Instructor perceptions of active learning in higher education in Oman and students' commitment to the approach

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Abstract

Purpose – Creating active learning opportunities requires building a learning culture in which the instructor plays the role of a facilitator, leaving the ultimate responsibility of learning to the student. The question, however, is whether this is happening in practice. This study aims to answer this question through instructors' perceptions of active learning in a higher education institution in Oman.

Design/methodology/approach – The study participants were 85 instructors working for a private university in Oman. Data were collected by surveying these instructors' perceptions of active learning practice indicators, such as active teaching strategies and student educational practices. This was followed by interviewing a random sample of the same instructors ($N = 10$) to obtain a deeper understanding of their implementation of the active learning approach.

Findings – Data collected through the survey revealed that the shift from passive to active learning in higher education in Oman created a discrepancy between instructors' willingness to practice active learning and learners' unpreparedness to become autonomous learners. The follow-up interview findings confirmed this point, revealing instructors' negative perceptions of student participation and engagement in out-of-class activities.

Originality/value – This study is among the first to investigate the application of active learning in a higher education institution in Oman from the perspective of instructors.

Keywords Active learning, Autonomous learners, Higher education in Oman, Instructional strategies, Student engagement

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The past decade has witnessed a broad shift from passive to active learning in higher education in Oman. In part, this was due to the establishment of the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) in 2010, which requires local institutions to achieve international quality standards in education through implementing stringent quality assurance measures. Consequently, the OAAA, which was renamed in 2021 as the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA), has produced the Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF), which requires higher education institutions to align their educational practice and graduate attributes with 21st century needs (i.e. equip students with higher-order thinking skills, transferable and interpersonal

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skills as well as advanced professional skills) (OAAAQA, 2018). To this end, higher education institutions have redesigned their educational policies to assign a more prominent role to active learning in the teaching and learning processes. This, however, necessitates commitment on the part of instructors, learners and the institution itself to the requirements of the new educational culture. Above all, implementing active learning pedagogy in higher education institutions relies on the instructor's teaching style and their ability to adapt to pedagogical changes. Synder (2003) emphasizes that although the ultimate responsibility for actual learning in active learning pedagogy rests with the student, the instructor plays a crucial role in creating active learning opportunities.

Given the limited amount of quantitative research on instructor perceptions of active learning practices in higher education, particularly in Arab higher education contexts employing English medium instruction (EMI), the primary purpose of this study is to explore instructor perceptions of active learning practices. Dag, Sumeur, and Durdu (2019) assert that it is essential to assess how active learning strategies are employed in specific teaching contexts. In addition, Foote (2014) notes that students' cultural backgrounds might hamper the practice of active learning. In fact, an emergent finding of this study revealed students' unpreparedness to practice their roles as active learners. This study thus contributes to this area of research by examining indicators of and barriers to active learning practice in an Arab higher education context.

The study is organized as follows: First, the active learning approach and its theoretical backgrounds are introduced. Then, the study methodology and findings are presented. The study surveys instructor perceptions of indicators of active learning practices. The survey results are considered against the follow-up interview results that reflect instructor perceptions of students' actual participation and engagement in active learning. All findings are brought together in the discussion section, highlighting the emergent findings that instructor positive attitudes toward active learning are not complemented by learners' willingness to play the role of autonomous learners. The study closes with a summary of points, limitations and suggestions for further research.

Active learning: from theory to practice

Watkins, Lodge, and Carnell (2007) broadly defined active learning as involving students behaviorally and cognitively through social learning activities. The approach is rooted in learning theories such as *constructivism* (see Piaget, 1980) and *sociocultural learning theory* (see Vygotsky, 1978). Constructivism asserts that learners construct knowledge by relating new information and experiences to existing ones or modifying existing knowledge to accommodate new information that may contradict prior ideas and thoughts. Hence, establishing a constructivist learning culture requires developing learning activities that trigger higher-order thinking or creating a dynamic learning environment in which students analyze, synthesize and evaluate information. Elaborating on this, sociocultural theory emphasizes the relationship between cognitive practices and social activities, proposing that new knowledge and experiences are constructed primarily when learners solve problems with the support of their teachers or classmates (Brame, 2018). In this learning environment, the teachers' basic responsibility is to design learning activities that facilitate students' cognitive development within social, cultural and historical contexts (see Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Examples of constructivist-based learning activities include reflective, integrative and collaborative learning practices (Brame, 2018; Lasry, Mazur, & Watkins, 2008).

