Barriers to implementing active learning in English and Social Science classes

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Abstract

Active learning is an essential pedagogical approach that enhances student engagement, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. However, its implementation in English and Social Science classrooms in India faces several challenges. This study examines the barriers to active learning, focusing on three key factors: time constraints, infrastructure limitations, and institutional barriers. A sample of 50 teachers was surveyed from Delhi-NCR to understand their perceptions and experiences regarding active learning adoption. The findings indicate that syllabus completion pressure, rigid academic schedules, and exam-focused teaching significantly hinder active learning. Additionally, inadequate classroom space fixed seating arrangements and limited access to technological resources restrict interactive teaching methods. Institutional barriers, including a rigid curriculum, lack of teacher training, and administrative restrictions, further impede the adoption of active learning strategies. Teachers recommend curriculum flexibility, improved infrastructure, better access to technology, and increased teacher training programs to overcome these challenges. This study highlights the need for comprehensive efforts to integrate active learning into English and Social Science education in India.

Keywords: *Active learning, time constraints, infrastructure limitations, institutional barriers, teacher training.*

INTRODUCTION

Active learning is a student-centered approach that encourages engagement through discussions, problem-solving, and collaborative tasks rather than passive reception of knowledge (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). It has been widely recognized for its effectiveness in improving student comprehension, critical thinking, and retention of knowledge (Prince, 2004). In English and Social Science classrooms, active learning strategies such as role-playing, debates, group projects, and inquiry-based learning are particularly beneficial as they foster deeper engagement with texts, historical events, and social phenomena (Freeman et al., 2014). However, despite the advantages of active learning, its implementation in Indian classrooms faces several challenges. The traditional lecture-based approach continues to dominate, and various barriers hinder the integration of active learning strategies. Among these barriers, time constraints, infrastructure limitations, and institutional barriers stand out as significant obstacles in English and Social Science classrooms in India (Gale et. al., 2022).

One of the primary barriers to implementing active learning is time constraints. Teachers often struggle to cover extensive syllabi within the prescribed time, leaving little room for interactive activities (Khatun & Dar, 2019). The Indian education system is largely examination-oriented, with a strong emphasis on rote memorization and standardized assessments (Sujatha, 2024). As a result, teachers prioritize content delivery over student engagement, fearing that spending too much time on discussions and collaborative activities might slow down syllabus completion. In English and Social Science classrooms, where critical thinking and analytical discussions are essential, time constraints prevent educators from fully utilizing active learning techniques (Varanasi et. al., 2019). Teachers are also burdened with additional responsibilities such as administrative tasks, lesson planning, and student evaluations, further limiting their ability to incorporate innovative teaching methods (Sarkar, 2020).

Another major barrier is the lack of adequate infrastructure to support active learning. Many schools, particularly in rural and underfunded urban areas, lack proper classroom arrangements, such as flexible seating, access to digital tools, and adequate teaching aids (Banerjee & Duflo, 2013). Active learning often requires spaces where students can engage in group discussions, role-plays, and multimedia-based learning, but overcrowded classrooms and rigid seating arrangements make such activities difficult (Ramolobe et. al., 2024). Moreover, the availability of technological resources, such as projectors, smartboards, and internet access, is limited in many government schools, restricting the use of digital interactive learning tools (Naik, 2024). In English classrooms, for instance, multimedia resources like audiobooks, language-learning apps, and online discussion platforms can significantly enhance learning experiences, but their absence forces educators to rely solely on traditional methods (Gond & Gupta, 2017). Similarly, in Social Science classes, access to maps, documentaries, and historical archives can enrich discussions, but inadequate infrastructure hampers their utilization (Sharma, 2018).

Institutional barriers also play a crucial role in limiting the implementation of active learning. The rigid curriculum structure prescribed by education boards such as CBSE and state boards leaves little flexibility for teachers to adapt their teaching styles (Sinha, 2016). Many schools enforce strict policies regarding classroom management, expecting teachers to maintain discipline through conventional lecture methods rather than interactive learning (Kuril et. al., 2021). Additionally, professional development opportunities for teachers remain insufficient, with limited training programs on active learning methodologies (Singh, 2019). Even when such training is available, the lack of institutional support and encouragement discourages teachers from adopting new pedagogical approaches (Clarke et. al., 2023). In some cases, school administrators and policymakers view active learning as time-consuming and ineffective compared to traditional methods, leading to a lack of motivation among teachers to experiment with student-centered learning strategies (Bhaskar et. al., 2022).

