Teachers' perceptions of active learning method in Afghanistan

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Abstract

Active learning has brought many changes in the educational context. The objectives of this study were to examine the perception of teachers towards the student-centered method and the challenges that hinder its implementation in two high schools in Kandahar, Afghanistan. A quantitative approach was employed, and the data was collected through a questionnaire. The participants were eighty-six teachers, and they were elected through a random sample. The findings revealed that instructors have a positive view regarding the student-centered method. Similarly, teachers support the active involvement of students, and persuade students during the teaching, and they are responsible for the learning of learners. Likewise, teachers connect new lessons with learners' prior experiences, and they motivate them to provide comments about their learning to lecturers. The large number of students, deficiency of teaching materials, and lack of time were the challenges to the use of a learner-centered approach.

*Keywords***:** Active learning; challenges; perceptions; teachers

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1. Introduction

In educational contexts, different kinds of methods are used for teaching. One of these methods is passive and active learning methods. The active learning approach attracted the attention of all educational centers because the aim of education is not only to transfer knowledge from lecturers to learners. The rapid progress of technology around the world has led to many alterations in numerous areas of teaching and learning (Sahibzada & Himat, 2019; Ukenova & Bekmanova 2023). Effective instruction and learning require the implementation of several methods and techniques to meet the demands of the students (Asnakew et al., 2021). The traditional method which is known as 'chalk and talk' for the students as receivers of knowledge is not appropriate for today's generation, and this is why there is a movement in schools from learning that is made up of facts to the learner-centered method (Asnakew et al., 2021). Teachers use the traditional method known as lectures to transfer information to their learners, even though it is considered old-style by numerous lecturers (Lee et al., 2017). In a lecture method, the instructor stands in front of a classroom to represent information for the students to learn with very little exchange between the teacher and the pupils during the teaching (Marmah, 2014). Learning through the lecture method is relatively superficial and temporary.

In a traditional method, the teacher is the main part of the teaching whereas learners are the sub-main parts of the teaching process. Moreover, in teacher-centered methodology, the educator holds most of the knowledge needed for students, and it leads them to memorize the material from their textbooks. In this method, the instructors are active and the students are inactive. However, in active learning, the teacher supports students to learn, and the instructor not only conveys information as it is in the teacher-centered method. They create an environment for learning to take place, follow, guide, and assess the learning of learners (Boudersa & Hamada, 2015). In the active learning approach, the role of the teacher changes from information provider to learning facilitator, for only the focus is placed on what and how learners are learning, how their learning is assessed, and how they can practice learning in real life (Boudersa & Hamada, 2015). Learner-centered is an approach that emphasizes the learners, and they become active participants in the process of learning.

The active learning approach is the participation of the students in and outside of the class (Asnakew et al., 2021). The student-centered is based on the constructivist point of view where learners are expected to be active in the process of learning by involving in cooperative activities (Bachman & Bachman, 2011; Himat & Nazari, 2019, 2021; Orabah et al., 2022). Furthermore, it enables students to relate new information with existing knowledge in significant methods, create important coherent knowledge, and facilitate innovative and critical thinking in students (Barlow et al., 2020). Active learning requires learners to perform meaningful learning activities, for it provides chances for thinking and develops greater learner-instructor and learner-learner interaction as well it requires them to be involved in the process of learning (Prince, 2004; Pundak et al., 2009; Ranjanie, 2012; Sultani & Himat, 2021). In the student-centered method, students have liberty and control over the organization of learning activities (Alemu, 2010). Moreover, active learning demands more work from both instructors and learners than traditional teaching. It encourages students because it has many activities during the lesson and makes them think about an activity (Gholami et al., 2014).

The learner-centered method helps students to acquire well and like the teaching, and it is a beneficial and effective way of learning (Gholami et al., 2014; Himat et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022). In student-centered, students do not sit and listen to their teachers because they participate in the activities of the classroom. Moreover, teachers play their role as facilitators and co-learners, but the role of students is to ask questions, differentiate, and be critical of the material received. In the new approach to modern education, known as student-centered, students not only receive information from lecturers, but they also get information, debate, record systematically, compare, analyze, draw inferences, and talk about it

(Mulugeta Worku & Mathivanan 2018). When they are given information and facts from their instructor or textbooks, they are asked to be somewhat active and innovative with the details, analyze it, consider it, debate it, and make reports on it. Learner-centered is a method of learning in which learners are involved in the learning process.