In short, the practice of active learning aligns with sociocultural learning theory, which is rooted in constructivism, in that it requires student-teacher interaction and peer-to-peer interaction to allow students to construct their knowledge successfully. Kane (2004) identified

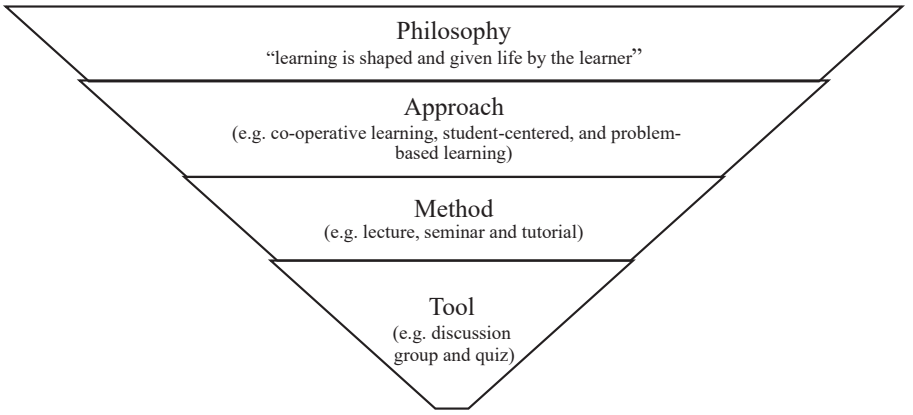
four standard features for active learning tasks: fostering critical thinking, granting students responsibility for learning, organizing learning activities and getting students to participate in open-ended learning activities. Instructors who are skilled in designing instructional activities that require active learning should therefore play a significant role in creating the instructional materials (Seferoglu, 2010).

Active teaching strategies

Examining the challenges of sustaining a constructivist classroom culture, Windschitl (2002) pointed out a crucial conceptual challenge, namely, the equation of constructivism with the insertion of instructional techniques such as inquiry-based and problem-based techniques into any learning environment. Watters' (2014) triangle model in Figure 1 can be used to demonstrate how instructors need to play their role in enhancing active learning in higher education. The model includes four key categories that reflect teacher conceptions and applications of active learning, namely: their teaching philosophy, approach, method and tools – all of which are interconnected and equally important.

Watters (2014) concluded that active learning could occur when instructors provide their students with a framework that can guide them to build, shape and direct their learning. Instructors' teaching philosophy, approach, method and tools can contribute to creating a dynamic learning environment in which learners are engaged in meaningful, complex learning activities that can improve their critical thinking skills (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Brame, 2018; Prince, 2004; Demirci, 2017; Naithani, 2008). Additionally, Sawers, Wicks, Mvududu, Seeley, and Copeland (2016) found a significant relationship between academic teaching philosophy, active learning strategies and instructors' perceptions of student engagement in the classroom.

