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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Between Belief and Barrier: EFL Teachers' Perceptions, Practices, and Constraints in Active Learning Implementation at Shinas Vocational College**

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**ABSTRACT**

Active learning (AL) is considered a proven pedagogical approach that improves student engagement, critical thinking, and academic performance in EFL linguistic context. The ongoing interest in the topic has not yet revealed any research on its implementation in Omani vocational colleges. This study investigates the perceptions, practices, and obstacles of EFL teachers in Shinas Vocational College, Oman towards active learning. A validated Likert-scale questionnaire was utilized to gather data from 28 EFL teachers, which was analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings indicated that teacher perceptions of AL's efficacy for motivating students to critically think and participate in lessons were positive and in agreement ( $M = 4.34$ ). Teachers consistently utilized collaborative strategies, including group discussions and constructive feedback ( $M = 4.22$ ). Nonetheless, there were also considerable institutional and structural barriers identified. The factors of heavy curriculum workload ( $M = 4.18$ ); not enough resources inside the classroom ( $M = 4.14$ ); and students not willing to do so were significant. These findings highlight the requirement for sustained and coordinated policy reforms, professional development of trainers and student readiness in Oman's vocational education to respond to the National Vision 2040 reform agenda.

**KEYWORDS**

Active learning, EFL teachers' perceptions, Vocational college education, Omani higher education, Pedagogical barriers

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**1. Introduction**

**1.1 Background to study**

Despite some challenges related to using active learning (Cattaneo, 2017), teachers have done a gradual shift from passive to active learning in EFL classes. Students learn effectively by being actively engaged with what they are learning, not by just being passive recipients (Chichering & Ehrmaan, 1996). According to Watkins et al (2007), Active Learning (AL) refers to the learners' utilization of mental abilities when students learn. Brame (2016) and Hendrickson (2021) argue that AL makes classroom teaching exciting and interactive. AL is important because it enhances critical thinking skills (Rossouw & Steenkamp, 2025) and helps learners learn more than students who are taught using traditional methods (Wilke, 2003). Besides, students' response systems and engaging in activities that learn actively help in improving learners' collaboration (El Shaban, 2017). Allsop et al., (2020), for instance, found that active learning leads to an increase in engagement, participation and learning. Furthermore, it is beneficial for interactivity, flexibility and greater satisfaction. Moreover, AL is effective in EFL classes as it improves the motivation of students (Rezai et al., 2025), which also has positive effects (Detlor et al., 2012). Active learning is effective and as a

result, students and instructors prefer it and wish to implement it in all their courses (Daouk et al., 2016), and students perform better in their quizzes (Walters et al., 2017). Furthermore, active learning helps increase retention for students with average or below-average grades (Kvam, 2000). Consequently, lecturers are urged to employ AL in EFL classes. Passive learning is considered less effective than active learning (Michael, 2006). Nevertheless, the active approach can also present challenges for teachers (Silva et al., 2019).

## 1.2 Problem Statement

While AL is increasingly discussed, gaps remain. Some studies exist regarding the teachers' understanding of AL in the Sultanate of Oman (Al-Amrani, 2025; Jahan et al., 2016); however, a comprehensive analysis is still missing from the scene regarding the Vocational Colleges in the Sultanate of Oman. Furthermore, because the teachers do not fully understand the concept of AL (Devira 2020), this study has to be carried out to teach the teachers how to implement AL in the EFL classroom and the importance of it. According to Michael et al. (2023), as long as the lecturers have various understandings of AL, the present study is planned to be conducted. Moreover, other research (Jahan et al., 2016; Karcher et al., 2022 & Michael et al., 2023) gathered data by way of a questionnaire and some by observation. Thus, a survey and a semi-structured interview for this study will be conducted to make up for the shortcomings.

## 1.3 Research objectives

To tackle these earlier research gaps, this research will look into the EFL instructors' perception about AL in EFL classes and how does it help instructors keep students engaged in the class. The study seeks to find out how teachers make use of AL in EFL classes, and the positive influence on students' academic performance. Additionally, this study pinpoints justification for not applying AL in EFL classrooms. It also pinpoints justification for some teachers employing age-old strategies for lesson delivery.

