Meeting the Demands of Higher Education: Examining Teaching and Learning Practices and Academic Challenges

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Abstract: This research paper investigates the current teaching and learning practices in higher education and the challenges faced by students. Higher education plays a vital role in personal and professional development, however, students often encounter various academic obstacles that impede their progress. The paper explores the causes of these challenges and proposes potential solutions, such as innovative teaching and learning approaches, that enhance student engagement and academic success. A comprehensive research methodology was used that employed quantitative and qualitative methods. A well-structured questionnaire was administered to 65 undergraduate students utilizing a 5-point Likert scale to assess their perspectives. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of five undergraduate students to gain deeper insights into the topic. The study's results indicate that the current teaching and learning practices are effective, as evidenced by the positive feedback from the students. They reported diverse teaching activities, including individual and group work, oral presentations, and research assignments. They also highlighted lecturers' encouragement of participating in class discussions and the fostering of an open communication and idea-sharing environment. These findings suggest that the current approach successfully engages students and promotes active learning. However, data analysis reveals seven primary learning challenges faced by students, including academic overload, time management, assignment burden, feeling overwhelmed, struggles with reading materials, extensive curricula, and short attention spans. These findings highlight the significant academic pressure on students and the need for increased support and resources to manage their workload effectively.

Keywords: Academic challenges, Higher education, Pedagogy, Students, Teaching and learning

1.   Introduction

Higher education plays a crucial role in shaping the intellectual, social, and economic development of individuals and society at large. With the ever-changing landscape of technology, globalization, and societal needs, the practices and challenges of teaching and learning in higher education have become increasingly complex and dynamic. While there have been significant advancements in educational theories, methods, and technologies, there are also persistent academic challenges that impede effective teaching and learning. Thus, it is essential to examine the current practices and academic challenges in higher education teaching and learning to identify potential solutions and improve the quality of education for all students.

Several studies have shown that the diversity of students in higher education has increased in recent years, which is reflected in the growing number of non-traditional students (Evitts, 2022) and students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Tkachenko, Bratland, & Johansen, 2016). This diversity poses significant challenges to the design and delivery of curricula and instructional methods, as well as to the assessment and evaluation of student learning outcomes. The development of educational programs and course materials requires comprehension of the learner's attributes and the instructional atmosphere, which can affect their educational achievement (Gronseth, Michela, & Ugwu, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial for curriculum developers to acknowledge that there is likely a wide range of learning preferences, skills, and past experiences that learners may bring to a learning environment. Additionally, the use of technology in teaching and learning has expanded rapidly with the adoption of online and blended learning, flipped classrooms, and personalized learning (Yeaton, 2018). While these innovations have potential benefits, they also present challenges related to pedagogy, student engagement, and assessment (Gillet-Swan, 2017).

Given the rapidly changing landscape of higher education and the increasingly diverse student population, teaching and learning in higher education is a complex issue that requires ongoing examination and improvement. Hence, the purpose of this research paper is to explore the current practices and academic challenges in teaching and learning in higher education. By identifying the current practices and challenges in higher education, this research hopes to contribute to the ongoing discussion and development of effective teaching and learning strategies for the benefit of all students. Recent studies have shown that there is a need for continuous improvement in higher education teaching and learning practices. For example, a study by Munna & Kalam (2021) found that the use of active learning strategies, such as collaborative learning and game-based learning, can significantly enhance student engagement and learning outcomes in higher education. Another study by Demir & Akpinar (2018) found that the integration of digital technologies, such as mobile learning, may have a positive impact on students' academic success. Students showed high levels of interest in mobile learning and perceived mobile learning as a valuable tool that could significantly increase their motivation. It is recommended that researchers and educators recognize the potential of mobile learning to positively influence academic achievement and performance, and to increase students' motivation. In addition, Pinto & Leite (2020) in their review of the usage of digital technologies in support of students' learning in higher education has found that incorporating technology into the learning process had a beneficial effect on student outcomes. Technology helped to promote a more effective and dynamic learning experience by encouraging active participation both in and outside of the classroom.

