Exploring EFL Student Teachers' Perceptions of Student-led Seminars

Majid Al-Amri
Taibah University, Saudi Arabia, majid_yic@yahoo.com

Exploring EFL Student Teachers' Perceptions of Student-led Seminars

Cover Page Footnote

Exploring EFL Student Teachers' Perceptions of Student-Led Seminars

By Majid Al-Amri[*]

Taibah University, Madinah, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

Student-led seminars have not been widely researched from the student perspective despite their prevalence in different streams of education literature. Based on four focus group interviews involving 24 students from a university in Saudi Arabia, this study evaluated student-led seminar sessions from the perspective of EFL student teachers, to generate relevant themes and categories. The themes identified comprised: preparing for seminar sessions, implementing seminar sessions, and receiving feedback after seminar sessions. Results found that students acknowledged the advantages of student-led seminars, but were worried about engaging in student-led seminars. Others preferred to receive guidance from the instructor, and some believed collaborative work was more important than individual work. It is essential to investigate students' perceptions to obtain a more thorough understanding and allow the formulation of an effective framework implementing student-led seminars.

Keywords: EFL Student Teachers, Higher Education, Self-Study Research, Student Teachers' Perceptions, Teacher Education

Introduction

Student-led seminars are among those active learning strategies attracting an increasing range of studies, as researchers investigate the effectiveness of this learning strategy to the extent that it meaningfully positions "students as partners" in learning and teaching in the context of higher education (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Kaur & Noman, 2020). Specifically, researchers have drawn attention to factors such as independent preparation, structured learning, taking responsibility, cultural values, and knowledge gaps in students' understanding. Student-led seminars have emerged as a prevalent research topic in different streams of education literature, including those focused on high schools, universities, and corporate training, as well as in the areas of medicine, geography (e.g., Worth, 2013), teacher education (e.g., McMullen, 2014), and psychology (e.g., Casteel & Bridges, 2007). Currently, university focus on student-led seminars has developed to the extent of designing student-directed seminar programs through providing students with the opportunity to coordinate and lead accredited seminars on topics not currently offered at international universities, such as has occurred at the University of British Columbia in Canada and the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom. This self-regulated performance has been claimed to be particularly important during college years when students are expected to independently

undertake various academic requirements and assignments for their learning and development (Day, et al., 2000; Klassen et al., 2008).

Student-led seminars are generally defined as "a structured open-ended seminar to which students bring their own questions (about some topic or reading), and in which through conversation and inquiry, they address some of these questions" (Finkel, 1999, p. 33). As an active learning strategy, the teacher's role must be less that of transmitting knowledge and more concerned with facilitating learning in less directive ways in order for students to take ownership of their learning. It has been contended that students take responsibility for their own learning when they lead discussions. According to a previous study (Littlewood, 1999), this is particularly important as students are assumed to feel ownership over their learning and independently undertake many duties and responsibilities that have traditionally linked to the teacher to achieve various requirements and assignments for their learning and development during and after the end of their formal education.

Also, the vision of student-led seminars includes attempting to make sense of content: one or more students initiate a discussion on the presentation topics with other students and undertake an in-depth investigation to inform the teacher and other students concerning any aspects of the course materials that interfere with the realisation of their aims or which may be problematic in terms of their needs and aspirations. It is likely that the engagement of independent thinking directly enhances participants' need for self-regulation (Zimmerman, 1989). In addition, student-led seminars are supposed to support an atmosphere where students have obligations towards each other for providing constructive and engaging discussions, based on the belief that students feel more comfortable disagreeing with other students than with their teacher (Casteel & Bridges, 2007). This phenomenon of "constructive controversy" as referred to by Johnson and Johnson (2009), would "result in greater achievement and retention, cognitive and moral reasoning, perspective taking, open-mindedness, creativity, task involvement, continuing motivation, attitude change, interpersonal attraction, and self-esteem" (p. 48).