Despite these challenges, active learning remains a crucial element for enhancing education in India, particularly in English and Social Science subjects. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach, including policy changes, teacher training programs, and investment in better infrastructure (Divaris et. al., 2008). Schools and

educational institutions need to recognize the long-term benefits of active learning and create an environment where teachers can integrate innovative teaching techniques without the fear of compromising syllabus completion (Dey & Bandyopadhyay, 2019). By overcoming time constraints through flexible scheduling, improving classroom infrastructure, and providing institutional support, the Indian education system can move toward a more engaging and effective teaching-learning process (Tharayil et. al., 2018).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Khwaja, U., Sadhukhan, S., Das, S., & Iyer, S. (2023) "Orchestrating Active Learning in Hybrid Classroom: A Case Study and Recommendations For Instructors" according to authors, one of the most significant barriers to the adoption of active learning in Indian classrooms is the rigid curricular framework and time limitations. They explained that Indian educators are often constrained by the pressure to cover a vast syllabus within a limited time frame. This is particularly challenging for subjects like Social Science, where extensive historical and political content needs to be covered. The emphasis on completing the syllabus often leaves little time for the integration of student-centered learning activities, such as group discussions, debates, and case studies, which are integral to active learning.

Naik, T., Shankaranarayanan, M. E., Swaminathan, M., Bali, K., & Jain, M. (2024) "Examining Factors Influencing Technology Integration in Indian Classrooms: A Teachers' Perspective" authors highlights how teachers' workload and administrative duties impact their ability to engage in active learning. In addition to teaching, educators in Indian schools are often responsible for managing student records, administrative tasks, and extracurricular activities. These additional responsibilities can detract from their time for lesson planning and active learning implementation. As a result, many teachers resort to traditional lecture methods, as they are easier to execute within tight time constraints and heavy workloads.

Swindle, J. (2013) "Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking about the Nature of Poverty" infrastructure limitations are another significant barrier to the implementation of active learning. Authors emphasize that inadequate physical resources in many Indian schools, such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of suitable seating arrangements, and poor classroom layouts, hinder the use of interactive teaching methods. Active learning strategies often require students to engage in collaborative activities, which can be difficult to manage in a cramped or ill-equipped environment. These constraints limit the ability of educators to employ strategies that encourage student participation, such as group discussions or project-based learning.

Ramolobe, K. S., Malatji, M., & Mavuso, S. (2024). An evaluation of venue capacity constraints on teaching and learning in higher education" authors argue that technological limitations in Indian schools further hinder the implementation of active learning. While digital tools like smartboards, projectors, and multimedia resources have the potential to enhance student engagement, many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack access to these technologies. The authors note that even in urban schools, limited access to reliable internet and technological equipment reduces opportunities for incorporating digital

resources into active learning practices. Teachers often resort to traditional methods due to these technological barriers, limiting the potential for innovative, tech-driven active learning experiences.

Niesz, T., & Ryan, K. (2018) "Teacher ownership versus scaling up system-wide educational change: the case of Activity Based Learning in South India" one of the major institutional barriers to active learning is the rigidity of curricula and standardized assessments. Authors argues that institutional policies in India often focus on achieving uniformity and standardization in teaching, leaving little room for creative teaching strategies. The standardization of assessments, particularly those that emphasize rote memorization, discourages teachers from using active learning strategies that might not align with the exam format. This curriculum rigidity is particularly problematic in English and Social Science classrooms, where in-depth discussions and critical thinking are crucial for developing a deep understanding of the subjects.

Emmer, E. T., & Sabornie, E. J. (Eds.). (2015) "Handbook of classroom management" the absence of adequate teacher training is another institutional barrier that limits the adoption of active learning. Author's points out that many teachers in India have not received formal training in active learning methods. Traditional teacher education programs often focus on the transmission of knowledge rather than on fostering student-centered approaches. This gap in professional development means that teachers may lack the skills and knowledge necessary to implement active learning effectively. Without proper training, teachers may feel ill-equipped to handle the challenges of facilitating active learning environments, leading them to rely on conventional methods.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To examine the impact of time constraints on the implementation of active learning strategies in English and Social Science classrooms.

