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Active Lecturing and Academic Performance in Uganda: A Qualitative Narrative Literature Review

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Abstract
The strategy of active lecturing has become one of the most effective teaching methods used by teachers to improve student engagement, critical thinking, and knowledge retention and student achievement in learning. Active lecturing includes collaborative learning, interaction in lectures, question techniques, problem-solving, case studies, peer instruction, digital learning technologies, and ongoing formative assessment, which differs from traditional lecture approaches by actively engaging students as information recipients. A lot of evidence gathered from developed countries has shown that active learning has beneficial impact on students' performance in school, however, the adoption of the same approach in Uganda has not been consistent because of several factors including infrastructural problems, overcrowding of classrooms, lack of pedagogical skills, lack of instructional tools, and institutional constraints.
This is a literature review of narrative in which the available empirical and theoretical works to answer the relationship between active lecturing and academic performance in Uganda are synthesized. A qualitative approach with a narrative review was used and systematic searches were conducted in peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy reports and international publications during the period 2005-2025. Thematic analysis of literature was used to recognise common concepts, trends, and challenges in context and gaps in knowledge. Through the review, it is shown that active lecturing is an effective tool that can improve learner engagement, participation in the class, motivation, higher order thinking, collaborative learning, and academic achievement in various learning contexts. However, there is scattered evidence in Uganda, and it is limited to higher education, with little attention paid to secondary schools, technical schools, and teacher education.
The review finds that enhanced pedagogical skills of lecturers, investment in learning technologies, smaller class sizes and policies that actively promote learning, can significantly affect learning outcomes in Uganda. Further empirical research with mixed method and longitudinal design is suggested to assess the long-term impact of active teaching by lecture in various levels of education.

Keywords: Active lecturing, active learning, learner-centred pedagogy, academic performance, higher education, Uganda, narrative literature review

Introduction

It is now widely acknowledged that the quality of teaching is a significant factor in the learning success of all pupils, at all levels. In the last few decades, there has been a change in the paradigm of the teacher-centred to learner-centred pedagogies, encouraging active learning, collaboration, thinking and problem solving. The shift is driven by the increasing recognition that meaningful learning takes place when learners construct knowledge, rather than merely receiving information (UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2023) [7, 11]. Current education reforms therefore focus on pedagogies that are geared towards the twenty-first century

skills, such as creativity, communication, collaboration and lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2023; Asiimwe & Magunda, 2024) [2, 11, 13].

One such learner-centred instructional strategy is called active lecture, which refers to the use of a structured activity in which students enjoy a lecture in a manner that actively engages them in learning and actively involves them in the process, such as through classroom discussion, questioning, cooperative learning, case study, problem solving, peer instruction, and formative assessment. These approaches enable students to reflect on ideas, use their learning to make sense of concepts and be engaged in the learning process, which fosters deeper learning and enhances learning outcomes (Strelan *et al*., 2020) [9]. Studies have shown that active learning is effective (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Freeman *et al*., 2014; Prince, 2004) [3, 4, 8], but more recent systematic reviews have confirmed that active learning has a strong impact on academic outcomes, student engagement, knowledge retention and higher-order thinking across a range of disciplines and learning contexts (Theobald *et al*., 2020; OECD, 2023; Asiimwe & Magunda, 2024) [2, 7, 10].

In Sub-Saharan Africa, competency-based education reforms have inspired learner-centred education in order to enhance education quality and learning outcomes in terms of competency of the learners (UNESCO, 2021) [11]. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), 2020 and the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), 2020 have also put in place curriculum reforms in Uganda, which have encouraged participatory and competency-based approaches in secondary and higher education. Despite these policy reforms, many classrooms in Uganda are still using conventional teaching styles like lectures, which are hindered by various factors including class crowding, poor teaching materials, lack of pedagogical competence, and the absence of the integration of education technologies (UNESCO, 2024) [12].

There is consistent evidence from around the world that active learning is correlated with better academic outcomes, but there is limited research in Uganda by level of education and subject matter. Thus, there is very little evidence available to synthesize to assess the effectiveness of active lecturing in the context of Uganda. The qualitative narrative literature review therefore synthesises research on the relationship between active lecturing and academic performance in Uganda, from 2018 to 2026, along with seminal studies as may be necessary to understand the relationship between the two, as well as their challenges, and to highlight directions for future studies.

