The Roles of a Peer-Led Collaborative Learning Approach in Ethiopian Secondary Schools

Feyisa Mulisa[a1],Simeret Kassahun Mekonnen[a]
[a]*Department of Psychology, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Bahir Dar University*

Abstract: One of the 4Cs school's core competencies in the 21st century is a collaborative learning with a heightened reputation that enables learners to become competent in the global economy. More than a decade ago, along with this growing concern, peer-led collaborative learning (PLCL) approach has been adopted and stuck into Ethiopian educational systems. By following these actions, there are certain attempts to understand the practices of PLCL in educational settings, however, there are no more studies regarding the role of PLCL for secondary school students. This study is, therefore, intended to examine the hands-on roles of PLCL for secondary school students. The participants in this study were 991 students that were recruited from six public secondary schools via stratified random sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires and focus group discussions whereas analyses were made using descriptive statistical methods and narrative description of data. The findings show that hypothetically the roles of PLCL for secondary school students are considered to be academic, psychosocial and economic. Ironically the approach by far rewards group leaders to do all activities that would be done by each of the group members increases the dependency of middle and low achiever students and becomes a milieu of sexual harassment mainly for female students. Acknowledging more research findings would be warranted, we suggest that the practice of PLCL ought to be arranged towards subject specific task orientation and the quality of mentoring processes should be restructured in the form of more supportive, participative and cooperative ways.

Keywords: Roles; Peer-led; Collaborative; Learning; Secondary school

INTRODUCTION

Over the last three decades, Ethiopia has been working hard to bring extensive paradigm shifts in its educational system to meet the insatiable dynamic needs of its citizens (Debele, 2017; Feleke, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2010) enduring tremendous challenges. To meet this promising goal, enormous endeavors have been made to establish good governance, social justice, infrastructure expansion, technology transfer, and quality educational services (Debele, 2017; Molla, 2014). Many efforts have also been made to devise and put into practice various forms of active learning strategies (Debele, 2017; Ministry of Education, 1994, 2010, 2015; Zwiers, 2007) irrespective of several challenges yet (Negasi, 2015). Among these endeavors, with the emphasis more on how the students could learn than how the teachers could teach, PLCL has received due emphasis in the educational system of Ethiopia (Ndlovu, 2017; Snyder, Sloane, Dunk, & Wiles, 2016). The political and educational

[1] Corresponding author: fayisamu@gmail.com

leaders' commitments to integrate PLCL into educational systems further shows the warranty PLCL has gained in the country. But there is no empirical study on how students practically benefit from PLCL. Therefore, the primary objective of this article is to explore the roles PLCL plays for secondary school students. The study may enable the stakeholders to give insight into the benefits that students derive from PLCL and devise intervention strategies for further effectiveness in secondary schools of Ethiopia.

Alongside integrating PLCL into academic settings, there are also strong interests to exercise various forms of active learning strategies that are presumed to enhance students' learning (Ministry of Education, 1994; Zwiers, 2007). PLCL, as one means of problem-solving skills and one of the active learning methods, is rooted in social constructivist epistemology that is widely practiced in actual school settings across the world (Biggs, 1996; Zwiers, 2007). The principle of social constructivism is that students learn best in social settings (Gordon, 2009). To promote this exercise, a practice of assigning five students into one group, which termed as PLCL, became a common practice in most public secondary schools. Its primary goal is to facilitate active learning and reduce the number of times wasted on lecturing (Baepler, Walker, & Driessen, 2014). PLCL is also crucial to create a learning environment where students can actively engage in learning processes and develop the 21st-century skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, communication and creativity (Dass, 2014; Seifert & Sutton, 2009). To nurture these 21st-century skills within its young generations, Ethiopia has given much attention to both the theoretical and practical implications of collaborative learning (Engidaw, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2015; Zwiers, 2007).

Having acknowledged the assumption that learning is a social activity instead of a personal phenomenon (Reusser & Pauli, 2015), every student in the school has been organized into a task-oriented peer-led group. Given that the country has taken a stand that social constructivism could be promoted via collaborative learning, PLCL was adopted as one of the tools that promote active learning strategies and enables students to develop appropriate social skills. In fact, the 21st-century learning is quite different from the past centuries due to very sophisticated information and communications technologies that require critical thinking, problem-solving and collaboration (Dass, 2014; Dede, 2009; Patarakina & Shilovab, 2015). In this century, collaborative learning is often considered as one means of enabling students to grow competent in the global market (Dass, 2014). For young generations, these domain-specific skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving and communication are far more essential to thrive in today's economy (Daniels & Shumow, 2002), which are hoped to grow through collaborative learning. Mainly inclusive collaboration among the students, staffs and other educational stakeholders would be prioritized (Dass, 2014). When arguing for the importance of collaborative learning, as one means of enabling students to achieve the 21st-century skills, Dede (2009) stated that reshaping infrastructure and building houses makes no sense for students' needs such as critical thinking and problem-solving unless they involve in collaborative learning.

