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*Issues that restrain Teachers from adopting active
learning instruction in Lebanese School*



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Abstract

The typical Lebanese classroom is teacher centered, whereby the teacher is respected and is considered to be the bearer of all information. Active learning teaching methods are not in the Lebanese teacher's expectations. The students are not expected to assume responsibility for their educational development and learning process. This paper aims to highlight the issues that prevent teachers from adopting the active learning teaching method. A small scale survey from 100 teachers of 10 different schools selected from various areas in Lebanon was undertaken. The survey results were compared and tested in order to evaluate the reasons for not adopting active learning instruction in the Lebanese schools.

Keywords: active learning; Learner centered; Lebanon; teacher-centered learning; traditional curriculum; constructivism

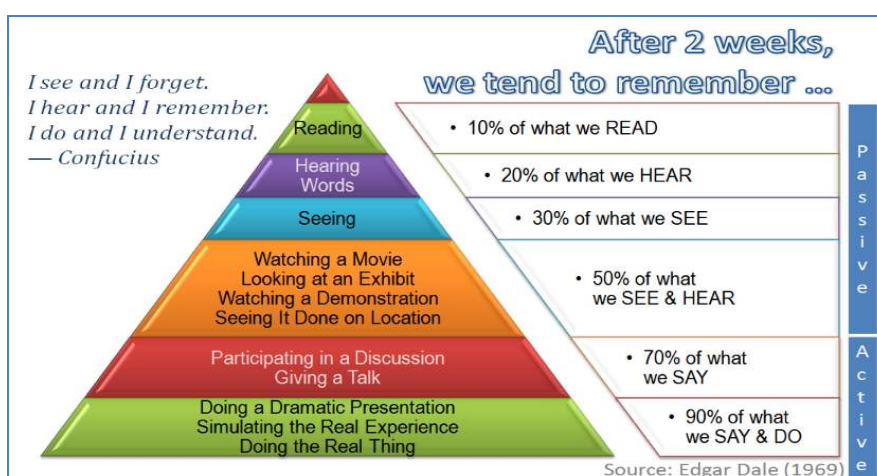
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1. INTRODUCTION

The majority of Lebanese schools use traditional lecture in their classrooms. The teacher-centered teaching approach has its historical roots set back since the beginning of the Lebanese public education. In a typical Lebanese classroom setting, students are often passive learners; i.e., in listening to the instructor, looking at the board, and reading (when required) the textbook. The teacher is seen as the master and the learner as the novice. Thus, the teacher is to be respected to a high degree. The learners sit quietly and neatly in their seats, while the teacher is up front pouring wisdom and knowledge into their brains. Students see their teachers as the fountains of information they cannot live without. The classroom setting is based on a lecture seminar style, since the teacher is presumed to know what is best for his/her students, and the students learn just by sitting in class listening to teachers, memorizing facts.



Many researchers confirm that passive learning leads to a limited retention of knowledge by students, as indicated in the 'cone of learning' developed by Edgar Dale in 1969.



The research within this paper is, in part, based on a ten-part questionnaire that is designed to gauge teachers' perspectives toward the factors that inhibit teachers from adopting active learning approach in Lebanese classrooms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

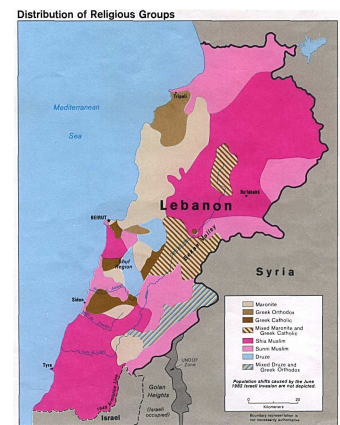
2.1 Active Learning Teaching Approach

The active learning teaching approach is a process where students engage in activities and tasks that enhance comprehension, understanding, and knowledge. In active learning the learners are committed to take roles in their own learning. Chickering & Gamson explained that "Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in class listening to teachers, memorizing repackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves", (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). In particular, it gives opportunities for students to incorporate new knowledge, concepts, or proficiencies into their own mental schema through rearticulating, drill, and practice. In active learning, learners can engage in small-group work; such as brainstorming or buzz groups. The teachers' responsibilities are to encourage students and to provoke their levels of curiosity (Nunan D., 1998:235). Where the learners in the classrooms carry the role of researchers in their own learning experience; and the teachers carry the role of the director and coordinator, guiding them into the right direction. The active learning approach gives control to the students which encourages their creativity and innovation and enhances their sense of competence and self worth, (Brown, 2001:46-47). Perhaps the most significant goal of active learning education approach is that learners can engage in meaningful communication in and out of the classroom

settings, which will help him/her to gain more confidence. Learners can also develop the habit to engage learning outside their classrooms.

