

Teacher's and students' Perceptions of Active Learning in High Schools in Afghanistan

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Abstract: With the rapid development of technology, method of the teaching to involve students in learning has also changed. These changes do require the teachers to act as a facilitator or a mentor in the class, and students to be actively involved in the learning. This study aims to investigate the perceptions of Afghan teachers and students regarding the effectiveness and implementation of the principles of the active learning approach. Moreover, the study also investigates the problems perceived by the teachers while implementing active learning in Afghan schools. A quantitative research design is used in order to collect the data from the students. The data of the study were collected from 93 school teachers and 98 students through a questionnaire adopted from (Sahar 2014). The data were analysed through SPSS for the mean of descriptive statistics. The findings of the study show that the teachers are using active learning and they consider active learning as an effective way, the teacher also supports the students who take responsibility for their learning. Furthermore, the teachers are providing a positive learning environment for the students where the students ask questions of each other's, In addition to that, all teachers had positive attitudes towards the use of the active learning techniques. The majority of the students agree that they can learn more effectively and efficiently through active learning compared to lectures. Besides that, the students also agreed that their teachers are using active learning methods and they have good knowledge of active learning.

Keywords: active learning, passive learning, group work, pair share, Afghanistan

Introduction

Education brings about a positive change in a person's behaviour. There are various ways and means to bring about this change, through which we can easily achieve our goals. According to Dawed. S. and Omer. M (2019), The quality of education has a direct impact on these changes and it becomes an important issue in both developed and developing countries. This is so that advancements in the economy,

society, culture, and other areas can be facilitated through education. The availability of high-quality education is a critical problem in developing nations, where efforts are made to increase access while retaining quality.

According to England & Nagel (2020), the definitions of quality provided by the World Bank, UNICEF, and UNESCO are too narrowly focused on some areas, such as the input (books, school facilities, teacher preparation), and output (learning output). But there is no explanation for what happens in the "black box" in between. It implies that the outcome is ultimately determined by the process. Therefore, the engagement of the students in the classroom is the most important factor that makes the quality of the content.

With the rapid development of technology, method of the teaching to involve students in learning has also changed. It doesn't matter what the situation is; the teacher's involvement is crucial. In light of this, the instructor is the most significant factor in every learning setting. His or her abilities and personality play a crucial role in fostering learning environments, as does their familiarity with teaching methodologies and procedures (Merab,2009). One of these ways is the way of active learning, which means that students are actively involved in the lesson and that the teacher acts as a guide and mentor so that learning can take place effectively. It is currently accepted all over the world. The purpose of active learning is to ensure that students grasp the many changes that have been made in educational institutions in our dear country. How effective have they been in education, and what are the challenges and problems facing this method? According to Chickering and Gamson (1987), students should participate in other activities outside listening, such as reading, writing, talking, or problem-solving. Most importantly, for students to fully participate, they must perform higher-order thinking activities like analysis, synthesis, and assessment. In this context, it is suggested that instructional activities that involve students in doing things, considering what they are doing are techniques for encouraging active learning.

According to Menon (2008), Afghanistan is one of the countries where passive learning (traditional system) has a great impact on the education system because teachers solely depend on passive learning techniques such as rote learning, repetition, and memorizing without knowing. In this scenario, the teachers dominate the classroom and the students have only a passive role. The students neither have a chance to express their opinions nor to think critically about the issues. However, Menon (2008) further states that there is a serious need to implement active learning in the educational system of Afghanistan to put an end to passive learning. Based on the report of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) (2008), teachers have limited materials in the classroom; only chalk and a blackboard are available, and there are activities involving teachers and students or students and students.

Besides these shortcomings, the Ministry of Education Reports (2003, 2006, and 2012) indicate that several teacher training such as INSET I and INSET II were implemented to familiarize teachers with the learner-centered/active learning approach and its techniques. On the other hand, Menon's (2008) study reports that although the new techniques and policies of active learning were introduced for teachers in schools, some teachers were not able to implement those activities in a proper way to improve the students' critical thinking. In Afghanistan, limited studies have been conducted to address this issue. Therefore, the researcher aims to explore teachers' and students' opinions regarding the implementation of active learning, its values, and principles.