## 1.4 Research questions

This study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Omani EFL teachers about Active Learning in EFL classrooms in vocational colleges in the Sultanate of Oman?
2. How do EFL teachers use active learning in EFL classrooms at the vocational colleges in the Sultanate of Oman?
3. Why do not some EFL teachers utilize active learning in their classes in vocational colleges in the Sultanate of Oman?

## 1.5 Significance of the study

The research has a significant contribution to EFL teachers from selected vocational colleges which are located in different regions in the Sultanate of Oman. This makes them originate out novel classroom activities to keep the learners fully engaged and change their learning approach to careful learning. To begin with, this study will considerably improve Omani EFL teachers' perception of AL and enable them to enhance their students' academic level. This research will alter the potential directions of education while assisting in the better connection between students' classroom engagement and academic achievement. As stated earlier, AL is an important tool for enhancing the students' study skills like reception and production skills. Moreover, the outcome of the research will guide teachers on best practices to use AL in the classroom and explain reasons why some lecturers refuse to deploy AL in the class.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical underpinning

Active Learning (AL) as referred to by Watkins et al. (2007) is when learners use their mental capabilities while in class. As well, they characterize AL as behavioral and cognitive engagement in learning activity. This method derives from learning theories such as constructivism (see Piaget, 1980 and sociocultural theory (see Vygotsky, 1978. Constructivism is created by designing learning activities that produce higher-order thinking or a dynamic learning environment (Al-Amrani, 2025). According to a study by Anthony in 1996, individuals learn actively, individually and steadily progress. A constructive approach in education increases the quality of the class (Prideaux, 2007). This is because educators believe that active participation of the learners is a productive way of teaching students. Constructivism allows learners to engage in activities; thus, pupils can enhance their skills and acquire the concepts. (Bhattacharjee, 2015)

### 2.2 Past studies

Numerous studies exist on the perspectives of instructors towards Active Learning (AL) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Al-Amrani (2025) gathered information through a questionnaire and an interview for the research. Eighty-five instructors joined in this study who were from a private university in Oman, and then ten teachers were randomly selected to be interviewed. The survey results indicate that the shift from passive instruction to active learning has created a paradox in education, with teachers' willingness to use active learning and students' unwillingness to be independent undergraduates. Based on the outcome of the interview, the teachers are negatively understanding the students' engagement in the activities done.

Likewise, a survey and semi-structured interview were carried out by Padilla-Petry et al. (2025). The number of participants in this study were the 57 lecturers and 125 students from the colleges of law, nursing and education from two universities in Spain. The finding suggested that teachers use AL to improve the results while giving importance to learners' motivation. Likewise, research has found that although teachers have low comprehension of active learning, they hold positive beliefs regarding teachers' beliefs about learning outcomes of active learning if it is harnessed in the class Michael et al. (2023). Teshome (2012) has also indicated that teachers view active learning positively. As also noted by Kassa et al. (2024), the majority of participants in their research had a positive perception of active learning.

A classroom observation was conducted by Miller and Metz (2014) wherein they found that 89% of the educators observed active learning happening in the classroom. In terms of lecturers' views on active learning, the study showed that they did not feel confident in their active learning ability and the other factors which inhibited their active learning efforts. The results of this research confirm the findings of Syeda et al. (2025) which indicated that the difficulties experienced by teachers to use active learning were: high demand to think, unlimited time for cover the content, unsuccessful attempt and fear, and lack of learners' predisposition to learn. Both studies together focused on factors that may hinder instructors' willingness to teach using active learning in their classrooms. The aversion of lecturers to active teaching and learning strategies was also discovered by Jahan et al. (2016) for various reasons including the limitation of time and resource insufficiency. Melaku et al. (2025) also claims that the curriculum-related factors, materials and financial resources made the implementation of active learning difficult within the classrooms.