To assess the role of infrastructure limitations in hindering active learning.

To analyze institutional barriers that restrict the adoption of active learning methodologies.

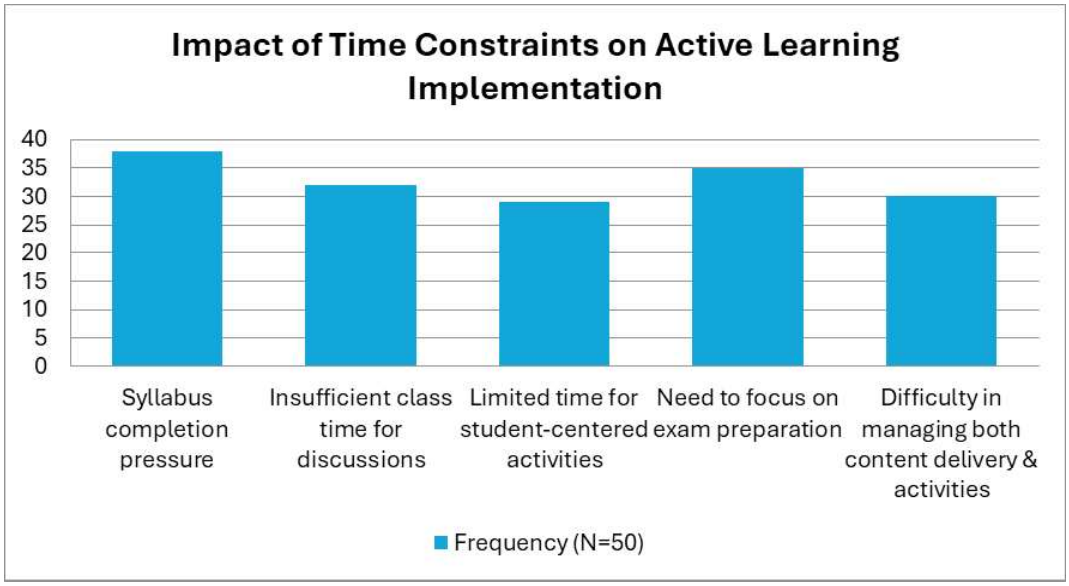
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques was used. A sample size of 50 teachers from Delhi-NCR was surveyed using structured questionnaires to collect quantitative data, focusing on their perceptions of time constraints, infrastructure limitations, and institutional barriers to active learning. Qualitative data was collected through interviews to gain in-depth insights into these challenges. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics for the quantitative data (frequency distributions, percentages, means) and thematic analysis for the qualitative data to identify recurring themes and underlying reasons for barriers. A convenience sampling method was used to select participants.

5. RESULT

Table 1: Impact of Time Constraints on Active Learning Implementation

Time Constraint Factors	Frequency (N=50)	Percentage (%)
Syllabus completion pressure	38	76%
Insufficient class time for discussions	32	64%
Limited time for student-centered activities	29	58%
Need to focus on exam preparation	35	70%
Difficulty in managing both content delivery & activities	30	60%