1.1. **Literature review**

1.1.1. Lecturers' perceptions of active learning method

A study by Yusuk (2020) investigated the perceptions of EFL teachers and the use of student-centered in schools, in Thailand. The results disclosed that many teachers have positive opinions on the use of student-centered methods. The study further indicated that the learner-centered method makes a great involvement towards improving learners' active involvement in class and the progress of their confidence in English. In addition, teachers believe that active learning is beneficial for teachers, and learners, and it can enhance the active involvement of students in learning as well can prepare learners for active participation in lessons. Similarly, the findings revealed that active learning boosts pupils' enthusiasm to be more focused and involved in the activities of classes. In addition, it offers students opportunities to get involved in an extensive variety of activities and these make them feel more attentive in the classroom. Another study was conducted in Thailand on instructors' opinions regarding the concepts in the student-centered method and its necessities in the classrooms, and the findings asserted that teachers and students should use active learning in English classrooms (Kulachit & Nuangchalerm, 2021).

Yilmaz (2008) conducted a study on the instructors' attitudes towards student-centered teaching. The findings determined that instructors have a positive attitude toward learner-centered teaching. Furthermore, research carried out by Mulatu & Bezabih (2018) and the results showed that teachers have a negative perception of active learning. Moreover, Hunde & Tegegne (2010) conducted a study on the usage of learner-centered instruction, and the findings showed that learners and educators have a clear conceptual understanding of the active learning method. The research findings of Fekadu (2017) revealed that teachers have a positive view of active learning approaches. Girma & Anagaw (2020) carried out a study on the perception and challenges of learner-centered methods in primary schools, in Ethiopia. The study disclosed that teachers and students trust that teaching and learning through learner-centered methods highly add to the accomplishment of learners, and teachers have theoretical knowledge and skills regarding the significance of student-centered teaching. The study further asserted that the majority of teachers and students have good opinions about the contribution of active learning in enhancing the achievement of students.

Sahar (2013) conducted research in Kabul and investigated the instructors' perceptions of active learning in Afghan schools. The findings showed that teachers support active learning, but the majority of them focus on passive learning. The instructors played active roles in class instead of learners, and the learners were passive in classrooms. The findings asserted that instructors were the core decision makers in class, but rarely did they give the occasion to the learners. Bidzakin's (2018) research findings indicated that teachers have a fair understanding of the concept of active learning. However, many teachers showed a negative attitude toward the practice of active learning in their classrooms. The study further indicated that instructors use teacher-centered methods mostly in classrooms.

1.1.2. Challenges towards active learning method

In Thailand, Yusuk's (2020) research findings asserted that the factors that obstruct the use of student-centered methods in schools are shortage of materials, deficiency of air conditioning, and inadequate classroom services. The majority of the instructors admitted that group work and pair work are the factors that hamper the efficiency of learner-centered instruction because they require students to work in groups. The results showed that teachers had management work to do. The other factor was that teachers

did not cover all the contents for the exam, specifically the national examination. Moreover, the study revealed that classroom facilities do not completely support the application of the learner-centered method. The research findings of Fekadu (2017) specified that shortage of training, large class size, and the physical layout of the classes were the barriers to implementing active learning in schools.

In Ethiopia, Girma & Anagaw (2020) carried out a study on learner-centered methods in primary schools. The study asserted that many teachers have a good understanding of the learner-centered method, but they had trouble in the application process. The lack of training, the tendency of teachers to use the lecturer method, the tendency of learners to be inactive in teaching, deficiency of time and workload were challenges to active learning. In addition, the study further asserted that no active participation of learners in the teaching process, students' lack of interest to participate, large class size, and lack of student motivation were the factors that affected the implementation of active learning. Moreover, a study carried out by Mulatu & Bezabih (2018) and findings asserted that the challenges to the use of the learner-centered method are the large size of the class with fixed seating arrangements, insufficient training of instructors, concentration on lecture, and lack of time. A study carried out by Desalegn (2014) and the findings showed that the conditions of the school and sitting arrangements of the classroom, the number of learners per classroom, low facilities, and low instructional materials for learning Algebra through active learning were the challenges.

Asnakew et al.'s (2021) research findings showed that a of lack teachers' encouragement, lack of students' motivation, lack of students' interest, and deficiency of enough reference materials were the challenges to the student-centered method. In Bangladesh, Jony (2016) carried out research, and the findings revealed that the biggest barriers to applying the student-centered method are lack of teachers' experience and lack of teachers' qualifications. The study showed more that loss the control of class, lack of facilities (library, labs, computers), lack of modern technology, lack of appropriate modern learning environment, inadequate time to accomplish the outcome, hard system of education, lack of students' willingness, lack of teachers training are the factors for employing active learning in classes.

