the perspective that it requires students to learn English in context. Hence, they construct meaning and knowledge of their own world with their teacher and with their peers. On this notion, an interviewee reported the following:

> In English language teaching, to my understanding, teaching is guiding, showing the way, giving hints and helping students expand what they have learnt. A day's teaching is said to be good if my students actively participate and demonstrate their attempt to learn the language through interactions: asking and answering questions, discussing and reporting …, such teaching allows students to explore, generate and construct ideas based on what they already know (I-T4).

Similarly, another EFL teacher stated the following:

> For me, teaching is said to be good if it centers on students' active involvement. Students learn the language better when they actively participate and are required to relate their past experience with the new knowledge. …, as a teacher my role is to create opportunities, facilitate, show ways, motivate and help students interact in the language classroom (T-10).

These extracts reveal that students are not passive recipients of what teachers deliver, but have a potential to learn, have an ability to construct meaning or knowledge and have something to share with their teachers or with their peers. The data uncover that students learn English better when they are directly involved in their own learning and are allowed to expand, explore, generate and construct ideas. For teachers in this category, teaching is, thus, a process of facilitating students' language learning and a means of enhancing students' language ability. Teachers act as facilitators to create opportunities that enable students take active role in their learning. The data also reveal that connecting the teaching contents to students' past experience or real world boosts students' active participation, triggers students' ability to learn the language, facilitates language teaching and learning

in context as the aim of teaching here is to enhance the holistic development of English language skills. In line with this, these teachers also consider the need to integrate their own contents rather than strictly sticking to the predetermined textbook and syllabus sometimes. Regarding this, a respondent reported that:

> Mostly, my English language teaching is based on the textbook contents and the syllabus. However, due to certain unfamiliarity and unconnectedness of the contents or topics to the students' need, interest, experience or real-world, sometimes I am obliged to look for other alternatives. For example, there are contents which talk about foreign countries cultures overlooking ours (I-T6).

In the same way, another interviewee reflected the following:

> Because some contents are not appropriate and relevant to trigger students' interest and ability to learn the language, I sometimes incorporate my own topics or contents elicited from students' own experiences. This way, I help my students actively participate by familiarizing or contextualizing the English classroom lessons with students' experience (I-T4).

As these extracts unveil, despite their excessive reliance on the textbook contents and syllabus, teachers sometimes seem to incorporate or adapt contents from their own and students' experience as well. This implies that teaching of English, in this 3rd category, is not confined to the predetermined contents of the textbook, but teachers seem to contribute a few of their own topics or contents. Teachers believe that this would seem to help teachers to familiarize, customize and connect the contents to students' prior experience, real-world, need and interest. This is an opportunity for teachers to maintain active learning in English classroom and facilitate students' ability to learn the language skills in context than in decontextualized way.

4th-C: Facilitating students' ability to apply learned knowledge/skills of the language or enabling students to use the language

As depicted in Table 1, teachers in the 4th category conceptualize the teaching of English, from the perspective of facilitating students' ability to apply the achieved knowledge of the target language. This way, the goal of teaching emphasizes on enabling students to use the language. Teachers' role here is to create situations or opportunities that help students use English. In addition, teachers should find means to trigger students' ability to generate ideas and construct meanings using English. Regarding this, a respondent reported that:

> In English language teaching context, for me, teaching is guiding, showing ways, helping and encouraging students on how to use the language, and supporting them on how to generate their ideas. Hence, effective teaching is helping students actively interact, communicate, generate and construct their own ideas, and share with their peers. …, my role is to create situations/contexts in which students enhance their language skills through interactions, in groups or in pair (I-T13).

In the same way, one interviewee said that "For me, good teaching is helping students learn and use the language in contexts. …, engaging students in solving real-life problems, questioning, oral discussions or debate are pivotal to help them express what they feel using the language" (I-T3).

