



## Teachers' Perception of Their Role in Active Learning in Elmergib University

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### تصور المعلمين لدورهم في التعلم النشط في جامعة المرقب

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#### Abstract

This study investigated university teachers' perceptions and practices of active learning, assessing how these perceptions influence their practices, and identifying factors that affect active learning implementation in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Elmergib University. A descriptive questionnaire, including open-ended questions, was administered to 20 participating teachers. Data analysis involved percentages and thematic identification of patterns. Findings revealed that teachers hold positive perceptions of active learning, though their actual practices were significantly low. The study also identified several factors hindering active learning, including teachers' preference for traditional methods, students' lack of interest, insufficient learning resources and technology, and large class sizes. Based on these key findings, the study offers clear recommendations to address the challenges faced by both teachers and students, ultimately aiming to enhance active learning practices at the university.

**Keywords:** active learning, teaching methods, perceptions, traditional teaching.

#### الملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف تصورات وممارسات أساتذة الجامعة للتعلم النشط، وتقييم مدى تأثير تصورات المعلمين على ممارساتهم، وتحديد العوامل المؤثرة في تحقيق التعلم النشط في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعة المرقب. تم استخدام استبيان وصفي، بما في ذلك أسئلة مفتوحة، وشمل 20 معلماً مشاركاً. تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام النسب المئوية وتحديد الأنماط والموضوعات. أظهرت النتائج أن المعلمين لديهم تصورات إيجابية تجاه التعلم النشط، ولكن ممارساتهم كانت منخفضة بشكل ملحوظ. كما كشفت الدراسة عن العديد من العوامل التي تؤثر على توظيف التعلم النشط، بما في ذلك ميل المعلمين نحو أساليب التدريس التقليدية، ونقص اهتمام الطلاب بالتعلم الجاد والهادف، ونقص الموارد التعليمية والمعدات التكنولوجية اللازمة لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية، وأخيراً، كبر حجم الفصول (العدد الكبير من الطلاب). وبناءً على هذه النتائج الرئيسية، تقدم الدراسة توصيات واضحة لحل المشكلات التي يواجهها المعلمون والطلاب، وتهدف في النهاية إلى تعزيز ممارسات التعلم النشط في الجامعة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التعلم النشط، أساليب التدريس، التصورات، التدريس التقليدي.

#### Introduction

Currently, there is an urgent need for Libyans to enhance their English language proficiency to foster economic progress and social development. Achieving this goal necessitates improving learning approaches through

modern and effective methods. Learners must acquire the tools to refine their understanding, as true learning occurs through active engagement rather than passive reception. As Mazur (1997) asserts, merely telling students what they need to know is insufficient; they must actively construct their own understanding.

This ambition, however, is set against a historical backdrop. Decades ago, Libya experienced a ban on English language education, which significantly impacted its use within the country. Following years of international isolation, underinvestment, and cronyism under Gaddafi, Libyan higher education continues to suffer the consequences of sanctions and detachment from the international academic community during the post-Lockerbie era. Specifically, in 1986, the Ministry of Education prohibited English language learning in schools and universities, alongside other symbols perceived as intrusive Western cultural hegemony. This misguided directive, primarily aimed at reinforcing Arab nationalism and reacting to the American bombing raids in April 1986, transformed English language learning into a political issue in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This politically motivated decision was a turning point, resulting in a generation growing up with minimal or no exposure to English. Although English teaching resumed in the mid-1990s, irreparable damage was done to educational standards, with curricula atrophying and qualified teachers being redeployed or seeking other employment. It was not until 2005 that English was officially recognized as Libya's second language (Najeeb, 2013).