In addition, Nijat et al. (2024) employed quantitative research design. Ninety-three schoolteachers and 98 students list was made by them. Based on this study's findings, teachers view active learning as effective. In the same way, Jachalee (2021) found that teachers believe that active learning is advantageous for learners. Dag et al (2019) also reported that teachers had positive impressions about the course where active learning was applied based on cognitive awareness, acceptability, cooperation and active participation. Yet, Karcher et al. (2022) found that educators are reluctant to implement active learning in class.

In a research paper presented by Patrick et al. (2016), they sent a survey to large numbers of undergraduates and five department instructors of a college. The results indicate that learners and teachers agreed on the usefulness as well as the effectiveness of active learning. Instructors found active learning to be more effective, asserted Tsang and Harris (2016). Another study conducted by Crisol-Moya et al. (2020) surveyed the learners and the lecturers. The results revealed that when instructors implemented active learning in their classes, this means that new functions in their teaching practices are present.

### **2.3 Critical discussion of the reviewed studies**

The studies being reviewed generally revealed that the perception of active learning in EFL classrooms varied from one study to another. The studies could in addition, use a survey, an interview and an observation of classroom. But, some studies only took two ways, and some only use one. Also, Al-Amrani (2025) concentrated on only one of Oman's private universities in his studies. Hence, the findings are not generalizable. Further, the study by Padilla-Petry et al. (2025) and other previous studies have an imbalance in participants' number. For example, Padilla-Petry et al., (2025) studied 57 teachers and 125 students. This inconsistency might lessen the informative nature (Chassang & Feng, 2022). Moreover, Miller and Metz (2014) performed classroom observations in their study, which may positively improve the accuracy of the result due to the benefit of observations that could assist the observer in optimizing their knowledge (Zaare, 2013). According to a study conducted by Nijat and his co-writers (2024), the quantitative research design was the only research design on which they depended. It could also have implemented a qualitative research design like the in-depth interviews since such interviews can help the researchers get deeper insight (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The research that was done by Nijat et al. (2024) also collected data which is equal to an equal number of participants. According to Linden and Samuels (2013), using this will aid the production of well-organized research and a fascinating discovery of successful practice.

## **3. Methodology**

This section describes the research design, participants, sampling procedures, tools and instruments, data collection procedures, analytical procedures and ethical considerations. A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview will be employed to collect the data for this study.

### **3.1 Research design**

The research will adopt a mixed-method approach. This will incorporate both the quantitative as well as a qualitative method (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) to collect data from the participants. The questionnaire will compile the quantitative data. To gather qualitative data from the respondents, the semi-structured interview will be used after the survey was given (Karatsareas, 2022).

### **3.2 Participants**

The participants in the study will include the EFL Omani teachers who are teaching English in the foundation program of the vocational colleges in Oman. A sample of 150 male and female teachers whose age will be in the age range of 25-45 years will

be taken for the present study (75 male teachers and 75 female teachers). The online questionnaire will be filled out by the respondents and subsequently, fifteen chosen interviewee participants. Within Oman, focus on Omanis with a bachelor's degree. This specific type of group was chosen because by focusing on a specific group, it helps provide effective information on how people think and feel about a certain matter (Freitas et al., 1998).

### 3.3 Sampling procedures

EFL Omani teachers from the Vocational Colleges of Shinas in Oman are the participants of this study. To start with, 150 EFL teachers will be given an online questionnaire. After finishing the virtual survey, it will be the turn of a few lecturers to be interviewed. The study respondents will be selected randomly depending on their consent to being a part of the study (Noor et al., 2022).

### 3.4 Tools and instruments

The researcher will collect data through an online questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The survey used by Al-Amrani (2025) will be adopted in this research and will be adapted according to this study. Furthermore, the interview questions utilized by Al-Amrani (2025) will be changed and adjusted according to this study.

### 3.5 Data collection procedures

Before the questionnaire is given, the consent form will be given to the participants to show that the respondents will be treated with respect and ethically (Mirza et al. 2023). Once the respondents consent to participate in the questionnaire, the survey will be virtually distributed to the Vocational Colleges teachers in Shinas, Oman via WhatsApp or email.