Rationale

Active teaching is a learner-centred teaching method that is gaining popularity and considered to be effective in promoting student engagement, critical thinking, and academic achievement (Theobald *et al*., 2020; OECD, 2023) [7, 10]. Uganda's education system has introduced competency based and learner centred education reforms (MoES, 2020; NCDC, 2020) yet there is limited evidence of how effective the active lecturing is in Ugandan schools. The purpose of this narrative literature review was therefore to synthesize the most recent evidence (2018–2026) to understand how active lecturing relates to academic performance, understand the implementation challenges and highlight any gaps in the knowledge needed to shape educational policy, teaching and future research on active lecturing and academic performance in Uganda.

Methods and Material

Research Design

The study used a qualitative narrative literature review design which involved a synthesis and critical analysis of the existing literature on active lecturing and academic performance in Uganda. A narrative literature review was chosen as the appropriate type of literature review because it allowed for the synthesis of findings from a variety of empirical and theoretical studies, providing a fuller understanding of the research topic, identification of emergent patterns, comparison of evidence across contexts, and awareness of gaps in knowledge without conducting primary research (Snyder, 2019) [17]. That is especially appropriate when evidence comes from a variety of methodologies and settings, such as in educational research.

Literature Search Strategy

A detailed literature search was done in the major electronic journals such as Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library and JSTOR. Other publications were sourced from policy documents and reports from organisations like UNESCO, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and the Ministry of Education and Sports (Uganda), while the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) was the source of the other publications.

The strategy that was used was to combine keywords with Boolean operators (AND, OR) such as active lecturing, active learning, learner-centred pedagogy, student-centred learning, interactive teaching, academic performance, student achievement, higher education, secondary education, Uganda, and Africa. The following search terms were used together to find literature relating to instructional approaches and educational outcomes, both worldwide and in Uganda.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Selected literature consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, systematic reviews and meta-analyses, conference papers and policy documents, mostly from 2018 to 2026. Where necessary, seminal papers prior to 2018 were incorporated to give theoretical and conceptual support to the concept of active learning. Active Lecturing or similar learner-centred approaches in their relationship with academic performance or learning outcomes in higher education, secondary education or teacher education was examined by eligible studies. English-language publications only were considered. The studies were only taken if they were online learning studies and had not included any active teaching strategies, were duplicated, or had no methodological or theoretical relevance.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

The titles, abstracts and full texts of relevant publications were screened to identify if they were relevant to the objectives of the review. Data collected from each of the studies contained the authors, publication year, study setting, research design, instructions used, participants, and results of the study that were pertinent to active lecturing and academic achievement. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the

collected evidence, which involved grouping together common themes and findings. Themes that were conceptualised were active lecturing, theoretical foundations, active lecturing strategies, academic performance, global evidence, African perspectives, evidence from Uganda, implementation challenges and research gaps. The thematic synthesis allowed for a comparison of findings across the different educational settings and also gave a coherent synthesis of the existing literature.

Quality Assurance

A special effort was made to use literature published in the past few years in well-known, peer-reviewed publications and from international and national organizations to increase the credibility and reliability of the review. Preference was given to publications between 2018–2026 so as to capture the recent developments in learner-centred pedagogy and in the same time, some of the seminal studies were selectively introduced so as to offer historical and theoretical background. The process ensured that the review was comprehensive, balanced and relevant in the context of educational practice in Uganda today.

Literature Review

Conceptualising Active Lecturing

Active lecturing is a learner-centred instructional approach that transforms conventional lectures from passive knowledge transmission into interactive learning experiences that actively involve students in constructing knowledge. Rather than relying exclusively on one-way communication, active lecturing integrates structured activities such as questioning, classroom discussions, collaborative learning, think–pair–share exercises, case studies, problem-based learning, peer instruction, reflective exercises, and formative assessment throughout lecture sessions. These activities encourage learners to analyse, apply, evaluate, and synthesise information while engaging meaningfully with course content, instructors, and fellow students (Strelan *et al*., 2020; OECD, 2024) [9].