Presently, the Libyan authorities are intensively working to rectify the damage to the education system and specifically to enhance English language teaching and learning (Aloreibi & Carey, 2017). Consequently, English is now taught from early primary stages through to universities. Furthermore, numerous governmental and private institutions, as well as research centers, utilize English for publication and communication. To realize Libya's educational reform plan, particularly in English language teaching, students must be taught effectively, adhering to the highest educational standards. The objective is to ensure students achieve a strong command of English, enabling them to pursue further studies and succeed in fields requiring English proficiency. Additionally, upon graduation, students will need effective oral and written communication skills in English to improve their prospects in the labor market. As John Dewey (1938) famously stated, "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself. Learning is most effective when it is an active, not a passive, process."

While the application of active learning approaches in English language teaching is recommended in Libya, it is not yet mandatory. An active learning classroom profoundly redefines the teacher's role, shifting them from a knowledge provider to a guide who meticulously directs students' intellectual journeys. Beyond their educational and vocational duties, teachers are expected to cultivate a learning environment that encourages students, prompts critical thinking, and raises insightful questions. According to Arbona (2016), in active learning, teachers are additionally anticipated to be designers, organizers, managers, innovators, researchers, and advisors in the teaching and learning process. This multifaceted role is crucial for successfully preparing students for lifelong learning and equipping them to acquire new skills and knowledge regularly in their careers. Therefore, English teachers in Libya are expected to undertake various roles, including designing, programming, diagnosing, researching, organizing, managing, educating, assessing, participating, and advising, to achieve effective English language teaching and learning (Brad, 2000; Gillies et al., 2008).

However, students' proficiency in both oral and written English skills in Libya remains consistently unreliable. Teachers and researchers frequently attribute this to secondary school students and even university graduates in Libya. Research by various scholars, including Abosnaf (2017), concludes that students' English language performance in high schools, colleges, and universities falls below expected levels.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Definitions of Active Learning**

Active learning is an educational approach that directly involves students in the learning process through purposeful activities, discussions, problem-solving, and reflection, moving beyond passive information absorption. Bonwell & Eison (1991) define active learning as engaging students in both doing and contemplating their actions. This methodology emphasizes student participation, critical thinking, and collaboration, thereby fostering deeper understanding and knowledge retention. Research by Freeman et al. (2014) indicates that active learning enhances student performance across science, engineering, and mathematics disciplines.

The literature identifies several key active learning strategies, including:

- **Collaborative learning:** Involves group work and peer teaching.
- **Problem-based learning:** Utilizes real-world scenarios and case studies.
- **Inquiry-based learning:** Driven by student-formulated questions and research.
- **Experiential learning:** Features hands-on activities and simulations.
- **Flipped classrooms:** Students review material before class, then engage in in-class discussions and activities.

Fundamentally, active learning is rooted in constructivist theories, which posit that learners construct knowledge through active engagement rather than merely receiving it passively. This approach shifts the educational focus from instructor-led teaching to student-centered engagement, leading to enhanced comprehension and long-term retention. Consistent research validates its superiority over passive learning methods, establishing active learning as a cornerstone of modern pedagogy.

### Principles of Active Learning

Active learning is an instructional approach designed to involve students meaningfully through activities and reflection. Four core principles underpin active learning:

1. **Engagement and Participation:** As Chickering & Gamson (1987) assert, "Learning is not a spectator sport." Students learn effectively by actively participating in discussions, problem-solving, and hands-on tasks, rather than passively receiving information or memorizing prepackaged assignments.
2. **Critical Thinking and Reflection:** Dewey (1938) highlights that active learning cultivates critical thinking skills by encouraging students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information instead of simply recalling it. Reflection is crucial for students to connect new knowledge with prior experiences, thus deepening understanding.
3. **Collaboration and Social Interaction:** Bonwell & Eison (1991) emphasize that "Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated." Group work, peer teaching, and discussions facilitate deeper learning by integrating shared perspectives.
4. **Application and Real-World Relevance:** Active learning stresses the application of knowledge to real-world scenarios, making learning more meaningful and memorable. This principle involves probing students' critical thinking through stimulating questions that encourage thoughtful, deep, and explanatory responses (Sherrington, 2017). Examples of such questions include:
  - Can you explain how you worked that out?
  - Can you give an example?
  - Is that always true?
  - Does anyone disagree?
  - Can you think of a case where this would be different?
  - How does that example compare to this example?
  - Which of those factors is the most important?