However, other research has identified various academic challenges that can impede students' learning and academic success in higher education, such as academic stress and mental health issues (Barbayannis et al., 2022; Mofatteh, 2021; Yang, 2022). This study investigates the existing gap between teaching and learning practices and the academic challenges experienced by students in the contemporary educational landscape. Despite the significant advancements made in technology and pedagogical approaches, it is crucial to examine the extent to which these developments adequately address the evolving needs of students. This paper aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the current practices of teaching and learning and identify the academic challenges faced by students, while offering insights into potential strategies to enhance the learning experience.

2.   Literature Review

Teaching and learning in higher education is a complex process that requires the integration of various teaching and learning strategies, approaches, and technologies. With the rapid growth of higher education globally, there is a growing need for higher education institutions to adopt innovative teaching and learning practices to meet the needs and expectations of diverse student groups. However, the higher education landscape faces several academic challenges that impact the quality of teaching and learning experiences for students. In this literature review, we explore the current practices and academic challenges in teaching and learning in higher education with a focus on the learning challenges faced by higher education students.

2.1   Current Practices of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Teaching and learning in higher education has undergone significant changes over the past few decades, particularly with the emergence of new technologies and a growing body of research on effective teaching practices. The current practices in teaching and learning in higher education are constantly evolving to meet the needs and expectations of the students. These practices include the use of innovative teaching and learning technologies, flipped classroom models, project-based learning, collaborative learning, and problem-based learning. In addition, the integration of digital technologies such as online platforms, multimedia resources, and social media tools has revolutionized the teaching and learning process in higher education (Henderson, Selwyn, & Aston, 2017; Mercader, & Gairín, 2020; Okoye et al., 2021; Haleem et al., 2022). These practices have been shown to enhance student engagement, motivation, and performance in higher education (Kumi-Yeboah et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2022).

One approach that has gained significant attention in recent years is active learning, which involves engaging students in the learning process through activities that encourage them to analyze, synthesize, and apply information. Active learning strategies can take many forms, including problem-based learning, group work, peer instruction, and classroom discussion. Cooper et al. (2018) proposed that active learning strategies can involve various student activities such as collaborating in pairs, collectively solving case studies, participating in role-playing tasks, engaging in debates, writing brief exercises, and practicing cooperative learning. Numerous recent studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of active learning in improving student learning outcomes across a range of disciplines. For example, a meta-analysis of over 200 studies found that students in active learning classes had higher exam scores and lower failure rates than those in traditional lecture-based classes (Freeman et al., 2014). Other studies, including Zhao et al. (2018), Kalaian et al. (2018), and Aqasa & Afaneh (2022) have also reported similar results, showing that active learning techniques have a greater impact on students.

Additionally, blended learning has become an increasingly popular approach in higher education in recent years. Blended learning combines traditional face-to-face instruction with online learning activities, such as online discussions, quizzes, and multimedia resources. Numerous recent studies have found that blended learning can be an effective approach for improving student learning outcomes (Dziuban et al., 2018; Kang & Kim, 2021; Tong et al., 2022). For example, a meta-analysis of over 30 studies found that students in blended learning classes had higher learning outcomes than those in traditional face-to-face classes (Yu et al., 2022).

In addition, flipped classroom is another approach that has gained popularity in higher education. In a flipped classroom, students watch pre-recorded lectures or complete online activities before coming to class, and class time is used for discussion, problem-solving, and other active learning activities. Recent research has shown that the flipped classroom approach can be effective in improving student learning outcomes (Fan et al., 2021; Aidoo et al., 2022).
van Alten et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis that explores the effectiveness of the flipped classroom approach on learning outcomes and satisfaction in various educational contexts. The study analyzed 69 articles published between 2012 and 2018 and found that the flipped classroom approach was generally associated with improved learning outcomes and satisfaction. The study suggested that the flipped classroom approach can be an effective instructional strategy for enhancing student learning and satisfaction across a range of educational settings.