Likewise, the research findings of Sahar (2013) revealed that classroom conditions, lack of time to involve learners in teaching procedures and the amount of content to be covered in one session were the challenges to the usage of the active learning approach in schools. A study was conducted on instructors, and the findings indicated that the challenges towards the usage of active learning were lack of time, teaching in large groups, lack of study materials, few interactive teaching methods, poor trainers of teachers for active learning, and lack of meta-cognitive skills (Niemi, 2002). Olana & Amante's (2017) research findings asserted that student-centered learning is cheap in schools, and the factors towards active learning are low attitude towards it, insufficient teaching resources, shortage of time allocated to each teaching period, and lack of teachers' motivation. Furthermore, research studies asserted that the challenges to active learning were large class size, the constraint of learning materials, lack of students' interest, lack of professional teachers, poor classroom conditions, and insufficient textbooks (Bidzakin, 2018; Hunde & Tegegne, 2010).

1.2. Purpose of study

Active learning is a method that learners learn through performance and taking action; the act can be either mental or corporal (Alemu, 2010). In active learning, students become more willing to participate in the lesson, and it fulfills the requirements of the new generation (Er et al., 2012; Gholami et al., 2014; van Halem et al., 2020). The student-centered method allows learners to be not only involved in one-way communication as well it allows them interact with their teacher and classmates (Himat, 2020; Nazari & Himat, 2020; Kulachit & Nuangchalerm, 2021). The learner-centered approach has become more popular in educational contexts compared to the teacher-centered one (Ashraf et al., 2013). However, there is less attention given to active learning in Shahid Mohammad Akram Khakrizwal High Schools because teachers

prefer passive learning rather than student-centered methods. Even though the active learning method is more significant than the traditional one. Therefore, it can be clearly said that the education system of Afghanistan is influenced by the outdated system where the teachers play their role in a central position while learners are inactive and do not have the opportunity to express their thoughts. According to a study, the application of learner-centered is low in schools in Kabul; however, this technique is an essential need for the educational context of Afghanistan (Sahar, 2013). There is still no suitable data available regarding active learning and there are very few studies conducted on active learning methods in high schools of Kandahar, Afghanistan. Therefore, there is a need to conduct a study regarding active learning. This research would assist the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan to bring positive changes in the part of teaching methods. As well as teachers will better familiarize themselves with the challenges that exist in active learning. The Research Questions are as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers towards active learning at Shahid Mohammad Akram Khakrizwal High Schools of Kandahar, Afghanistan?

2. What are the challenges that teachers face when they use the learner-centered method at Shahid Mohammad Akram Khakrizwal High Schools of Kandahar, Afghanistan?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

This research tried to investigate the views of teachers towards the student-centered method and the factors that hinder the use of active learning in Shahid Mohammad Akram Khakrizwal-Boys' and Girls' High Schools in Kandahar, Afghanistan. A quantitative research method was used for this study. In this study, the participants were 86 teachers (29 female teachers from girls' and 57 male teachers from boys' high schools) and they were selected through random sampling.

2.2. Data collection instrument

The questionnaire was adopted and adapted from Sahar's (2013) study. Minor changes brought in the items and the questionnaire translated into Pashto language (the first known national language of Afghanistan) because the language of the respondents was Pashto. In addition, the questionnaire has three main sections (demographic data of the respondents, teachers' perceptions towards active learning (items 1 to 8), and the challenges that teachers encounter when they implement active learning in classrooms (items 1 to 8).

2.3. Data analysis

The data of this study was analyzed with the assistance of (SPSS) software 24 version and reported in tables.

2.4. Ethical consideration

The study was conducted ethically. The participants voluntarily participated in the study, after giving their oral consent. The report of the study also followed ethical standards.

3. Results

Table 1
Demographic Data

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	57	66.3
	Female	29	33.7
Age	Under 20	10	11.5
	Between 20 & 25	46	53.8

	Upper then 25	30	34.7
Teaching Experience	One Year	24	27.9
	Between One & Five years	36	41.9
	More than Five Years	26	30.2
Educational Level	Baccalaureate	26	30.2
	Post-baccalaureate	26	30.2
	Undergraduate	34	39.6
Teaching Subject	Social Sciences	23	26.7
	Math/Natural Sciences	28	32.6
	Islamic	14	16.3
	Other	21	24.4
Number of Students in Classroom	Less than 20	5	6.8
	Between 20 & 30	8	9.5
	More than 30	73	83.7