These principles collectively underscore that active learning transitions from passive absorption to active doing, discussing, and reflecting, leading to profound understanding and lasting knowledge retention.

### Teachers' Role in Active Learning

Active learning transforms the traditional teacher-centered approach into a student-centered one, where learners dynamically engage with the material. Despite this shift, the teacher's role remains pivotal in facilitating, guiding, and structuring the learning process. The literature identifies six crucial roles for teachers in active learning, detailed below:

1. **Facilitator of Learning:** Teachers are responsible for cultivating an environment where students actively explore, question, and construct knowledge, rather than passively receiving it. As Vygotsky suggests, the teacher's role is not to transmit knowledge but to facilitate learning through guidance, questioning, and resource provision. Key responsibilities include designing interactive activities (e.g., discussions, problem-solving tasks, group work), encouraging student participation and collaboration, and providing scaffolding to support students' skill development.

2. **Designer of Engaging Learning Experiences:** Teachers meticulously structure lessons to require students to analyze, evaluate, and apply knowledge. Bonwell & Eison (1991) emphasize that active learning necessitates intentional instructional design where students "do" things and reflect on their actions. Teachers' core responsibilities in this role involve developing problem-based learning (PBL) scenarios, case studies, and simulations; integrating real-world applications to enhance learning relevance; and incorporating technology and multimedia to boost engagement.
3. **Promoter of Critical Thinking and Inquiry:** Teachers encourage students to question, debate, and reflect deeply rather than merely memorizing facts. Inquiry-based learning, as Kuhn (2015, p. 45) notes, fosters critical thinking by prompting students to ask questions, explore diverse perspectives, and construct their own understanding through investigation and reflection. To promote critical thinking, teachers must ask open-ended questions, guide students in evaluating evidence and forming arguments, and cultivate a classroom culture that values curiosity.
4. **Assessor and Feedback Provider:** Teachers utilize formative assessments to monitor student progress and deliver constructive feedback. In active learning, the assessor's role is crucial for evaluating student performance through formative assessments, moving beyond sole reliance on summative evaluations. Formative assessments help students identify knowledge gaps and promote continuous improvement, aligning with active learning principles where students take responsibility for their learning through reflection and adaptation. Hattie & Timperley (2007, p. 102) assert that assessment in active learning environments should be formative, enabling students to reflect and adjust their learning strategies, thereby promoting deeper engagement and self-regulation. Unlike traditional lecture-based teaching, active learning emphasizes dialogic feedback, where students engage in discussions about their work, enhancing metacognition and self-directed learning (Boud & Molloy, 2013). Teachers' key responsibilities in this area include implementing peer assessments, self-reflections, and rubrics; providing timely, specific feedback for improvement; and adjusting teaching strategies based on student performance.
5. **Motivator and Encouragement Provider:** Teachers inspire students to take ownership of their learning. Students learn most effectively when motivated, and motivation stems from meaningful engagement. Active learning demands cognitive and emotional engagement with the material, with motivation serving as the driving force. Prince (2004) underscores that motivation is essential for meaningful participation in active learning; without intrinsic or extrinsic motivators, students may remain passive, reducing the effectiveness of interactive strategies. Ambrose et al. (2010) highlight that educator encouragement fosters a growth mindset, helping students overcome hesitation in active learning settings, while positive reinforcement can increase participation in discussions, problem-solving, and collaborative tasks. Teachers' key responsibilities include recognizing and celebrating student efforts, creating a supportive and risk-free learning environment, and connecting lessons to students' interests and goals.
6. **Role Model of Lifelong Learning:** Bandura (1977) posits that human behavior is learned observationally through modeling, where observing others informs new behaviors. Similarly for students, role modeling is crucial in shaping behaviors through observational learning. In lifelong learning, individuals who actively seek knowledge and engage in problem-solving serve as exemplars, demonstrating how to navigate challenges and persist in learning. Their behaviors provide a template for others to adopt similar proactive strategies, reinforcing the interplay between active learning and social modeling. Role models in lifelong and active learning bridge theory and practice by embodying self-directedness, collaborative engagement, and reflective habits. Through observational learning (Bandura, 1977), they inspire others to adopt similar strategies, fostering environments where continuous growth and active participation become normative. These exemplars, whether educators or peers, demonstrate that learning is not confined to formal settings but is a dynamic, lifelong endeavor (Knowles, 1984; Lunenberg et al., 2007). By integrating active methods like problem-solving and discussion (Prince, 2004), they cultivate skills essential for navigating an ever-evolving knowledge landscape. As role models, teachers' key responsibilities include sharing personal learning experiences, staying updated with new teaching strategies, and encouraging a growth mindset in students.

