

Perceptions and Barriers of Active Learning amongst Business Students- A study at Sohar University

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Abstract

Purpose: The objective of this study was to find out what are the perceptions of active learning, to rule out the barriers and to see whether it holds any importance in a classroom.

Design/methodology/approach: Data has been collected through a structured questionnaire, from 280 samples, being students of Faculty of Business at Sohar University, Oman. This was a cross-sectional, exploratory study to identify the perceptions and barriers from the student's point of view.

Findings: The findings of the study reveal that student-teacher interaction is essential and thereby the students' communication skills and social interactive skills enhances. Students' perception is that they develop more interest in the subjects and that their creative and critical thinking improves. Students consider the lack of student-teacher interaction as a huge barrier followed by the lack of experiential learning. Also, their own lack of communication is a huge obstruction.

Research implications: With the world becoming more digitalized, we would like to further find out how to implement active learning through the online education system and how to improve it for both teachers and students. We can introduce hands on practice in classrooms.

Originality / Value: This research work is an idea taken up from other resources but is one of a kind since it is focused on Business students at Sohar University which have not been done before.

Keywords: Active learning, Business Students, Sohar University, Perceptions, Barriers, Importance, Undergraduate, Teaching, Study, Student Engagement, Academic Challenge.

Introduction

Active learning is one of the key factors that affects the students' learning capabilities and also restricts teachers in their teaching methods to convey what they have to say. The concept of active learning is one in which students are directly involved by the teacher through which they understand better and they tend to learn more. There is sometimes certain knowledge that is not directly understood by the student; therefore, the teacher tends to make it easier by involving them in the part of learning with one-on-one interaction and discussions. This in turn results in the student engaging himself and learning better which helps him remember that information for a longer period of time. Active learning is essential in the classroom. It is very important to engage students in thinking and taking part in activities like analyzing and evaluating (Wilson & Sipe, 2014).

God has created people with different abilities and skills to communicate in special situations. Some people are good at attracting, informing, and soothing than others because of their different individual constructs. In this twenty-first century, in order for students to survive, teachers should prepare learners for the awaiting world outside universities. To accomplish this, the lecturer needs to come up with new ideas, in class, so that students can develop motor skills and social skills to overcome all types of hardships in their life. For teachers, knowledge of different learning styles is very important to present information in an attractive way to students.

When they understand their students' ways of understanding and their preferences towards learning styles, teachers can make course information more accessible and appealing and help students feel more confident in the classroom. The effectiveness of different learning styles — namely, active and passive — has been heavily debated within schools.

This study will identify the perspectives of students they have on active learning and help teachers and students to see through the barriers of active learning. The undergraduate researchers collected data from different levels of students and then do a comparative study between the first and final level students and also to analyze the viewpoints of the students in these different years. The study will also aid in how teaching can be improved for the betterment of learners.

Active learning is not being practiced in university classrooms and the typical way of teaching is followed by almost everyone. Our study fills the gap by comparing the first and the final year students' perceptions towards active learning. Studies show what active learning is and how it is implemented in an academic system whereas our study focuses on the viewpoint of students in higher education that what do they perceive about active learning.

An effective and in-depth learning environment stimulates students to think critically and to take part in in-class activities which result in them sharing their opinions and ideas. In the Business Faculty, Sohar University, majority of the students seems to be very reluctant to answer in a class. This could be due to the lack of self-confidence and self-control that is needed in a learning environment which makes it very difficult to tackle situations in the real world. Active learning prepares students to overcome these obstacles and prepares them to face real-world consequences.

Literature Review

Active learning requires students to do meaningful learning activities and think about what they are doing" (Prince, 2004). Self-directed learning is important for students to be a part of active learning which enables them to be lifelong learners through improving their thinking abilities but also their self-regulating style (Jahan, Siddiqui, Al Zadjali, and Qasim, 2016). Miller and Metz (2014) indicated that the active learning led to students being more motivated and confident. Active learning stands to standard modes of instruction in which teachers do most of the talking and the students are passive (Silberman, 1996).