Literature Review

Active learning

The term active learning has the connotation of constructivism, which is learning actively and constructed in a social context. Vasan (2018) active learning is generally de-fined as an instructional approach that engages students in the learning process. In short, active learning requires students to do meaningful learning activities and think about what and how they are doing. This is based on students getting understanding in learning through interaction with their environment and students involved in constructing their knowledge. Constructivist groups emphasize learning oriented on problem-solving so students actively do something so that it can transform information into knowledge. Epistemologically constructivism is a philosophical explanation of how knowledge is obtained. Constructivism leads to a humanistic approach. The humanistic approach emphasizes the three domains, namely cognitive, affective, and conative. The Role of Educators is more as a facilitator that is doing everything to help individuals build their identity and concept. Ulla (2013) the study of curriculum materials, textbooks and other teaching resources is an essential element in lesson and learning study. Students are involved in the learning process by being given successful experiences, acknowledged, accepted and valued. Here educators treat students as human beings with all their needs through four approaches namely self- esteem approach, creative approach, clarification, and moral development values approach and multi- talent approach.

In Afghanistan, a similar study was conducted by Azizi (2014) to investigate one of the active learning techniques (oral interaction in the classroom, students with students and teacher-students interaction). The mentioned study concluded that taking active participation in classroom interaction increase self-esteem in students and students can man-age their own ways of learning. Moreover, talking students can lead their own thinking and becomes a good participant in learning process. In addition, the study claimed that talking has very important role in learning process. They believed that interactive teaching stimulates students to study the fact about specific topic and

found the different aspect of the topic based on their knowledge and comprehension, and discuss it with other students in the class and with the teacher for sharing ideas.

Mueller, Knobloch and Orvis (2015) also conducted a study on the effects of active learning on students' outcomes and teachers' perceptions on utilizing active learning in their instruction. The findings of the study indicated that the students enrolled who were enrolled to active learning classrooms increased their knowledge of the subject matter compared to the students who were instructed in traditional way. The teachers also shared the same positive perceptions about active learning instruction.

Aksit, Niemi and Nevgi (2016) conducted a study in Turkey to investigate the promoting of active learning in teaching education and understanding of the concept of active learning. The study also examined its application and the obstacles toward its application. The findings of the study indicated that many indicators of active learning can be observed, but there are still many obstacles to be overcome.

Education is the main pillar for the development of a country. Therefore, a specific and essential method of teaching and learning must be used in order to transfer knowledge in an appropriate and effective manner (Alemu, 2010). Thus, different methods were experienced during the life time of humanity. Until several decades ago, it was considered that students were only receivers of knowledge, and it could be delivered to them by those who were knowledgeable. In contrast, according to modern cognitive psychology, it has been revealed that learning is a constructive process, not a receptive process (Perkins & Wirth, 2008).

Cheng & Wang (2007) and Alemu (2010) explain that in constructivist learning theory, instruction takes place in a learner-centered style where the students are the main focus while teachers play a facilitator role. Moreover, learners construct their own understanding of knowledge through their personal experiences and their interaction with the environment.

Therefore, active learning has been experienced to be a better method to change the traditional teacher-centered classroom into the new student-centered approach. As it gives an opportunity to facilitate effective and useful learning by enabling students to participate and have active involvement (Van de Bogart, 2009).

According to some studies in Afghanistan, most teachers used the traditional teaching and learning methods, which included repetition, rote learning, and memorizing the text without understanding it. In that method, teachers had the central role and the students were passive and did not have a chance to express their opinion or critically discuss things (Menon, 2008).

However, active learning is essential for the education system of Afghanistan (Menon, 2008). Therefore, it would be appropriate to throw some light on active learning; its history, main features, and challenges involved in the concept. Surveys on active learning have shown that active learning is an effective way to get to the point

where real situations are useful, and the concern is that overstating examples reduces the amount. (Prince, 2004).