In conclusion, active learning transforms the teacher from a "sage on the stage" to a "guide on the side," fostering an environment where students actively construct knowledge. Freire (1970) articulates this shift, stating that the teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is themselves taught in dialogue with the students. By embracing these multifaceted roles, teachers empower students to become independent, critical thinkers, and lifelong learners.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants of the Study**

The study participants were twenty randomly selected university teachers from the Department of English in the Faculty of Arts – Khoms, Elmergib University. These teachers are actively involved in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to students from year 1 to year 4. The sample comprised 11 female and 9 male teachers, all holding Master's (M.A.) or Doctoral (Ph.D.) degrees.

### **Instruments of Data Collection**

The primary data collection instrument was a self-report questionnaire designed to explore teachers' perceptions and practices regarding their role in implementing active learning at a Libyan university. This questionnaire was carefully adapted from existing instruments by Mebratu and Woldemariam (2018) and Arruda & Silva (2021), with some items specifically developed by the researchers based on the literature review and the study's research questions (see Biggs, 1989b).

The questionnaire consisted of two main sections. The first section featured 14 objective items utilizing a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Uncertain, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The second section included two open-ended questions designed to elicit explanatory qualitative information about the teachers' teaching experiences. The questionnaire also provided brief details about the research's nature and aims. Of the 25 questionnaires distributed, 20 were completed and returned, yielding an 80% response rate.

### **Techniques of Data Analysis**

Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were employed. The quantitative data from the Likert-scale items were analyzed statistically, presenting results in numbers and percentages. The qualitative data, derived from the open-ended questions, underwent thematic analysis. Qualitative data were indexed according to the research questions and emergent themes. Based on the integrated findings, conclusions and recommendations were formulated.

## **Findings and Discussions**

### **Teachers' Perceptions of Their Role in Active Learning Methods**

The analysis of teachers' responses indicated generally high agreement with statements pertaining to their roles as facilitators and co-learners in student-centered teaching. Specifically, items 2, 4, and 8, which addressed the teacher's role as a classroom facilitator, providing precise guidance for English language development, and engaging as a co-learner to support struggling students, consistently yielded high mean values, with a significant number of teachers "strongly agreeing." This suggests that facilitating, guiding, and co-learning are roles widely perceived by English teachers in the department.

Similarly, items 1, 5, 6, 9, 13, and 14, which covered responsibilities such as organizing daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly activities; designing relevant in-class and out-of-class activities; organizing events for diverse learners; conducting assessments to understand student backgrounds; providing ungraded classwork, tests, and tasks for understanding checks; and offering constant feedback for language development, also received strong agreement from the majority of teachers. Data from the open-ended questions further corroborated these findings, indicating that teachers largely view themselves as planners, designers, organizers, assessors, evaluators, and feedback providers in student-centered classrooms.

Conversely, approximately half of the participating teachers (10) expressed uncertainty regarding certain roles. Their "not sure" responses to items 3, 11, and 12, which pertained to determining lesson delivery and leading the overall teaching-learning process, training students how to learn better, and conducting action research to identify effective teaching methods, suggest ambiguity. These relatively low agreement levels indicate that some teachers are unclear about whether leading the entire classroom process, training learners in effective learning strategies, and conducting research to improve teaching techniques are indeed part of their active learning responsibilities.