### 3.6 Analytical procedures

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) has been popular in the academic and business fields (Arkkelin, 2024) where it is considered useful and easy to use (Masood & Lodhi, 2016). The quantitative data will be analysed using it. In addition, the qualitative data will be evaluated using thematic analysis. This evaluation will allow the researchers to identify the key themes and ideas in the interviews (Ringer & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). Thematic analysis is a well-established, flexible method used in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006) (22 words). Thematic analysis is also considered as the foundation of qualitative research (Morgan, 2022).

### 3.7 Ethical Consideration

Before requesting any information from the respondents, the consent form is the most important thing. The consent form will be sent to the possible respondents before sending the online questionnaire and the interview so they will be willing to participate. Ethics in research refers to the principle that govern activities of the researchers towards their subjects, audience, society and academic circles in that order. Ethics in research promotes honesty and transparency in collecting and analysing the data, which help in reporting as well. This helps in preventing the use of dishonest means like plagiarism, fabrication and falsification among others (Wojcik, 2024). Mirza et al. (2023) contends that researchers must not exploit their subjects and shun malpractice altogether because the right ethics can ultimately help in overall development. Ethics is considered the heart of any study (Hasan et al., 2021). Without the clear ethical norms that apply in human reporting research, it is hard to trust the results or address real-life issues fairly (Hasan et al., 2021).

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Participant Profile

There were 28 responses to the online questionnaire from Shinas Vocational College EFL teachers (N = 28). The sample of 28 was a convenience sample of teachers who agreed to participate in the data-collection window, despite the methodology stating that the target was 150 participants. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistic for the sample.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 28)*

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	15	53.6%
	Male	12	42.9%
	Prefer not to say	1	3.6%
Age Group	25–30 years	10	35.7%

	31–35 years	4	14.3%
	36–40 years	10	35.7%
	41–45 years	2	7.1%
	Above 45 years	2	7.1%
<b>Nationality</b>	Omani	25	89.3%
	Non-Omani	3	10.7%
<b>Qualification</b>	Bachelor's Degree	22	78.6%
	Master's Degree	6	21.4%
<b>Teaching Experience</b>	Less than 2 years	4	14.3%
	2–5 years	11	39.3%
	More than 10 years	13	46.4%

*Note. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.*

#### 4.2 RQ1: Perceptions of Active Learning

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics for Section A: Perceptions of Active Learning (N = 28)*

#	Item Description	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	M	SD	Interpretation
1	AL is more effective than traditional lecture-based teaching in EFL classrooms	0	0	1	13	14	<b>4.46</b>	0.58	Strongly Agree
2	AL increases students' motivation to participate in EFL classroom activities	0	0	2	12	14	<b>4.43</b>	0.63	Strongly Agree
3	AL helps EFL students develop critical thinking skills	0	0	2	17	9	<b>4.25</b>	0.59	Strongly Agree
4	AL strategies promote greater student engagement compared to passive methods	0	0	2	12	14	<b>4.43</b>	0.63	Strongly Agree
5	AL contributes positively to students' academic achievement in EFL classrooms	0	0	3	14	11	<b>4.29</b>	0.66	Strongly Agree
6	AL fosters collaboration and communication among EFL students	0	0	1	16	11	<b>4.36</b>	0.56	Strongly Agree
7	AL is consistent with constructivist principles of education	0	0	4	14	10	<b>4.21</b>	0.69	Strongly Agree
8	Implementing AL in EFL classrooms leads to higher-order thinking	0	0	3	15	10	<b>4.25</b>	0.65	Strongly Agree
9	AL is a practical and feasible approach in vocational college contexts	0	0	2	15	11	<b>4.32</b>	0.61	Strongly Agree
10	I feel professionally confident in my understanding of AL in EFL pedagogy	0	0	1	15	12	<b>4.39</b>	0.57	Strongly Agree
<b>Section Overall Mean</b>							<b>4.34</b>		<b>Strongly Agree</b>

Note. SD(1)=Strongly Disagree; D(2)=Disagree; N(3)=Neutral; A(4)=Agree; SA(5)=Strongly Agree; M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation.