The concept of active lecturing is grounded in the broader philosophy of active learning, which emphasises that students learn more effectively when they actively participate in the learning process rather than passively listening to lectures. Bonwell and Eison (1991) [3] first popularised active learning as instructional methods that require students to engage in meaningful learning activities while reflecting on what they are doing. Prince (2004) [8] further argued that active learning encompasses instructional approaches that require learners to perform activities and think critically about the knowledge being acquired. Although these foundational definitions remain influential, recent scholarship has expanded the concept by emphasising cognitive engagement, collaborative interaction, learner autonomy, and authentic problem-solving as defining characteristics of active instructional practices (Martella & Schneider, 2024; Asiimwe & Magunda, 2024) [2, 19].

Pedagogical Principles and Characteristics of Active Lecturing

Recent educational research suggests that active lecturing should not be viewed as replacing lectures entirely but rather as redesigning lectures to include purposeful interaction that promotes deeper learning. OECD (2024) notes that effective lectures increasingly combine brief instructor explanations with opportunities for discussion, collaboration, reflection, immediate feedback, and application of knowledge. Similarly, UNESCO (2024) [12] argues that teaching approaches promoting interaction and learner participation are essential for developing higher-order thinking skills, creativity, communication, and lifelong learning competencies required in contemporary education systems.

Traditional and Active Lecturing

The distinction between traditional lecturing and active lecturing lies primarily in the role assigned to learners. Traditional lectures position lecturers as the principal source of knowledge while students assume relatively passive roles characterized by listening, note-taking, and memorization. In contrast, active lecturing positions lecturers as facilitators of learning who guide students through carefully designed learning experiences that encourage inquiry, discussion, collaboration, reflection, and problem-solving. Consequently, learning shifts from information transmission towards knowledge construction, where students become active participants in understanding and applying concepts rather than merely reproducing information during examinations (Liljestrand, 2024; OECD, 2024).

Technology-Enhanced Active Lecturing

Advances in educational technology have further broadened the implementation of active lecturing. Learning management systems, audience response technologies, online discussion forums, virtual simulations, mobile learning platforms, digital quizzes, and collaborative online applications enable lecturers to sustain active participation in both face-to-face and blended learning environments. The integration of these technologies has become increasingly important following the COVID-19 pandemic, during which institutions recognised the need for interactive pedagogies capable of maintaining student engagement across multiple learning modalities (Hague, 2024; UNESCO, 2024) [12].

Active Lecturing in African Education

Within the African context, active lecturing aligns closely with ongoing competency-based education reforms that seek to equip learners with practical competencies rather than solely theoretical knowledge. Educational reforms across Sub-Saharan Africa increasingly encourage learner-centred instructional approaches that promote critical thinking, innovation, communication, collaboration, and authentic problem-solving. However, implementation remains constrained by contextual factors such as limited instructional resources, inadequate teacher preparation, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient technological infrastructure, all of which affect the effective adoption of active pedagogies (UNESCO, 2024) [12].

Active Lecturing in Uganda

In Uganda, active lecturing has gained increasing policy attention following the introduction of competency-based curricula at secondary and tertiary education levels. The Ministry of Education and Sports and the National Curriculum Development Centre advocate learner-centred instructional approaches that encourage classroom participation, collaborative learning, inquiry, and continuous

assessment. Recent evidence from Ugandan teacher education institutions demonstrates that active teaching methodologies, including project-based learning and learning stations, positively influence learners' academic achievement, practical competencies, and technological skills despite challenges associated with large class sizes and limited instructional resources. These findings suggest that active lecturing has considerable potential to improve educational quality if adequately supported through professional development, institutional investment, and policy implementation (Martella & Schnieder, 2024; Asiimwe & Magunda, 2024) [2, 19].

Summary

The literature as a whole show that active classroom-based teaching has gone far beyond the mere sum of its parts, and is now a learner-centred pedagogical method that combines interaction, collaboration, reflection, formative assessment and authentic learning experiences. Active lecture is one of the key strategies of current educational reform everywhere in the world, and it has been a consensus of contemporary education research that active lecture is a good method to enhance the learner's participation, higher-order thinking and achievement.