Again, another teacher reflected the following:

> Effective teaching for me is a teaching that encourages students to apply their ability and the one that leads students to become independent learners. …, as my goal is to help students use the English language ability, I try to create opportunities, trigger students' ability, and permit students to use the target language skills. Accordingly, I help them generate ideas, conduct a debate and solve problems (I-T6).

As these data reveal, teachers in this category consider the importance of empowering students as a precondition to effective teaching in English classroom. This implies that students should not be left behind as if they know nothing, but they should be encouraged to use their potential. These teachers consider teaching as a process where students are allowed, given chances, and encouraged to use their ability. In addressing this, a teacher's role is to create situations in which students use the language to generate ideas, construct meanings, solve problems, and interact with their teacher and peers. This, on one hand, makes the teaching of the language contextualized, interactive and student-centered; and there would seem to be a shift of focus from learning about the language to using the language, on the other.

3.2. Comparison of Different Conceptions of Teaching English

As demonstrated in Figure 1 below, the variation of the orientations of teaching English held by EFL teachers show hierarchical relationships which range from the bottommost category of conceptions [1st-C] to the topmost conception of teaching English [4th-C]. These relationships were compared based on the nature of teaching and the key dimensions highlighted in Table 1 above, such as the roles of the teacher, the roles of the student, the expected outcomes, the English language teaching contents, and the methods of teaching. The categories of conceptions were then examined in terms of the associated higher-order orientations they fall under.

With the first two categories of conceptions: delivering knowledge of English language items and preparation for exam, students' roles are passive. The textbook, the syllabus and the typical exam contents predetermine what is to be taught as teachers and students have insignificant role in deciding about the contents. As the hierarchical order grows up from the 1st-C to the 2nd-C, teachers' roles of delivering knowledge of specific language aspects shift towards taking additional responsibility for exam preparation. As to the teaching approaches, one-way mode of instruction, such as lecture method and teacher-talk from the teachers' side and listening, copying and drilling exam worksheets from students' side are typical to the 1st-C and the 2nd-C of conceptions. Thus, these categories of conceptions slightly differ in the expected outcome they are aligned with. The former category merely emphasizes knowledge transmission, while the latter category has twofold concern- accumulation of knowledge of specific English language contents and high achievements in exams. This makes the conception of teaching English to be viewed as one-directional and undertaken merely for external demands.
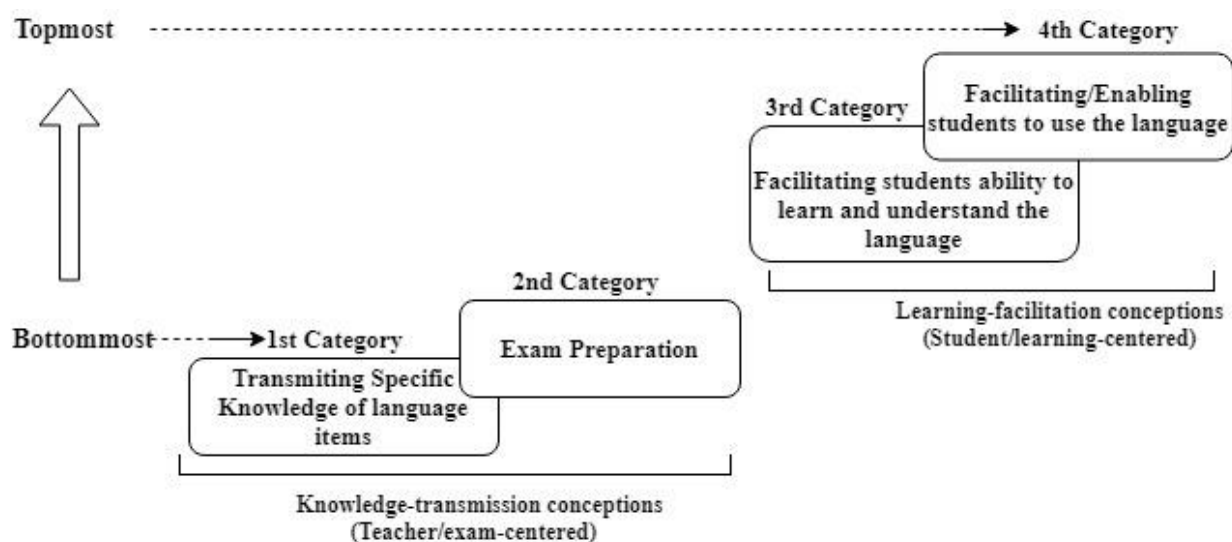