Some researchers have contended that too much freedom is not helpful during student-led seminars. They suggest providing some parameters and guidance, and some choice within the framework. More specifically, it is claimed that, without structure, students' "perceived competence and perceptions of control over outcomes" would be negatively affected (Jang et al., 2010, p. 590). Structure is defined as "the amount and clarity of information that teachers provide to students about expectations and ways of effectively achieving desired educational outcomes" (Jang et al., 2010, p. 589). Student-led seminars may be structured in a specific format where the student(s) leading the seminar may be required to take a particular stance. They may be assessed and their work contribute to coursework marks, but this is not always the case. Students may sometimes be assigned a topic while, at other times, there may be a degree of choice on topics. It has been claimed that, where teachers provide choice, this is likely "to enable students to choose tasks that they perceive as consistent with their goals and interests" (Assor et al., 2002, p. 264). It has been reported that students may initially be hesitant or worried about engaging in student-led seminars (Al-Amri, 2018; McMullen, 2014). This is especially true in contexts where individual autonomy, which is "laden with cultural values, especially those of the West" (Jones, 1995, p. 228), is considered inappropriate within certain traditions of learning and teaching. It has been suggested, therefore, that instructors should debrief their students after the first few meetings to obtain useful information for improving the learning structure for student-led seminars (McMullen, 2014).

The structure of a student-led seminar might be different, depending on the seminar's objectives. In the present study, the basic goal of the student-led seminar was to facilitate content mastery of the course through individual and group work. To achieve this goal, students were required to discuss their questions and arguments about the course material and other relevant materials and teaching experiences before drawing connections between their findings and the assigned content information.

Using student-led seminars is still an under-researched area. However, it appears that instructors are developing student-led seminars in reaction to their experiences of, and frustrations with, teaching classes which are based on "the traditional model of a lecture-seminar delivery pattern" (Railton & Watson, 2008) in the context of higher education. On the one hand, student-led seminars have been found to be effective in increasing students' participation and learning, and in helping students study on a regular basis and achieve high levels of academic achievement (Al-Amri 2018; Casteel & Bridges, 2007; McMullen 2014; Worth 2013). On the other hand, issues have been raised in relation to an increasing use of student-led seminars, where, once the first moments of excitement are over, students in later weeks may come to perceive student-led seminars as being a less effective way of gaining knowledge, due to lower knowledge gain and lack of interactivity. This latter finding is in agreement with findings concerning other teaching approaches and models, arguing that continuing innovation is needed, such as reverse teaching, which aims to foster innovation in teaching (Nguyen et al., 2016). While several solutions to the challenges arising have been proposed, researchers suggest that maintaining consistent student-led seminar effectiveness may require student-led seminars to be implemented in moderation, as a supplement to lectures or other educational methods.

The present study aimed to: (a) explore participants' perceptions of student-led seminars, in order to (b) identify what are considered to be the most effective practices concerning student-led seminars among this group.

Methodology

Data Collection

This was an exploratory research study to capture and interpret the student perspective concerning student-led seminars in a non-controlling way (Patton, 2002). Four focus group interviews were conducted in Arabic, the participants' native language, using non-directive open-ended questions. A focus group method was chosen as a structured and directed means of data collection because of its advantage in facilitating a collection of informative responses in a relatively short time (Krueger & Casey, 2000). In other words, focus group interviews are a method which is advantageous for exploratory research through its centering of group interactions and discussions (Kitzinger, 1994). Participants were asked about a range of topics related to student-led seminars.

However, the focus group approach, which necessarily involves group interaction, can be challenging to implement successfully without appropriate caution. The most significant difficulties for this research study were, first, the challenge in dealing with one or more group members dominating the discussion so that their opinions were the only ones clearly articulated and, second, making sure that all opinions on a question had a chance to be heard. These challenges were addressed by methods designed to facilitate the direction and control of the group discussion. I developed a set of questions designed to solicit the information required from the group. As I developed the interview questions, I ensured that the questions were conversational and natural in nature and not confusing, leading, or biased (Berg & Lune, 2012). The questions included opening, introductory, transition, key, and ending questions (Kreuger & Casey, 2000). Thus, the question route was characterized by an easy beginning, flowing logically and naturally from one question to another, and moving from the general to the specific (Rennekamp & Nall, 2002). Also, different techniques were used, such as: summarizing what the researcher thought he had heard, and asking if the group agreed; phrasing the same question in a different way; asking if anyone else had any comments on a question; jotting down notes to remind the researcher to return to an earlier point; suggesting how to frame follow-up questions; and looking around the room, and making brief eye contact, especially with those who may not have spoken, as identified in previous studies (Johnson & Johnson, 1997; Kreuger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1998). The groups were small enough to allow all participants the opportunity to contribute.