Microlearning is another approach that has gained popularity in recent years, particularly in corporate training and professional development, but is also being used in higher education (Leong et al., 2021; Sankaranarayanan et al., 2022). Microlearning involves breaking down content into small, easily digestible units or modules that can be delivered through a variety of media, such as videos, podcasts, infographics, or short quizzes. Research has shown that microlearning can be an effective approach for improving learning outcomes, particularly when used to reinforce previously learned material or to introduce new concepts in a manageable way (Mohammed et al, 2018). Salleh et al. (2022) in their study found that microlearning has been shown to be effective in boosting students' interest and motivation in their learning, ultimately leading to better learning outcomes. Another study by Lee at al. (2021) found that learners who participate in a mobile microlearning course experienced

a boost in their knowledge level, gained more confidence in making decisions related to practical applications, and exhibited an increase in proficiency and self-assurance in performing related skills. One advantage of microlearning is that it can be delivered in a variety of formats, making it accessible to a wide range of learners with different learning styles and preferences. Microlearning can also be delivered on-demand, allowing students to access content when they need it and at their convenience. The results of these studies indicate that microlearning as an innovative instructional pedagogy can effectively enhance various aspects of learners' academic performance, including their comprehension of the subject matter, motivation, engagement, confidence, and learning outcomes. These positive effects are evidenced by the observed increase in learners' knowledge level, as well as their improved performance in various learning tasks and assessments.

In recent years, education has witnessed rapid transformation due to technological advancements and the adoption of innovative teaching methodologies. However, it is essential to critically examine the effectiveness of these practices in meeting academic needs and overcoming the challenges faced by students. This paper aims to contribute to the existing body of literature by identifying the gap between current teaching and learning practices and the academic challenges encountered by students. By addressing this gap, educators and policymakers can devise more targeted interventions to foster an optimal learning environment.

Previous studies have highlighted the significance of aligning teaching practices with the changing needs and preferences of students (Roßnagel et al., 2021). However, a comprehensive analysis of the current landscape reveals a gap between the theoretical frameworks and the actual experiences of students in the classroom (Hailikari et al., 2022). The digital revolution has paved the way for new instructional methods, such as online learning platforms, adaptive learning technologies, and gamified approaches (Joosten et al., 2020). While these innovations offer promising possibilities, it is imperative to assess their impact on addressing the persistent academic challenges faced by students.

2.2 Academic Challenges among Students

Despite the adoption of innovative teaching and learning practices in higher education, there are several academic challenges that impact the quality of teaching and learning experiences for students. These challenges include language barriers, cultural differences, learning disabilities, and mental health issues (Koivuniemi et al., 2017). Language barriers can impede the learning process for non-native English speakers, while cultural differences can impact the learning environment for international students (Nazir & Özçiçek, 2022). Learning disabilities such as dyslexia, ADHD, and autism can affect students' academic performance and participation in class activities. Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress can also impact students' academic performance and well-being (Pascoe et al., 2021). In addition to these challenges, there are other academic challenges that impact the quality of teaching and learning experiences for students, such as lack of academic preparation, lack of motivation, and lack of critical thinking skills (Fadhlullah, & Ahmad, 2020). Students who lack academic preparation may struggle to engage with the course content and participate in class activities, while those lacking motivation may be less willing to learn and engage in the learning process. Additionally, students with insufficient critical thinking skills may face challenges when it comes to analyzing, evaluating, and applying course content in real-world scenarios.

2.2.1 Academic Overload Problems among Students

Another challenge faced by students in higher education is academic overload. Academic overload refers to the situation where students are overwhelmed with the amount of academic work they have to do, including assignments, essays, exams, and readings (Kamel, 2018). Academic overload can lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout, which can negatively impact students' academic performance and well-being (Pascoe et al., 2020; Ismail, 2022). Academic overload can also affect students' ability to engage with the course content, participate in class activities, and effectively learn the relevant materials (Ezeonwumelu, & Eduwem, 2021).

Several factors contribute to academic overload among students in higher education. These factors include the increasing demands and expectations of higher education institutions, the pressure

to excel academically, and the need to balance academic work with personal and social commitments (Reddy, Menon, & Thattil, 2018; Flores, 2021). In addition, the transition from secondary school to higher education can be challenging for students, as they have to adjust to new teaching and learning environments, academic standards, and expectations (Thompson, Pawson, & Evans, 2021). Addressing academic overload requires a comprehensive and strategic approach that involves collaboration between students, faculty, and higher education institutions. Strategies to address academic overload include providing students with time-management skills, effective study techniques, and resources to manage stress and anxiety (Kaur, 2019). Higher education institutions can also implement policies to reduce academic workload, such as by addressing the affective needs of students, rather than solely focusing on cognitive development. This holistic approach is necessary for the cognitive and socio-emotional growth of young learners. It is important to always prioritize the learner in the education system and maintain a learner-centered approach. Ezeonwumelu & Eduwem (2021) emphasized that educators should break down the curriculum into simpler, more manageable units to allow students to learn at their own pace, which can help reduce academic frustration and burn-out.