There are seven principles to improve learning in higher education, the first and the foremost is to have a strong and communicative relationship between the teacher and student; to make that happen both have to followed encouraging active learning (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). Keuger and Lindhal (2001) stated that student-teacher interaction is one of the most essential parts of a classroom where active learning takes place. Interactions between teachers and students create a positive atmosphere and students become more committed to learning (Dufresne, Gerace, Leonard, Mestre & Wenk, 1996; Nidzam, and Shaharim Saidatul, 2017). In classrooms, some students chose to stay silent and listen to lectures rather than actively participating (Aksit & Nevgi, 2016). An individual has knowledge but most of his or her knowledge is build up by interacting with other individuals (Dufresne et al., 1996). One of the best exercises to perform an active learning in a classroom is to have a students' role-play which allows them to enhance their communication skills (Siwi, 2014). Other in-class activities that uplift the students' communication skills are games, group discussions active and collaborative learning (Christie, 2018).

Van Amburgh, Devlin, Kirwin, and Qualters (2007) stated that active learning has advantages as it is extremely important to integrate active learning strategies in a classroom on a real-time basis. It is the responsibility of the teachers to take care of the involvement of students in various activities helping them to overcome real world obstacles with confidence (Strati, Schmidt, & Maier, 2016).

Experiential learning is one type of active learning which gives a platform and experience to students where they learn how to affect make proper decision making (Levant, Coulmont, & Sandu, 2016). Demirci (2017) found out that students who were taught under experiential learning rather than traditional learning had a significant change in their attitudes towards learning.

The advancement of technologies provide diversified techniques in teaching and students can access the learning materials easily in order to understand better (Deakin Crick, and Goldspink, 2014). Pugna and Boldeanu (2013) stated that with the use of advancement in Information Technology, the students getting a

better chance to have an advanced knowledge in the areas like strategic, tactical, and operational decision making.

Student-focused teaching approach increases the students' accountability towards learning (Al Murshidi, 2014). Tiew (2010) suggested that student evaluation should be based on in-class participation and the students learn better through peer and self-assessment. Self-assessments are a way through which students can self-evaluate them in identifying their academic position in the class (Amo and Jareño, 2011). One of the major barriers of active learning is incompetent teachers who are unable to create that environment for the students and they are unable to integrate the knowledge in them (Aksit & Nevgi, 2016).

Business students need to have creative ideas that enhance their management skills and help them in problem-solving skills but also indicates their originality and expresses their thoughts (Brown, 1989; Titus, 2014). Creativity is created when a teacher teaches a subject in a way that leads students to apply their knowledge in problem solving by analyzing the problems and finding solutions to them (Mayer, 1989). Teachers use creative techniques to attract the students in the best interest of the students (Vasudevan, 2013). Creativity arises through students' problem-solving, in innovative ways which is associated with innovative thinking and active learning (Schlee and Harich, 2014). Students with better critical-thinking skills tend to raise more questions, have a solid defense for their opinions and are confident in being independent learners and therefore that have a better academic performance compared to other students (Saleh, 2019).

Group study is a perfect way to install creative and critical thinking amongst students with on hand discussions with their peers which helps them in gaining better knowledge and develop their cognitive skills and to critically analyze their study material (Livingstone & Lynch, 2000).

Active learning and teamwork are highly associated with each other since active learning is student centered approach which allows students to feel empowered during their teamwork session and gives them a sense of real situation (Matveev & Milter, 2010). Teamwork not only helps in learning better but also builds mutual relationships and a sense of working together (Harris and Harris, 1996). Teachers act as active facilitators of teams in the learning process and ensure that there are no areas of conflict amongst the students (Fredrick, 2008).