The interviews included the following topics: the motivation for leading a seminar; the view of oneself as a seminar leader; views of seminar leaders' role; significant learning experiences during the workshops; future perspectives; and worries and fears related to starting a student-led seminar. Participants were not explicitly asked about the relationship between the instructor's effort in implementing student-led seminars and how useful students find student-led seminars. By asking questions about students' experiences of themselves as seminar leaders, the researcher sought to understand how the relationship between the instructor's effort in implementing student-led seminars and how useful students find student-led seminars were embedded in their views of themselves as seminar leaders.

Procedures

Action research was chosen as the research technique (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). That is, to ensure that student teachers had enough exposure to student-led seminars, two sections of an educational diploma class were conducted as student-led seminars. The topic for these two sections was English Language Curriculum. All student teachers were required to lead a seminar during the course. They were guided to make ready for the seminars through: (a) reading the chapter assigned and taking notes while doing so; (b) answering the questions posted on the course website; (c) bringing relevant materials and teaching experiences to class (e.g., from the internet, the university library, materials from previous courses, their teaching experiences, or relevant people or ideas considered stemming from the course assigned readings); (d) doing higher-level thinking by creating questions about the material based on Bloom's taxonomy; and; (e) submitting reflection journals to the instructor about their learning. During class, approximately four students were randomly chosen to initiate the session by writing their questions on the board over the course of 10–15 minutes. Then, each student had 20–25 minutes to discuss his questions and arguments based on the course material and teaching experiences before highlighting connections between his findings and the assigned content information. They then sought feedback from other students (20–25 minutes). I did not participate in the seminar discussions but did take notes and posted them on Blackboard after the meeting. Also, I read their reflective journals, gave comments and returned them to the students. This allowed me to provide positive comments, guidance, or directions for different arguments.

Participants

After the two sessions (n = 62), 24 students (12 from each of the two sections) were randomly asked whether they would be willing to be interviewed, in four groups of six participants. Interested students were selected, and these students agreed to answer questions about the student-led seminars. The interviews were terminated after conducting four group discussions. Out of a class size of 62 students, the decision to interview 24 was taken to obtain varied responses and to achieve data saturation. The respondents were male EFL student teachers, aged between 25 and 31 years, and residing in Saudi Arabia. I took on the role of moderator myself, as I knew about the relevant workshop in detail and was familiar with managing group focus discussions.

Ethical Considerations

All participation in the study was voluntary. Ethical issues were discussed with all the participants in advance, with information about the nature of the study provided and explanation given on how important their participation was in the study, to ensure transparency and clarity. In accordance with the ethical principles that guide research, interviewees were told that the interviews would be tape-recorded and their responses would be treated responsibly. The participants were informed about confidentiality, anonymity, and the right of withdrawal at any time and without giving any reason. Participants also had the right to pass on any question they found inappropriate. They were assured that there would be no harm or injury

as a result of their participation in the study, nor would they derive any specific benefits. Participants were asked to choose a place where they would feel comfortable to speak freely, as this factor has been reported as likely to help participants feel more empowered in their interaction with the researcher (Elwood & Martin, 2000). However, because they were reluctant to decide, the researcher suggested several different potential sites.

Data Analysis

After data collection, the group discussions were transcribed and written in English after a careful process of translation and reviewing against back-translations. The translated version was then coded. Following a grounded theory approach, systematic coding was undertaken, consisting of two main phases, and analysed in part using "constant comparative methods" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), to establish analytic distinctions and, thus, make comparisons at each level of analysis. The grounded theory approach incorporates systematic, constant line-by-line coding, initially involving the most significant or frequent initial codes, to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data, and then later allows for pinpointing and developing the most salient categories derived from large batches of data through locating differences, similarities, and repetitions; therefore, making sure that all data were examined thoroughly and all the pertinent dimensions investigated (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The analysis of the content introduced consistencies and implications in using student-led seminars. Through interpretation of the data, it was possible to gain insights to help enrich the understanding of student-led seminars.