Discussions

The literature reviewed consistently demonstrates that active lecturing is a more effective instructional approach than traditional lecture-based teaching in promoting learners' academic performance. Across different educational contexts, active lecturing enhances student engagement, participation, critical thinking, collaboration, knowledge retention, and academic achievement by positioning learners as active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of information (Theobald *et al*., 2020; Strelan *et al*., 2020) [9, 10]. These findings align with constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners develop deeper understanding through active interaction with knowledge, peers, and instructors (Vygotsky, 1978) [31]. The consistency of these findings across multiple disciplines suggests that active lecturing represents a pedagogical approach capable of improving learning outcomes regardless of subject area.

The review further indicates that active lecturing supports the development of higher-order cognitive skills beyond examination performance. Strategies such as collaborative learning, case-based instruction, problem-solving, peer instruction, and reflective learning encourage learners to analyse, evaluate, and apply knowledge to authentic situations. These competencies are increasingly recognized as essential for graduates in contemporary knowledge economies that demand creativity, innovation, communication, and lifelong learning (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2021) [7, 11]. Consequently, the value of active lecturing extends beyond improving grades to preparing learners with transferable skills required in professional practice.

Evidence from developed countries demonstrates that institutions have successfully integrated active learning into higher education through investments in lecturer professional development, instructional technologies, flexible classroom environments, and supportive institutional policies (Theobald *et al*., 2020) [10]. These enabling conditions have facilitated widespread adoption of learner-centred pedagogies and contributed to improved student success. In contrast, evidence from many African countries suggests that although competency-based education reforms increasingly advocate active learning, implementation remains constrained by contextual challenges including overcrowded classrooms, inadequate instructional materials, limited technological infrastructure, and insufficient pedagogical training for educators (UNESCO, 2024) [12]. These findings indicate that successful implementation depends not only on curriculum reform but also on institutional capacity and resource availability.

The Ugandan literature reflects similar patterns. National education reforms have embraced learner-centred and competency-based approaches through the Ministry of Education and Sports and the National Curriculum Development Centre (MoES, 2020; NCDC, 2020). However, classroom practice in many institutions continues to be dominated by traditional lectures characterised by teacher-centred instruction, note-taking, and examination-oriented teaching. This disparity between policy intentions and classroom practice highlights the persistent challenge of translating educational reforms into effective pedagogical implementation. Factors such as large class sizes, inadequate instructional resources, limited digital infrastructure, heavy teaching workloads, and insufficient professional development continue to restrict lecturers' ability to implement active learning consistently (UNESCO, 2024; Asiimwe & Magunda, 2024) [2, 12].

Another important finding emerging from the review is that technology has become an increasingly significant enabler of active lecturing. Learning management systems, online discussion platforms, classroom response systems, virtual simulations, and mobile learning applications provide opportunities for enhancing student participation, collaboration, and continuous feedback. The expansion of blended learning following the COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the integration of digital technologies into teaching and learning. Nevertheless, disparities in access to technological infrastructure across Ugandan institutions continue to influence the effectiveness of technology-supported active learning, particularly in resource-constrained settings (UNESCO, 2023) [29].

The review also reveals important gaps within the existing Ugandan literature. Most studies have focused on higher education institutions, with relatively limited evidence from secondary schools, technical and vocational education institutions, and teacher education colleges. Furthermore, much of the available research employs cross-sectional designs that describe associations between instructional approaches and academic performance without establishing long-term causal relationships. Few studies have examined how contextual factors such as institutional leadership, lecturer motivation, classroom culture, assessment practices, or professional development influence successful implementation of active lecturing. Addressing these gaps would strengthen the evidence base required to guide educational policy and practice.

Conclusion

Overall, the reviewed literature suggests that active lecturing has considerable potential to improve academic performance in Uganda if supported by appropriate institutional policies,

investment in instructional resources, continuous lecturer professional development, and assessment systems that encourage higher-order learning. Effective implementation should therefore extend beyond curriculum reform to include strengthening teaching capacity, improving classroom infrastructure, integrating educational technologies, and promoting institutional cultures that value learner-centred pedagogy. Such interventions would contribute to enhancing educational quality and producing graduates equipped with the competencies required for national development.

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