Table 2 results find a highly positive attitudinal profile towards AL across all ten items with a section overall mean of  $M = 4.34$  interpreted as Strongly Agree. The AL is more effective than lectures is the highest rated item ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ) for Item 1. Both items 2 and 4 ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) suggest that AL is believed to foster student motivation and promote greater engagement. Professionals strongly believe in understanding of AL pedagogy as shown by item 10 ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ) Most of the respondents strongly agreed that AL enables EFL students to promote collaboration and communication ( $M=4.36$ ,  $SD=0.56$ ).

### 4.3 RQ2: Active Learning Practices in the EFL Classroom

**Table 3**

Descriptive Statistics for Section B: Active Learning Practices ( $N = 28$ )

#	Item Description	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	M	SD	Interpretation
1	I regularly incorporate pair and group discussion activities into my EFL lessons	0	0	0	19	9	<b>4.32</b>	0.48	Strongly Agree
2	I use problem-based learning tasks requiring students to apply skills to real-world scenarios	0	0	4	14	10	<b>4.21</b>	0.69	Strongly Agree
3	I design activities requiring students to reflect on their own learning (metacognitive tasks)	0	0	4	14	10	<b>4.21</b>	0.69	Strongly Agree
4	I use role-play, simulations, or drama activities to make language learning interactive	0	0	3	16	9	<b>4.21</b>	0.63	Strongly Agree
5	I employ technology-based tools (e.g., online quizzes, digital platforms) to facilitate AL	0	0	5	14	9	<b>4.14</b>	0.71	Agree
6	I regularly provide opportunities for students to engage in critical discussion	0	0	1	17	10	<b>4.32</b>	0.55	Strongly Agree
7	I use project-based learning (PBL) to engage EFL students in sustained active learning	0	0	5	16	7	<b>4.07</b>	0.66	Agree
8	I adjust lessons to include student-centred activities rather than teacher-dominated instruction	0	0	1	20	7	<b>4.21</b>	0.50	Strongly Agree
9	I provide timely and constructive feedback during active learning tasks	0	0	1	17	10	<b>4.32</b>	0.55	Strongly Agree
10	I involve students in setting learning objectives or deciding on activities	0	0	3	17	8	<b>4.18</b>	0.61	Agree
<b>Section Overall Mean</b>							<b>4.22</b>		<b>Strongly Agree</b>

Note. SD(1)=Strongly Disagree; D(2)=Disagree; N(3)=Neutral; A(4)=Agree; SA(5)=Strongly Agree; M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation.

The overall section mean for AL practices was  $M = 4.22$  (Strongly Agree) indicated EFL teachers at Shinas Vocational College use a variety of AL strategies either actively or consistently. According to the results of the research study, the highest-rated practice

Item revealed: Item 1 (pair and group discussions; M = 4.32, SD = 0.48); Item 6 (critical discussion; M = 4.32, SD = 0.55); Item 9 (constructive feedback; M = 4.32, SD = 0.55). The low dependency on resources helps understand strategy choices.