In the present study, data analysis first involved the researcher "getting to know" the data through listening to the tapes, transcribing interviews from tape to paper, and reading over the written transcripts to gain a general feeling or idea of what the participants were saying and of the results. Second, the researcher "cleaned-up" the text by removing material in the transcripts that did not relate directly to the topic at hand or that was repetitious or peripheral, leaving only text that could help in understanding a respondent's point of view. Third, the researcher worked with the text and highlighted any distinctive phrase(s) or sentence(s) that conveyed relevant ideas or related perceptions of student-led seminars, and put down in the margin key phrases/words that seemed to reflect the student perspective (Mostyn, 1985). Categories and themes were then created. To reduce the role of researcher bias when identifying emerging themes and categories, I considered all the data obtained and constantly reflected on it with a clear mind. I continuously re-evaluated the responses and impressions and ensured that pre-existing assumptions were kept at bay. I eventually developed a coding scheme, using the data analytical technique known as "template analysis." Central to this technique is the development of a coding template, usually based on a subset of data (Brooks et al., 2015) derived from textual data including that obtained from interviews, which is then applied to more data, to be revised and refined (Kirkby-Geddes et al., 2013). I used codes to identity the study's participants: S1–S24.

To reinforce trustworthiness, I invited a colleague with significant experience in carrying out the interviews and dealing with transcripts to study the transcripts and develop categories and themes before studying my coding scheme. The colleague's results agreed with my coding scheme and my initial findings. To facilitate effective data management, qualitative analysis software (NVio) was used to code and sort the interview transcripts. To further reinforce trustworthiness, I invited the groups to validate the data, allowing participants to verify the categories and themes connected with chosen verbatim statements (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Results

Three clear themes and seven categories emerged from the interview transcripts. They represented participants' perceptions of student-led seminars. The themes identified were "preparing for seminar sessions," "implementing seminar sessions," and "receiving feedback after seminar sessions."

Preparing for seminar sessions

Preparing for seminar sessions describes the process of preparing for the upcoming seminars, which included reading the assigned materials and taking notes, answering the questions posted on the course website, discussing relevant materials derived from diverse sources and teaching experiences, developing questions related to the material, and writing reflection journals. The theme of preparing for seminar sessions described an essential part of student-led seminars, which were divided into two categories: working independently (N = 21, 88%) and working with others (N = 17, 71%).

The data suggested that participants appeared to fall into two distinct categories: "active students" and "passive students." Their levels of engagement in preparation for student-led seminars appeared to be variable, with students falling between two ends of an active-passive spectrum. Some students actively prepared for student-led seminars. They commented positively on the seminar requirements, as in the following examples: "the seminars had clear guidelines for the preparation of the presentations" S3; "searching different sources for the seminars was important for learning" S5; "I felt it was well structured to help students prepare a lot of things about one thing" S7; "the organized and coherent approach allowed us to follow closely the course contents" S9; "when I felt I had a lot to do, I felt I should do my best in the seminar" S10; "what was needed from me put me in a situation where I had to read the course materials regularly through the semester" S17, and; "my professional and personal experiences were important to understand the materials and prepare a good presentation" S21. However, other participants seemed to lack motivation and understanding, and did not prepare for seminar sessions. They negatively commented on the seminar requirements, as in the following examples: "it was a challenge for me to prepare for the seminars" S15; "it was difficult to do all what was required before I came to class" S18; "to search different sources, I had to spend a lot of time and effort" S1; "I struggled to concentrate on the course material" S22, and; "I found it very demanding to reflect on my experiences for the seminars" S11.

A few students had had adequate opportunity to have discussions with other students before coming to class and leading the seminars, and when such discussions occurred, as one student noted, "that added greater depth and richness to my understanding of my inquiry and its relation to the material" S24. In order to help them prepare for seminars, some students claimed that it would have been of value to discuss the reading materials with their peers before coming to class, and it was clear this was something they wanted to help make sense of their readings and to lead their seminars more efficiently. Most respondents thought it essential to implement a system that linked the preparation processes to peer support and discussion of assigned readings, as the following comments indicate: "I think working together would have helped us prepare better for the seminars" S2; "I suggest students email each other articles and website addresses before coming to class. That would have increased our knowledge and understanding of the topic" S4, and; "if we had divided the work among us and shared it online, it would have been great, I think" S9.