Previous studies have demonstrated that academic overload is a significant academic challenge faced by students in higher education. Academic overload can lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout, which can negatively impact students' academic performance and well-being. Addressing academic overload requires a comprehensive and strategic approach that involves collaboration between students, faculty, and higher education institutions. Strategies to address academic overload include providing students with time-management skills, effective study techniques, and resources to manage stress and anxiety, as well as implementing policies to reduce academic workload.

3.   Research Method

This study aimed to address two key research questions: (1) What are the current teaching and learning practices in higher education? and (2) What are the academic challenges faced by higher education students? The research design employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods by utilizing a survey with a 5-point Likert scale and an interview protocol. To ensure the robustness of the research instruments, two experts were consulted for evaluation regarding the content of the questionnaire and interview protocol. A purposive sampling strategy was employed in selecting 65 undergraduate students from the Faculty of Education at a public university. Participants were required to meet specific inclusion criteria, which entailed being full-time students currently enrolled in the Faculty of Education. Students who had not completed at least one full semester of study were excluded from the study. The quantitative data were collected through an online survey administered via email, with participants allotted approximately 20 minutes to complete it. The survey comprised closed-ended questions to facilitate statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution were employed to identify patterns and trends in the data. In addition, qualitative data were obtained through interviews conducted with five undergraduate students. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data, enabling the identification of recurring themes and patterns within the participants' responses. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. The study received approval from the research ethics committee to ensure adherence to ethical guidelines. Participants were provided with an information sheet that outlined the study's purpose, their rights as participants, and how their data would be used. Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to their participation. The collected data were treated with utmost confidentiality and anonymity, with any identifiable information removed prior to analysis. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any penalties. The researcher took necessary precautions to ensure the participants' well-being and prevent any harm throughout the duration of the study.

4.   Findings

The findings of the study are divided into three sections which are demographic profile and findings based on the two research questions.

4.1   Demographic Profile

The demographic profile of the respondents was presented by considering their gender, year of study, and current CGPA. Table 1 provides a summary of these findings.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (100%)
Male	45	69.2
Female	20	30.8
Year of Study	Frequency (n)	Percentage (100%)
Year 2	1	1.5
Year 3	38	58.5
Year 4	26	40
Current CGPA	Frequency (n)	Percentage (100%)
Below 3.0	1	1.5
3.0-3.49	30	46.1
3.5 and above	34	52.3
Total	65	100

4.2   Research Question 1

The first research question sought to investigate the current methods and approaches used in teaching and learning in higher education. This includes exploring the instructional strategies, technologies, and tools used to facilitate student learning, as well as the practices that shape the overall learning environment. By examining these practices, this research aimed to provide insights into the ways in which higher education institutions can improve their teaching and learning methods to enhance student engagement, academic achievement, and overall satisfaction with their educational experiences. This research can be useful for educators, administrators, and policymakers in higher education institutions to identify best practices and areas for improvement in their teaching and learning methods, which can ultimately lead to better outcomes for students and a more effective higher education system.

Table 2 below provides information about the average scores of current teaching and learning practices in higher education. The table includes various factors that contribute to teaching and learning and the mean scores represent the average rating given by participants in the study. This information could be helpful for researchers or educators who want to understand how current teaching and learning practices are perceived and where improvements can be made. The findings from Table 2 suggest that the students agree that their lecturers use a diverse range of teaching activities, including individual and group work, oral presentations, and research. The mean score for this agreement was 4.49, with a standard deviation of 0.710. Furthermore, the students believed that a wider variety of resources, such as online platforms, media resources, and social networks, contribute to their successful learning experiences, with a mean score of 4.45 and a standard deviation of 0.708. Additionally, the students agreed that their lecturers encouraged active participation in class and created an environment where sharing of ideas and knowledge is encouraged, with a mean score of 4.45 and a standard deviation of 0.708. The results indicate that the students appreciated the variety of teaching methods and resources used by their lecturers. They felt that this approach helped to create a more engaging and successful learning experience. The findings also suggest that the lecturers were effective in encouraging active participation and creating a supportive learning environment that promotes the sharing of ideas and knowledge. These results could be useful for educators who seek to improve their teaching methods and provide a better learning experience for their students.

