
Using active methodologies in the Political Science and International Relations classrooms in Spain: Views from instructors

El uso de metodologías activas en las aulas de Ciencia Política y Relaciones Internacionales en España: las opiniones de los profesores

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Abstract

This paper highlights the classroom use of active methodologies in Political Science and International Relations in a Spanish setting. Using both surveys and in-depth interviews, it examines how extensively active methodologies are used in Spanish universities, what professors understand active methodologies to be, and how are they implemented in the classrooms. Most importantly, it seeks to understand the instructional transition made by professors that started off their professional careers as lecturers and, subsequently, decided they wanted to include active methodologies as a meaningful part of their courses. Results show an extensive use of active methodologies, although instructional choices are often made without prior pedagogical expertise, nor a proper evaluation of the student's learning experience. We conclude with some suggestions on policy recommendations that would increase the quality of teaching and improve the learning outcomes in the classrooms.

Keywords: active methodologies, teaching and learning, instructional choices.

Resumen

El artículo explora el uso de las metodologías activas en las aulas de Ciencia Política y Relaciones Internacionales en España. La investigación se sirve tanto de encuestas como de entrevistas en profundidad con el fin de averiguar cuán extendido está su uso, qué entienden los docentes por el concepto de metodologías activas y cómo se implementan en las aulas. Asimismo, se pretende entender qué factores determinaron la transición llevada a cabo por profesores que comenzaron su andadura profesional impartiendo clases magistrales y, en un momento determinado, decidieron

incluir las metodologías activas como una sustantiva de sus cursos. Los resultados muestran un uso extensivo de las metodologías activas, aunque las elecciones se suelen tomar sin un conocimiento pedagógico previo ni tampoco con una adecuada evaluación del proceso de aprendizaje por parte del alumno. Se concluye con una serie de recomendaciones encaminadas a mejorar la calidad del proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje en las aulas.

Palabras clave: metodologías activas, enseñanza y aprendizaje, elecciones pedagógicas.

INTRODUCTION: A NEW EDUCATION FOR CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

The 1990s brought about a feeling of dissatisfaction with the mission of higher education in the United States. According to the Kellogg Commission, higher education was increasingly perceived as “unresponsive [...], out of touch and out of date” (Kellogg Commission, 1999: 9). Boyer determined universities were suffering from a “crisis of purpose” (Boyer, 1990: 55) and called for the concept of scholarship to be broadened to include other knowledge creation functions besides research/discovery-, namely-, integration, application, and teaching. Boyer argued that the University’s mission should cater to all these dimensions. Thus, by including teaching as a form of scholarship, Boyer highlighted its importance within higher education. While the causes of this crisis in higher education fall beyond the scope of this paper, it was in general, a response to the societal changes propelled by technology and employability and a perception that universities were not properly adapting to change.

This paper will focus on one of the consequences this identity crisis has had for higher education: the paradigm shift from a teacher-to a student-centered approach (Hansen and Stephens, 2000). This transformation has in general brought increased attention to the scholarship of teaching and learning, and this has also influenced the disciplines of Political Science and International Relations, as evidenced by the relatively recent emergence of journals and conferences devoted to teaching. Moore (2011) notes that from 2002, *PS: Political Science and Politics* started to include a section entitled “The Teacher,” while in 2004 APSA began its Teaching and Learning Conference, and one year later it also launched *The Journal of Political Science Education*.

The shift to a student-centered learning environment conveys a change in methodologies to modes of instruction akin to a constructivist conception of education. Constructivism’s original idea establishes that “knowledge and learning do not derive from a direct reading of reality or experience, but that both —reality and experience— are the result of a constructive mental activity of the individual” (Coll, 2001: 20). Learning, the theory goes, is more than an active and constructive process, but also an individual and internal process. It is individual because “students must accomplish their own process, both in the construction of meaning and in sense-giving; no-one can substitute them in this task. It is internal because learning is not the result

of a mere understanding of experience, but the upshot of a complicated construction process that implies the modification and reorganization both of the cognitive instruments and the models that serve the purpose of interpreting reality” (*ibid.*: 57).¹