**4.4 RQ3: Barriers to Active Learning Implementation**

**Table 4**

*Descriptive Statistics for Section C: Barriers to Active Learning (N = 28)*

#	Item Description	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	M	SD	Interpretation
1	Large class sizes make it difficult to effectively implement AL strategies	0	0	4	19	5	<b>4.04</b>	0.58	Agree
2	A heavy curriculum workload leaves insufficient time to design and deliver AL activities	0	0	1	21	6	<b>4.18</b>	0.48	Agree
3	I lack adequate training or professional development in AL methodologies	0	0	9	13	6	<b>3.89</b>	0.74	Agree
4	Students' reluctance to participate actively is a significant barrier to my use of AL	0	0	8	15	5	<b>3.89</b>	0.69	Agree
5	Insufficient classroom resources (technology, space, materials) limit my ability to use AL	0	0	3	18	7	<b>4.14</b>	0.59	Agree
6	Institutional or administrative pressure to follow traditional teaching formats discourages AL	0	0	8	12	8	<b>4.00</b>	0.77	Agree
7	I find it challenging to assess students' performance during AL activities	0	0	5	18	5	<b>4.00</b>	0.61	Agree
8	Students' low English proficiency makes it difficult to implement AL tasks effectively	0	0	10	12	6	<b>3.86</b>	0.76	Agree
9	The absence of clear guidelines or policies on AL reduces my motivation to use it	0	0	8	14	6	<b>3.93</b>	0.72	Agree
10	I am concerned that AL activities reduce the amount of language content I can cover	0	0	9	13	6	<b>3.89</b>	0.74	Agree
<b>Section Overall Mean</b>							<b>3.98</b>		<b>Agree</b>

Note. SD(1)=Strongly Disagree; D(2)=Disagree; N(3)=Neutral; A(4)=Agree; SA(5)=Strongly Agree; M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation.

The overall section mean M = 3.98 (Agree) indicates that EFL teachers confirm a moderate to high degree of barrier presence for all ten items. The barrier rated highest on the rating scale was heavy curriculum workload (Item 2; M = 4.18, SD = 0.48) followed by insufficient classroom resources (Item 5; M = 4.14, SD = 0.59) These two barriers highlight institutional-level systemic and structural barriers.

**5. Discussion**

This section places the empirical evidence in the context of other empirical evidence according to the AL literature in EFL and higher education internationally referring to constructivist, sociocultural and pedagogical frameworks. **5.1 Teachers' Perceptions of Active Learning: Strongly Positive but Theoretically Shallow**

The highly positive perceptions captured in Section A (M = 4.34) are consistent with those reported by Al-Amrani (2025) in another similar Omani higher education context. Thus, this adds to the evidence that strongly supports AL in achieving more effective learning in the TVET sector, a previously under-researched sector. The highest-rated perception item (Item 1; M = 4.46)

confirmed that instructors viewed AL as significantly more effective than the use of lectures. This resonates with Michael (2006) who provides a basis for this noting that the use of passive approaches to teaching is, as the evidence consistently shows, linked to demonstrably less effective learning. The similarly strong endorsement of AL for motivational enhancement (Item 2;  $M = 4.43$ ) mirrors Rezai et al. (2025) finding that the implementation of AL approaches with EFL learners had a positive impact on motivation, anxiety reduction, and positive attitudes. The Omani context is interestingly noted here as a contributory cultural and linguistic factors that may lead students to be reticent in EFL context (Al-Amrani, 2025).

The responses for items 3 and 8, which assess critical thinking and higher-order thinking skills respectively, had a mean of 4.25. This perfect agreement reflects alignment with Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) revision of Bloom's taxonomy. In order for AL to meet its educational promise, teachers must not only conduct participatory activities; they must design activities that assist the students in analysing, evaluating and creating. The AL intervention applied in Rossouw and Steenkamp (2025) had a significant positive impact on the critical thinking of first-year accounting students. However, the comparatively lower endorsement of the constructivist alignment item (Item 7;  $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ) deserves our attention: its relatively higher standard deviation suggests some teachers appear to endorse AL beliefs somewhat distanced from Piagetian constructivism and Vygotskian sociocultural theory. This is in line with Devira (2020), which states that teachers apply AL activities without a clear understanding of the conceptual architecture behind the implementation. This no doubt runs a risk of surface learning.

## 5.2 Active Learning Practices: Alignment Between Belief and Behavior

The literature on AL has noted a problem with teachers having a gap between belief and practice. For example, teachers may have positive attitudes toward AL but revert to transmission-centred pedagogies in practice (Al-Amrani, 2025; Miller & Metz, 2014). The present data are reassuringly not suggestive of such a gap: the mean overall practices ( $M = 4.22$ ) is only marginally lower than the mean perceptions ( $M = 4.34$ ), indicating good correspondence between teacher beliefs and what they report doing.