There is a consensus on the assumption that the 21st century of teaching-learning process is built upon the cloud pedagogy (Barak, 2017), which is heightened with the roles learners play

in creating meaning for themselves in a collaborative manner as primary learning outcomes (Biggs, 1996). In this view, how students could make a meaning from instructional processes collaboratively is highlighted instead of how the students gain a standardized body of knowledge (Richardson, 2003; Seifert & Sutton, 2009). Although there is some public disagreement (Liu & Matthews, 2005) this social constructivist approach, which was first launched in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 30s by Lev Vygotsky (Bozkurt, 2017; Engeström, 2009; Tien, Roth, & Kampmeier, 2002), places high focus on the ways scaffolding could be possible in academic settings. This theoretical framework stresses the usefulness of collaborative learning as an alternative to a single active teacher in a classroom to apply a scaffolding and prepare the youth for the 21st-century global economy (Biggs, 1996; Bradford, 1999). While trusted to engage students in active meaning making and facilitate scaffolding processes, there are also several criticisms associated with the use of social constructivism approach such as peer-to-peer collaborative in real classroom settings. For example, Matthews (2003) stated that there is no empirical evidence that shows the effectiveness of social constructivism in the classroom and has no clear *objective reality* in the teaching and learning process. Similarly, Gordon (2008) argued good teaching depends largely on the capacity of teachers' connectedness with learners than the instructional techniques that are used in the classroom. Furthermore, Kozoline, Gindis, Ageyev, and Miller (2003, p. 1) stated that;

> … in Japanese classroom there are students and there is knowledge and the teacher serves as a mediator between them. In German classroom, there are also known and students, but teachers perceive this knowledge as their property and dispense it to students as they think best. In the American classroom, there are teachers and there are students, but the status of knowledge is uncertain.

Regardless of a given teaching method theoretical preferences or criticisms, effective teaching often requires flexibility (Tulbure, 2012). So that there should be no thought that there is the best teaching method and insist on it exclusively. Even, there is an evidence that shows contemporary societies are facing a new challenge of how to organize the educational processes to produce knowledgeable graduates (Katalnikovaa, Novickisa, Prokofyevaa, Uskovb, & Heinemannb, 2017). This will highlight the choice of PLCL and that other learning strategies require special attention. In terms of its practical usability, research findings show that PLCL is more effective in subject matter specific practices (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005; Hsiao, Chang, Lin, Chang, & Chen, 2014; Tulbure, 2012) than as a system of practice in education. Mainly, it was reported that PLCL is more often successful in science, such as technology, engineering, medicine, and mathematics areas (Pazos, Micari, & Light, 2010).

Despite these criticisms, with proper utilization and effective implementation, PLCL has special roles in facilitating the students' deep learning, autonomy, creativity and critical thinking (Gordon, 2009; Lai, Lei, & Liu, 2016; Oldland, Currey, Considine, & Allen, 2017). In facilitating the development of higher-order thinking skills, participatory learning, and decision-making PLCL is believed to be important (Oldland et al., 2017; Snyder et al., 2016;

Zwiers, 2007). Additionally, PLCL is believed to enable the minority groups and students with a disability to gain the opportunity to participate collaboratively in the academic chores and learn more effectively (Snyder et al., 2016). As added advantages, the active engagement of students in learning processes encourages shy and introvert students to play very active roles in learning processes (Gosser & Roth, 1998; Hsiao et al., 2014). Furthermore, in collaborative learning peer influence and the socialization process can predict the students' liking and enjoyment of school chores (Ryan, 2001). Beyond its academic recognition, PLCL is presumed to provide students opportunities to establish learning partnerships between students and the staffs as well as the institutions (Chen, 2012; Keenan, 2014; Priest & Paula, 2016; Tien et al., 2002).