Jamila (2014) stated that students who are not self-confident tend to be extremely anxious in their work terribly whereas students with high level of confidence tend to have lower level of anxiety but academically perform well. Students who are confident feel socially competent (Nurhayati, Rosmaiyadi, Buyung, 2017).

Hypotheses

From the above review of literature, the following hypotheses have been derived:

1. Teachers do not pay attention to active learning and do not provide an active learning atmosphere in the classrooms.
2. Students do not give to priority to active learning and that they do not practice it in classrooms.

Research Methodology

The research work was done through a cross-sectional, exploratory study to identify the perceptions and barriers of active learning in business students. The samples of the study were the undergraduates from the business faculty at Sohar University and the sample size was 280. The online survey questionnaire was filled by students for which the questionnaire was shared through digital media. The analysis was carried out using excel and SPSS.

Findings

able 1 Reliability Analysis of the data

	N	%
Valid Cases	280	100%
Excluded	0	0

Cronbach Alpha	N of Items
0.95	32 items

The reliability analysis shows that the Cronbach Alpha score = 0.95 > 0.7

Table 2 Demographic Details

Questions		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	102	36.4
	Female	178	63.6
Nationality	Omani	249	88.9
	Non-Omani	31	11.1
Age	Less than 20	28	10.0
	20 to less than 25	190	67.9
	25 to less than 30	44	15.7
	30 above	18	6.4
Level of Study	Level 1	65	23.2
	Level 2	72	25.7
	Level 3	52	18.6
	Level 4	91	32.5
Marital Status	Single	190	67.9
	Married	80	28.6
	Widowed/er	9	3.2
	Separated	1	0.4
GPA	Less than 2	24	8.6
	2 to less than 3	138	49.3
	3 to less than 4	101	36.1
	4	17	6.1
Study-Type	Full-time	214	76.4
	Part-time	66	23.6
Residence City	Sohar	52	18.6
	Saham	37	13.2
	Liwa	25	8.9
	Khaboura	23	8.2
	Shinas	31	11.1
	Muscat	21	7.5
	Musannah	22	7.9
	Barka	28	10.0
	Other	41	14.6
Residence	Home	179	63.9
	Hostel	101	36.1

Source: Questionnaire

Table 2 Factors Influencing Active Learning

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	K-S Value	Chi-Square	p-Value
The Schooling background affect the learning process	80 28.6%	79 28.2%	59 21.1%	41 14.6%	21 7.5%	3.56	45.786	< 0.05
Student-Teacher interaction is necessary for a good learning environment	125 44.6%	91 46.1%	38 13.6%	13 4.6%	13 4.6%	4.21	185.771	
Good communication skills and social	120 42.9%	75 26.8%	5 18.2%	18 6.4%	16 5.7%	3.95	134.393	

interactive skills become better								
Stress in life affects the students' learning	129 46.1%	84 30.0%	39 13.9%	16 5.7%	12 4.3%	4.08	177.464	
Social media is used to improve learning through videos and related materials	105 37.5%	90 32.1%	46 16.4%	21 7.5%	18 6.4%	3.87	112.964	
Study overload affects the studying process	127 45.4%	82 29.3%	46 16.4%	19 6.8%	6 2.1%	4.09	172.964	
The student-focused approach is done in class	86 30.7%	104 37.1%	48 17.1%	24 8.6%	18 6.4%	3.77	102.429	

Null Hypotheses: There is no relationship between the statements for the respondents and Factors influencing active learning.

From the table above, it is observed that the p-value is less than 0.05 which means that the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a clear relationship between the statements of the respondents and the Factors influencing Active learning. Comparing the K-S values that were obtained from the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, it can be observed that 'Student-teacher interaction is very necessary for a good learning environment'. Adding to that, 'Good communication, social and interactive skills become better' and 'Stress in life affects the students' learning'.