The shift from passive learning to active learning is based on collaborative learning. In collaborative learning, students are divided into small groups and work together, sharing ideas and Students' involvement in collaborative learning enables them to help each other solve problems and ultimately use intellectual talents to reach an agreement and work together to achieve a goal. Reaches higher levels of education (Johnson & Johnson 2008,). Computers, projectors, flip and flash charts, markers, and whiteboards are used to solve functional learning problems (Baepler, Walker, & Driessen, 2014).

In active learning, students are asked to become familiar with the teacher's approach, to think about something and also to give them time to exchange views and discuss the topic. In addition, when the teacher or a student asks other students questions and the students answer, their answers are processed. After the process, new information is presented. Students are assigned homework outside the classroom and perform experiments in indoor and outdoor laboratories, and yet there are students who do not participate properly in activities (Felder & Brent, 2009).

In the active learning process, the teacher works as a facilitator and the students are usually asked to find answers to the questions. The students usually put their heads together in terms of pair work, group work, and role plays, which is quite important for enhancing the social and collaborative skills of students; it also encourages students to work independently, participate in mental activities which are so vital for enriching their autonomy and self-confidence. They make mistakes and receive feedback from teachers, then try hard to have accurate answers, which gives them room to be consistent with perseverance. Active learning avoids memorizing lessons, definitions, and dense literature; instead, it encourages students to think more deeply, understand terms, and improve their analytic skills and creative efforts. (Nguyen, Wallace & Lease 2015).

Over time, active learning has attracted the attention of the public instead of passive learning, so students solve problems independently and teachers collaborate with them (Aksit, Niemi, & Nevgi, 2016). Active learning is learning that keeps students engaged in the classroom, with the teacher taking on the role of instructor (Faust & Paulson, 1998).

Allowing students in active learning to go anywhere to solve problems. That is, the student is active in learning and respects his or her freedom (Cooperstein and Kocevar, 2004). Key points in active learning include asking questions and presenting results in general (Cohn, 1994). Active learning uses different methods that differ from each other in practice, such as the question-and-answer method; the discussion method;

the group method; the project method; the problem-solving method, and so on (Prince, 2004).

In inactive learning, students are inactive, listening and taking notes, and in active learning, students play an active role in acquiring knowledge. The active learning method is a useful tool for building social relationships (Dufresne et al, 1999) In active learning, students are encouraged to solve problems on their own. Environmental changes in active learning must be monitored, student activities monitored, and necessary guidance provided (Modell, 1996). Critical thinking is trained in active learning to analyse and interpret topics and achieve the desired results (Walker, 2003).

Research Methodology

A quantitative research design is used in the current study. Two separate questionnaires are used in order to collect the data for the study. One hundred twenty 120 teachers and one hundred 100 students randomly from schools has participated in the study and answered the survey questionnaire. Among these numbers of teachers and students 93 school teachers and 98 students have answered the questionnaire and agreed to participated in the study. The questionnaire was adopted from Sahar (2014). According to Cohen et al. (2007), surveys, are used to study a population at a specific point in time he also states that a questionnaire is known to be one of the most common methods used to collect data on attitudes and opinions from a large group of respondents. The benefit of using a questionnaire is that it is useful to collect data in a short time from larger groups of people and is cheap and easy. The questionnaires used in this study were based on Likert scales (1–5). Likert Scales, according to Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009), are a dependable, simple, and versatile method of rating a scale. According to Joshi, Kale, Chandel, and Pal (2015), the Likert-Scale is used when researchers want to know about the opinions and perceptions of participants regarding a single variable, open to different scales to be chosen by the respondents. After the data of the study were collected, then it was analyzed as per the objectives of the study. The quantitative data of the study were analyzed through The Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) software. And the qualitative date of the Research was analyzed for the mean of thematic analysis. After the quantitative data collection, first, it was carefully inspected, verified, sorted out than coded and keyed into the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) for descriptive statistics (Frequency, Percentage, mean standard deviation).

Results

Teacher's Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire of the teachers is divided into two parts. The first part of the questionnaire is about the demographic information of the participants and the second part of The teacher's questionnaire consists of three categories with regards to teacher's perceptions and challenges on active learning. Each item under each category

is analyzed below through SPSS version 25 for the mean of descriptive statistics (Frequency, Percentage, and mean).