Peers can exert a strong influence on the life of the youth, which is more complex (Bradford, 1999) and begins to be manifested early in various aspects of life including educational domain (Ryan, 2001). The influence of peer on one another may be positive and move on the right track. Indeed, scientific findings show that when teens perceive a more supportive peer environment, equality and mutuality in group, minimal emotional risk of participating in a given activities, and positive recognition by peers, the sense of cohesiveness among the clique increase and become more productive (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005; Lai et al., 2016; Snyder et al., 2016). Consequently, the authors suggest that using a peer-led learning model requires close monitoring and supports (Snyder et al., 2016; Tien et al., 2002). To reduce the associated risks and increase its benefits, some writers have tried to devise some principles that guide the practices of PLCL. Indeed Seifert and Sutton (2009) set out three basic principles that guide practitioners: (a) student arrangement in team of five to seven groups that facilitates strong social interaction and collaboration (b) a group leader with better academic and social competencies that can serve a team as experienced mentor (c) teachers that enable students to explore their personal experience and relate it to the current instructional contents. Similarly Katalnikovaa et al. (2017, p. 167) also identified six basic laws that could be used as a guide in collaborative learning; (1) focus on the ultimate objective, (2) development of measures for precise system functioning, (3) compliance of the sub-objectives with the ultimate objective, (4) availability of resources, (5) consistency, and (6) safety. Besides these ground rules, there is evidence that shows the success of collaborative learning is rooted in strong relationships among students, mentors, and faculty (Colvin & Ashman, 2010).

The practice of PLCL is a recent phenomenon in the Ethiopian educational system with a belief that it has immense benefits for students' learning. As a recent practice, it requires ongoing research investigations and follow-up. But, there are limited shreds of evidence that show the benefits the students earn from PLCL and the challenges associated with the practices in secondary schools. Although there are few recent endeavors aimed to explore the practices of PLCL (Enyew, Yigzaw, & Muche, 2015; Yigzaw, Muche, & Mamo, 2015), they were predominantly limited to higher education. Findings such as Melesse and Jirata (2015) focused primarily more on students' perception towards its practices than the practical benefits and challenges associated with PLCL. Therefore, investigating the roles of PLCL for secondary school students is crucial to maximize the students' learning vial collaboration and

devise early intervention in the areas of challenges. The primary objective of this paper is, therefore, to assess the benefits of PLCL for secondary school students and the challenges associated with this practice. Due to there is a gender difference in the quality of peer relationships (Jenkins, Goodness, & Buhrmester, 2002), we put into account whether there is a gender difference in the current practices of PLCL. In order to fully understand the practices of PLCL and devise plausible interventions, the following research questions were forwarded.

- How do the students view the overall importance of peer-led collaborative learning approach in school settings?
- Does peer-led collaborative learning have psychosocial (facilitating interpersonal interaction) roles for secondary school students?
- What are the challenges associated with peer-led collaborative learning approach in the real classroom settings?
- Is there significant sex difference with regard to reporting the benefits and risks related to peer-led collaborative learning practices?

METHODS

In this study, a mixed research design based on sequential explanatory methods was used (Creswell, 2009). The participants of the study were secondary school (grade 9 -12) students from six urban centers of Ethiopia; Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar, Gondar, Adama, Dire Dawa, and Hawassa. Having secured informed consent, data were collected from 991 (509 female and 482 male) students with a support of assistant data collectors out of 10, 258 total students. Participants were selected in two stages. First, using proportionate stratified random sampling method, the number of participants from each school and grade level was determined. Next, using cluster sampling methods, participants from selected schools and grade levels were selected.

A questionnaire, interview and focus group discussion were employed to collect data in this study. We have prepared the questionnaires and focus group discussion items having had an initial interview with 9 students from one of the schools included in the sample. The interview was to gain clues about the roles of PLCL for secondary school students and the associated challenges. The interview results were scrutinized and categorized into two higher order categories: the benefits and the associated challenges. Under the theme of PLCLs benefits, there were three sub-categories such as academic, psychosocial and economic. Likewise, under the theme of challenges, there were sub-categories such as dependence, harassment, and bullying. The goal of analyzing the data collected from pilot students was to facilitate the development of questionnaires. As a result, the data collected via interview was not included in the final data analysis.

Based on the information obtained from the interview, the questionnaire items and the focus group discussion guidelines were devised. The questionnaires were distributed to 1000 students whereas about 964 questionnaires were completed in a valid way. We were

compelled to discard 36 questionnaires because they were either filled carelessly or incomplete. The focus group discussions were organized with 18 participants in three schools based on the protocols set by (Breen, 2006). All the focus group discussion sessions were conducted in student union offices and took about 25 minutes each. All the focus group discussion sessions were audio recorded to avoid missing of data. Because the saturation point was accomplished in the third focus group discussion, no further discussion was held. Focus group discussion was designed to explore further information that might not be addressed by questionnaires. Those participants that involved either in group discussions or interview were not involved in completing the questionnaires. The questionnaire items were initially prepared in the English language and translated into the Amharic language to enable the participants to fully understand the items embedded in the questionnaire. The Amharic version of the questionnaire was also translated back into the English language in order to avoid language disparity. Ultimately, the Amharic versions of the questionnaire were used in the final data collections.