2.2 Lebanon

Lebanon is a small democratic country located on the east of the Mediterranean Sea. It stretches over a small territory of 10,452 square meters (ESIS, 2001). In 2009, The Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs estimated the population of Lebanon to be a little less than 4 million; including a wide range of diversity. There are at least 18 different religious sects and 19 different political parties (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, 2008). The current Lebanese constitution was written in 1926 and specifies a unique political system based on a balance of political power among the various religious groups.



2.3 Lebanese Education Institutes

The majority of the Lebanese classrooms constitute of traditional lecture teaching format. Overall, the teachers are considered to be wise. They should be respected in and out of the classrooms, never contradicted, and credited with student excellence. Teachers outline students' paths and are considered to be always right. The Lebanese classroom hierarchy places the teacher on top; while the Lebanese learners are expected to speak up only when invited to do so by the teacher, follow strict orders, respect the teacher at all times, and listen to the teacher giving lectures. Large numbers of Lebanese learners see learning as a



task that is forced upon them by powers outside their control. Consequently, since learners are used to this type of teaching style, where the learner is a passive participant, it is therefore a great hurdle for the teacher to have his/her students overcome such mental restraints in the classroom. This makes it difficult for the teacher to get his/her students to assume increased responsibility for their own learning and development. In most Lebanese education institutes, the principal takes control over all the teachers, school policy and classroom decisions. However, the teachers carry on the instructional role by transmitting the curriculum package, utilizing the traditional lecturing approach, to the students. Most of the time, the teachers' efforts to implement active learning practices in schools, are met with conceptual, pedagogical, cultural, and political challenges which cause the complication of the renovation.

2.4 Cultural and Religion Implications

The unwillingness of the Lebanese to deviate from the traditional view of teaching can perhaps be explained in terms of its ancient cultural history and religions. Religions had a profound influence on both political and social aspects of life in Lebanon, with a sufficient impact on education. As we mentioned previously, there are more than 18 different religious sects and 19 different political parties in Lebanon. Religions anchor Lebanese to strict social codes and principles with deeply embedded roots. Religions, with their emphasis on family values and respect for age and learning, have been particularly influential on the Lebanese. In addition, the current Lebanese constitution specifies a unique political system based on a balance of political power among the various religious groups. When a Lebanese encounters with new situations in which they lack knowledge structures and cognitive strategies, they return back to their leaders to guide them. This vertical hierarchy system occupies a prominent place in the

Lebanese way of life. This may be especially true in teaching; this vertical hierarchy certainly has had a tremendous influence on the Lebanese education, with the teacher at the top of the hierarchy, such that it places the responsibility on the educator to provide all the necessary information the learners will need in their learning endeavors. Therefore, any attempt to get the average Lebanese learner to accept new teaching approaches as alternative to the passive lecturing approach will most likely be met with resistance, at least in the initial stages.

3. RESEARCH STUDY

3.1 Research Mythology

This study investigates the reasons for not adopting active learning instruction in the Lebanese schools. This effort led to an understanding that can guide governments, professionals and educators to evaluate, modify, and develop active learning instructions in the Lebanese schools' curriculum. It is important to note that this research study is a small-scale and not professional research on a 'large-scale'. The instrument in this study was a paper survey that was used to gather data from 100 teachers from 10 different schools ranging from middle to secondary schools selected from various areas in Lebanon. Participants completed a 10 minute survey. The schools chosen for this study were located in urban areas with diverse populations, representing an array of ethnicities and socio-economic levels. The teachers from all the different schools were treated as a single group; therefore no distinction was made among the schools. This study was conducted in a manner that protected the confidentiality of the participants. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire administered in paper and pencil form. Survey items were developed based on an extensive literature review as well as querying participants

using an exploratory questionnaire. The study gathered quantitative data to answer the research questions.

3.2 Research Questions and Hypothesis

The objective of this research was to determine the reasons for not adopting active learning instruction in the Lebanese schools. In this research study, the following research questions and hypothesis were addressed:

Guiding Research Question: What are the self reported teachers' perceptions on the factors that inhibit teachers from adopting Active learning teaching approach?