Teacher’s Attitudes to active learning

Table (1.1) below shows the Frequency, percentage, and mean scorer recorded of each item in the first section of the questionnaire. The first section is about the teacher’s attitude toward active learning.

Table 1.1

Teacher Attitude towards active learning

Frequency and Percentage Table							
Item No	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	M
1	I try to create a classroom Environment that supports students to have active involvement in the classroom making fun.	42 (45.16) %	41 (44) %	5 (5.4) %	4 (4.3) %	1 (1.1) %	4.27
2	In the teaching-learning process my responsibility is to facilitate student’ learning.	28 30.1 %	42 45.2 %	18 19.4 %	3 3.2 %	2 2.2 %	3.97
3	I motivate students to actively participate in the teaching-learning process.	39 41.2 %	43 46.2 %	8 8.6 %	1 1.1 %	2 2.2 %	4.24
4	I generally link new knowledge to students’ prior experiences.	44 47.3 %	41 44.1 %	5 5.4 %	1 1.1 %	2 2.2 %	4.33
5	I encourage students to deduce general principles from practical experiences.	29 31.2 %	52 55.9 %	8 8.5 %	3 3.2 %	1 1.1 %	4.12
6	I help students to take responsibility for their own learning.	42 45.2 %	38 40.9%	9 9.7%	3 3.2%	1 1.1%	4.25
7	I encourage students to make decisions about the what, how and when of learning.	55 59.1 %	35 37.6 %	2 2.2 %	0 0 %	1 1.1 %	4.53
8	I encourage students to provide comment to their teachers about how they learn effectively.	40 43	41 44.1 %	8 8.6 %	2 2.2 %	2 2.2 %	4.23
9	I use the students’ useful comment to improve my teaching.	42 45.2 %	44 47.3 %	4 4.3 %	2 2.2 %	1 1.1 %	4.33
Valid N (listwise)		93					

Table 1.1 indicate that teacher was willing to encourage students to make decisions about the what, how, and when of learning, link new knowledge to students’ prior experiences, and use of the students’ useful comment to improve my teaching, about 90 %, 86 % and 85% of the respondents supported these approaches respectively. Furthermore, in table 4.1 for the item such as: motivating the students, helping the students to take responsibility of their own learning, and creating a positive learning environment the respondents supported this by above 80%. Likewise, for the item that they encouraged the student to ask questions from each other, 79 % of respondents support this item. The result in table 4 also indicates that for the section wherein the teacher is taking responsibility for the teaching-learning process to facilitate student’ learning, respondents showed 80% agreement. Generally, all teachers had positive attitudes toward the use of active learning techniques.

Factors and problems that affect implementation of active learning

Table (1.2) below shows the Frequency, percentage and mean scorer recorded of each item in the second section of the questionnaire. The second section is about the Factors and problems that affect implementation of active learning.

Table 1.2

The Use of Active learning practices in the class

Frequency and Percentage Table							
Item No	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	M
1	I often arrange the students into groups of more than two pupils	26 (28) %	52 (55.9) %	9 (9.7) %	4 (4.3) %	2 (2.2) %	4.03
2	I often divide the students in to couples to work on their tasks.	38 40.9 %	42 45.2 %	9 9.7%	2 2.2 %	2 2.2 %	4.20
3	I often ask close-ended questions for which there is only one correct answer.	54 58.1 %	26 28 %	10 10.8 %	2 2.2 %	1 1.1 %	4.40
4	I often ask open-ended questions.	63 67.7 %	24 25.8 %	3 3.2 %	1 1.1 %	2 2.2 %	4.56
5	I often give enough time for students to think after asking questions.	35 37.6 %	45 48.4 %	9 9.7 %	1 1.1 %	3 3.3 %	4.16
6	I encourage students to ask questions.	58 62.4 %	28 30.1%	5 5.4%	1 1.1%	1 1.1%	4.52
7	I encourage students to have discussions between each other on their tasks.	41 41.1 %	42 45.2 %	5 5.4 %	4 4.3 %	1 1.1 %	4.27
8	I often monitor the interaction between pupils.	23 24.7 %	49 52.7 %	14 15.1 %	5 5.4 %	2 2.2 %	3.92
Valid N (listwise)		93					