For items 7 and 10, which addressed providing students with various learning resources and helping students practice independent learning through peer cooperation, teachers generally agreed on their responsibility. However, the responses for item 10 notably showed a perception that supporting students in independent learning, particularly through peer cooperation, is not a primary part of their active learning responsibilities. This suggests a nuanced understanding where providing resources is accepted, but fostering independent, collaborative learning might be less clearly defined as a direct responsibility.

In conclusion, the analysis of teachers' responses revealed that while the majority believe they must perform their roles professionally, there are specific areas where their understanding of active learning responsibilities, particularly concerning leadership, student learning strategies, and research, appears less defined.

**Table (1): Teachers' Perceptions and of Their Role in Active Learning Methods.**

Item No.	Categories Of Teachers' Perceptions of Their Role in Active Learning	Agreement		Disagreement	
		No. of Responses	%	No. of Responses	%
1	It is my role to plan activities on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis	16	80	4	20%
2	The teacher in student-centered teaching is a facilitator of activities	16	80%	4	20%
3	I must determine the way how to deliver the lesson and lead the overall teaching-learning	15	75%	5	25%
4	It is my role to give clear guidance to the students on how to improve their use of English language	18	90%	2	10%
5	I must design relevant activities for my students to practice language skills in and out of the classroom	12	60%	8	40%
6	I must organize different events to meet the needs of all types of learners	6	30%	14	70%
7	As a teacher, it is my role to provide my students with different learning resources	17	85%	3	15%
8	I join groups as a co-learner to help group members who face difficulties	15	75%	5	25%
9	I conduct different assessments to understand my students	12	60%	8	40%
10	I help students practice learning by themselves through cooperation with their peers	4	20%	16	80%
11	It is my role to train students how to learn better	16	80	4	20%
12	I must conduct action research to bring a method where most of the students learn better	16	80	4	20%
13	I must give my students ungraded class works, quizzes, and assignments to check their understanding	15	75%	5	25%
14	I give continuous feedback to my students to check their progress in learning the language	20	100%	0	0%

### Teachers' Practice of Playing Their Role in a Student-Centred Classroom

Regarding teachers' actual implementation of active learning roles, the findings reveal varied practices:

- **Planning:** A significant majority of teachers (80%) consistently prepare daily, weekly, and annual plans for student-centered learning, with 35% responding 'always' and 45% 'usually' to item 1.
- **Providing Learning Opportunities:** Item 2 indicated that 80% of teachers 'always' provide learning opportunities both inside and outside the classroom, demonstrating their commitment to fostering active learning environments.

- **Leadership Role:** Conversely, a combined 75% of teachers responded 'sometimes,' 'rarely,' or 'never' to item 3, which inquired about their role as leaders of the overall teaching-learning process. This suggests a notable gap in teachers actively assuming this leadership aspect.
- **Guidance:** Teachers overwhelmingly provide clear guidance on improving English language use, with 65% 'always' and 25% 'usually' responding positively to item 4.
- **Activity Organization:** Despite the positive perception of planning, item 6, concerning designing relevant activities and organizing them, saw 45% of teachers responding 'rarely' and 25% 'never,' indicating that many teachers do not effectively perform their role as an organizer of active learning methods.
- **Resource Provision:** Most teachers (45% 'always,' 40% 'usually') confirmed providing diverse learning resources to their students (item 7).
- **Co-learner Engagement:** Item 8 showed that 75% of teachers 'always' join groups as co-learners, confirming frequent engagement in this supportive role.
- **Student Self-Practice and Peer Cooperation:** While 60% 'always' supported item 9 (not specified in the provided text, but implied positive practice), item 10, which focused on advising/helping students practice independent learning through peer cooperation, received lower positive responses, with 20% 'sometimes,' 20% 'rarely,' and 25% 'never.' This indicates a less consistent practice in fostering self-directed and peer-collaborative learning.
- **Training Learners How to Learn:** Items 11 and 12 (30% 'always,' 50% 'usually') collectively suggest that teachers largely embrace the role of training learners in effective learning strategies.
- **Formative Assessment:** Item 13 revealed that 75% of teachers 'always' give ungraded classwork, quizzes, and assignments to check understanding, demonstrating a strong practice of formative assessment.
- **Continuous Feedback:** Item 14 indicated universal practice of providing continuous feedback, with 60% 'always' and 40% 'usually' confirming that teachers consistently offer feedback on language learning progress.