Hypothesis: There is a correlation relationship between not adopting an active learning approach and the following variables:

- I. Staff professional development.
- II. Standard Curriculum and official examinations
- III. School Facilities and Resources
 - Inadequate library resources
 - Inadequate lab equipments
 - Inadequate technology resources
- IV. Class Size
- V. School Leadership

3.3. Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire administered in paper and pencil form. Survey items were developed based on an extensive literature review as well as querying participants using an exploratory questionnaire. The instrument used in this study addressed the factors that inhibit teachers from adopting active learning instructions in the Lebanese schools. For the factors questionnaire, a 3-point Likert-type scale from disagree (1) to agree (3) was adopted for evaluation. The survey was 2 pages in length and took each teacher approximately 10 minutes to finish. In order to validate the content of the survey, three expert professors were asked to evaluate the survey questionnaire. Next, a pilot survey test was conducted with a group of ten teachers. The second survey was conducted 10 days later. The data I collected was entered into the computer and analyzed. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to verify the test-retest reliability. A correlation coefficient was determined for each of the scale questions in order to evaluate the test-retest reliability of each question.

4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Survey implementation and collection: During January 2013, I visited the schools who agreed to participate. Sample groups were used for this study. Students were randomly solicited during lunch hour in the teachers' lounge. The teachers were given the opportunity to be involved in the study; the teachers who decided to participate signed a paper acknowledging that this study was voluntary and that it was understood that all information would remain confidential. Each volunteer teacher was given the two page survey to be completed. By mid February, I collected 100 survey questionnaires from ten different schools. The data collected from the survey was entered in the SPSS software, for further analysis.

5. DATA RESULTS

The results of the survey were evaluated and analyzed using SPSS software. Because of the exploratory nature of this research, a number of different types of analyses were conducted with the survey data. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts and percentages, were used to summarize the data from research questions. A principal component analysis was conducted and five distinct components emerged. I reviewed the components and labeled them:

Component 1: Professional development

Component 2: Standard curriculum and official examinations

Component 3: Lack of resources in schools

Component 4: Class Size

Component 5: School Leadership

The principal component analysis was used to set up the matrix to answer the research questions.

All of the teachers surveyed (100%) reported that they have difficulty or they are unable to incorporate active learning approach in their classroom.

5.1 Lack of Professional Development

Teachers' professional development is a key factor to successful integration of active learning teaching approach into classroom teaching. Clearly, it is very important to allow teacher trainees to apply active learning teaching approach in their programs in order to be able to use it to supplement their teaching activities. The results of the survey indicated that the all of the teachers (100%) reported that they never had professional development training on how to

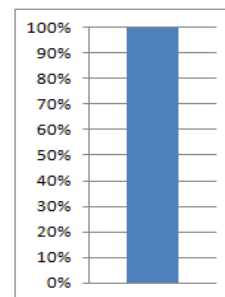


Table 1: 100% of the teachers did not have professional development on how to incorporate active teaching approach

integrate active learning teaching approach into classroom (see table 1). The result confirms that there is a strong correlation between lack of professional development training for the teachers and not adopting active learning teaching approach.

5.2 Standard Curriculum and Standard Examinations

The result of the survey showed that all the teachers (100%) reported that the intense of the standard curriculum and examinations is influencing their acceptance of active learning teaching approach (see table 2). Many of the teachers commented that the overcrowded standard curriculum and extremely busy work day is pushing them to select the traditional lecturing method. They also mentioned that most of the times they feel under pressure trying to enable students to pass the standard examinations and are for that reason they are forced to cram the curriculum in too little time in order to cover all the content of the standard curriculum. The results reveals that overcrowded standard curriculum is a strong factor that inhibiting teachers from adopting the active learning teaching approach in Lebanon.

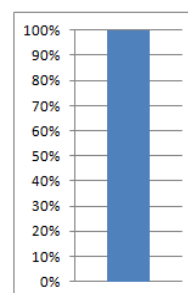


Table 2: 100% of the teachers reported that standardize curriculum and examinations is a factor that inhibited them from adopting a active learning

5.3 Lack of Resources in Schools

Access to resources in schools is a necessary condition to the integration of active learning approach. Access to resources in schools is a necessary condition to the integration of active learning approach. The results of the survey indicated that the

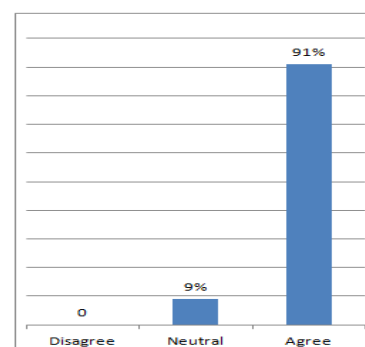


Table 3. Frequency distribution for schools lack the resources needed in order to integrate the active learning approach

majority of the teachers (91%) agree that that their schools lack the resources needed in order to integrate the active learning approach in their classroom, (9%) were neutral, and no one disagree (see Table 3). The central Tendency mean of the distribution is 33.3 with dispersion standard deviation of 50, the median is 1, and the mode value is 2 (see table 4).