Table 1 indicates the demographic data of the respondents of the study. In this study, 57 (66.3%) were male and 29 (33.7) were female teachers. In addition, 10 (11.5%) teachers who participated in this study were under 20 years old, 46 (53.8%) were between 20 & 25 years old, and 30 (34.7%) teachers had upper ages than 25 years old. Moreover, 24 (27.9) teachers had 1 year of experience in teaching, 36 (41.9%) had experienced between 1 & 5 years, and 26 (30.2%) instructors had more than five years of experience in teaching. Furthermore, 26 (30.2%) teachers were baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate whereas only 34 (39.6%) were undergraduate. Besides, 23 (26.7%) were social sciences, 28 (32.6%) were natural sciences, 14 (16.3%) were Islamic and the remaining 21 (24.4%) were other subjects that teachers were teaching in classrooms. Also, 5 (6.8%) were the classrooms where students were less than 20, 8 (9.5%) were the classes where learners were between 20 & 30 in their classes and the remaining 73 (83.7%) were the classrooms that had more than 30 students.

Table 2

Teachers' perceptions of active learning

No	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I create the environment of the classroom that supports the learners to participate actively in the classroom.	3.82	.53
2	I encourage students to participate actively in class.	3.70	.50
3	I facilitate the learning of learners in the classroom.	3.70	.48
4	I link the new knowledge of students to the previous experiences in the classroom.	3.63	.52
5	I motivate students to provide comments about their learning to me in the classroom.	3.61	.55
6	I use the views/comments of students to improve the process of teaching.	3.55	.64
7	I assist learners to take responsibility for their learning in the classroom.	3.20	.92
8	I motivate students to make decisions about what, how, and when to learn in the classroom.	2.98	1.02

Likerts scales: 1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Agree 4= Strongly agree
Note: M= is for mean and SD is for standard deviation.

Table 2 shows the views of instructors towards the student-centered method. The mean scores of the items from 1 to 3 items can be calculated as (4= strongly agree) because the scores are close to (4= strongly agree). The remaining items from 4-8 assert that teachers are (3=agree) with items. Similarly, the last item also indicates that instructors agree. The 1st item asserts that teachers strongly agree because

they try to create an environment of the classroom that supports the learners to participate actively in the activities of the classroom (M=3.82, SD=0.53). The 2nd item asserts that instructors persuade their learners to participate actively (M=3.70, SD=0.50). The 3rd item reveals that teachers strongly agree (M=3.70, SD=0.48) because they only play their role as facilitators in the classrooms. In addition, the 4th item indicates that teachers link new materials with the past experiences of learners (M=3.63, SD=0.52). Moreover, the 5th indicated that teachers encourage students to provide comments regarding their learning to their lecturers (M=3.61, SD=0.55). The 6th item shows that teachers use the views of their learners, to improve the process of teaching (M=3.55, SD=0.64). The teachers agree with the 7th item because they assist their learners in taking responsibility for their learning (M=3.20, SD=0.92). The final item shows that lecturers encourage their students to make decisions about what, how, and when to learn in the classroom (M=2.98, SD=1.02).

Table 3
The challenges that teachers face when they use active learning in the classroom

No	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	The large number of students does not leave me to use active learning in the classroom.	2.80	1.06
2	The lack of teaching materials does not leave me to use active learning in the classroom.	2.77	1.02
3	The lack of time does not leave me to use active learning in the classroom.	2.68	1.05
4	The amount of content that needs to be covered in the teaching hour does not leave me to use active learning in the classroom.	2.52	.94
5	The lack of technology does not leave me to use active learning in the classroom.	2.43	.86
6	The condition of the classroom does not leave me to implement the learner-centered method in the classroom.	2.41	.97
7	The learners dislike active participation in teaching because I cannot use the student-centered method in the classroom.	1.96	.87
8	The lack of training regarding active learning does not leave me to use the learner-centered approach in the classroom.	1.95	.99

Likerts scales: 1= Strongly disagree   2= Disagree   3= Agree   4= Strongly agree
Note: M= is for mean and SD is for standard deviation.

