

Does active learning method for higher education promote students' learning? (Students-teachers perceptions towards the implementation of active learning method)

Widya Ratna Kusumaningrum^{1,*}, Rangga Asmara²

^{1,2} Universitas Tidar, Jalan Kapten Suparman No 39, Magelang 56116, Indonesia

¹ kusumaningrum@untidar.ac.id*; ² asmara@untidar.ac.id

* corresponding author

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ABSTRACT

Active learning method (ALM) has drawn global attention over the past years. In some Indonesian higher educational institutions, the notion of active learning has changed the university lecturer's perspective. It has flipped it from the conventional tradition to the new idea. This paper aims to study the university lecturer and students' perception on the implementation of active learning in higher education. This study investigates the university teachers and students perception towards the implementation of ALM to promote the students' learning. The participants of the study were 10 university lecturers and 60 students experiencing and practicing the application of ALM in the second language classroom. The issue was investigated using descriptive qualitative research with close-ended questionnaires. The results showed varied perception, beliefs, and practices on how ALM encouraged collaboration and boosted students' language performance.

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1. Introduction

Over the last decade, the active learning method (henceforth, ALM) has drawn global attention from education practitioners and researchers. Generally defined, ALM is a teaching method that tries to attract the students' participation and engagement in the teaching and learning process (Prince, 2004). The ALM procedure involves meaningful classroom practices and activates students' cognitive development. ALM is functioned to optimize and promote students' learning in a learner-centred environment (Frankel & Frankel, 2016). ALM gives the students' opportunities to learn and comprehend any subjects and urges them to be responsible for their learning as well (Mansson, 2013). In this sense, ALM is seen as an alternative assessment for the conventional or traditional instructional methods.

The use of active learning method (ALM) in higher education has been comprehensively discussed in the higher educational institutions. One empirical study on the application of ALM at the university level by Lumpkin, Achen, & Dodd (2015) showed ALM procedure with a variety of exploratory writing assignment and small-group discussion results in positive learning activities. The study revealed how ALM had shifted the lecture-based paradigm into an interactive mode. Students are actively engaged with the materials, and they have positively valued the benefits of ALM in classroom practice. Another study on ALM in higher education by Kim, Sharma, Land, & Furlong (2013) indicated that ALM helps and improves the students' critical thinking significantly.

In the study, Kim et al. incorporated ALM with the notion of group-based learning with authentic tasks, scaffolding, and individual reports. The research implied that ALM was beneficial for promoting students' critical thinking.

Active learning method (ALM) involves processes beyond the traditional procedure and not merely limited on reading and writing activities, but students are required to discuss and solve the problems from their reading and writing (Millis, 2013). Bonwell & Eison (1991) support ALM with learning objectives are to gain information, to apply the knowledge in the practices, to develop students' problem solving and critical thinking skills, and to motivate student learning. However, this conceptual understanding may be perceived differently. As a result, the notion of ALM has been deviated and wrongly understood and implemented in a language classroom in Indonesia. ALM has been sensed as an interactive engagement activity with fun and enjoyable procedure. ALM attracts the students' attention by ice-breaking activities, drawing, colouring, playing videos and games. It may lessen the students' tense and stress level, but it does not contribute to the individual language development.

To this sense, this study concerns to investigate how university lecturers and students perceive the concept of active learning for higher education. In this study, we proposed a research question on "how to do the lecturers and students' perceptions towards the concept of active learning and its practices in the second language classroom in higher education?".

2. Method

Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive qualitative with survey method as its research design to collect, present and analyze the data. The descriptive survey design was to portray the EFL situations implementing active learning method (ALM) methods in second language classroom practices and the EFL university lecturers and students perceptions about the ALM practices.

Participants

The participants of the study were ten universities lecturers and 60 undergraduate students who were involved in both ESL skill course and ESL knowledge course at a public university in Magelang Indonesia. The participants were purposely selected by the criteria of experiencing an active learning method (ALM) in their second language classroom both in the teaching and learning context.