Even though active methodologies are not exclusive to constructivist notions of education and are also used in other non-traditional teaching and learning paradigms, the last two decades have brought their heyday. Active learning is much discussed but to what extent is it a widespread across the Political Science and International Relations classrooms in Spain? This paper seeks to provide a state of the art of the use of active methodologies in the Political Science and International Relations classrooms of Spanish universities. To enhance this goal, this paper will explore:

- The extent to which they are used.
- What do professors understand by the notion of “active methodologies”.
- How they are implemented in the classroom and the existing structural and agency obstacles for their use.
- To understand the reasons underlying the instructional transition made by professors that started their careers lecturing and, at a certain moment, decided to include active learning methodologies as an integral part of their courses.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we explore the state of the art regarding active methodologies, their efficiency in enhancing student learning, and the breadth of their use. We then move on to the method and case selection to explain how the surveys and interviews were conducted and the thematic analysis applied to the data obtained. In the subsequent sections, we present the results showing the abovementioned aims and, lastly, we provide some policy recommendations that offer suggestions about how to move forward in order to improve the quality of university teaching in the Political Science and International Relations Spanish classrooms.

WHAT IS ACTIVE LEARNING?

As with many other concepts in social sciences, there is no agreed upon definition of active learning in the educational literature (Prince, 2004; Bonwell and Eison, 1991). Bonwell and Eison’s literature review on the topic for the annual ASCHE-ERIC Higher Education report identify a series of strategies usually associated with active learning (Bonwell and Eison, 1991: 19), as follows:

1. Students are involved in more than listening.
2. Less emphasis is placed on transmitting information and more on developing student’s skills.

1. Own translation from the original in Spanish.

3. Students are involved in higher-order thinking —analysis, synthesis, and evaluation— (Chickering and Camson, 1987 quoted in Bonwell and Eison, 1991: iii)
4. Students are engaged in activities (e.g., reading, discussing, writing).
5. Greater emphasis is placed on student’s exploration of their own attitudes and values.

From this point of departure, they suggest the following definition: “anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing” (Bonwell and Eison: 1991: 19). This view of active learning encompasses two dimensions which are inextricably linked. First, an activity in which the student is engaged with *doing* a certain task. Second, a closing activity to reflect upon what has been done. In more technical language, active learning involves doing something, and a further process of metacognition in which there is a reflection on the learning process.

The teacher-centered model has become known as “traditional learning” and has been characterized as “passive”, since the process of learning is understood as knowledge absorption or recording. The responsibility for learning is vested in the teacher and in what he does —or does not!— teach (Michael, 2006: 160). This labeling of “traditional” learning as “passive” is not without criticism, because many instructors claim that “all learning is inherently active and that students are therefore actively involved while listening to formal presentations” (Bonwell and Eison, 1991: iii).

A learning paradigm grounded on active methodologies involves a change in the educational sphere that comprises the following:

A change in the roles of professors and students

Instructors are no longer the “sage on stage” but the “guide on the side”. Their task is meant to be one of “facilitators” who create an appropriate environment to enhance student education. Some even see this shift as going beyond methodology to encompass a moral endeavor where the purpose of the facilitator is to enhance student growth (Hansen and Stephen, 2000: 45). For their part, learners are the actors of their own learning process. They are required to shift from a mental experience of knowledge assimilation to one of inquiry (Anthony, 1996).

A change in teaching techniques

Traditional teaching techniques include “lecture, lecture-based recitation questions, reading assignments” (Powner and Allendoerfer, 2008: 76) and “closed questions, and practice and application of information already presented” (Anthony, 1996: 350) Following Bonwell and Eison’s (1991) definition, active learning comprises a broader spectrum of possibilities encompassing “anything” including activity and reflection on learning. This includes problem-solving, investigational work, small group work,

collaborative learning, and experiential learning (Anthony, 1996). In Political Science and IR simulations, and discussions are widely used too.