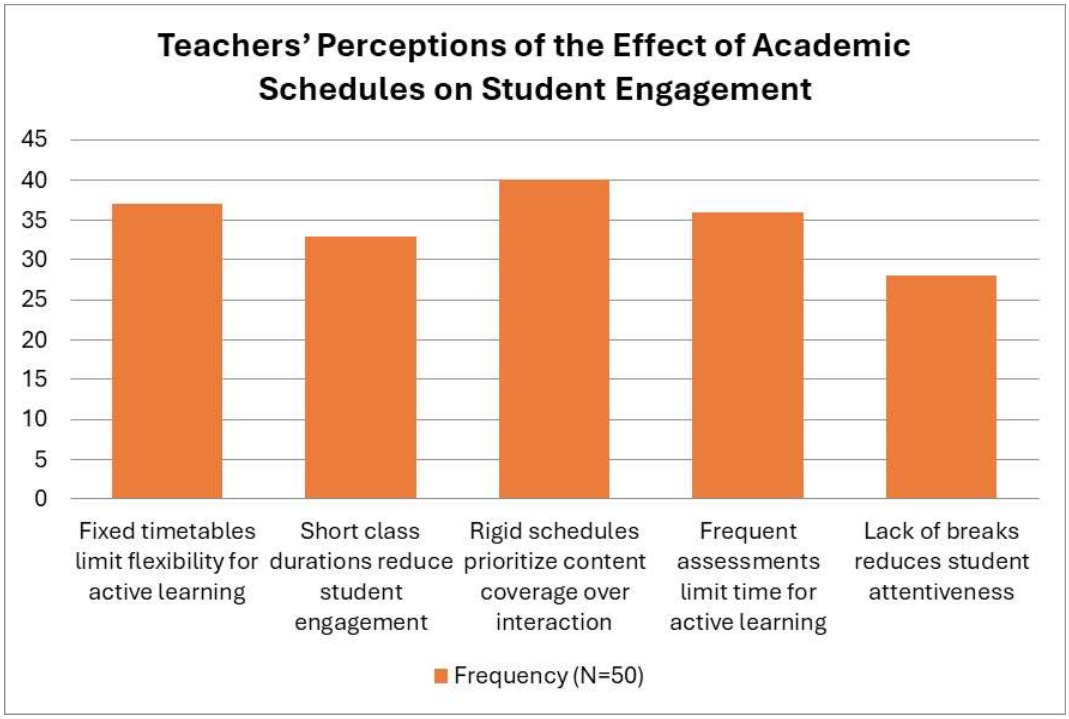


The analysis indicates that 76% of teachers perceive syllabus completion pressure as the biggest barrier to implementing active learning. Additionally, 70% report that exam-focused teaching restricts time for student-centered activities. About 64% of teachers struggle with insufficient class time for discussions, while 60% find it challenging to balance content delivery with interactive methods. The data highlights that time constraints significantly hinder the adoption of active learning strategies in English and Social Science classrooms.

Table 2: Teachers' Perceptions of the Effect of Academic Schedules on Student Engagement

Academic Schedule Factors	Frequency (N=50)	Percentage (%)
Fixed timetables limit flexibility for active learning	37	74%

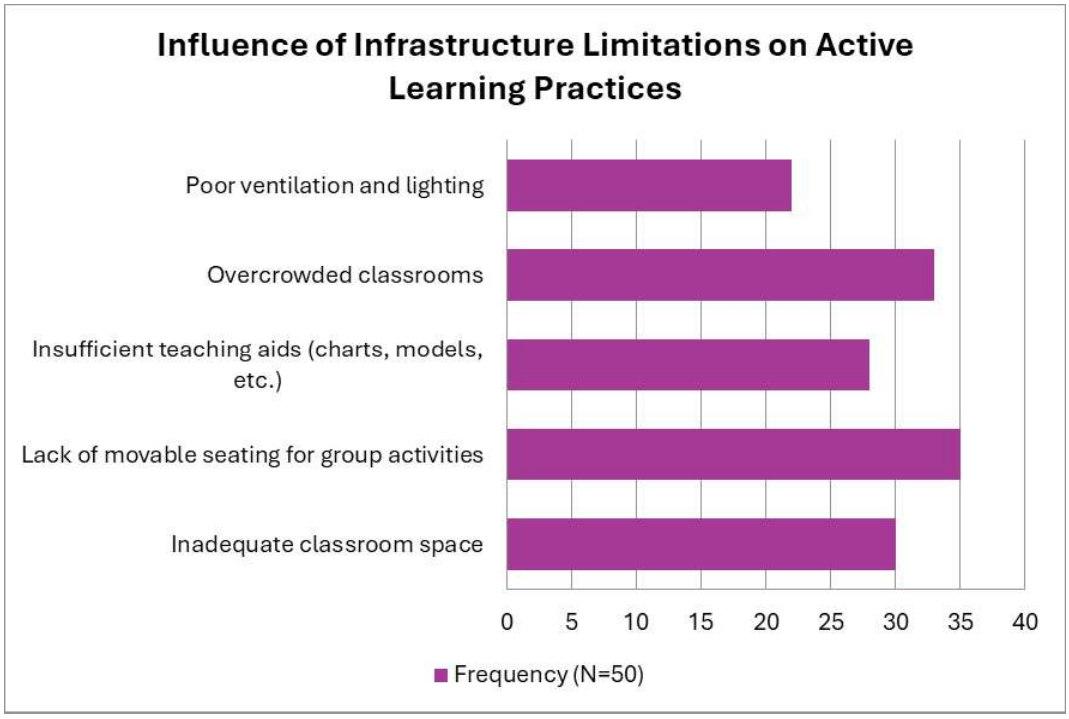
Short class durations reduce student engagement	33	66%
Rigid schedules prioritize content coverage over interaction	40	80%
Frequent assessments limit time for active learning	36	72%
Lack of breaks reduces student attentiveness	28	56%