Instruments

To provide the quality data on the university lecturers and students beliefs towards the concept of active learning method (ALM) and its practices in a second language classroom, this study employed three types of questionnaires with two of them were for the university lecturers and one instrument for university students. The lecturers responded to the first questionnaire with five-point Likert-type scales adopted from Mulatu & Bezabih (2018) ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This five-point Likert scales explored the concept and understanding of the ALM methods in classroom practices. This questionnaire comprised ten questions focusing on the encouragement of collaboration, the surge for students' performance development and motivation, and the opportunity for independent, critical, and creative thinking.

Meanwhile, the second research questionnaire for the lecturer was adopted from Xhafa & Kristo (2014). This second research questionnaire was for investigating how university lecturers put the ALM belief to their teaching practices with twenty item questions. It used a three-point Likert scale ranging from never to always. The third research questionnaire was modified from the second questionnaire investigating the students' values on the ALM practices applied by university lecturers.

Procedures

The university lecturers and students who were actively implementing active learning method (ALM) in a second language classroom were observed and asked to have initial consideration for being the participants or respondents. This initial evaluation was based on their experience and understanding the idea of ALM. In this sense, the respondents who had integrated ALM with their teaching were considered to be the participants. The participants were both lecturers and students group responded to the questionnaire. The results were then tabulated and analyzed using a specific procedure to present valid information.

Data Analysis

This research used a qualitative method by interpreting the close-ended questionnaires both for university lecturers and students. The lecturer and students responses to the questionnaire were evaluated in terms of its frequency and percentage. The overall estimation and evaluation were to analyze the percentage and to draw conclusion and recommendation based on the findings.

3. Findings and discussion

To answer the research question on “how do the lecturers and students’ perceptions towards the concept of active learning and its practices in second language classroom in higher education”, the study presented the results and data according to two categories of (1) focusing on the encouragement of collaboration, and (2) the surge for students’ performance development and motivation.

Active learning method to boost the collaboration

The application of active learning method (ALM) predominantly functions to encourage effective collaboration between the students, as presented below.

Table 1. The university lecturers’ perceptions towards the ALM function to enhance effective collaboration

Items	Strongly agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Active learning creates opportunities to share experiences and encourages friendship among students	4	40%	6	60%						
Active learning enhances the active involvement of students in learning instead of passive listening	5	50%	5	50%						

Lecturers might understand this function and agreed that ALM would create the opportunities to share experiences with 40% strongly agree, and 60% agree. Besides, ALM might encourage friendship among students and enhance the active involvement of students in learning instead of passive listening with 50% strongly agree and 50% agree. Further investigated, the understanding of the belief that ALM might promote effective collaboration was not always practiced in the language classroom, as follows.

Table 2. The university lecturers’ practices in implementing ALM to enhance effective collaboration

Items	Always		Sometimes		Never	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
I had students engage in a brainstorming activity (i.e., a group activity designed to generate as	8	80%	2	60%		

many ideas as possible)						
I led a class discussion focused on a visual/audio stimulus (e.g., a picture, cartoon, graph, song)	6	60%	4	60%		
I assigned small group presentations (e.g., debates, panel discussions, plays)	4	40%	6	60%		
I lectured with at least 15 minutes devoted to class discussion (interaction between student-student, with occasional questions/remarks by the teacher)	5	50%	5	50%		
I assigned a small group discussion or project (e.g., case study work)	5	50%	5	50%		
I assigned a laboratory exercise that was done by students			6	60%	4	60%
I assigned a short writing activity that was followed by at least 15 minutes of class discussion	3	30%	7	70%		
I assigned an in-class reading activity that was followed by a significant class discussion lasting 15 minutes or more	4	40%	6	60%		

Table 2 presented eight items on how the university lecturers explored their L2 classrooms with active learning method (ALM) to promote effective partnership among the students. Further explained, table 2 described how the university lecturers were not implementing ALM as their weekly teaching bases such as conducting group activity in brainstorming ideas, visual/audio stimulus, small-group presentation, group discussion, laboratory exercise, and assign short writing and reading activities. The data gathered from table 2 were directly compared to students' perception of the implementation of ALM was to enhance effective collaboration (see table 3).