In order to practice active learning, university educators need to adopt an approach underpinned by a learning-centered teaching philosophy that increasingly promotes autonomous and collaborative learning. The learning-centered approach should be reflected in the module content, assessments, teacher role and students' responsibility in the learning process (Weimer, 2002; Wright, 2011). It is also essential that the teachers' (or institutional) expectations about class participation are made clear. In some instances of EMI contexts in higher education, gaps between teacher expectations of learning and students' understanding of appropriate classroom behavior have led to failure rates and attrition



Source(s): Adapted from Watters (2014, p. 146)

Figure 1.
Levels of conceptions of active learning

(Roche, Sinha, & Denman, 2015; Sinha, Roche, & Sinha, 2018). Moreover, given that recent higher education learning experiences are increasingly digitally mediated (e.g. learning sites, online classes, discussion boards and online learning labs), it is worth considering the role of digital technologies in facilitating active learning experiences. It is widely accepted that digital literacy is essential for students and instructors in higher education to participate in society and work thoroughly to maintain lifelong learning (Jeffrey, Hegarty, Kelly, Penman, Coburn, & McDonald, 2011; McMahon, 2014; Roche, 2017; Ahmed & Roche, 2021). In EMI contexts, incorporating learning technology into higher education experiences can improve students' confidence in their communication abilities, decrease their communication anxiety and overcome sociocultural barriers. This, in turn, can enhance students' willingness to communicate and participate in class discussions (Al-Amrani, 2019; Al-Amrani & Harrington, 2020).

The studies mentioned above demonstrate the equally important roles of teaching philosophies, instructional strategies, digital literacy skills and student engagement in the classroom in applying active learning practices in higher education. Additionally, the studies reported a range of specific learning activities that promote active learning, such as problem-solving, analytical thinking, problem-based learning, integrative learning, reflective learning and collaborative learning. The present study aims to contribute to this area of research by examining the indicators of the application of the active learning approach in a higher education context in Oman.

Research methodology

Participants

The study participants were drawn from instructors working at Sohar University (SU) – a private, regional university in the Sultanate of Oman. Around 85 SU instructors (30 females and 55 males) accepted participation in the study and completed the online survey. The respondents were from six faculties in the university: Language Studies, Business, Education and Arts, Computing and Information Technology, Engineering, Law and General Foundation Program.

The overwhelming majority of the study participants held the ranks of assistant professor ($N = 35$) and lecturer ($N = 39$). Only four professors, six associate professors and one teaching assistant were among the participants. Some participants worked in universities and higher education colleges in Oman before joining SU. Thus, the results obtained from the study may include perceptions of active learning that can be based on instructors' teaching experiences in different higher education institutions in Oman and not only in SU.

Research design and procedures

The study used a mixed-method approach by designing a survey and a follow-up interview. The tools were appropriate for finding out facts related to instructors' perceptions of active learning through both numbers and words (see Kvale, 1996). The follow-up interview gave rise to emergent findings regarding students' preparedness to assume the role expected of them in an active learning environment.

The survey

This tool includes a new scale developed by the researcher, Staff Evaluation of Active Learning (SEAL), to measure instructors' perceptions of active learning practices in a higher education setting. Five academic experts validated the SEAL, and the comments received were incorporated into the revised scale. The scale items were derived from the literature on

active learning in higher education. The SEAL has 51 items divided into four main themes and eight indicators/subscales with different numbers of items that require responding to a five-point Likert-type scale, as shown in Table 1. The participants filled out the survey online.

The internal consistency of the reliability of the subscales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α). All subscales showed adequate internal consistency of reliability, as all exceeded Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.74$, as shown in Table 2. Descriptive analyses showing means and standard deviations (SD) were used to characterize the tabulated subscales.

The interview

A random sample of study participants ($N = 10$) received an invitation to informal (or unstructured) follow-up interviews. The interviews proceeded like natural conversations between higher education instructors about the success and challenges experienced while implementing the active learning approach.

Results

Survey results

The presentation and analysis of the results focus on one subscale or indicator of active learning at a time.

Institutional support to active learning

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of the individual items of the institutional support subscale. Overall, the instructors reported that they had received moderate support from their institution to practice active learning (mean = 3.66, SD = 1.10). The instructors perceived the online platform and the learning-centered approach, which the institution promoted, as the highest level of support. However, they perceived allowing student involvement in curriculum design, training on active learning and promoting change as receiving the least support from the institution.