Table 3 Perceptions of Active Learning

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	K-S Value	Chi-Square	p-value
Knowledge integration and memory of the students increases	93 33.2%	91 32.5%	50 17.9%	24 8.6%	22 7.9%	3.75	85.893	< 0.05
There is a boost of self-confidence amongst the students	74 26.4%	108 38.6%	67 23.9%	22 7.9%	9 3.2%	3.77	116.321	
The learning environment becomes better	125 44.6%	84 30.0%	45 16.1%	15 5.4%	11 3.9%	4.06	167.357	
Teacher-student interaction increases	97 34.6%	102 36.4%	50 17.9%	16 5.8%	15 5.4%	3.89	127.036	
Students develop more interest in studies	113 40.4%	95 33.9%	40 14.3%	21 7.5%	11 3.9%	3.99	147.786	
Creative and critical thinking of the students increases	126 45.0%	67 23.9%	53 18.9%	19 6.8%	15 5.4%	3.96	144.286	
Working in a group increases team-building skills in students	133 47.5%	61 21.8%	53 18.9%	22 7.9%	11 3.9%	4.01	163.286	
Students enhance their communication skills	123 43.9%	85 30.4%	44 15.7%	17 6.1%	11 3.9%	4.04	161.071	

Null Hypotheses: There is no relationship between the statements for the respondents and Perceptions of active learning.

From table 43 we can observe that the p-value is less than 0.05 i.e. the null hypothesis gets rejected. Therefore, there is a clear relationship between the statements and the perceptions of active learning. Comparing the K-S values, that were obtained from the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, we can examine that 'The Learning

environment becomes better', 'Students develop more interest in studies' and 'Creative and critical thinking of the students' increases' followed by 'Working in the group increases team-building skills in students.' Also, 'Students enhance their communication skills'.

Table 4 Barriers to Active Learning

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	K-S Value	Chi-Square	p-value
There is a lack of student-teacher interaction	81 28.9%	85 30.5%	66 23.6%	27 9.6%	21 7.5%	3.64	64.857	< 0.05
In Smaller group classes it is easy to understand	113 40.4%	78 27.9%	48 17.1%	25 8.9%	16 5.7%	3.88	113.536	
Teachers do not use innovative methods for teaching	91 32.5%	83 29.6%	71 25.4%	29 10.4%	6 2.1%	3.80	96.571	
Students are encouraged to involve in the studying process by the teacher	72 25.7%	75 26.8%	78 27.9%	34 12.1%	21 7.5%	3.51	50.179	
Lack of Control by Teachers over the students	73 26.1%	107 38.2%	66 23.6%	25 8.9%	9 3.2%	3.75	110.000	
Lack of Experiential Learning	89 31.8%	88 31.4%	70 25.0%	24 8.6%	9 3.2%	3.80	98.964	
Students are given Self-assessments	88 31.4%	88 31.4%	65 23.2%	22 7.9%	17 6.1%	3.74	85.821	
Students are taught critical thinking	71 25.4%	89 31.8%	73 26.1%	31 11.1%	16 5.7%	3.60	68.357	
Students do not have self-confidence	74 26.4%	73 26.1%	84 30.0%	33 11.8%	16 5.7%	3.56	62.964	
Students lack Communication Skills	81 28.9%	104 37.1%	49 17.5%	30 10.7%	16 5.7%	3.73	93.821	
Language barriers between students and teachers	123 43.9%	78 27.9%	44 15.7%	22 7.9%	13 4.6%	3.99	145.036	
Students are not interested in the subjects	69 24.6%	63 22.5%	89 31.8%	43 15.4%	16 5.7%	3.45	54.929	
Teachers fail to motivate students	75 26.80%	108 38.60%	59 21.10%	26 9.30%	12 4.30%	3.74	105.536	
Teachers do not have class management skills	77 27.5%	97 34.6%	55 19.6%	31 11.1%	20 7.1%	3.64	72.214	
Lack of creativity by the teachers	90 32.1%	90 32.1%	60 21.4%	19 6.8%	21 7.5%	3.75	87.893	
There are no group-study sessions	101 36.1%	85 30.4%	54 19.3%	28 10.0%	12 4.3%	3.84	99.821	
Students do not have group-discussion sessions outside classes	78 27.9%	78 27.9%	75 26.8%	33 11.8%	16 5.7%	3.60	61.750	

Null Hypotheses: There is no relationship between the statements for the respondents and the barriers of active learning.