Measures

There were 30 items prepared to measure how students' reflect on the benefits and associated challenges of PLCL based on five Likert scales that range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. For example, items from the subscale are: "peer-lead collaborative learning is very important for students' learning, peer-led learning benefits all students equally, and peer-led learning has contributed positively for students' better academic performance and the like". The response to each item is scored based on a rating where; 1represents strongly disagree, 2 represents disagree, 3 represents undecided, 4 represents agree, and 5 represents strongly agree. The questionnaire has five subsections. The first section consisted of seven items that measure the academic roles of PLCL, the existing PLCL, the second section included five items that measure current trends in secondary schools, the third section contained six items that measure the psychosocial roles of PLCL, the fourth section contained six items that measure students' perspective of PLCL in the future and the last section contained six items that measure risks associated with PLCL in school system. For each measurement scale, the reliability tests were computed and Cronbach alpha coefficients were found for $\alpha = 0.68$, 0.87, 0.79, 083 and 0.91 respectively.

Analysis

The data collected through questionnaire were analyzed using univariate descriptive statistics such as *mean* values that range from *1* - a minimum value to *5* – a maximum value, standard deviation, and standard errors. The statistical distributions of whether there is a mean difference between male and female students regarding how they view the practices of PLCL and its roles in school was computed using independent sample t-test. Additionally, Pearson correlation coefficient was used to compute the inter-consistency of items to show the homogeneity of items that had used to measure the educational outcomes of PLCL. Even though it was extremely challenging to transcribe, all the data obtained through focus group discussion were explicitly transcribed verbatim and the narrative was integrated into analysis using concurrent triangulation method (Creswell, 2009).

RESULTS

In this study, we looked at how students from secondary school view the roles of PLCL in academic settings. From the students' perspective, it has three important benefits in school: academic, psychosocial and economic benefits, despite, it is also associated with tremendous challenges. First, the data related to the academic, psychosocial and trends of PLCL was presented in Table 1. Next, the challenges and students' perspective of PLCL was presented in Table-2. Last, the correlation matrix was presented to reveal the inter-consistence among the measurements of academic benefits of PLCL for secondary schools students.

Table 1

PLCL's current trends and benefits in secondary schools of Ethiopia

Items	No	Mean	SD	SE	t-value	p-value
Academic dimensions of PLCL in school						
Promotes deep learning	947	4.09	1.170	.077	2.830	.105
Causes better class performance	943	4.17	1.198	.097	1.230	.219
Motivates students to stay on the learning	942	3.63	1.381	.136	1.492	.136
Enables to learn more lessons	935	3.72	1.305	.057	0.651	.515
Helps to do academic chores timely	936	3.60	1.309	.087	0.861	.390
Helps to prepare better for the exam	937	3.58	1.408	.094	-0.046	.964
Enables effective time management	933	3.32	1.435	.095	-0.029	.977
Students' view of current trends in PLCL						
Important for students to learn	935	4.14	1.251	.082	3.260	.001
Benefits group leaders only	951	2.54	1.424	.094	0.870	930.
Contributes to experience sharing	942	4.00	1.201	.079	0.822	.378
Fairly supports all students' learning	940	3.68	1.358	.090	0.553	.580
Heightened with political agenda	846	4.36	1.103	.0698	0.786	.479
Psychosocial dimensions of PLCL for students						
Nurtures senses of tolerances	937	2.62	1.415	.093	1.170	.242
Develops conflict resolution skills	946	2.80	1.348	.095	2.218	.125
Increases interpersonal skills	959	3.12	1.624	.107	1.607	.108
Helps to make friends	907	4.21	1.200	.081	0.951	.342
Facilitates social support	961	2.67	1.475	.099	-2.913	.084
Increase self-confidence	935	3.74	1.316	.057	0.651	.525

Academic dimensions of PLCL in secondary schools

It seems that there is a paradox in the participants reported the roles of PCLC in school. On the one hand, students believe that PLCL is very important for their academic affairs. On the other hand, they highlighted that its primary purpose is for the psychosocial benefits than its academic benefits. The mean score shows that the students rated both the academic and psychosocial values of PLCL above the mean values, which shows that its benefits more than

average both in terms of academic and psychosocial benefits. Ironically, there is also a report that shows it is highly heightened with non-academic values such as political agenda. This paradox can be attributed to the fact that students were given little or no orientations regarding the benefits and applications of PLCL. Regardless of some theoretical perspectives, currently it seems that there is no more significant gender difference in terms of viewing the academic and psychosocial values of PLCL as wells as its trends.