Implementing seminar sessions

This theme concerned the classroom interaction process, which was divided into two categories: interactivity (N = 22, 92%) and contribution to knowledge (N = 13, 54%).

Most students overwhelmingly expressed satisfaction with the knowledge they had gained from the seminar sessions in terms of the main topics presented and the detailed information provided. Most found the knowledge they gained important and useful: "I found the information very useful" S10; "I learned a lot from the seminars" S19; "what students presented was very valuable" S12; "I liked the way students talked about their experiences" S23; "that really expanded my knowledge"; S5 "we valued the depth of understanding and experience which other students brought to the seminar sessions" S16. However, some

respondents raised various issues relating to the knowledge obtained in the seminar sessions. These issues centered on lower knowledge gain, uncertainty concerning the accuracy of some information presented by other students, lack of clarity concerning some information presented, and the need for more explanations and examples, as indicated through the following comments: "sometimes I felt some information was missing in the presentation" S20; "I easily got the main idea but I was not sure whether other ideas were accurate, especially when they did not come from the textbook but from other sources" S1; "some ideas were not clear, especially those related to personal and teaching experiences" S13; "I think we sometimes needed more examples and explanations to build an understanding of the presentation" S8.

Some students expressed a desire for creating more space for interactivity during the seminar sessions. They claimed that the process of implementing seminar sessions focused too much on presentations executed as lectures, with several respondents noting that "seminars were implemented individually with less interactivity and discussion" S11, and that "all the work was done by one student and that the high number of individual presentations also left not enough space for discussion" S6. They highlighted modifications for improving the seminar sessions, such as: "it would be good to make changes to the seminars to make them more interactive" S2, that there should be "group discussions along with presentation to create effective participation to achieve a common set of goals" S21, and "I suggest that a number of students lead classes, not only one student. Leading classes by individuals is very demanding and you feel like you are working alone" S3.

Receiving feedback after seminar sessions

This theme concerned feedback students received after the seminar sessions, and was divided into three categories: timing (N = 20, 83%), mode of communication (N = 18, 75%) and elements of feedback (N = 19, 79%).

Most respondents acknowledged the novelty of being provided with feedback on a regular basis, as one respondent noted, "it was our first-time receiving comments on our work regularly after class" S18. Also, most students appreciated the benefits of electronic communication media in giving feedback. As one respondent said, "the website was very useful. I always referred to it. There I could find valuable notes and comments from the teacher and other students" S1. However, most suggested a need for creating more interactive space where they could receive and discuss feedback not only from their instructor but also from other students, expressed for example as follows: "that would have helped us to inquire about notes posted on the course website" S17; "it would have created an opportunity to discuss with the instructor his comments on the reflective journals" S12, and; "sometimes I needed to interact with other students to discuss what was posted there" S9. In addition, to understand feedback, some students demonstrate the need for face-to-face dialogue with the instructor to discuss the feedback, and that, despite one student claiming, "there was a common belief among students that providing feedback was about justifying the mark awarded" S4, some respondents felt that this aspect was not emphasized enough. They felt that "the instructor should have included a mark for work done and a justification for the mark" S11. However, there were a few students who appeared to be more eager and anxious to know more about their weaknesses and strengths concerning their knowledge and their presentation and communication skills, as evidenced in the following comments: "some suggestions turned my attention to develop my communication skills" S20; "one note acknowledged my ability to make a connection between content and my teaching experiences" S3, and; "I realized that I should improve my academic writing" S7.

Discussion

As a type of action research, this study informs how to best implement student-led seminars in my curriculum. The finding that some students seemed to lack motivation and understanding and faced

challenges working independently suggests that I should communicate my expectations and welcome criticism from my students (Cheon et al., 2019; Fraser, 2019). In other words, my engagement should support students' natural activities and be more malleable and responsive to interactions between students and their learning environments at different contextual levels (Ballinger, 2003; Connell, 1990; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). According to self-determination theory, students are able to become self-motivated when their needs for competence, connection, and autonomy are fulfilled (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Self-motivation theory suggests that I also need to reflect on how much autonomy, structure, and involvement I should provide and promote in order to motivate my students in a way that engenders commitment, effort, and high-quality performance during the implementation of student-led seminars.