The results of table 1.2 show that the majority of the teachers are using active learning techniques in the class. From the findings, as indicated in Table 4.2, all items indicated high mean scores above 4 except for item 8 with a mean score of 3.92. Among these items, all items were agreed upon by the majority of the teachers with a mean score of 4.00. It is indicated that most of the teachers agreed to use Active learning in the classroom. The result indicates that a total of 90 % of the teachers are using active learning and they support an active learning environment. Also, a big percentage of teachers (above 80%) agreed to use active learning techniques such as dividing students into couples and groups, asking open-ended questions, asking close-ended questions, giving students enough time to think, encouraging students to answer, and encouraging students to participate in the discussion in the class. Item 8 was the least agreed one where 72% of the teachers accepted monitoring the nitration of the students in the class while 28% of the teachers opposed this and did not monitor the interaction of the students.

Factors and problems that affect the implementation of active learning.

Table (1.3) below shows the Frequency, percentage, and mean score recorded for each item in the third section of the questionnaire. The third section is about Factors and problems that affect the implementation of active learning.

Table 1.3

Factors and problems that affect the implementation of active learning.

Frequency and Percentage Table							
Item No	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	M
1	I lack training on the implementation of some techniques which make students to actively involved in the classroom.	60 64.5 %	30 32.3 %	1 (1.1) %	1 (1.1) %	1 (1.1) %	4.27
2	The lectures are the best way for me to teach students.	57 61.3 %	28 30.1 %	6 6.5 %	1 (1.1) %	1 (1.1) %	3.97
3	Students dislike active participation in my classroom teaching.	55 59.1 %	34 36.6 %	1 1.1 %	1 2.2 %	1 1.1 %	4.24
4	The amount of content that needs to be covered prevents the actively involvement of students in my classroom.	45 48.4 %	36 38.7 %	8 8.6 %	3 3.2 %	1 1.1 %	4.33
5	There is a lack of time to actively involve students in my classroom teaching.	46 49.5 %	34 36.6 %	8 8.6 %	3 3.2 %	2 2.2 %	4.12
6	Active involvement of students will create problems in my classroom management.	30 32.3 %	44 47.3%	10 10.8%	6 6.5%	3 3.2%	4.25
7	Lack of materials inhibits to actively involve students in my classroom.	57 61.3 %	31 33.3 %	2 2.2 %	1 1.1 %	2 2.2 %	4.53
8	It is impractical for me to actively involve students in large classes	34 36.6%	44 47.3 %	1 1.1 %	12 12.9 %	2 2.2 %	4.23
Valid N (listwise)		93					

Based on the results of the table 1.3, in order of importance (as indicated by the percentages and means), the following points were mentioned as the main factors impeding the implementation of active learning approaches. The lack of materials inhibits me to actively involving students in my classroom. The mean score 4.53 and 94% of the teachers agreed on this factor as the main problem in the implementation of active learning. Likewise, the amount of content that needs to be covered prevents the actively involvement of students in my classroom is another problem that is most agreed upon by the teachers 87%. Furthermore, lack of training on the implementation of some techniques which make students to actively involved in the classroom, and Lack of time to actively involve students in the teaching-learning process are the other problems that lecturers had agreed on respectively 86% and 85%. Lack of materials and the amount of content that needs to be covered are the other factors that hinder the use of active learning in the classroom. Based on questionnaire responses, teachers responded that there was not enough space for preparing students into groups or pairs

in the classrooms. Mostly, all teachers had the same point of view about the factors that hinder the implementation of active learning approaches.

Students' Questionnaire: The survey questionnaire of the students is consist of ten yes and No questions on students; knowledge and perceptions of active learning. Each item is analyzed below through SPSS version 25 for the mean of descriptive statistics (Frequency, Percentage).

Students' knowledge and perception on active learning

Table (1.4) below shows the Frequency and percentage of each item in the students' questionnaire.