Table3. The university students' views on the implementation of ALM to enhance effective collaboration

Items	Always		Sometimes		Never	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Students were engaged in a brainstorming activity (i.e., a group activity designed to generate as many ideas as possible)	27	45%	33	55%		
Students had a class discussion focused on a visual/audio stimulus (e.g., a picture, cartoon, graph, song)	6	10%	54	90%		
Students were assigned small group presentations (e.g., debates, panel discussions, plays)	33	55%	27	45%		
Students were lectured with at least 15 minutes devoted to class discussion (interaction between student-student, with occasional questions/remarks by the teacher)	39	65%	21	35%		
Students were assigned a small group discussion or project (e.g., case study work)	24	40%	36	60%		
Students were assigned a laboratory exercise that was done by students	3	5%	21	35%	36	60%
Students were assigned a short writing activity that was followed by at least 15 minutes of class discussion	12	20%	42	70%	6	10%
Students were assigned an in-class reading activity that was followed by a significant class discussion lasting 15 minutes or more	9	15%	48	80%	3	5%

Table 3 indicated that the students' points of view on the implementation of active learning method (ALM) to enhance effective collaborative. Students perceived the ALM was implemented now and then. In this sense, some ALM activities such as group discussion and presentation might be far to elicit effective collaboration amongst the students.

Active learning method to foster students' performance

Active learning method (ALM) was associated with the issue of students performance. The university lecturers believed that the implementation of ALM might solve the students' performance problems.

Table 3. The university lecturers' perceptions towards the ALM function to enhance effective collaboration

Items	Strongly agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
The quality of education can be improved if teachers shift their instruction from the lecture methods to active learning.	6	60%	4	40%						
Active learning enhances students' level of understanding and involves them in problem-solving.	1	10%	9	90%						
Active learning enhances self-confidence and independent learning of students.	3	30%	7	70%						
Teachers must encourage students to communicate effectively.	6	60%	4	50%						
Active learning offers opportunities for the progress of students in language use.	5	50%	5	50%						

Lecturers might believe that ALM would benefit the learners' second language performance and improvement, as well as the quality of education with the preferable options, were dominated on strongly agree and agree. This understanding was compared to the ALM activities emphasizing on the learners' L2 development (see table 5).

Table 4. The university lecturers' practices in implementing ALM to enhance learners' language performance and improvement

Items	Always		Sometimes		Never	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
During the lecture, I gave a short, ungraded quiz to check student comprehension of the material	6	60%	4	40%		
I assigned a short writing activity without having a class discussion afterwards (e.g., writing end-of-class summaries, providing questions over material)	2	20%	3	30%	5	50%
I had students complete a survey instrument	5	50%	5	50%		
I had students complete a self-assessment activity (e.g., complete a questionnaire about their beliefs, values, behaviours)	2	20%	6	60%	2	20%
I assigned a laboratory exercise that was done by students			6	60%	4	20%

Table 5 discussed five questions on how the university lecturers explored their L2 classrooms with active learning method (ALM) to enhance learners' language performance and improvement. Table 5 showed that even though some believed the importance of ALM to improve students' skills, not all activities would be done during the ALM activities such as a short writing activity with 50%

opted never. These data were then contrasted to the students' opinions on the ALM activities to improve their L2 skills (see table 6).

Table 5. The university students' views on the implementation of ALM to enhance learners' language performance and improvement

Items	Always		Sometimes		Never	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
During the lecture, students were given a short, ungraded quiz to check student comprehension of the material	3	5%	57	95%		
Students were assigned a short writing activity without having a class discussion afterwards (e.g., writing end-of-class summaries, providing questions over material)	6	10%	24	40%	30	50%
Students had to complete a survey instrument			33	55%	27	45%
Students had to complete a self-assessment activity (e.g., complete a questionnaire about their beliefs, values, behaviours)	2	20%	6	60%	2	20%
Students were assigned a laboratory exercise that was done by students			6	60%	4	20%

Table 6 pinpointed that the students' points of view on the implementation of active learning method (ALM) to boost learners' language performance and improvement. The table showed some similar opinion with lecturers' point of view with limited use of short writing activity. However, table 6 indicated the different opinions about the survey instrument activities, in which students rarely do such activities.

4. Conclusion

This current study aimed to investigate how university lecturers and students perceive the concept of active learning for higher education. Concerning to the objective, this study implemented a descriptive qualitative research design to confirm the proposed research question on how to do the lecturers and students' perceptions towards the concept of active learning and its practices in the second language classroom in higher education. The results implied the varied perception, beliefs, and practices on how ALM encouraged collaboration and boosted students' language performance.

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