The above table 3 shows the factors that teachers encounter when they implement active learning in their classrooms. The first four items indicate that teachers are willing to use active learning. However, the remaining statements from 5-8 reveal that instructors disagree with items (2=disagree). The 1st item shows that it was hard for instructors to involve actively students in large classes, for they agreed (M=2.80, SD=1.06). There was a lack of teaching materials (M=2.77, SD=1.02). Similarly, the 3rd item asserts that there was a lack of time for the teaching process (M=2.68, SD=1.05). The 4th statement (M=2.52, SD=0.94) reveals that the size of contents was a lot that did not leave instructors to involve students in the classroom. There was no lack of technology (M=2.43, SD=0.86) because the teachers disagreed with the item, and the condition of the classroom did not hinder to use of active learning (M=2.41, SD=0.97). The 7th item reveals that students like active participation in teaching because teachers disagree with the item (M=1.96, SD=0.87). The last item indicates that teachers disagreed with the deficiency of training which shows that there was not a lack of training regarding active learning (M=1.95, SD=0.99).

4. Discussion

The findings of this research specified that teachers have a positive perception of the student-centered method because teachers create an environment that supports the learners to be involved in the activities of classrooms. This finding is in line with the research studies that most teachers have a positive view on

the use of learner-centered instruction (Fekadu, 2017; Yilmaz, 2008; Yusuk, 2020); however, this finding is not under the research of Mulatu & Bezabih (2018) that teachers have a negative perception towards active learning. The next finding of this current study disclosed that instructors encourage learners in the teaching process. This finding is supported by Hunde & Tegegne (2010) who researched the usage of a student-centered approach from the views of learners and instructors in the selected secondary schools of Jimma, Ethiopia. The findings showed that students and instructors have a clear conceptual understanding of the active learning method. Through this finding, it can be said that teachers know about the effectiveness of active learning in Kandahar City.

Moreover, the findings of this research revealed that teachers were responsible for facilitating the learning of students. It means that teachers played their role as facilitators in the classroom. Through this finding, we can clearly say that teachers try to make the students active in the teaching. This finding is not in line with the research findings of Sahar (2013) that instructors played an active role in class instead of learners and most learners were passive in the classroom environment. The findings asserted that instructors were the central decision makers in class, where rarely instructors gave the chance to the learners to decide what, how, and when to study. Additionally, teachers were linking new knowledge with the prior experiences of students, which through this finding it can be said precisely that teachers relation new lessons with studied lessons. This finding is supported by the study of Yilmaz (2008) that instructors have a positive attitude towards student-centered instruction. The finding of this research declared that teachers motivate students to provide comments about their learning to their teachers. This finding is not by Olana & Amante (2017) and their findings indicate that the use of the learner-centered method is cheap, and the factors towards active learning are low towards student-centered learning, poor instructional resources, scarcity of time allocated to each teaching period and lack of teachers' motivation.

The findings of this research indicate that the first major factor towards active learning is large classes. Through this finding, it can be said that it is hard for teachers to involve actively students when there are many students in classrooms. Also, many students cannot participate in the activities of the classroom because of the large number of their classmates. This finding is in line with the findings that students' lack of interest, large class size, and lack of student motivation were the challenges to active learning (Fekadu, 2017; Girma & Anagaw, 2020). Moreover, the findings indicated that the next challenge to the student-centered method is the lack of teaching materials. This finding was supported by a study carried out by Hunde et al., (2010) and the findings showed that the challenges towards active learning were large class size, the constraint of learning materials, lack of student interest, and shortage of professional teachers.

The findings of this current research asserted that the shortage of time is another factor in a learner-centered approach in high schools in Kandahar City. This finding is in line with the challenges towards active learning are inadequate instructional resources, lack of time, lack of teachers' motivation, need for too much pre-class preparations, large number of learners, lack of problem-based teaching material, and lack of facilities (Alemu, 2010; Niemi, 2002; Olana & Amante, 2017; Sahar, 2013). The last major finding indicated that the amount of content that needs to be covered prevents the active involvement of students in the classroom. This finding is supported by Alemu, (2010) states that the challenges are large classes, lack of classroom space, shortage of time, lack of problem-based teaching material, lack of facilities, lack of time to actively involve learners in the class, and the amount of content that needs to be covered during one class session.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the perceptions of teachers towards active learning and the challenges that hinder the usage of student-centered methods in high schools in Kandahar. The quantitative method was used for this research, and the data was collected through questionnaires from the participants. The participants were selected by the use of a random sample. The findings of this study identify from the

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viewpoints of teachers that lecturers support the active participation of students, and teachers persuade students during the teaching process in classrooms that teachers are responsible for the learning of learners.

Likewise, teachers link new knowledge with the prior experiences of the students, and they encourage students to provide comments about their learning to lecturers. In addition, teachers have a positive perception of active learning. Moreover, the major challenges that hinder the usage of the learner-centered approach are the large number of students, lack of teaching materials, deficiency of time, and the amount of content that needs to be covered in a period or in a whole year that does not leave them to use in the teaching process.

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