That students desired peer support and discussions before coming to class reflects a need to create more opportunities for students to make sense of the materials and understand content "through dialogue" (Railton & Watson, 2005). Since so many teachers work collaboratively in curriculum planning and revision, adding peer support and pre-class discussions to my class would provide additional authenticity to the implementation of student-led seminars. I should take more advantage of social media and the internet to promote more interaction with students (Nguyen et al., 2016). There are many additional opportunities to create group space, for example, using a virtual learning environment such as Blackboard, where I can meet with my students outside our scheduled classes through group discussion boards, as well as through sending emails and exchanging files. In such online learning environments, I am able to track the use of learning materials and levels of participation in virtual discussions.

Most students recognized the advantages of student-led seminars with respect to in-depth learning, consistent studying, and creating an environment where they could learn from each other. Such findings are in line with previous studies (Al-Amri, 2018; Casteel & Bridges, 2007; McMullen, 2014; Worth, 2013). However, some respondents expressed their need for more knowledge, clearer information, and certainty concerning the accuracy of the information presented by other students. Such concerns suggest that I should implement student-led seminar sessions in moderation, as a supplement to lectures or other educational methods. Appropriate modifications in student-led seminar sessions would be likely to increase my students' interest and enthusiasm to learn, improve their communication skills, and provide an opportunity for them to actively participate and learn (Worth, 2013).

Most students also appreciated receiving regular feedback on their seminar sessions, a finding consistent with understandings of the value of feedback held by university lecturers and instructors. Providing feedback on a regular basis encourages and supports both active and passive students to learn from seminars. According to Gibbs (2010, p. 24), "Students need early feedback, for encouragement and to orient their efforts throughout the rest of the course, and regular opportunities to use and tune up what they know, and know how to do, through assignments with feedback." However, passive students may find incorporating timely feedback into their coursework more demanding. This suggests that by centering timely feedback as an important part of the program's assessment process, the challenges that regular feedback causes for students—whether passive or active—should hopefully become less intimidating.

Regarding the mode of communication for feedback on their seminar sessions, most students appreciated the use of electronic communication, but preferred more interactive communication, with a smaller number preferring face-to-face dialogue with the instructor and other students regarding their seminar sessions. These findings intimate that I should be flexible in the method of feedback utilized (Higgins et al., 2002; Rae & Cochrane, 2008). Even though feedback was regular and sometimes delivered to students online, there is still a need to take advantage of other technologies, techniques, and strategies to assist with communication, personalize feedback narratives, and invite dialogue via comments.

Further, most students highlighted the benefits of providing feedback prior to the final exam, while few students were concerned with the benefits of feedback in identifying strengths and weaknesses. This finding warns of a possible "disparity between lecturer intentions and student interpretation of the feedback and their ability to use the written assessment feedback effectively" (Rae & Cochrane, 2008, p. 218), suggesting that I should acknowledge the agency of learners in the feedback process. As suggested by the concept of feedback literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018; Molloy et al., 2019; Sutton, 2012), learners have the capacity to realize, utilize, and expand feedback information for their own learning purposes. For example, they have the competencies to accept and reject views from others, consider feedback from multiple sources, anticipate their own learning needs, use a wide range of ways to obtain relevant information from others to promote learning, recognize the role of criteria and standards in evaluating the work of oneself and others, and acknowledge the role of feedback in improving work. (Molloy et al., 2019). My awareness of the agency of learners in the feedback process would in turn require me to advance their own feedback literacy and develop strategies to enhance the effectiveness of feedback processes.