Figure 1. A general framework of the conceptions of teaching English as foreign language

On the contrary, within the hierarchical arrangement of the 3rd-C (facilitating students' ability to learn and understand English language) and 4th-C (enabling students use the target language) conceptions of teaching English, the teacher's role is limited to facilitator. Here, students take an active role to take charge of their own learning. In these 3rd-C and 4th-C, varieties of teaching approaches are encouraged to help students learn, understand and use the language to construct meanings based on their own real-life or past experience. Unlike the 1st-C and the 2nd-C, which are predominantly delimited to teacher-talk/lecture, the 3rd-C and the 4th-C principally employ interactive and participatory approaches, thus, students develop their language skills as they interact with their peers and their teachers. Besides, for the 3rd-C and the 4th-C, the contents of teaching are not entirely confined to the conventional textbook, syllabus and exam, but flexibility exists to adapt and use materials outside the predetermined ones. These two conceptions of teaching English seem to differ in the expected outcome they entail. As an

ultimate goal, the former aims to enhance students' learning and understanding of the target language, while the latter intends to enable students to use the language in their real life.

In this analysis, a framework consisting of two higher-order orientations were considered to describe the overall meaning and relationships between the categories of conceptions of teaching English identified. Given above the two orientations of this framework, Figure 1 depicts, in ascending hierarchical order, the four different categories of conceptions identified from EFL teachers' descriptions of their English language teaching experience. In view of this, the first two categories of conceptions in the hierarchal order (delivering knowledge of English language items and exam preparation) are grounded on teacher-centered/content/exam-focused orientations. By implication, this category of conception reflects the banking/traditional view of one-way transmission of knowledge. Likewise, the two categories of conceptions, which stand in the top of the upper level of the framework (facilitating students' ability to learn and understand English language skills and facilitating students' ability to use the language), are based on student-centered/learning focused orientations. This orientation reveals innovative/constructivists' view of empowering and enabling students to learn the language by their own. The stepping up of the hierarchal order, in Figure 1, also uncovers the variation of the conceptions of teaching English held among the EFL teachers' and changing level of orientations from the bottommost category to the topmost category.

4. Discussions

In this study, four different categories of conceptions and two higher-order orientations were identified from the secondary school EFL teachers' descriptions of the teaching English. In hierarchy, teaching is viewed as delivering knowledge of specific language items, exam preparation, facilitating students' ability to learn the language, and 'facilitating students' ability to apply learned knowledge/skills or enabling students to use the language. Despite some differences, the identified categories of conceptions seem consistent with the categories proposed in the previous studies. With the first three conceptions, Gao and Watkins' (2001) categories of conceptions show consistency as they suggest knowledge delivery, exam preparation and ability development. The current study also shares a few of the categories of conceptions of EFL teaching proposed by Chan (2014); however, in some ways this study conflicts with Chan's categorization of exam preparation under the general category of cultivation. On the other hand, the two higher-order orientations identified in this research also reflect the framework scheme that Kember (1997) has proposed as teacher-centred/content/exam-focused category and student-centered/learning-oriented category for categorizing the conceptions.