The practices that were most frequently used were collaborative or dialogic strategies, which included pair or group discussions (Item 1;  $M = 4.32$ ) and opportunities for critical discussion (Item 6;  $M = 4.32$ ). This is in line with El Shaban (2017) on using interactive tools in ESL classrooms to enhance participation while Allsop et al. (2020) who associate AL-based classroom designs with higher engagement, participation, and satisfaction. Constructive feedback provision (Item 9;  $M = 4.32$ ) was at a comparable equally high position which reflected the Vygotskian principle of learning occurring at zones of proximal development instead of self-directed learning. Scaffolding makes use of collaborative mediation to help students achieve their potential under teacher guidance or peer interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). Reported use of metacognitive tasks (Item 3;  $M = 4.21$ ) suggests effective use of AL at pedagogical level.

The item that was less frequently used but with a solid positive score was Technology integration (Item 5;  $M = 4.14$ ). The moderate variability ( $SD = 0.71$ ) data indicates some deviations in the readiness of the respondents. This is consistent with general concerns about the existence of a digital divide in Omani educational institutions (Al-Amrani, 2025). Project-based learning (PBL) (Item 7;  $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) had the lowest practice average. Karcher et al. (2022) found something similar in that lecturers are reluctant to adopt sustained, complex AL formats that require significant restructuring of lesson planning and assessment.

## 5.3 Barriers to Active Learning: A Multi-Layered Constraint System

Despite their positive perceptions and practice, EFL teachers reported significant barriers to AL implementation (Overall  $M = 3.98$ ). Barriers faced in learning can be classified into 3 inter-related layers, that is, institutional and structural barriers, resource-related barriers, and learner-related barriers.

### 5.3.1 Institutional and Structural Barriers

The high rated barrier was heavy curriculum workload (Item 2;  $M = 4.18$ ). This supports the finding of Jahan et al. (2016) that turbulence is one of the commonest barriers to AL implementation in the HE of Oman. According to Melaku et al. (2025), Ethiopian primary schools face challenges in AL implementation due to the overloaded curriculum as well as limited resources. This barrier is not unique to any geography, but rather a structural tension that characterizes AL integration across a range of educational systems. The reason for this is that AL typically requires more preparation time per hour of instruction than a lecture does (Syeda et al., 2025).

### 5.3.2 Resource-Related Barriers

Large class sizes (Item 1;  $M = 4.04$ ) represent a structural-resource barrier at the intersection of pedagogy and logistics. Carlos et al. (2023) showed that even motivated instructors face major difficulties using interactive strategies in large cohorts, and

proposed hybrid models of spaced learning and team-based learning. Insufficient classroom resources (Item 5;  $M = 4.14$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ) also rated strongly, consistent with Melaku et al. (2025), who found material limitations in poorly resourced continental educational environments. The fact that the  $SD$  for Item 5 is low implies that this constraint is faced more uniformly which suggests a systemic rather than idiosyncratic deficit.

### **5.3.3 Learner-Related Barriers**

Students' reluctance to participate (item 4,  $M = 3.89$ ) is already well documented in Gulf EFL contexts. Al-Amrani (2025) noted that the teacher's inclination towards AL is growing while the student's unwillingness to give up on their passivity from their learning culture is equally growing. The educational system in Oman has always tended to rote learning and deference to authority meaning that the participatory, self-directed demands of AL are epistemologically unfamiliar to many students (Jahan et al., 2016).

Students' English low proficiency (Item 8;  $M = 3.86$ ) was the barrier that received the least agreement; however, it is still meaningful in the vocational context, afterwards this group of students usually enters with weaker academic English. For AL tasks such as debates, critical discussions or PBL to be constructed, it inherently requires a threshold level of communicative competence, and when this threshold is not met, AL tasks can trigger anxiety (Rezai et al. 2025) The practice is further complicated due to the assessment difficulty (Item 7;  $M = 4.00$ ). The artefacts produced by AL activities are much more difficult to code systematically. Thus, teachers trained in summative evaluation find themselves in a dilemma.