N	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance	Range
3	33.3	9	2	50	2.51E+03	91

Table 4. SPSS scores- schools lack the resources needed in order to integrate the active learning approach

Among the (91%) of the teachers:

- (89%) reported that their schools have inadequate lab equipments,
- (91%) reported that their schools have inadequate technology resources,
- (91%) reported that their school library's resources are inadequate.

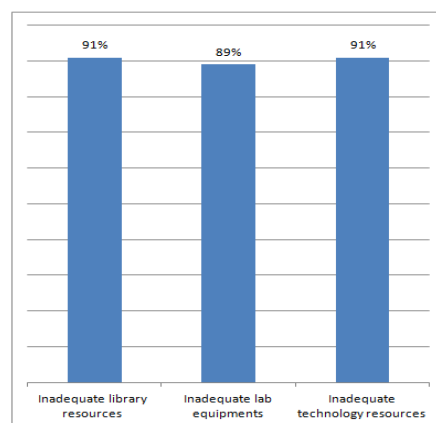


Table 5. Lack of schools' resources is a factor which inhibits teachers from adopting a active learning

The results of the survey showed that the majority of the teachers reported that their schools lack the resources needed in order to integrate the active learning approach in their classroom (Table 5). Table 6 shows the SPSS output, the results demonstrate a strong correlation between the lack of schools' resources and the teachers not adopting the active learning approach in Lebanese schools.

	N	Mean	Std. Error of Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance	Range
Inadequate Lab Equipments	3	33.33	28.01	11.00	0.00	48.52	2354.33	89
Inadequate Technology Resources	3	33.33	28.95	9.00				
Inadequate Library Resources	3	33.33	28.95	9.00				

Table 6. SPSS scores- Lack of the resources needed in order to in

5.4 Class Size

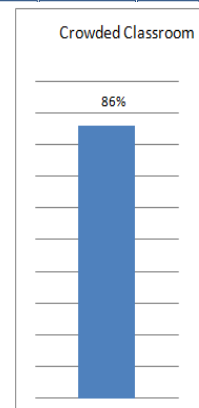


Table 7: 86% of the teachers reported that crowded classroom is a factor that inhibiting teachers from adopting a active learning teaching approach

Middle and secondary school teachers in Lebanon usually keep their classrooms teacher-centered, this is because a vast majority of schools are overcrowded, and have large classes. The result of the survey confirms that the majority of the teachers (86%) agree that large number of students in a class is a factor that inhibits school teachers from adopting active learning approach

in their classroom

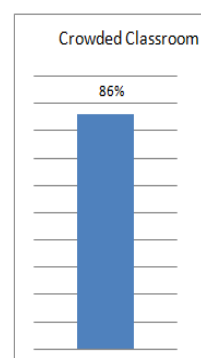
	N	Mean	Std. Error of Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance	Range
Crowded classroom	3	33.33	26.39	10.00	4.00	45.71	2089.33	82

Table 8. SPSS scores- Crowded classroom is a factor that inhibit teachers from adopting the active learning teaching approached

(table 7). Some teachers commented that in their larger classes they are unable to devote time to each student; they spend more time on controlling students' behaviors. Table 8 shows the SPSS output, the he results point toward that the crowded classroom is a factor that inhibiting teachers from adopting the active learning teaching approach in Lebanese schools.

5.5 Unsupportive School Leadership

School leadership is a stronger predictor of teachers' use of active learning approach in teaching. The results of the survey indicated that the majority of the teachers (86%) reported that their schools policy and leaders do not accept or trust the active learning education approach (table 9). Table 10 shows the SPSS output, the he results point toward that the results confirmed that the unsupportive school leadership is factor that inhibiting teachers from adopting active learning teaching approach in Lebanese schools.