The analysis also reveals that 'delivering knowledge of specific language items' and 'exam-preparation' are the highly reported categories of conceptions. The more the EFL teachers' conceptions of teaching English are associated with these two categories signifies the lesser cognizance they hold about the interactive, participatory and facilitative orientation to teaching and learning English. With this, the findings acknowledge Canbay and Beceren's (2012) and Tavakoli and Baniasad-Azad's (2017) studies, which note that teachers who associate good teaching to transmitting knowledge tend to adopt content-centered approaches, most likely for achievements on exams. Kember (1997) also affirms that teachers whose conceptions are associated with information transmission are likely to rely upon one-way delivery mode and adopt that, but are unlikely to adopt and engage students in an interactive teaching method This implies that the conceptions teachers' hold about teaching obviously affect their adoption of teaching strategies, which would influence the quality and outcome of student learning (Kember and Gow, 1994). As necessitated by many countries, the context of English language teaching in Ethiopia also denotes a need for changing EFL teachers' conceptions of teaching English as it is pivotal to improve quality of learning. Despite differences in scope and setting, Degago and Kaino (2015) and Zerihun *et al*. (2011), in their studies, note that if teachers' conceptions of teaching are not developed, it is unlikely that they adopt teaching practices that boost students' active participation in the process of teaching and learning.

Yet, the two facilitative orientations to teaching and learning English language are the least reported categories of conceptions in this study. EFL teachers with these conceptions are claimed to hold the most important conceptions of teaching that they are more likely to guide, facilitate and enable students not only to learn and understand the language skills, but they are also likely to enable students to apply or use the attained knowledge and skills of the target language. Besides, they are more likely to create opportunities in which students attempt to enhance their English language skills in context by adopting teaching approaches, activities and strategies that require students to generate ideas, construct meanings and solve-problems that relate to students' own real-life or past experiences. Approving these claims, Canbay and Beceren (2012) and Tavakoli and Baniasad-Azad (2017) note that teachers who identify good teaching as learning facilitation adopt more learning-centered approaches into their teaching. However, in the context of Ethiopia, EFL teachers' profound awareness of this approach is not a guarantee as tremendous emphasis on exam-preparation and students' high scores are the critical problems that impede the practice of facilitative orientations of learning in English classroom. In support of this, Gao and Watkins (2002) note that changing teachers' conceptions of teaching is very important since the great focus on examinations has become a major problem to improve the quality of teaching.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

This study investigated Ethiopian secondary school EFL teachers' conceptions of 'teaching' English. The findings from this phenomenographic study are believed to offer refined insights to improve the current understanding of EFL teachers' conceptions of teaching English. For one thing, in the study 'transmission of knowledge of specific language items' and 'exam- preparation' are identified as the most predominant categories of conceptions. Hence, EFL teachers who associate good teaching with these two overlapping conceptions tend to adopt content-centered and mechanical teaching approaches in English classroom, most likely for achievements in exams. Again, it was revealed that the two facilitative orientations to teaching and learning English language are the least reported, but are the most important categories of conceptions identified in the study. Evidently, EFL teachers who identify good teaching as learning facilitation more likely adopt interactive, participatory and learning-centered approaches for their actual classroom practices. However, having advanced conceptions about English language teaching is not guarantee, as EFL teachers' may fail to realize the awareness they hold about facilitative practices into their actual classroom for they are highly expected to boost students' performance in the university entrance-examinations. In general terms, the study uncovered that EFL teachers' conceptions of teaching English are predominately knowledge-transmission/banking-oriented than learning-facilitation/meaning-making-centered, as the former approach discourages the integration of active learning methods in English classroom which is against the EFL policy claims.

5.2. Recommendations

Effectiveness of the schools program and performance should be seen in isolation from students' performance of the university entrance exams as high expectations from this angle require EFL teachers to prepare students merely for successes in exam. This could also be a critical factor to influence teachers' conceptions of teaching English. Besides, as part of continuous professional development, reflective practices in which teachers re-construct various meanings about their own teaching need to be designed as constant reflections may contribute to alter teachers' conceptions of teaching English. What is more, there needs to be a platform in which universities jointly work with secondary schools to update or boost up teachers' conceptions of teaching, by offering school based refreshment trainings.

7. References
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