Themes	Active learning indicators/subscales	No of items	5-point likert scale
Learning environment	Institutional support for active learning	7	1 = Always 5 = Never
Active teaching strategies	Instructional teaching strategies	12	1 = Always 5 = Never
	Higher-order thinking skills	6	1 = Always 5 = Never
	Reflective and integrative strategies	5	1 = Always 5 = Never
	Collaborative activities	4	1 = Always 5 = Never
Student educational experiences	Quality of student learning experiences	9	1 = Always 5 = Never
	Quality of interactions with students	1	1 = Always 5 = Never
Digital literacy skills	Digital literacy skills	7	1 = Always 5 = Never
Total	8	51	

Source(s): Created by the author

Table 1. Description of the themes, subscales and items of the survey

Instructional teaching strategies

Overall, instructors' responses showed that most of them have been using very effective teaching strategies (mean = 4.08, SD = 0.88), as shown in Table 4. They believed that they had effectively explained module learning outcomes and requirements, provided their

Table 2. Internal consistency reliability of subscales

Subscales	Cronbach's α	No of items
Institutional support for active learning	0.87	7
Effective teaching practices	0.89	12
Collaborative activities	0.74	5
Reflective and integrative strategies	0.81	6
Quality of student learning experiences	0.91	9
Higher-order thinking skills	0.86	4
Digital literacy skills	0.88	7

Source(s): Created by the author

Table 3. Means and standard deviations of institutional support items

Item description	*N*	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Allow your students to be involved in redesigning your course's curriculum and assessments	85	1	5	3.34	1.220
We provided an online platform that can support learning spaces other than classrooms	85	1	5	4.11	1.024
We offer training for you on active learning	85	1	5	3.24	1.250
Promote change through ongoing dialogue with local, regional, national and international communities	85	1	5	3.25	1.224
Allowed learning through discussion, logic, reasoning, experimentation and feedback	85	1	5	3.87	1.044
Emphasize the learning process, not just the learning outcome	85	1	5	3.74	1.014
Promote the student-centered approach to learning and teaching	85	2	5	4.04	1.019
Average				3.66	1.10

Source(s): Created by the author

Table 4. Means and standard deviations of instructional teaching strategies

Items	*N*	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Explained course learning outcomes and requirements to your students?	85	1	5	4.61	0.66
Provided students with formative assessments	85	2	5	4.51	0.75
Given feedback on an assignment draft or work in progress?	85	2	5	4.56	0.76
Given prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments?	85	2	5	4.58	0.70
Offered students various learning resources, e.g. videos, textbooks, websites, etc	85	2	5	4.42	0.71
Utilized smartphones as tools for learning, research and communication	85	1	5	3.61	1.18
Established a strong relationship between learning, teaching and research	85	1	5	3.74	1.09
Encouraged self-assessment and peer-assessment among students	85	1	5	3.85	0.97
Implemented diverse assessment practices	85	1	5	4.16	0.95
Acted as a facilitator and coach in the classroom rather than a lecturer	85	2	5	4.29	0.84
Designed the curriculum to be inclusive, providing multiple means of engagement for all learners	85	1	5	3.95	0.90
Developed the curriculum based on students' prior knowledge, intelligence and experience	85	1	5	3.93	1.00
Average				4.08	0.88

Source(s): Created by the author

students with formative assessments and provided feedback on assignment drafts as well as completed assignments. However, they reported moderate effectiveness in using smartphones for learning, research and communication. Additionally, they had a moderate rate for the relationship between learning, teaching, research, curriculum/activities design, students' prior knowledge, experience and intelligence.

Collaborative learning activities

In general, instructors reported that they usually involve their students in various collaborative learning activities (mean = 3.98, SD = 0.89), as shown in Table 5. They almost always put students in small groups to work on projects and assignments. They usually encourage students to practice think-pair-share tasks and work in small groups to understand the learning material. However, they perceived students' involvement in creating and sharing their learning flexibly in the classroom and online through research, problem- or inquiry-based learning strategies among the least frequently practiced activities.