Table 2. Mean Scores of Current Practices of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Items	Mean	Std. Dev	N
Lecturers use a wide variety of resources (online platforms, media resources, social networks)	4.43	.706	65
Lecturers use a variety of teaching methodologies that help to achieve the objectives	4.34	.776	65
Lecturers use a wide variety of teaching activities (individual and group work, oral presentations, research).	4.49	.710	65
Lecturers often conduct activities that encourage me to think critically	4.31	.789	65
I learn successfully when a wider variety of resources (online platforms, media resources, social networks) are used.	4.45	.708	65
Lecturers guide and support me to learn autonomously	4.23	.786	65
Knowledge transfer supplied with excessive workload	3.88	.992	65
Lecturer provides teaching with appropriate practical examples	4.25	.791	65
Lecturer encourages students to share their ideas and knowledge	4.45	.708	65
Lecturer opens new learning opportunities	4.35	.779	65
Lecturer always provide prompt feedback after assessment	4.25	.830	65
Lecturer encourages active participation in class	4.45	.685	65
Lecturer provides us task that stimulates our interest	4.25	.730	65
Lecturer uses variety of teaching aids (visual aids, texts, online materials)	4.35	.779	65
There are a lot of useful in-class activities (e.g. groups, simulations, demonstrations)	4.35	.799	65

In order to gather diverse perspectives on the current teaching and learning approaches employed in higher education, five students were interviewed, and their feedback shed light on the different methods used in their classes. According to the students' responses, it was evident that certain courses provided a range of learning experiences that went beyond traditional lectures. This study revealed that students were exposed to a diverse range of learning experiences in their classes. These experiences encompassed engaging in group discussions, participating in collaborative projects, delivering presentations, analyzing case studies, participating in simulations, and observing demonstrations. These interactive activities were seen as beneficial by the students, as they provided them with opportunities to actively participate in their learning, apply theoretical concepts to real-world scenarios, and develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Such multifaceted experiences not only enhanced student engagement but also fostered a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

However, the study also revealed a notable concern raised by three of the interviewed students regarding the reliance on traditional teaching methods by certain lecturers. These students expressed their observation that some instructors heavily relied on lecturing and predominantly used slides as the primary instructional tool. According to these students, this approach limited their opportunities for active participation and engagement in the learning process. They felt that a more interactive and engaging instructional approach could have greatly enhanced their learning experience. Specifically, they felt that incorporating hands-on activities, interesting videos, thought-provoking questions, intellectual games, and real-life problems would have been more effective in promoting their understanding and engagement with the subject matter. These insights highlight the importance of incorporating diverse and interactive teaching methods that encourage student participation to promote a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

By including the students' perspectives on both the positive aspects and the drawbacks of the teaching and learning approaches, this study underscores the importance of incorporating a variety of instructional methods in higher education. It highlights the need for a balanced approach that combines interactive activities, collaborative learning, and effective use of technology, while minimizing overdependence on lectures and slides.

4.3   Research Question 2

The second research question seeks to investigate the various academic difficulties and obstacles that higher education students encounter during their studies. These academic challenges can encompass a wide range of factors that may impact students' learning and academic performance. By examining these issues, this research aims to provide insights into the complex academic landscape of higher education and the ways in which students navigate and cope with the challenges they face. This research can be useful for educators, administrators, and policymakers in higher education institutions to identify areas where they can provide more support to students and help them succeed in their academic pursuits.

Table 3 below illustrates the mean for academic challenges experienced by students in higher education. The data provides an overview of the most common academic challenges faced by higher education students to help researchers or educators identify areas where students may need more support or intervention. The data presented in Table 3 reveals that students prioritize the need for lecturers to incorporate engaging and entertaining activities into their classes, with the highest mean rating of 3.65 and a standard deviation of 1.082. Additionally, students reported feeling burdened by assignments (mean = 3.25, SD = 1.146) and overwhelmed by the academic demands of pursuing a degree (mean = 3.20, SD = 1.135). The survey also found that students often struggled with the amount of required reading materials (mean = 3.15, SD = 1.265) and felt weighed down by the length of their courses/curriculum (mean = 3.09, SD = 1.169), leading to a sense of academic overload (mean = 3.09, SD = 1.027). Notably, many students acknowledged having a short attention span (mean = 3.06, SD = 1.248). Overall, the findings suggest that the students faced significant academic pressure and would benefit from increased support and resources to manage their workload effectively.