IS ACTIVE LEARNING “SUPERIOR” TO TRADITIONAL LEARNING?

According to Kember’s literature review, most scholars believe the student-centered approach to be “superior” (1997: 261). On the other hand, Prince’s (2004) seminal article provides a review of the active learning literature in engineering, and he concludes that all the different modalities explored (active learning during lecture, collaborative learning, cooperative learning, and problem-based learning) have positive outcomes in learning. Michael’s (2006) contribution on another literature review assessment on active learning in the disciplines of the learning sciences of physics, chemistry, biology, and physiology shows that there is evidence active learning works both in middle school and in higher education. Michael contends that this success can be explained because students learn more when they are with others, rather than alone (*ibid.*: 161). The latter claim is also corroborated by Landemore (2012) in Political Science, where she shows that even though people can be mediocre individual reasoners, they might be good problem solvers when engaged in collective decision-making.

In IR we don’t have a meta-study nor an extensive literature review on the matter to sustain claims such as the ones made in natural sciences and engineering. Isolated case studies, seem to confirm that learning is enhanced when using active methodologies (Powner and Allendoerfer, 2008). When looking at simulations, the most widely used active methodology in our discipline, despite problems measuring their validity², several scholars have pointed out in their single case studies that, if done well, they improve student learning (Baranowski, 2007; Bernstein and Meizlish, 2003). Ferreiro’s (2020) IR literature review on simulations shows that there is a clear increase in student motivation. Motivation is something intrinsically positive for learning because “well-motivated students are generally more curious about the topic, choose more difficult tasks, are more ready to invest effort in learning in a sustained way, and are more emotionally involved in participating in learning activities” (Deci *et al.*, 1991: 327 quoted in Mikalayeva, 2016: 215).³ However, motivation should not be over-emphasized, as there is a gap between the subjective perception students have of their learning and the actual learning outcomes (Ferreiro, 2020). In the results section, specifically, on “Reasons for using active methodologies”, the reader will find further elaboration on the distance between perception of learning and actual learning.

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2. There are two main problems for assessing simulations: First, the generalized absence of control groups. Second, the measurement of learning with pre and post-test has a learning effect.
 3. Mikalayeva suggests five sources that explain increased motivation: 1) novelty effect; 2) progressive goal achievement; 3) competitiveness; 4) peer dynamics; 5) multilayered experience (Mikalayeva, 2016: 218).

DO PROFESSORS USE ACTIVE LEARNING?

Lammers and Murphy's review of the literature from the 1970s to the 1990s stresses that during those three decades, lecturing was the dominant method of college teaching and that its use increases with class size (Lammers and Murphy, 2002). In the US, throughout the 1980s "passive" learning occupied between 80% and 95% of class time (Mac Govern, 1993: 183-124, quoted in Morgan, 2033: 366).

Hartlaub and Lancaster (2008: 380) carried out a national survey in the Political Science departments of the US. They showed that 61.5% of faculty reported lecturing between 40% and 80% of the time. Whenever active learning methodologies were used, the most popular student-focused activities involved working in small groups or simulations. Hartlaub and Lancaster's findings (2008) do not show that the number of students per class, nor the personal ideology of the professor, is a relevant variable. The factors they found to have *some* effect on pedagogical choices are gender, years of experience, and rank.

Men lecture more than women (Lammers and Murphy, 2001: 56). According to Hartlaub and Lancaster's results 48% of male faculty lecture more than 61% of the time, compared with only 25% of female professors (Hartlaub and Lancaster, 2008: 382). When looking at years of experience, novices are also more predisposed towards lecturing according to Bueheler and Marcum's (2007) pilot study conducted with 12 graduate students. Their work was carried out in a large Midwestern university in the US, and it highlighted that graduate students relied on lecture even if the respondents did not consider it to be the best pedagogical tool. Moreover, there was a dissonance between the teaching philosophy of graduate instructors who considered they lectured around 50% of the time with the observations taken by the researchers which increased that figure to 75%. Non lecturing time was devoted to class discussion or class activities (Bueheler and Marcum, 2007: 32) but not to simulations, problem-based learning, collaborative or cooperative learning, or other cutting-edge active lecturing instructional methods. The gap between what people say they do and what they actually do in the classroom (Bueheler and Marcum (2007) highlights the difference between theories *of* action versus theories *in* action.