From the table above we can observe that the p-value is less than 0.05 which means that the null hypotheses get rejected. Therefore, there is a clear relationship between the statements and the barriers of active learning. The test done was Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, from which we got the K-S values through which we can see that 'There is a lack of student-teacher interaction', 'In smaller groups it is easy to understand' and 'Teachers do not use innovative methods for teaching'. Also, 'Lack of experiential learning' and that 'Language barriers between teachers and students.' Adding to that, 'Teachers fail to motivate students' and that 'Students lack communication skills.'

Table 5. (a), (b), (c) and (d) Regression

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
	Barriers of Active Learning, Factors influencing Active Learning ^b	...	Enter

^aDependent Variable: Benefits of Active Learning

^bAll requested variables entered

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	.824 ^a	.679	.677	4.13589

^aPredictors: (Constant), Barriers of Active Learning, Factors influencing Active Learning

ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	10037.652	2	5018.826	293.402	.000 ^b
Residual	4738.259	277	17.106		
Total	14775.911	279			

^aDependent Variable: Benefits of Active Learning

^bPredictors: (Constant), Barriers of Active Learning, Factors influencing Active Learning

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.454	1.306		.348	.728
Factors influencing Active Learning	.605	.053	.493	11.336	.000
Barriers of Active Learning	.228	.024	.422	9.699	.000

^aDependent Variable: Benefits of Active Learning

Discussion

36.4% of the respondents agreed that the teachers lack good class management skills. A majority of 38.6% respondents agreed that the teachers fail to motivate students. According to the students, educators lack experiential learning in the classroom. This shows that teachers do not pay attention to active learning and thus do not provide an active learning atmosphere in classrooms.

37.1% agree that the student-focused approach is done in the class. This showed that the teachers are working on creating relationship with the students in order to enhance their learning process whereas the majority of the students claimed that there is a lack of student-teacher interaction. It is also showed that there is a lack of experiential learning in classrooms. Therefore, it is evident that the students are not aware of active learning. In other words, it is proved that the teachers do not prioritize active learning in classrooms.

The respondents agreed that creative and critical thinking increases when they practice active learning. They also agreed that that they are aware of the effects of active learning but they do not practice active learning strategies as they do not practice in the classroom as they were not taught. Adding to that, they agreed that the students lack communication skills and their active learning enhances their communication skills.

Conclusion

From the above discussions, it can be clearly identified that students feel that the learning environment becomes better through active learning and the students develop more interest in their subjects. Further, they also develop their cognitive skills they enhance their communication, social and interactive skills. They also develop their team-building skills when working in groups. It can also be noticed that there is a lack of

student-teacher interaction in classrooms and students prefer studying in a small groups as large groups makes them difficult to learn. Further, lack of experiential learning and language barriers between students and teachers are the prime factors which act as barriers of active learning. This make teachers fail to motivate students.

It is also noticed that students do not prioritize active learning in classrooms and teachers are not putting enough efforts in order to implement active learning strategies in classrooms. Teachers are not paying full attention towards implementing active learning in classrooms. According to students, the perceptions towards teachers are that they feel they need to be pay more attention as they are competent and creative in order to keep the students interested and involve in the learning process.

Lack of interactive classroom environment has led students to become least interested in the subjects and their confidence levels have also decreased since the traditional style of learning diverts the students' interest.

Suggestions

Therefore, it was suggested that to overcome obstacles it is both teachers' community and the students' community should take active interest in active learning. Teachers should come forward to introduce active learning in classrooms using their innovative teaching methods keeping in mind the future of the students whereas the student community should take their responsibility in active learning through active participation.

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