The findings show that 80% of teachers believe rigid schedules prioritize content coverage over interactive learning, limiting student engagement. Additionally, 74% report that fixed timetables restrict flexibility for active learning, while 72% feel frequent assessments further reduce available time for interactive methods. 66% of teachers identify short class durations as a barrier, and 56% note that a lack of breaks affects student attentiveness. These results suggest that the current academic schedules create structural challenges for implementing active learning.

Table 3: Influence of Infrastructure Limitations on Active Learning Practices

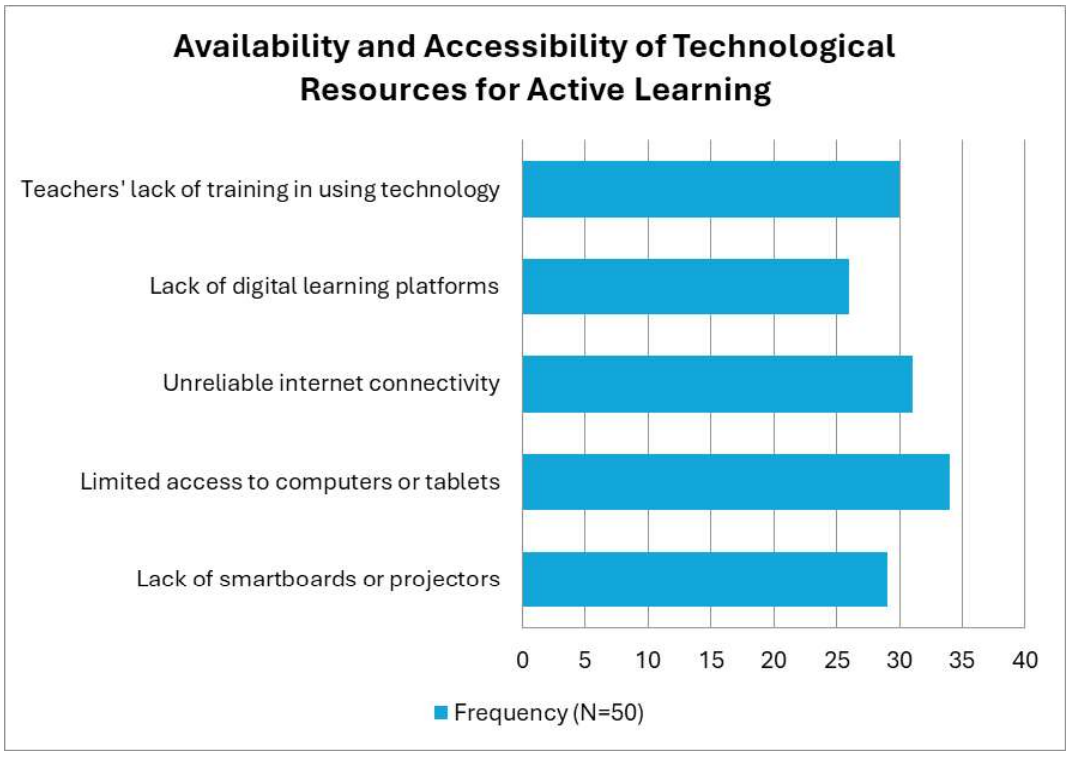
Infrastructure Limitations	**Frequency (N=50)**	**Percentage (%)**
Inadequate classroom space	30	60%
Lack of movable seating for group activities	35	70%
Insufficient teaching aids (charts, models, etc.)	28	56%
Overcrowded classrooms	33	66%
Poor ventilation and lighting	22	44%



The results indicate that 70% of teachers face issues due to fixed seating, limiting group work and interactive learning. 66% report overcrowded classrooms as a major barrier, while 60% struggle with limited space. 56% highlight a lack of teaching aids, and 44% cite poor ventilation and lighting as factors affecting classroom engagement. These infrastructure limitations make it difficult for teachers to implement effective active learning strategies.