The current study is relevant to the implementation of student-led seminars in both local and global contexts. The study demonstrates the relevance of investigating students' experiences as student-led seminar leaders. The study procedures can certainly be used by other researchers. Further, they provide educators insight into the way they communicate their expectations while investigating students' perceptions of student-led seminars in the post-method era. Educator engagement is hypothesised as being malleable and responsive to interactions between both students as seminar leaders and their learning environments at different contextual levels. One particular concept, feedback literacy, may be accepted as being highly significant in utilizing student-led seminars to promote self-motivation and independent learning. The findings are expected to trigger scholarly debate and encourage scholars' individual professional reflection, as well. Engagement in debate and reflection can promote the role of student-led seminars in education.

While this study contributes to current research studies concerning innovation in teaching and learning, a number of limitations should be acknowledged. First, it was not attainable to deliver the entire course as self-study seminars. Therefore, more research is recommended to find out whether students' perceptions would be more or less positive if a whole course was delivered as student-led seminars. Second, while the existing research explored students' perceptions in relation to a single course, it could not be ascertained to what extent the students were able to fully grasp what was on offer in student-led seminars. Therefore, at this stage, the findings are more indicative than conclusive, and more investigations are recommended to verify the findings. Third, as this is qualitative research the results can be regarded as generalizable to theory, but not to populations. In other words, the present study was conducted during an EFL educational course and based on researcher influenced context, specifically, which might not be generalized to other contexts of implementation where the researcher does not have direct influence on the context of the study (Barab & Squire 2004). Therefore, it is recommended to undertake similar studies at different educational levels and in relation to other subject areas. Such cross-validation research would help determine the overall value of this study's results. As is usual in focus groups, another limitation is that the results are self-reported. Future research may take advantage of mixed methods research designs. Finally, this study was limited to ascertaining the students' perspectives. More comprehensive research is needed to more fully understand the value of the student-led seminar concept from the perspective of other groups, including instructors and students participating in the classes but not contributing to student-led seminars.

Majid N. Al-Amri is an associate professor of TESOL/bilingual education and applied linguistics at Taibah University, Saudi Arabia.

References

Al-Amri, M. (2018). Student-led seminars as an active learning strategy to enhance English as a foreign language procrastinating students' achievement. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives, 15*(1). https://doi.org/10.18538/lthe.v15.n1.302

Assor, A., Kaplan, H., & Roth, G. (2002). Choice is good, but relevance is excellent: Autonomy-enhancing and suppressing teacher behaviours in predicting student's engagement in schoolwork. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *72*(2), 261–278. https://doi.org/10.1348/000709902158883

Ballinger, G. J. (2003). Bridging the gap between A-level and degree: Some observations on managing the transitional stage in the study of English literature. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, *2*(1), 99–109. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022203002001009

Barab, S., & Squire, K. (2004). Design-based research: Putting a stake in the ground. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, *13*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327809jls1301_1

Berg, B. L., & Lune, H. (2012). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (8th ed.). Pearson.

Brooks, J., McCluskey, S., Turley, E., & King, N. (2015). The utility of template analysis in qualitative psychology research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *12*(2), 202–222. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2014.955224

Carless, D., & Boud, D. (2018). The development of student feedback literacy: Enabling uptake of feedback. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *43*(8), 1315–1325. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2018.1463354

Casteel, M. A., & Bridges, K. R. (2007). Goodbye lecture: A student-led seminar approach for teaching upper division courses. *Teaching of Psychology*, *34*(2), 107–110. https://doi.org/10.1080/00986280701293123

Cheon, S. H., Reeve, J, & Song, Y-G. (2019). Recommending goals and supporting needs: An intervention to help physical education teachers communicate their expectations while supporting students' psychological needs. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *41*, 107–118. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2018.12.008

Connell, J. P. (1990). Context, self, and action: A motivational analysis of self-system processes across the life span. In D. Cicchetti & M. Beeghly (Eds.), *The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation series on mental health and development. The self in transition: Infancy to childhood* (pp. 61–97). University of Chicago Press.

Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C. & Felten, P. (2014). *Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching: A guide for faculty*. Jossey-Bass.

Corbin, J, & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, *13*(1), 3–21. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00988593

Day, V., Mensink, D., & O'Sullivan, M. (2000). Patterns of academic procrastination. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, *30*, 120–134. https://doi.org/10.1080/10790195.2000.10850090

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105–117). Sage.