Reflective and integrative teaching strategies

Overall, instructors reported that they usually used reflective and integrative teaching strategies (mean = 4.06, SD = 0.82), as shown in Table 6. They almost always allowed students to ask questions and contribute to discussions. They also encouraged them to connect the learning activities to their real-world environments.

Items	*N*	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Engaging in think-pair-share tasks during class discussions?	85	1	5	4.09	0.88
Collaborating with peers in pairs or small groups to comprehend course material in the class?	85	2	5	4.19	0.82
Participating in group work for course projects or assignments?	85	3	5	4.29	0.65
Preparing for exams in small groups by discussing or working through course material in the class?	85	1	5	3.72	1.03
Adapting and sharing their learning flexibly in the classroom and online through research, problem- or inquiry-based learning strategies?	85	1	5	3.62	1.05
Average				3.98	0.98

Source(s): Created by the author

Table 5. Means and standard deviations of collaborative learning activities

Items	*N*	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Reflecting on their learning progress in the class	85	1	5	4.08	0.86
Connecting their learning to their real-world environment	85	2	5	4.18	0.66
Including diverse perspectives (political, social, cultural, etc) in course discussions	85	1	5	3.75	0.93
Using concept maps or any visual representation to understand relationships between concepts	85	2	5	3.91	0.92
Asking questions or contributing to course discussions in any other ways	85	1	5	4.41	0.70
Providing smart, creative, functional and targeted solutions for better learning	85	1	5	4.02	0.83
Average				4.06	0.82

Source(s): Created by the author

Table 6. Means and standard deviations of reflective and integrative teaching strategies

Quality of interactions with students

During the semester, most of the instructors showed a very high quality of interaction with students (mean = 4.65, SD = 0.48).

Quality of student learning experiences

Responses indicated that instructors believed they had contributed considerably to developing students' knowledge, skills and personal qualities (mean = 4.06, SD = 0.08), as shown in Table 7. They had significantly provided their students with opportunities to communicate clearly and effectively and to think critically and analytically. However, they contributed less to developing students' numerical and statistical analysis skills, understanding people from various backgrounds and solving complex real-world problems.

Higher-order thinking skills

Generally, instructors significantly emphasized higher-order learning skills (mean = 4.22, SD = 0.77) in their classrooms, as shown in Table 8. They placed a great deal of emphasis on student understanding of new concepts. However, the least emphasized skill was evaluating a point of view, decision or information source.

Digital literacy skills

Overall, instructors reported that they had moderately involved their students in employing digital literacy skills in the learning process (mean = 3.61, SD = 1.11), as shown in Table 9. They significantly encouraged students to employ their digital literacy skills to avoid

Table 7.
Means and standard deviations of student learning experiences

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Communicating clearly and effectively	85	3	5	4.29	0.67
Thinking critically and analytically	85	2	5	4.19	0.70
Analysing numerical and statistical information	85	1	5	3.74	1.16
Acquiring job- or work-related knowledge and skills	85	2	5	4.07	0.86
Working effectively with others	85	2	5	4.36	0.77
Understanding people of other backgrounds (economic, racial/ethnic, etc)	85	1	5	3.87	0.99
Solving complex real-world problems	85	2	5	3.95	0.90
Being informed and active citizens	85	1	5	4.00	1.01
Developing or clarifying a personal code of values and ethics	85	1	5	4.11	0.90
Average				4.06	0.88

Source(s): Created by the author

Table 8.
Means and standard deviations of higher-order thinking skills

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Understanding new concepts from various pieces of information	85	2	5	4.35	0.67
Applying facts, theories or methods to practical problems or new situations	85	2	5	4.20	0.83
Analyzing an idea, experience or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts	85	2	5	4.19	0.75
Evaluating a point of view, decision or information source	85	2	5	4.15	0.81
Average				4.22	0.77