Table 4: Availability and Accessibility of Technological Resources for Active Learning

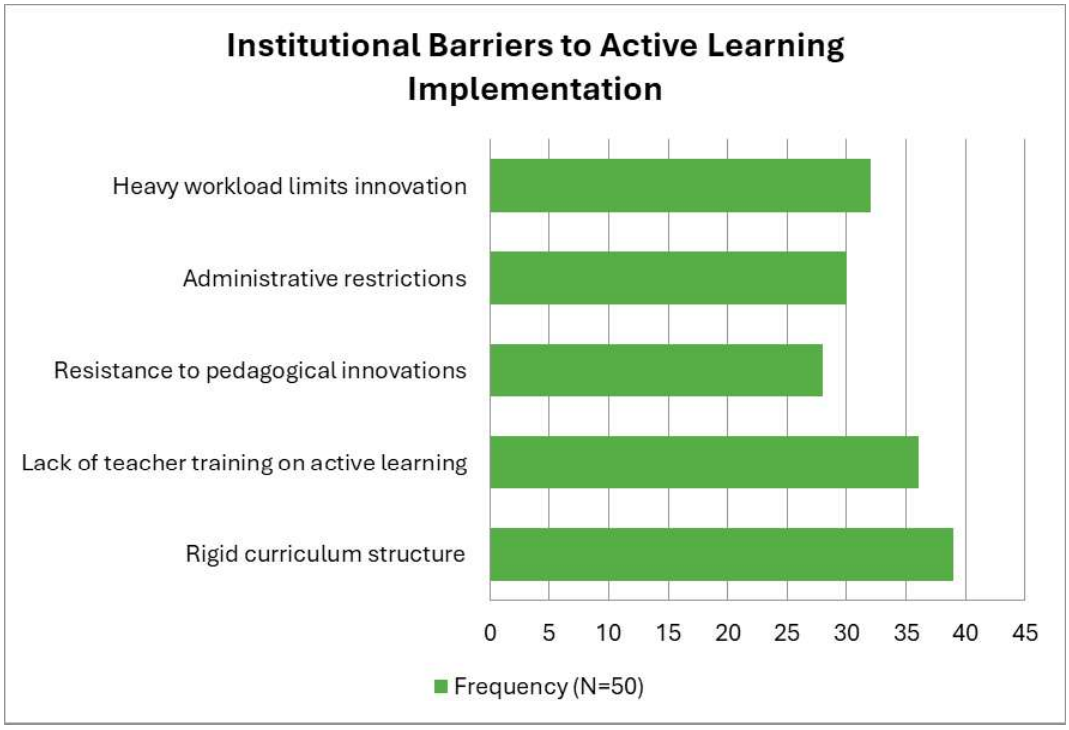
Technological Resource Limitations	Frequency (N=50)	Percentage (%)
Lack of smartboards or projectors	29	58%
Limited access to computers or tablets	34	68%
Unreliable internet connectivity	31	62%
Lack of digital learning platforms	26	52%
Teachers' lack of training in using technology	30	60%



The findings show that 68% of teachers report limited access to computers or tablets, while 62% cite unreliable internet as a challenge. 60% of teachers feel they lack adequate training in using technology for active learning. Additionally, 58% note the absence of smartboards or projectors, and 52% mention a lack of digital learning platforms. These technological limitations significantly reduce the opportunities for interactive and engaging teaching methods.