Table 3. Mean Scores of Academic Challenges

Items	Mean	Std. Dev	N
I have poor study habits	3.00	1.186	65
I rarely talk in the classroom	2.83	1.084	65
Some of my lecturers make me feel intimidated to participate in group activities	2.52	1.077	65
Some of my lecturers are inefficient in teaching	2.51	1.002	65
Some of my lecturers are unapproachable	2.38	.995	65
I have difficulty in expressing my thoughts and ideas in my class	2.98	1.125	65
I have difficulty in communication skills	2.58	1.088	65
I lack focus and cannot concentrate in the class	2.72	1.023	65
I lack interest in my studies	2.38	.995	65
I lack motivation in my studies	2.55	1.046	65
I am often absent/tardy from my classes	1.72	.820	65
I have poor academic performance	2.28	.944	65
I have very strict lecturers	2.49	.937	65
I often feel burdened with assignments	3.25	1.146	65
I often feel overwhelmed/burdened with the amount of reading materials	3.15	1.265	65
I find it's hard to be an active learner in a classroom	2.91	1.182	65
I feel burdened with the lengthy courses/curriculum	3.09	1.169	65
I feel there is a lack of activity in a classroom	2.58	1.130	65
I have difficulty understanding certain topics	2.98	1.068	65
My class is heavily lecture based	2.65	1.037	65
I find lecture method less effective	2.58	.934	65
I have short attention span	3.06	1.248	65
I wish lecturers can integrate more interesting and fun activities in the class	3.65	1.082	65
There is lack of opportunity to participate in the classroom	2.62	.995	65
I often feel bored in the classroom due to the way my lecturers teach	2.77	1.057	65

Items	Mean	Std. Dev	N
I spend a lot of time reading materials related to the courses	2.82	.934	65
I am very passive in the classroom	2.88	1.068	65
I often feel overwhelmed by the academic requirements or responsibilities while pursuing a degree at university	3.20	1.135	65
I have difficulty managing my time	3.02	1.179	65
I often experience academic overload	3.09	1.027	65

The interviews conducted shed light on a significant issue faced by students, which was academic overload that led to burnout, decreased motivation, and difficulties in concentration. This shared sentiment among all five students underscores the importance of lecturers demonstrating greater understanding and empathy towards the challenges students encounter. The students expressed a need for lecturers to acknowledge the heavy workload and pressures they face. They emphasized that a more empathetic approach from instructors can greatly contribute to their well-being and overall academic performance. By recognizing the demands on students' time and mental resources, lecturers can foster a supportive learning environment that encourages engagement and alleviates the negative effects of academic overload.

These insights highlight the significance of considering students' perspectives and well-being when designing and delivering courses. It is crucial for lecturers to take into account the workload and potential impact on student mental health when structuring assignments, assessments, and overall course requirements. By creating a balance between academic rigor and student well-being, educators can promote a positive and conducive learning experience that nurtures student motivation, engagement, and overall success. These student perspectives highlight the importance of thoughtful assignment design and variety in assessment methods. By incorporating a wider range of assignment types and aligning them with specific learning outcomes, instructors can create a more engaging and enriching learning experience. By reducing repetition and offering diverse opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding and skills, the learning process can be more dynamic and rewarding. Furthermore, the students' call for lecturers to be understanding and considerate of their workload and mental well-being emphasizes the need for a balanced and supportive learning environment.