Source(s): Created by the author

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Become a critical consumer of online information	85	2	5	3.73	0.86
Use social media for learning and collaborating	85	2	5	3.78	0.94
Learn how to avoid plagiarism	85	1	5	4.04	1.03
Manage their online identity and privacy	85	1	5	3.32	1.32
Manage distractions while utilizing digital tools for learning purposes	85	1	5	3.45	1.21
Utilize technologies as in real-world uses (e.g. Engage in online discussions)	85	1	5	3.52	1.19
Move out of their comfort zone in using technology (e.g. Share their opinion through a more in-depth blog post)	85	1	5	3.42	1.21
Average				3.61	1.11

Source(s): Created by the author

Table 9. Means and standard deviations of digital literacy skills

plagiarism. However, they somewhat involved students in utilizing digital literacy to manage their online identity and privacy.

The study results confirm that SU instructors received some support from the institution to employ active learning by promoting the learning-centered approach, allowing students to redesign the curriculum and assessments and offering active learning training.

Follow-up interview results. From the interviews with a random sample of ten instructors, it became evident that instructors have positive perceptions of the active learning approach and of the support they receive from SU to apply it. Instructors considered their implementation of the active learning approach to have been successful, noting that they used a range of active learning strategies, such as providing students with formative assessments and prompt feedback on the learning activities and assessments, promoting self-assessment and peer assessments among them and playing the role of a facilitator rather than a lecturer in the classroom. Reflective and integrative teaching strategies have also been utilized to allow students to reflect on their learning and connect it to their real-world environment. Moreover, they indicated that their coursework had emphasized higher-order thinking skills, including understanding, applying, analyzing and evaluating. Furthermore, collaborative learning activities such as think-pair-share and small group work have been employed effectively throughout the semester in teaching tasks and assessments. Students' digital literacy skills were utilized, particularly to encourage appropriate academic integrity practices and avoid plagiarism.

However, SU instructors believe that there is room for improving the quality of teaching and training and promoting educational change through ongoing dialogues with local, national and international communities. Additionally, they point out the need to enhance students' abilities in higher-order thinking, research, statistical analysis, solving complex real-world problems and sharing learning experiences flexibly.

The interviews yielded an emergent finding as follows: 90% of the participants had negative perceptions of students' commitment to out-of-class active learning activities. The following responses reflect these negative perceptions:

(1) "Students are not interested in supplementary materials."

(2) "Students do not do practice exercises."

(3) "Students disregard weekly formative assessments."

The activities that students are disregarding are designed by the instructors to help students construct knowledge autonomously. One instructor complained that "The teachers are now doing everything for the students, from preparing activities to solving them. The students want

the answer keys for all activities before even attempting them." Some instructors tried to find a solution to the difficulty of engaging students in out-of-class activities (including formative assessments) by suggesting that "such activities should be credited." Instructors also expressed concern over students' obsessions with exam results (rather than learning). One instructor said, "Most of the questions raised by students are focused on how they can pass exams with high marks. Only a few students ask questions related to the course content."

The above results demonstrate the challenges experienced by SU instructors in their attempts to create and practice the active learning approach. The source of the challenges is students' unpreparedness to assume autonomous learners' roles – an essential aspect of implementing the active learning approach. It is worth noting that higher education institutions in Oman focus on offering instructors continuous training on active learning and promoting student-centered learning in the classroom. For instance, Sultan Qaboos University established a Center of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (Oman Observer, 2018), similar to the Center for Educational Development at Sohar University. These centers provide workshop training to enhance teaching and learning in general and active learning in particular. International conferences on learning and teaching were also organized to review the existing teaching and learning practices and make the necessary shift to new teaching and learning trends to achieve the 21st-century requirements (Oman Observer, 2020). However, no orientation or training centers have yet been established to help learners adapt to the new learning culture.