Table 5: Institutional Barriers to Active Learning Implementation

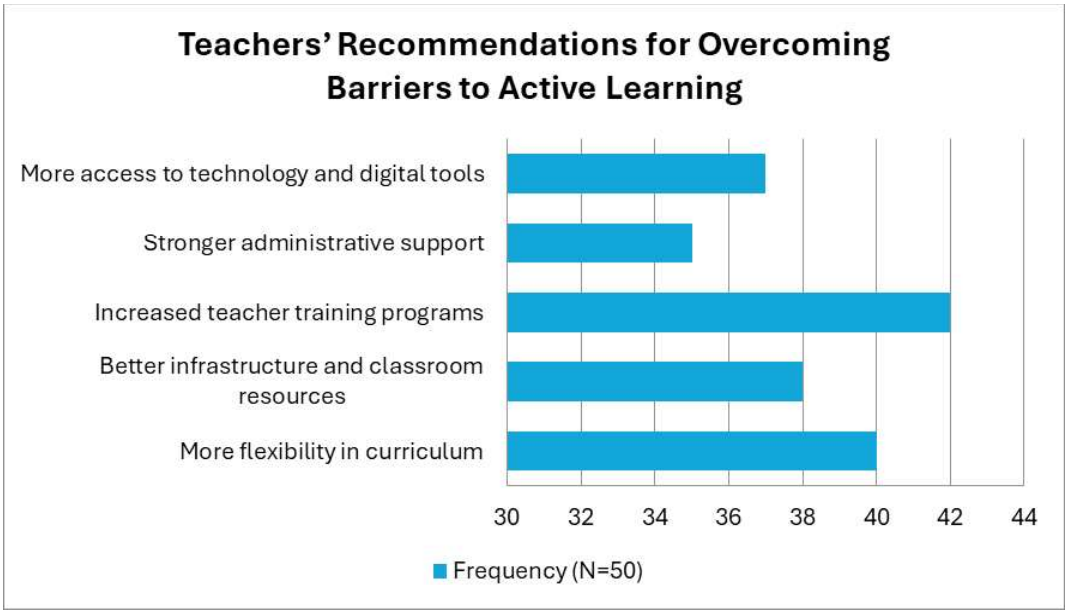
Institutional Barriers	Frequency (N=50)	Percentage (%)
Rigid curriculum structure	39	78%
Lack of teacher training on active learning	36	72%
Resistance to pedagogical innovations	28	56%
Administrative restrictions	30	60%
Heavy workload limits innovation	32	64%



The data suggests that 78% of teachers feel constrained by a rigid curriculum that does not allow flexibility for active learning. 72% report a lack of formal training, while 64% cite heavy workloads as a barrier to adopting new teaching strategies. 60% mention administrative restrictions, and 56% note resistance to change within their institutions. These institutional factors create significant obstacles to the widespread adoption of active learning.

Table 6: Teachers' Recommendations for Overcoming Barriers to Active Learning

Recommendations	Frequency (N=50)	Percentage (%)
More flexibility in curriculum	40	80%
Better infrastructure and classroom resources	38	76%
Increased teacher training programs	42	84%
Stronger administrative support	35	70%
More access to technology and digital tools	37	74%



The majority of teachers (84%) recommend increased training programs to help them effectively implement active learning. 80% suggest a more flexible curriculum, while 76% emphasize the need for better infrastructure. 74% advocate for improved access to digital tools, and 70% seek stronger administrative support. These recommendations highlight the key areas that need improvement to foster an environment conducive to active learning in English and Social Science classrooms.

Table 7: Correlation between Time Constraints and Frequency of Active Learning Activities

Time Constraint Factors	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)
Syllabus completion pressure	-0.68	0.002
Insufficient class time for discussions	-0.72	0.001
Exam preparation focus	-0.65	0.004

The correlation analysis reveals a strong negative relationship between time constraints and the frequency of active learning activities. Syllabus pressure ($r = -0.68$, $p = 0.002$) and insufficient discussion time ($r = -0.72$, $p = 0.001$) significantly hinder active learning. A similar trend is observed with exam preparation demands ($r = -0.65$, $p = 0.004$), showing that the rigid focus on assessments limits interactive teaching methods. These findings highlight that reducing time constraints could enhance the implementation of active learning strategies.