5.   Discussion

The results of the study provide evidence that the current teaching and learning practices are effective in engaging students and promoting active learning. The positive feedback from students regarding the use of a diverse range of teaching activities, including individual and group work, oral presentations, and research assignments, supports the notion that employing multiple methods of instruction can lead to increased student engagement and achievement (Lewis-Kipkulei et al., 2021; Farashahi, & Tajeddin, 2018). For example, Lewis-Kipkulei et al. (2021) found that a combination of roundtable discussion and flipped classroom curriculum model led to higher levels of student engagement and achievement among occupational therapy (OT) doctorate and special education (SPED) undergraduate students. The study revealed that this teaching strategy not only enhances student engagement but also facilitates the development of critical thinking skills, boosts confidence, and improves collaborative abilities among peers. Similarly, Farashahi & Tajeddin (2018) reported that a variety of teaching methods, including case studies and simulations, were effective in promoting student learning outcomes in business courses. The results showed that simulations were the most effective teaching method for improving students' understanding and application of course material, followed by case studies and then lectures. Simulations and case studies were found to be particularly effective in developing students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills, while lectures were found to be less effective in this regard.

In addition, the use of a variety of resources, including online platforms and social networks, has been shown to support student learning and engagement (Abuhassna et al., 2020; Ansari & Khan, 2020; Alalwan, 2022). For instance, Abuhassna et al. (2020) found that the use of online platforms for collaborative learning activities led to increased student engagement and achievement among 243 students in higher education. Ansari & Khan (2020) and Alalwan (2022) reported that the integration of social media tools facilitated student interaction and communication, leading to improved learning

outcomes. This indicates that a well-designed integration of social media tools into the teaching and learning process can foster a dynamic and interactive learning environment that better engages students and enables them to learn more effectively. This can ultimately lead to improved academic performance, as students are more likely to be motivated and invested in their learning experience. Therefore, it is important for educators to consider incorporating social media tools into their teaching strategies to enhance their learning experience and promote better academic outcomes for their students. Moreover, the finding that students feel encouraged to participate in class discussions and to share their ideas and knowledge aligns with the concept of participatory learning environments, which have been found to promote student motivation and academic achievement (Dastyar, 2019). Philominraj et al. (2020) reported that a participatory learning environment that emphasizes active engagement from students, such as group work, discussions, peer interaction and feedback and other interactive activities, rather than passive listening and note-taking enhance learning outcomes in a language course. Philominraj et al. (2020) argued that this method promotes a more inclusive and engaging classroom environment that benefits all students, regardless of their language proficiency. Xu, Wang, & Wang (2023) conducted a meta-analysis of empirical literature to examine the effectiveness of collaborative problem-solving in promoting critical thinking skills among students. The study found that collaborative learning activities that encouraged students to share their ideas and perspectives led to improved critical thinking skills. This indicates that by creating an atmosphere of open communication and idea-sharing, lecturers can facilitate a more interactive and collaborative learning experience, which can lead to deeper understanding and improved critical thinking skills. Overall, these findings suggest that the current approach to teaching and learning is successful in engaging students and promoting active learning. By employing diverse teaching activities, utilizing a variety of resources, and fostering a participatory learning environment, lecturers can create a more engaging and effective learning experience for their students.

In addition, this research also examined the challenges that higher education students face and found that academic pressure is a significant challenge for students. The findings indicated seven primary learning challenges that students face in higher education, including academic overload, time management, burden of assignments, feeling overwhelmed by academic demands, struggling with the volume of required reading materials, being weighed down by the length of their courses/curriculum, and having a short attention span. These challenges can lead to a sense of academic overload and may result in negative outcomes such as stress, anxiety, and burnout. Academic overload is a common issue for higher education students, with many students feeling overwhelmed by the volume of work required for their courses. A study by Ng, Chiu, Fong (2016) found that academic overload was a significant predictor of academic stress among university students. The study uncovered that experiencing high levels of academic stress can have a detrimental effect on academic performance. Furthermore, this stress can also lead to a host of other issues, such as internet addiction, insufficient sleep, changes in dietary behavior, and mental health problems. Similarly, the study by Ismail (2022) found that academic overload was a significant predictor of academic burnout that can negatively impact the students' quality of life (QOL) and consequently impact their psychological and physical well-being.

Students may also struggle with time management, which can exacerbate feelings of overload and make it difficult to balance academic work with other responsibilities. A systematic review and meta-analysis study by Ahmadi and colleagues (2021) found that time management was a significant predictor of academic failure among students. The burden of assignments and the pressure to perform well academically can also be challenging for students, particularly those who are juggling multiple courses or have other commitments outside of school. Ahmadi et al. (2021) found that academic stress was positively associated with academic performance expectations among university students. Overall, these recent studies suggest that academic overload, time management, and the burden of assignments and pressure to perform well academically continue to be significant challenges for higher education students. Providing students with support and resources to manage these challenges is crucial for their academic success and overall well-being.