The role of PLCL in students' academic affairs is considered to be very important. For example, according to the results obtained, in spite of its some current operational limitations, PLCL is believed to be important to increase deep learning (M = 4.09, SD = 1.170), cause better academic performance (M = 4.17, SD = 1.198) and motivate students to stay on learning (M = 3.64, SD = 1.381). The students were also asked if PLCL was important for their academic affairs. Although both sexes rated high value for the importance of PLCL for their academic affairs, there is a statistically significant mean difference between male and female students with $t(933) = 3.260$, $p = .001$ regarding the importance of PLCL for students. Female students place more value on the importance of PLCL for its academic affairs (M = 4.27, SD = 1.131) than male students (M = 4.01, SD = 1.347), meanwhile there is strong conception that PLCL approach was primarily commenced more for its hidden political agenda than educational purposes (M = 4.36, SD = 1.103). The data obtained from the focus group discussion further confirmed that the students strongly argue that PLCL is primarily organized more for political purpose than for students' academic affairs. The leaders of the groups often are subjected to join a political party to force other members to do the same. This political reason has led many group leaders to frustrate from pursuing their leadership roles and have chosen to resign from their position.

Next to the importance of PLCL at a theoretical level, how students view its practical impacts for their current academic affairs was also posited. Based on this query, it seems that there is a discrepancy between quantitative data and qualitative data. For instance, the data collected via focus group discussion showed that students have gained little academic credits from PLCL and notified that strong attention should be given to make it more successful. On the other hand, the data collected through questionnaire revealed that students gained slightly above average benefits. For example, it helped them more in preparation for exam (M = 3.58, SD = 1.408) and enabled them to manage their time effectively (M = 3.32, SD = 1.435). This seems to suggest that there is a gap in the application of PLCL.

Having attempted to ascertain the students' views of the current practical values of PLCL, an examination of students' perspectives on the effectiveness and success of PLCL in the school contexts was made. It was found that with a condition that educational resources could easily be accessible; the participants rated a high score on the importance of PLCL to be firmly stuck into the educational system. (M = 4.17, SD = 1.210). With regard to its prospective success, the participants were found to have a strong stand that it could be effective if more attention will be given to its practices from all the stakeholders (M = 4.42, SD = 1.173) that enrich students successes. The data verify that the majority of students show strong preferences for the practices of PLCL in school (M = 3.68, SD = 1.463). In general, the

findings in Table 1 show that students have a positive view of the practices of PLCL if it is properly exercised in the schools.

There was a considerable consensus among the participants that the benefits of PLCL are somewhat limited to the group leaders and high achiever students who have a strong attachment with the team leader (M = 2.54, SD = 1.424). Even, the majority of the group members argue that it is the responsibility of the leader to execute all activities and support other group members to understand what has been done in the course of actions. This practice has led to a large number of students to become lenient to take responsibility for performing school chores. Partly, this habit has been associated with the improper use of PLCL by the teachers and the leniency to evaluate each group members independently. Furthermore, what students would do in the team, was another big question of focus group discussion. According to the participants, most of the times, teachers demand students to summarize content in the textbook and make a presentation in their next classroom. As a result, PLCL becomes one means of covering the contents embedded in the textbooks, especially when there is a shortage of time. The inefficient organizing roles of a mentor (usually homeroom teacher) and poor monitoring and evaluation of PLCL practices can be the causes for these problems. In fact, there is a weekly report session conducted on every Wednesday but it is not genuine, rather fabricated and done for the sake of reporting.

As to the participants, the stakeholders such as students, teachers, and officials did not share responsibility for the effectiveness of the practices of PLCL in schools. Because of the national policy that has been adopted in the educational setting, PLCL was imposed on the school to implement in the contexts where no clear guidelines, helpful manuals, negotiation on its implementation process, and adequate training for the students. There is also no clear set of envisaged academic outcomes and ethical behaviors of PLCL. As a result, there is high confusion among the students on its practices, its primary goals, and their responsibilities. For example, among the group members, the group leader is viewed as an executive in all the activities given to the group by the teachers. In practice, the group leaders were also enacting as an executive that perform entire activities given to the group either solely with a modesty support from other group members.

Psychosocial dimensions of PLCL in secondary schools

In parallel to the academic support, the psychosocial benefit of PLCL to promote social networking and interpersonal skills is also considerable. The main psychosocial impacts that PLCL has brought to the participants were both positive and negative. According to the participants, a grouping system in which commonly five students are organized into one group gave them the opportunity to develop strong and long-lasting attachment, intimacy and find a friend/s that share similar common goals and interests (Table 1). In addition, it has become a milieu of learning a sense of tolerance (M = 2.62, SD = 1.415), increasing interpersonal skills (M = 2.80, SD = 1.448), and boosting self-confidence (M = 2.74, SD = 1.316). Regarding gender difference, there was no statistically significant gender difference

between male and female students regarding how they view the psychosocial benefits of PLCL among secondary school students.