Overcoming the obstacles for implementation of proper active learning is difficult and change needs to come from beyond the classroom, at a cultural and institutional level.

TABLE 1.

SYSTEMIC OBSTACLES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVE LEARNING METHODOLOGIES

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| 1. Student learning | Learned helplessness Student appraisal |
| 2. Group Dynamics | Low tolerance for challenges Social loafing |

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 3. Environmental conditions | Political correctness |
| | Consumer attitude |
| 4. Evaluation demands | Peer evaluation anxiety |
| | Product fixation |

Source: Own elaboration based on Hansen and Stephens (2000: 42-45).

Lean *et al* (2011) focus on both the institutional and agency features that impede an effective implementation of active methodologies. Their findings show that many higher education institutions give teaching innovation a low priority (*ibid.*: 35; Krain *et al.*, 2015: 148) or only make limited resources available to use new methods (Lean *et al.*, 2011: 235). In addition, there are time constrictions, both in terms of class time needed to implement these methodologies and non-class time needed to learn new strategies (Dancey and Henderson, 2010; Froyd *et al.*, 2013; Miller and Metz, 2014 as quoted in: Wright *et al.*, 2019: 53). Beliefs held by the instructor, such as fear of the unknown or lack of awareness and/or training take their toll, too (Lean *et al.*: 2011: 235). Lastly, some pedagogues are simply satisfied with the lecturing model (*id.*; Dancey and Henderson, 2010; Froyd *et al.*, 2013; Miller and Metz, 2014 quoted in: Wright *et al.*, 2019: 53).

Given the systemic character of many of these obstacles, it is worth asking what can be done, if anything, to improve active learning implementation. Universities tend to address the issue by providing teacher training courses. For instance, training university teachers has become standard in the UK, Norway, and Sri Lanka, with programs that range from 120 to 500 hours of instruction. These are sometimes linked to probation or tenure. (Gibbs and Coffey, 2004: 88). Gibbs and Coffey conducted a study in 1999/2001 covering twenty universities in eight different countries with 104 professors taking training courses. The authors reached a threefold conclusion:

- (i) training increases the extent to which professors adopt a student focus (as measured by ASTI).
- (ii) according to students, it improves teachers teaching and
- (iii) it enhances student's learning.

In contrast, in the control group —those without training— trainees became more teaching centered after a year of teaching, students did not report better teaching of their instructors or if it happened, it was deemed negative. Lastly, no evidence could be found to suggest there was a positive change in student learning” (*ibid.*: 98).

METHOD AND CASE SELECTION

This study has applied a mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology. The quantitative methodology is based on surveys (see questions in the appendix), while the qualitative method is based on interviews.

Surveys

We have applied univariate and bivariate analysis considering the variables Hartlaub and Lancaster (2008) showed exercise *some* leverage in explaining instructional choices: gender, years of teaching experience and rank. In addition, we added type of university because, in the Spanish context, private universities emphasize their work in terms of teaching innovation, and we wanted to see if any difference could be found between public and private institutions. When exploring the obstacles professors found when applying active methodologies, we used the questions from Lean *et al.*'s study (see appendix).

The last question of the survey was an open question that asked respondents why they used active methodologies. Some comments were registered as belonging to more than one category. A code was created whenever there were more than two comments alluding to the same reality. Comments with only one response were ascribed to the category "Other".

In terms of the creation of the sample, in Spain there are 39 universities with Political Science and/or IR departments (even if for some, IR is merged with other departments). However, not all 39 universities have emails of their professors available online, nor is it possible to tell in joint departments what faculty belong to IR and which to the other discipline. A Google Forms survey was sent to 31 universities⁴. In addition, it must be highlighted that adjuncts sometimes work in several universities at the same time, so it's possible that in the email list created for the survey, the same person received the email more than once because of their affiliation with different universities.