Teabel 9. 86% of the teachers reported that the unsupportive school leadership is a factor that inhibiting teachers from adopting a active learning teaching approach

	N	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance	Range
Unsupportive School Leadership	3	33.33	9.00	5.00	45.65	2084.33	81

Table 10. SPSS scores- Unsupportive school leadership is a factor that inhibiting teachers from adopting ctive learning teaching approach

6. DISCUSSION

There are many factors that inhibit Lebanese teachers from adapting active learning approach in education. This paper describes factors that hinder teachers' opportunity to use active learning teaching approach. The first factor is the lack of professional development. Teachers' professional development is a crucial factor to successful integration of active learning approach in classrooms. The results of the survey indicated that none of the teachers have had training on how to integrate active learning in the classroom. The only method they use is the traditional lecturing method. Clearly, it is very important for the teacher to have professional development on how to apply active learning teaching approach in their programs in order to be able to use it to supplement their teaching activities.

The second factor is the heavy standard curriculum and schedule that the teachers should follow within a short time in order to meet the standard examinations. All of the teachers consider the intense of the standard curriculum and examinations their greatest challenges; they consider time is their greatest challenge in accomplishing the curriculum. They do not have enough time to cover the entire standard curriculum subjects and meet the needs of all learners to pass the Lebanese official exams so they are forced to cram the curriculum in too little time in order to cover all the content. Teachers commented that the overcrowded standard curriculum and extremely busy work days are pushing them to select the traditional lecturing method. The traditional lecturing method is considered as the most efficient and convenient method to deliver a large amount of information in a short time.

The third finding that hinders teachers' from adapting active learning teaching approach are several factors that are linked to the lack of school facilities and resources such as Labs, Libraries and school resources to support learning such as technology equipments including

(computers, LCDs, internet....). Effective adoption and integration of active learning approach into schools depends mainly on the availability and accessibility of resources. Many researches indicate that the use of resources in schools can improve students' outcomes; while the lack of resources is identified as a significant barrier toward implementation of active learning approach. The results of the survey indicated that the majority of the teachers reported that their schools lack the resources needed in order to integrate the active learning approach.

The fourth factor is the overcrowded classrooms. The belief that small classes are better is widely held today. Many schools consider that small classes are essential to good student learning. Smaller classes can enhance the teacher's capability to supervise students' performances and learning (O'Connell & Smith, 2000). The size of the class is also used as an important indicator of an institution's commitment and the nature of the experiences students will have. The majority of middle and secondary school teachers in Lebanon usually keep their classrooms teacher-centered since a vast majority of schools are overcrowded and have large classes. The high pupil to teacher ratio minimises possibilities of individual attention to the pupils which inhibited teachers from adopting the active learning teaching approach in Lebanese schools.

The fifth factor is school policy and unsupportive school principals. School leadership is a strong predictor of teachers' use of active learning approach in teaching. Many studies have examined the relation between school leaders and teacher efficacy. Ross and Gray found that school leaders have a direct and indirect impact on the teachers' professional commitment and efficacy (Ross & Gray, 2006). In addition, Koh, Steers & Terborg explained that school leaders are a strong predictor of teachers' beliefs, practices, commitment and the willingness to go beyond the formal requirements of the job and to engage in productive functions to enhance

organizational effectiveness that can contribute to higher student achievement, (Koh, Steers & Terborg, 1995). On the contrary, the results of the survey indicated that the majority of the teachers reported that their schools' policy and leaders do not accept or trust the active learning education approach.

Due to these issues, Lebanese schools require the adaptation of traditional lecture approach of education, through which learners rely excessively on teachers. Lebanese students learn by simply duplicating or memorizing the information given to them; their center of attention is only on examinations and memorizing information in order to pass. Such learners do not expand their creativity and their thinking abilities and may become dependent learners and take little initiative, (Brown, 2000). Learners who are not introduced to group learning also lack team abilities which are crucial in their future workforce. Learners of the traditional lecturing education may also be terrified of change and failure; they strive to protect themselves from failure, criticism, competition with fellow students and possibly punishment (Brown 2000).

7. CONCLUSION

It is difficult to change the Lebanese educational system and build successful learners in a short period. However, it is possible to some extent by taking some initiatives through teacher professional development. Active learning needs to be adapted in the educational curricula of the country. The Lebanese Educational system should expose the Lebanese youth to the opportunity to inductively build and strengthen their knowledge, skills and expertise.

8. LIMITATION

A replication of the study reported here to a larger sample might yield different results. The implications of the problems and challenges identified in this study beg for further research, more focussed education policies and more support for teachers to improve pupils' opportunities to learn. The findings of this study should be interpreted with caution because of the small number of teachers who participated in it.

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