Economic dimensions of PLCL in secondary schools

The third dimension of the PLCL is its economic benefits for high school students. At first glance, it may seem a trivial, but it was found very important for students. Although the finding in this connection is not supported by quantitative data, the data from focus group discussions revealed that PLCL's economic benefits are equivalent to the academic and psychosocial benefits to students. Particularly, as the majority of students in public schools come from parents with low socioeconomic backgrounds, the economic aspect of PLCL for students is much recognized. In schools, students are frequently requested to do assignments and prepare reports that incur some costs. Covering these costs may be challenging for some students. As a result, students take two solutions: either a student from better socio-economic family completely cover a cost required or the entire team members equally share the costs to complete the given task. According to the participants, it is very frustrating for some students to pay for all these expenses to cover entire schoolwork privately. In addition, it allowed students to share educational resources to accomplish the given academic objectives, which may be very difficult for some students to own the properties.

Table 2

Students' perspectives of PLCL and challenges associated with its practices

Items	No	Mean	SD	SE	t-value	p-value
Students' views of PLCL in the future						
Can be effective if applied properly	955	4.17	1.210	.077	1.612	.107
Better to remove from a school system	939	2.29	1.472	.091	-1.408	.159
Could not be effective by any means	937	2.03	1.448	.097	-0.752	.452
Can be effective with more effort	943	4.42	1.173	.096	1.612	.107
Must adhere strictly to a school system	938	4.16	1.486	.098	1.947	.052
Strong changes must be made	948	4.72	1.171	.086	1.612	.071
Challenges associated with PLCL practices						
Causes conflict among the peers	937	2.24	1.397	.092	-.905	.366
Comes sources anxiety and stress	947	2.44	1.448	.095	2.248	.025
Increase dependence among students	953	3.08	1.624	.107	1.607	.108
Subjects students to bullying	936	2.68	1.463	.098	-0.485	.628
Exposes to peer pressures	907	4.11	1.200	.081	0.951	.342
Exposes to sexual harassments	937	2.62	1.415	.093	1.170	.242

In contrast to the psychosocial benefits of PLCL, the results in Table 2 show that, it is also associated with several psychosocial challenges such as conflict among the peers (M = 2.24, SD = 1.397), becoming source of anxiety and stress among some students (M = 2.44, SD =

1.448) exposing students to peer pressure (M = 4.11, SD = 1.200) and facilitating social support (M = 2.67, SD = 1.475). With regard to experiencing stress caused by PLCL, there is somewhat statistically significant mean difference between male and female students with t(923) = 2.248, p = .025. The male students' mean score (M = 2.55, SD = 1.424) is relatively higher than female students' mean score (M = 2.34, SD = 1.474) which shows that male students are more susceptible to stress than female students in PLCL practices. The other psychosocial consequences that students receive from peers group could be viewed from increased dependence among middle and low achiever students (M = 3.32, SD = 1.435).

The other critical risk behavior that is associated with PLCL is sexual harassment against female students (M = 2.62, SD = 1.415). This finding was more considerably supported by data from focus group discussions. According to the participants in the focus group discussions, sexual harassment occurs both in and outside classrooms. The participants pointed out that students tell their parents that they are going to do peer-led activities, but on the ground, the reality might be nonacademic affairs such as lovemaking and recreational target. For the parents, their children are going right to school to do on a given academic work, which led a number of female students to get pregnant and drop from school. Mainly females' cliques strongly influence their friends to make them easily vulnerable to sexual attacks. There were also instances where female students were subjected to rape. This is how the objective of PLCL was gone wrong when students cheat their parents under the umbrella of PLCL activities. Showing their dreads, students reflected that over periods of time, parents might refrain from sending their female students to participate in peer-led activities even though it is a real. In some contexts, minority students such as females with less physical attractiveness and students with disabilities are often marginalized and made victims of such practices which make them develop low self-esteem and poor self-images.

Table 3

The inter-correlation matrix of academic benefits of PLCL for secondary schools

	Items	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
1.	Promotes the deep learning	*								
2.	Supports a substantial share of experiences	.572	*							
3.	Inspires to engage in learning	.520	.586	*						
4.	Makes students achieve better results	.512	.520	.564	*					
5.	Encourages independent learning	.426	.422	.437	.527	*				
6.	Increase dependency on each other	.353	.344	.505	.370	-.573	*			
7.	Engages all students in school activities	.462	.456	.477	.495	.516	.451	*		
8.	Promotes active learning	.411	.387	.396	.396	.439	.352	.460	*	
9.	Facilitates real world based leaning	.476	.445	.424	.447	.459	.374	.454	.504	*
10.	Motivates learner to be active in learning	.551	.528	.516	.542	.474	.382	.516	.441	.527

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to measure the inter-consistency among the items that were used in the inventories to assess the educational role of PLCL presented in Table 3. The result showed that there is positive and weak to strong associations among the items with few exceptions. For example, strong correlation was found between 'supports share of experiences at high level' and 'promotes the deep learning' (0.572); between 'increase students' engagement into learning activities' and 'support high rate of sharing experiences' (0.586), between 'motivated students' instructional involvement' and 'deep learning' (0. 551) and between 'motivates students' instructional involvement' and 'engages all students in school activities' (0. 516). But a strong and negative Pearson correlation coefficient was found between 'increase dependency of the students on each other' and 'engages all students in school activities' (-0. 573). This reveals that when the majority of the students' dependency on team leaders increases, it is more likely that the students' engagement in the school activities decreases strongly. In order to increase the students' benefits from PLCL and to promote students learning, active engagement of all students in the school activities is very essential.