Table1.4

Students' knowledge and perception on active learning

No	Items	Yes		No	
		F	P	F	P
1	Students have good knowledge and skill in the implementation of active learning	90	88%	8	12%
2	Do you like to participate actively rather than attending teacher lecture?	88	86%	10	12%
3	Do you believe active learning contributes to better academic achievement?	70	68%	28	32%
4	Do you learn more efficiently and effectively in active learning classes than lecturing classes	92	90%	6	10%
5	I master the learning material in a better way in active learning classes than lecture classes	90	88%	8	12%
6	When teachers give activities to be done in groups/pair they go round each group and help students	80	78%	18	22%
7	Active learning method creates a heavy load on the part of the student, and it is difficult to practice	82	80%	16	20%
8	Teachers provide feedback on time for learning tasks	75	74%	23	26%
9	Do your teachers regularly motivate you to practice different activities in the classroom regardless of your mistakes that can be improved through practice	80	78%	18	12%
10	Do Teachers use active learning methods in their teaching learning classrooms	92	90%	6	10%

Table 1.4 above is the result of the students' perceptions and their responses about the knowledge about active learning. The conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that the vast majority of students are of the opinion that active learning enables them to acquire knowledge in a manner that is both more effective and more efficient than listening to a lecture. In addition to that, the students all concurred that their teachers employ active learning approaches and that their teachers have a solid understanding of active learning. In addition to that, the students think of active learning as a means of grasping what they have learned and actively participating in the class rather than setting themselves to a passive role. Students have an awareness and good perception of active learning, and they understand that it has the potential to contribute to their academic achievement. Additionally, they understand and master well the learning materials when teachers give opportunity, and they participate

actively in the learning process rather than only attending the lecture and presentations of teachers. These findings can be inferred from the findings presented in the table. The instructors will provide the students with feedback and will urge them to be active participants in their own education. There is a limitation on the part of the teachers when it comes to using various active learning strategies to involve students in the teaching-learning process and to provide opportunities for students to construct their own knowledge, and develop problem-solving abilities, and there is also a limitation on the part of the teachers when it comes to supporting and rounding each group of students when they are doing their activities in group and pair settings.

Discussion and Conclusions

The results shows that the teachers are using active learning and they consider active learning as an effective way, the teacher also supports the students who take the responsibility of their own learning. Furthermore, the teachers are providing the positive learning environment for the students where the students ask questions from each other's. As Girma (2020), says that the in 21st century most of the teachers are in the support of the active learning, he found in his research that the teachers are encouraging the students and providing them active learning environment. In addition to that all teachers had positive attitudes towards the use of the active learning techniques and majority of them are using active leaning techniques in the class such as dividing students in couples and groups, ask open ended questions, ask close ended questions, giving students enough time to think, encourage students to answer, and encourage students to participate in the discussion in the class. these findings are in line with Sahar (2014), as she conducted a study in the Kabul Afghanistan and she found that most of the teachers in the favor of the using active learning techniques. But this finding is completely different with Menon 2008, as he states that learning in Afghanistan is still suffering from traditional system where students teach through repetition, memorize the text without understanding, and keep away from critical discussion during the class hours. Likewise, Karlsson's research (2005) in Afghan primary schools indicated that teachers are active in the teaching learning process while students are passive and do not have chance to actively participate in the classroom activities. The results of his study showed that the teachers do not rest at the whole class sessions; they were constantly putting questions, writing on the black boards, reading from the textbooks, and correcting or commending the students. At all, teachers are the main decision makers.

From the students' perceptions, majority of the students agree that the they can learn more effectively and efficiently through active learning compare to lecture. In addition to that the students also agreed that their teachers are using active learning methods and they have good knowledge of the active learning. Besides that, the students consider active learning for mastering their learning and actively participating

in the class rather than setting passive. From the findings, it can be implied that students have awareness and good perception about active learning and it has a potential to contribute for their academic achievement and also, they understand and master well the learning materials when teachers give opportunity and they participate actively in the learning process rather than only attending the lecture and presentation of teachers. Teachers give feedback and encourage students to be active in their learning. There is a limitation in the side of teachers in using different active learning strategies to involve students in teaching learning process and to provide opportunities to construct their own knowledge, to develop problem solving abilities and also there is limitation in supporting and rounding each group of students when they are doing their activities in group and pair.

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