Elwood, S. A., & Martin, D. G. (2000). "Placing" interviews: Location and scales of power in qualitative research. *Professional Geographer*, *52*(4), 649–657. https://doi:10.1111/0033-0124.00253

Finkel, D. L. (1999). *Teaching with your mouth shut*. Heinemann.

Fraser, S. (2019). Understanding innovative teaching practice in higher education: A framework for reflection. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *38*(7), 1371–1385. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1654439

Gibbs, G. (2010). *Using assessment to support student learning*. Leeds Metropolitan University.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine.

Higgins, R, Hartley, P, Skelton, A (2002) The conscientious consumer: Reconsidering the role of assessment feedback in student learning. *Studies in Higher Education, 27*(1), 53–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070120099368

Jang, H., Reeve, J., & Deci, E. L. (2010). Engaging students in learning activities: It is not autonomy support or structure but autonomy support and structure. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *102*(3), 588–600. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019682

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, F. P. (1997). *Joining together: Group theory and group skills* (6th ed.). Allyn and Bacon.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2009). Energizing learning: The instructional power of conflict. *Educational Researcher, 38*(1), *37*–51. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X08330540

Jones, J. (1995). Self-access and culture. *ELT Journal*, *49*(3)*,* 228–234. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/49.3.228

Kaur, A., & Noman, M. (2020). Investigating students' experiences of students as partners (SaP) for basic need fulfilment: A self-determination theory perspective. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, *17*(1). https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol17/iss1/8

Kirkby-Geddes, E., King, N., & Bravington, A. (2013). Social capital and community group participation: Examining 'bridging' and 'bonding' in the context of a healthy living centre in the UK. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, *23*(4), 271–285. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2118

Kitzinger, J. (1994). The methodology of focus groups: The importance of interaction between research participants. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, *16*(1), 103–121. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.ep11347023

Klassen, R. M., Krawchuk, L. L., & Rajani, S. (2008). Academic procrastination of undergraduates: Low self-efficacy to self-regulate predicts higher levels of procrastination. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *33*(4), 915–931. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2007.07.001

Krueger, R., & Casey, M. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (3rd ed.). Sage

Littlewood, W. (1999). Defining and developing autonomy in East Asian contexts. *Applied Linguistics*, *20*(1), 71–94. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/20.1.71

McMullen, V. B. (2014). Using student-led seminars and conceptual workshops to increase student participation. *College Teaching*, *62*(2), 62–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.2014.885876

Molloy, E., Boud, D., & Henderson, M. (2019). Developing a learning-centered framework for feedback literacy. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2019.1667955

Morgan, D. L. (1998). *The focus group guidebook*. Sage.

Mostyn, B. (1985). The content analysis of qualitative research data: A dynamic approach. In M. Brenner, J. Brown, & D. Canter (Eds.), *The Research Interview: Uses and Approaches*. Academic Press.

Nguyen, B., Yu, X., Japutra, A., & Chen, C-H. S. (2016). Reverse teaching: Exploring student perceptions of flip teaching. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, *17*(1), 51–61. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787415616727

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed). Sage.

Rae, A. M., & Cochrane, D. K. (2008). Listening to students: How to make written assessment useful. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, *9*(3), 217–230. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787408095847

Railton, D., & Watson, P. (2005). Teaching autonomy: 'Reading groups' and the development of autonomous learning practices. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, *6*(3), 182–193. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787405057665

Rennekamp, R., & Nall, M. (2002). *Using focus groups in program development and evaluation*. University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service. https://psd.ca.uky.edu/files/focus.pdf

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. Guilford.

Skinner, E., & Belmont, M. (1993). Motivation in the classroom: Reciprocal effects of teacher behavior and student engagement across the school year. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *85*(4), 571–581. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.85.4.571

Sutton, P. (2012). Conceptualizing feedback literacy: Knowing, being, and acting. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *49*(1), 31–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2012.647781

Worth, N. (2013). Experimenting with student-led seminars. *Planet*, *27*(2), 30–35. https://doi.org/10.11120/plan.2013.00003

Zimmerman, B. J. (1989). A social cognitive view of self-regulated academic learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *81*(3), 329–339. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.81.3.329