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to investigate the roles of PLCL for secondary school students. The findings indicated that PLCL helps students in terms of three dimensions: academic, psychosocial and economic. Academically, it was found that peer support through PLCL can make learning easier and more meaningful for learners. In this regard, we agree with the finding of Reda and Hagos (2017) who reported that the importance of PLCL for students learning is very high in a school setting. For instance, students can gain academic benefits through sharing ideas, deepening their understanding of the subject matter, learning with relatively a better peer/s (usually a group leader/s) and earn better academic scores which are consistent with some previous findings such as (Patarakina & Shilovab, 2015). Psychosocially, it was found that PLCL is an important milieu to build a social network that helps students to get access to peers who would be caring, trusting and responsible for each other. As a result, forming a stable and intimate relationship with cliques becomes one of the meandering benefits of PLCL among these peers although it exposed some students to peer pressure. Economically, it became one means of supporting students from low socio-economic status via sharing resources and reducing financial expenses to complete given academic activities. Our finding also supports the finding of Thalluri (2016) who reported peer-led learning is logistically advantageous for at-risk and non-at risk students although it subjects few students to harassment. Particularly, peer-led learning enables the shy students to involve in the teaching-learning processes with little anxiety and better comfort which has similarly been reported by (Gosser & Roth, 1998).

Basically, PLCL was launched to enable students to have more time on problem-solving, their learning, communicating more effectively with one another, reviewing the lecture material, asking questions and testing their understanding, and thinking more deeply about the conceptual side of their learning (Gafney & Varma-Nelson, 2008). Its objective in the 21st century is to create a link between the educational and the real world market (Dass, 2014). In

these respects, PLCL has been found to have relatively negligible outcomes for students in Ethiopian contexts based on the findings of this study. Moreover, the strategic importance of PLCL has been lagged behind its psychosocial and economic benefits. Therefore, more efforts would be exerted to utilize the possibilities of how to create a circumstance that could be compatible with our present contexts prioritizing the resources to be used in a school setting. First, all the stakeholders in an educational setting should be familiarized and acknowledge the importance of PLCL for students' learning. Next, the preparation phase, implementing phase, monitoring phase and feedback phase would be clearly set collaboratively via shared responsibility with students.

Despite students' firm belief that PLCL is primarily imposed on schools for its hidden political agenda, the greatest opportunity found in this study was that students were ready more to accept approaches that could work than duly rely on preexisting modes of teaching methods valued by the community, which is inconsistent with the finding of Zwiers (2007) that reported students often stick to a widely accepted methods of teaching by the community. On the other hand, this finding is consistent with previous findings such as (House et al., 2017; Reda & Hagos, 2017) regarding students' positive view of PLCL. Although both males and females place a high value on the importance of PLCL for their academic affairs at principle level, female students show more value for the importance of PLCL for their academic affairs than of their male counterparts. This might be due to the fact that female adolescents define themselves within interpersonal settings and place a high value of intimacy than identity as compared to their male counterparts (Maher, Winsto, & Rani, 2017).

Although there are a number of advantages that secondary school students derive from effective PLCL practice, some students were exposed to certain types of risk behaviors. Because PLCL group leaders are often elected based on their academic merits, mostly group activities are left for these group leaders and this, in turn, reduces the roles of medium and low achieving learners and the benefits they could gain from it. This finding is inconsistent with Abegglen and Morris (2015) finding which indicated that the entire students organized in a peer-led group seem to academically take on greater ownership of their own learning and gain benefit largely. However, this result is consistent findings such as (Keenan, 2014; Ndlovu, 2017) who reported that leaders acquire a high level of personal and professional skills, and traditional grouping encourages high achievers to become dominant in the group whereas it makes the rest of the group members uncooperative. Of course, the role of a group leader in a given PLCL is to facilitate, organize and manage the group members' roles rather than to execute all the activities to be performed by entire group members and tutoring low achievers. The group leaders themselves had a thought that PLCL is an approach in which one academically better group leader supports, tutors, and enables other low achieving group members. This might be due to the absence of clear directions and pertinent guidelines from the higher education officials on how PLCL should be practiced. Therefore, there would be clear guidelines for all stakeholders to monitor the practices of PLCL.