Table 8: Correlation between Infrastructure Limitations and Student Engagement in Active Learning

Infrastructure Limitations	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)
Lack of classroom space	-0.61	0.005
Insufficient teaching aids	-0.57	0.007
Limited access to digital tools	-0.66	0.003

The results indicate a strong negative correlation between infrastructure limitations and student engagement in active learning. Limited classroom space ($r = -0.61$, $p = 0.005$) restricts movement for group activities, while insufficient teaching aids ($r = -0.57$, $p = 0.007$) reduce interactive learning opportunities. Limited digital access ($r = -0.66$, $p = 0.003$) further decreases student participation. Addressing these infrastructure barriers could significantly improve student engagement and enhance active learning experiences.

Table 9: Correlation between Institutional Support and Teachers' Adoption of Active Learning Strategies

Institutional Support Factors	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)
Availability of teacher training	0.74	0.001
Flexibility in curriculum	0.69	0.002
Administrative encouragement	0.63	0.004

A strong positive correlation is observed between institutional support and teachers' adoption of active learning. Availability of teacher training ($r = 0.74$, $p = 0.001$) has the highest correlation, indicating that better training significantly increases active learning adoption. Curriculum flexibility ($r = 0.69$, $p = 0.002$) also plays a key role, along with administrative encouragement ($r = 0.63$, $p = 0.004$). These findings suggest that providing institutional support can effectively enhance the use of active learning strategies in classrooms.

The study reveals that time constraints significantly hinder the implementation of active learning strategies in English and Social Science classrooms. A majority of teachers (76%) identify syllabus completion pressure as the primary barrier, restricting their ability to engage students in interactive activities. Additionally, 70% report that the focus on exam preparation further limits opportunities for student-centered learning. Insufficient class time for discussions (64%) and the challenge of balancing content delivery with interactive methods (60%) further highlight the difficulties teachers face in incorporating active learning.

Academic schedules also play a crucial role in shaping student engagement. The study finds that 80% of teachers believe rigid schedules prioritize content coverage over interactive teaching methods, reducing student participation. Furthermore, 74% report that fixed timetables limit flexibility for active learning,

and 72% believe frequent assessments reduce the time available for interactive teaching. Short class durations (66%) and the lack of breaks (56%) also affect student attentiveness, making it difficult to sustain engagement in active learning.

Infrastructure limitations present another major challenge. The study finds that 70% of teachers struggle with fixed seating arrangements that restrict group activities. Overcrowded classrooms (66%) and inadequate classroom space (60%) further limit active learning opportunities. Additionally, 56% cite a lack of teaching aids, while 44% report poor ventilation and lighting as factors that reduce classroom engagement.

Institutional barriers further restrict active learning adoption. A rigid curriculum structure (78%) and a lack of teacher training (72%) are among the biggest challenges. Additionally, 64% of teachers cite heavy workloads, while 60% report administrative restrictions that limit pedagogical innovation.

To address these challenges, teachers recommend increased training programs (84%), greater curriculum flexibility (80%), better classroom infrastructure (76%), improved access to digital tools (74%), and stronger administrative support (70%). Addressing these barriers could enhance the effectiveness of active learning in classrooms.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to explore the barriers to implementing active learning in English and Social Science classrooms in India, focusing on three key challenges: time constraints, infrastructure limitations, and institutional barriers. The findings revealed that these factors significantly impacted the effectiveness of interactive teaching methods, limiting opportunities for student engagement and participatory learning. Addressing these barriers is crucial to fostering a more dynamic and student-centered learning environment. Time constraints emerged as one of the major challenges, with teachers citing syllabus completion pressure, exam preparation requirements, and limited class time for discussions as significant obstacles to engaging students in active learning.

Infrastructure limitations also played a significant role in hindering active learning practices. Teachers reported issues such as fixed seating arrangements, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate classroom space, and a lack of teaching aids. Moreover, limited access to technology and unreliable internet connectivity further restricted opportunities for integrating interactive teaching methods. Institutional barriers, including a rigid curriculum structure, lack of formal training on active learning, heavy workloads, and administrative restrictions, also contributed to the challenges. Teachers suggested that curriculum reforms, professional development programs, and improved classroom infrastructure would be essential to overcoming these obstacles. By addressing these challenges and implementing recommendations such as increased teacher training, flexible curricula, and better access to digital tools, active learning could be more effectively integrated into English and Social Science classrooms.

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