Overall, the analysis suggests that while teachers generally acknowledge and accomplish most expected roles in active learning, there are specific areas, such as leadership in the overall teaching-learning process and consistent encouragement of student self-practice/peer cooperation, where implementation remains inconsistent.

### **Difficulties and Challenges Affecting Teachers' Achievement of Their Role in Active Learning Classrooms**

Both questionnaire responses and open-ended questions highlighted significant difficulties hindering the effective implementation of active learning in classrooms. These challenges primarily include:

- **Student Motivation and Interest:** A pervasive issue is the low motivation and interest among students in serious and meaningful learning.
- **Teacher Hesitation:** Many teachers expressed hesitation to adopt active learning strategies, often due to their own lack of motivation and interest in moving away from traditional methods.
- **Large Class Sizes:** The substantial number of students in classes poses a significant impediment to implementing active learning effectively.
- **Resource Scarcity:** Teachers reported a notable lack of adequate library resources, internet access for both teachers and students, and up-to-date teaching and learning materials, particularly books and teacher's guides.
- **Unsuitable Classroom Conditions:** Poor classroom conditions were frequently cited as an obstacle.
- **Lack of Authentic English Exposure:** The absence of real-world interactions and materials for English language exposure negatively impacts student progress and their ability to achieve higher fluency and linguistic competence.

In summary, the main difficulties preventing effective active learning implementation at the university are rooted in the motivation levels of both teachers and students, the unavailability of effective and current teaching materials, large class sizes, inadequate classroom conditions, and limited authentic exposure to the English language.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

Based on the data collected from questionnaires and open-ended questions, this study confirms that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers at Elmergib University hold positive perceptions regarding their role in active learning. They demonstrate knowledge and awareness of active learning's importance and exhibit responsible and positive attitudes toward its implementation. However, a significant proportion of teachers (40%) also acknowledged that effective active learning practices are hampered by various factors, including student and teacher motivation/interest, and institutional infrastructure limitations. These findings align with previous research by Abushina (2017) and Abushafa (2014).

While teachers concur that active learning is essential for student development and progress, they concurrently highlight numerous challenges that impede its effective implementation. The study, which investigated 20 English teachers at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Elmergib University, through mixed-methods data collection, reinforces the existence of a gap among teachers regarding the consistent employment of active learning strategies in English language instruction. Teachers specifically noted several technical and logistical shortages within their faculty, such as inadequate library resources, limited access to current course books, poor internet connectivity, and a general lack of up-to-date materials. Furthermore, the limited authentic exposure to the English language significantly impacts students' progress and their attainment of higher fluency and linguistic competence.

### Recommendations

Based on the analysis of findings derived from the participants' data, the following recommendations are put forth:

1. **Teacher Professional Development:** Teachers should participate in comprehensive short-term and long-term training programs designed to enhance their knowledge and practical competence in active learning methodologies.
2. **Student Active Learning Awareness:** Given that students are often unprepared for and lack interest in active learning practices, university managers, faculty deans, and staff members must proactively foster active learning awareness and motivation among students.
3. **Classroom Environment Improvement:** Officials at Elmergib University are urged to address the unsuitability of current classrooms for active learning, particularly the challenge posed by large class sizes.
4. **Resource Allocation:** University directors and managers should prioritize allocating adequate funds to procure essential equipment and materials necessary for successful active learning classes, thereby addressing the identified serious resource deficiencies.

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