Finally, the coverage of content (Item 10;  $M = 3.89$ ) reflects the tension existing between depth and breadth in language teaching, which Cattaneo (2017) referred to as a coverage paradox in AL pedagogy. Educators worry that the time commitments of AL may cut down the quantity of language material delivered, although this concern is especially pronounced in vocational areas with external curricula and competency-benchmarking. Nevertheless, as Michael (2006) has pointed out, the long-term benefits of AL in terms of retention and transferability are more worthwhile than diminished content coverage.

## **6. Limitations**

There are various limitations to consider when interpreting this study's findings. Firstly, and most critically, the sample size achieved ( $N = 28$ ) is significantly smaller than the originally intended target of 150 participants. As a result, the power of the study is restricted (i.e., its ability to detect if there are statistically meaningful effects), as well as any inferential analysis (regression, confirmatory factor analysis, etc.) being precluded, and lessening the generalizability of the findings to the larger population of Omani vocational college EFL teachers. Future studies should use better recruitment strategies to achieve adequately powered samples (Field, 2018).

The study relied solely on self-reported questionnaire data. This raises a problem of social desirability, meaning that respondents are likely to rate their AL practices better than what their actual classroom behaviours would warrant (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Observing practices in classrooms would provide a more objective measure of AL enactment. Miller and Metz (2014) have demonstrated that observations of classrooms provided critical correctives to teacher self-reports.

Third, the sample was drawn from one vocational college in the North Al Batinah governorate which limits institutional and geographical diversification. Omani vocational colleges cater to specific regional communities, each with their own languages and institutional cultures, so the experience described here is unlikely to reflect that of vocational colleges in other parts of Oman. Strengthening external validity can be accomplished by means of multi-site comparative design of the eight regions in Oman.

Furthermore, the qualitative component planned for semi-structured interviews with 15 participants was not activated in the current phase of data collection. Without qualitative data, teacher experience and the institutional context will not be captured in the findings. Hence the quantitative findings should be regarded as preliminary and directional rather than definitive.

Fifth, the cross-sectional survey design takes a snapshot of teachers' perceptions and practices at one point. A longitudinal design would be suitable to capture the way perceptions of and practices related to AL change over time, especially in response to PD participation or institutional policy change.

## 8. Conclusion

This study investigated the perceptions, practices, and perceived barriers of EFL teachers at Shinas Vocational College, Oman, towards active learning (N = 28) through a quantitative survey design based on a five-point Likert instrument in three thematic sections. The study generated three sets of findings that corresponded with the research questions.

Taken together, these findings point to the need for coordinated, multi-stakeholder intervention on the issues not just around the professional development 'needs' of teachers but also institutional policy frameworks, resource allocation and preparing learners for participatory modes of learning. As Oman pushes forward with the goals defined by Vision 2040 that emphasize the creation of a knowledge-based innovation-driven society, EFL education in the vocational sector must revolutionize. Active learning as a pedagogical philosophy, as well as an empirically validated instructional approach, is a critical lever for this transformation.

Paste text generated by AI tools like ChatGPT, Claude, or other AI systems. You can then detect if it appears AI-generated or humanize it to make it sound more natural.

This carries implications for three groups. At the institutional level, both MoHERI and college leadership should formalize the AL policy, reduce curriculum overload, and create physical and timetabling conditions for AL. This is because, without these, AL remains a matter of individual professional discretion rather than policy and practice. For the sake of professional development, we require sustained communities of practice, rather than one-off workshops. This professional development would aim to also build the capacity to shift positive AL beliefs into practice-ready competencies. Assessment literacy is particularly vital for getting participatory and project-based formats right. In the classroom level, teachers are encouraged to start off with low resource, high impact strategies – think-pair-share, guided discussion, reflective journal – and then slowly move towards structurally complex formats like PBL, thus making adoption of AL sustainable within existing workloads of teachers.

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