Discussion

The study's findings show that instructors have positive perceptions of institutional support for active learning, active teaching strategies, enhancement of students' knowledge, skills and personal qualities and students' digital literacy skills. However, a discrepancy between instructors' positive perceptions of the active learning approach and its practice can be seen in the low ratings given to questions inquiring about instructors' use of important active learning activities. Table 10 summarizes the points under two categories: "Perceptions" and

Table 10.
Active learning as perceived and applied by the study participants

Perceptions	Applications
• Institutions and instructors support the active learning approach • Instructors perceive the diverse tasks and assessments they design and deliver through active learning techniques to be important for presenting course concepts	The following important active learning practice indicators received the lowest ratings • Designing curriculum based on students' prior knowledge, intelligence and experience • Involving students in redesigning curriculum and assessments • Creating a learning environment for students to share their learning flexibly in the classroom and online through research, problem- or inquiry-based learning • Solving complex real-world problems • Evaluating a point of view, decision or information source • Becoming critical consumers of online information • Moving out of their comfort zone in using technology (e.g. sharing their opinion through a more in-depth blog post)

Source(s): Created by the author

"Applications." The points under the latter category show that curricula are not necessarily built on a clear philosophy that views students' prior experience and knowledge as the basis on which knowledge is to be constructed. Additionally, the learning materials, assessments and activities designed by the instructors are not necessarily tools for developing students' ability to research, evaluate, think, give opinions and solve real-life problems. Pelch and McConnell (2016) and Lund and Stains (2015) noted that the implementation of the active learning approach might be influenced by instructors' beliefs about teaching and learning. It can thus be argued that instructors' perceptions related to the unpreparedness of Omani students to play an active role in the learning process could have negatively impacted their practice of the approach. This impact is evident in their use of active learning tools to engage students in tasks mimicking exams to help them pass with good grades. The results of the follow-up interviews confirm this observation, as they show that students failed to do the work designed for them to perform autonomously.

In light of the above, the unpreparedness of SU students to play an active role in the learning process may be said to have posed a challenge to the establishment of an active learning culture in SU and possibly in other Omani higher education institutions, considering that active learning requires abilities that students start to gain in the formative years. Educators and decision-makers can address this issue by closely observing the active learning practice in Omani schools. In addition, the practice of active learning in an EMI context, which is the case in SU, might be an important reason why SU students tend to resist playing an active role in the learning process, particularly outside the classroom where the teacher is not around to help them. Studies that examined the effect of the EMI context on Omani students' learning suggest that such a context could be an important factor affecting these students' ability to become active learners (Al-Amrani, 2009; Al-Kalefawi & Al-Amrani, 2021). The implication here is that instructors' positive perceptions of active learning in higher education need to be complemented by student training. SU instructors can provide this training by fostering a learning culture in which all indicators of active learning, including the ability and willingness of students to participate in active learning activities, play complementary roles. Crediting these activities may contribute to the establishment of such a culture, as students will develop the motivation to explore, think and express their thoughts in the language of instruction.

Conclusion

This study is the first to provide an Arab conceptualization of active learning from instructor perspectives and examine how it manifests in an Omani higher education institution. The study used the SEAL survey to study instructor perceptions of active learning practice, which could be considered equivalent to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) that focused on student perspectives on good teaching practice in higher education (Kuh, 2009). The findings imply that instructors have positive perceptions of institutional support of active learning, active teaching strategies, enhancement of students' knowledge, skills and personal qualities and students' digital literacy skills. However, the findings that emerged from the follow-up interviews suggest that establishing a coherent active learning culture, particularly in an EMI higher education context, requires training that can strike a balance between teachers' and students' commitments to the approach. Adopting such recommendations may help instructors attain such a result.

However, the study has several limitations. One limitation is that only 85 SU instructors agreed to respond to the EEAL survey. The small sample size may have provided consistent data, but the study findings are not generalizable to any Omani higher education context without further research. Another limitation is that the study did not compare respondents'

perceptions holding different academic ranks. This, however, was due to the imbalance observed in the number of respondents holding different ranks. Another limitation is that the study did not complement teacher perceptions of active learning with student perceptions. This comparison, which lies beyond the scope of this study, is a potential venue for further research.

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