Based on the role group members play in PLCL and their contributions in the group, it was found that there were three categories; executive, fitful and submissive. The executive members are those students, group leaders usually, who actively engage in the given academic tasks and perform all the tasks that could have done by the entire group members. The fitful members are those group members who show certain efforts for the success of the group by engaging in the given academic tasks but irregular in a degree of contribution. The consistency of effort they exert on a given tasks fluctuate from time to time and from task to task. Majority of these students are middle achiever to few high achiever students that tried to scale up their academic chores, but inconsistent with their trustworthiness for the successful completion of the given academic tasks. The submissive members at the other cost, are those members who play no more active roles in the success of the group but exclusively depend on the efforts of the others. The majority of these students are relatively low achiever students who believe that they can contribute nothing more than those of high and middle achiever students. In practice, instead of taking responsibility for the success of the group, they often think that it is a responsibility of the group leader to execute all the activities and to report to them only the progress of tasks under consideration. Submissive members have no more roles except registering their name on the lists of the group members' name category. What makes this behavior bizarre in a school setting was that the students are less likely to feel that it is legally unethical behavior and is an academic misconduct.

In spite of PLCL's effectiveness in a subject-specific practice such as mathematics and engineering (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005; Hsiao et al., 2014; Pazos et al., 2010; Tulbure, 2012), in Ethiopia, the practice of using PLCL for academic practices isn't organized around subject specific orientation rather it was based upon a one-size-fits-all principles. That is, once it formed at the beginning of a year or a semester, the group relatively remains intact throughout the semester or even for the academic year, and applied to every subject matter that students were registered for. Consequently, it was associated with risk behaviors such as dependency, stress and sexual harassment of female students. Within the same sex, PLCL is associated with positive psychosocial outcomes through increasing attachment and intimacy. This habit may help students to stay in school as loneliness and negative social relations were associated with school dislike (Rönkä, Sunnari, Rautio, Koiranen, & Taanila, 2017).

To recap, it seems that there is a great ambiguity in the practices of PLCL in the studied schools. On one hand, the students reported that its advantages are very high in the academic, psychosocial and economic domains. On the other hand, its actual benefits for students' academic affairs is somewhat subtle and it exposed students to some risky behavior. On the ground, it gave the group leaders an opportunity to execute every work of group members. These show that there is a gap between what was theoretically envisaged and what students have practically gained from PLCL. As a result, the primary task of the educational stakeholders should be to discuss how the PLCL's approach works more effectively for students. Additionally, increasing the role of students in the organizing and monitoring of the PLCL activities would be advantageous. Because a large number of students think that PLCL's main purpose is a hidden political agenda, prioritizing early intervention in this area may further increase the value of PLCL for students' academic affairs.

CONCLUSIONS

Acknowledging that this study is limited to students' perspectives regarding the roles and challenges associated with PLCL, controversial responses were obtained from students. Although PLCL has academic, psychosocial and economic purposes for students, in this study, it was found that PLCL was not academically effective for students in the schools as envisaged so far. Of course, there is evidence which shows that PLCL, on its current trajectory, is giving plenty of benefits to team leaders than for entire team members. However, this does not mean that it has no benefits to other students. This may require strong efforts to be exerted to make it productive and enable students to acquaint with desired learning objectives collaboratively. So we would like to suggest an intensive revisit of the existing practices and building culture sensitive and context-specific guidelines that can work better in Ethiopian school contexts so that there will be clear and shared responsibilities in peer-led collaborative learning approach that could be properly exercised among the students, staffs and other educational stakeholders. A worthwhile implementation of PLCL should often be associated with better educational resources.

Although students can get substantial interpersonal benefits from PLCL interactions in general, the study indicated that PLCL is also making female students vulnerable to sexual harassment. This requires strong follow-up and monitoring by school leaders, mentors and parents. It may also require legal and ethical principles for students to interact with each other, especially in opposite-sex contexts. In order to avoid a misconception associated with the practices of PLCL, which students think that it was commenced for a hidden political agenda, the pedagogic functions of this cooperative learning approach should be made clear to all stakeholders and should be communicated to the main beneficiaries, i.e., students. Acknowledging more research finding would be warranted to investigate the multi-dimensional benefits and associated risks of PLCL, the researchers also suggest that the quality of mentoring processes should be restructured in the form of more supportive, participative and cooperative ways. In order to achieve the ultimate goal of PLCL, there should also be a common understanding among students, schools and educational leaders. Furthermore, the practices of PLCL should be geared towards helping students achieve practical academic outcomes instead of merely offering teachers the chance to summarize the chapters in given textbooks and to in turn save their time.

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