The findings also reveal that the majority of students reported having a short attention span, which can make it difficult to stay focused on coursework and may lead to procrastination or poor time management. Recent research supports the idea that students' attention spans can be a significant challenge for academic success. The level of concentration a student possesses is a significant factor that impacts the quality of their learning. As students advance to higher levels of education, such as

university, their concentration tends to decrease in the classroom (Le, 2021). This lack of focus can pose challenges for instructors attempting to engage students at this level and may also hinder students' ability to achieve their desired outcomes. Similarly, a study by Aziz and colleagues (2017) found that attentional control was a significant predictor of academic procrastination among university students. This may be particularly problematic in today's digital age, where distractions such as social media and mobile devices can make it even harder for students to concentrate. These digital distractions frequently lead to reduced attention and engagement in class, resulting in diminished academic performance and overall learning outcomes (Wang et al., 2022). Another study by Muslikah, Mulawarman, & Andriyani (2018) found that social media use was positively associated with academic procrastination among university students. These recent studies highlight the challenges that many students face in maintaining their focus and attention on academic tasks, especially in the face of modern technological distractions. It underscores the importance of employing teaching and learning strategies that cater to the needs of the students. Employing teaching and learning strategies that cater to the needs of the students, such as microlearning, is essential in today's digital age, where many students continue to experience difficulties in sustaining their focus and engagement when presented with academic materials (Cicekci & Sadik, 2019). Traditional classroom lectures and long-form content are no longer sufficient to engage and retain learners. Therefore, educators must incorporate interactive and engaging microlearning modules into their teaching practices to create effective learning experiences.

6.   Conclusion

The findings of this study contribute to the field of higher education by shedding light on the effectiveness of current teaching and learning practices and identifying specific academic challenges faced by students. By addressing the gap between current teaching and learning practices and academic challenges, this study aims to provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers. The findings will contribute to the ongoing discourse on improving instructional strategies, curricular design, and support systems to enhance the educational experiences of students in the digital age. By bridging this gap, we can work towards cultivating an inclusive and effective learning environment that caters to the needs of all students. Teaching and learning in higher education is a complex process that requires the integration of various teaching and learning strategies, approaches, and technologies. While innovative teaching and learning practices have been shown to enhance student engagement, motivation, and performance in higher education, there are several academic challenges that impact the quality of teaching and learning experiences for students. These challenges include feeling burdened by assignments, feeling overwhelmed by the academic demands, struggling with the volume of required reading materials, and being weighed down by the length of their courses/curriculum, which can lead to a sense of academic overload. In addition, many students reported having a short attention span, which is also a challenge. According to Ismail (2022), academic overload can result in feelings of anxiety, stress, and even burnout, which can have a negative impact on students' academic performance and well-being.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and holistic approach that takes into account the diverse needs and expectations of the students. The findings from this study suggest that addressing these challenges requires a collaborative effort between institutions, educators, and students. By creating a supportive and inclusive academic environment and adopting innovative teaching methods, higher education institutions can help students overcome these challenges and achieve academic success. Creating a supportive and inclusive academic environment is essential for students to feel comfortable and thrive in higher education. This includes providing resources such as counselling, mentorship programs, and academic support services. Recent research has shown that creating an inclusive academic environment can improve students' learning and motivation (Li & Singh, 2022). In addition to creating a supportive environment, adopting innovative teaching methods can also help students overcome academic challenges. For instance, active learning strategies such as flipped classrooms, problem-based learning, collaborative learning and microlearning can increase student engagement and improve learning outcomes. Furthermore, the use of technology such as online resources and educational games has been shown to improve teaching and students' learning (Kumar, Singh, & Kumar, 2022). Overall, creating a supportive and inclusive academic environment and

adopting innovative teaching methods are essential for helping students overcome academic challenges and achieve success in higher education.

7.   Co-Author Contribution

The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. The conception and design of the study involved the contribution of all authors. The initial author was responsible for conducting the literature review and data analysis, as well as drafting the manuscript. Afterwards, the second author played a crucial role in critically revising the manuscript to ensure its completeness.

8.   Acknowledgement

9.   References

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