The survey was sent to a total of 1078 people, of which twenty-four bounced back because the recipient was *unknown*. Therefore, the total number of sent and received emails was of 1054. The total number of respondents was 152 which means a turn out rate of 14,42%. There is probably a self-selection bias. It is likely instructors that enjoy teaching are the ones that have answered the survey.⁵

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4. The surveys were conducted in Spanish. The excerpts that can be seen in this paper were translated into English by the author. The following universities have studies in Political Science and/or IR but do not have their faculty list available online or if they do, they cannot be contacted via email: Universidad Alfonso X El Sabio, Universidad de Navarra, Schiller University, Universidad Villanueva, EU Business School, Universidad de Burgos. Universidad Europea only had very few emails available online. Loyola Andalucía has a list of professors but not their emails, just a contact form. As I had a colleague working in Loyola university, this person sent the email with the surveys to her peers. However, I had to exclude the rest of institutions. UNED is the distance university in Spain, and it was excluded from the list because of this characteristic).
 5. One of the reviewers pointed out the turnout rate is very low. In addition, to the self-selection bias, we hypothesize that sending the interview between the 20th and 30th June (2021) once classes had finished, might have also had an effect in terms of the number of respondents. Everyone in the sample received the same generic email stating my name and surname, where I teach, why I was getting in touch and kindly asking for 5 minutes of their time to fill out the form.

Those that responded were 58,6 % (89) male and 40,8 % (62) female; 44,7 % (67) worked in private universities while 55,3 % (83) were employed by public institutions.⁶ In terms of rank, the following table shows the distribution of the sample:

TABLE 2.
RESPONDENT'S RANK⁷

| Rank | N | % |
|-------------------------------|----|------|
| Chair, professor | 8 | 5,3 |
| Civil servant associate | 28 | 18,4 |
| Private university professor | 17 | 11,2 |
| Non-civil servant associate | 19 | 12,5 |
| Assistant | 22 | 14,5 |
| Adjunct | 44 | 28,9 |
| Other categories ⁸ | 14 | 9,2 |

n=152.

Source: own elaboration.

It can be seen that data does not seem to match since in rank, 11,2 % of respondents report being “private university professor”, whereas the sample roughly divided in half, though it is slightly higher for professors that claim to work in a public institution (55,3 % versus 44,7 %). I believe this is due to the order of the questions since question two asked about the employer (private or public) whereas question three asks about rank. Thus, probably many of those that answered private university for question two (employer) have probably selected adjunct (*asociado*) or associate (*titular*) in rank (question 3), instead of private university professor. Given the sheer number of adjuncts in the sample, 44 people (28,9 %), this suggestion seems to bridge the gap between the number difference in both questions.

6. This question was not responded by two people, so n is 150 and not 152.

7. We have done the translations using American English as follows: *catedrático*, chair/Professor, *profesor titular* (civil servant associate), *profesor contratado doctor* (non-civil servant associate), *ayudante doctor* (assistant), *profesor asociado* (adjunct). We believe the translations for *catedrático*, *profesor titular* and *asociado* bear no problem as they have direct translations into English. Considering *ayudante doctor* is tenure-track but not yet on tenure, the most appropriate translation is assistant, whereas *contratado doctor* is a figure that does not exist in the US or the UK and is difficult to describe. It refers to a professor that has a permanent contract, therefore, they have tenure—and only under very rare circumstances can they be laid off—but they are not civil servant, like an associate.

8. Within those self-identified as other categories, we have the following: collaboration with ANECA (1), pre-doctoral researchers (1), FP personnel (1 case), intern professor (1 case), visiting professor (2 cases). 7 professors do not specify their professional category.

For the open question, we applied a very simple thematic analysis coding each comment into themes.

Interviews

Within the scope of available qualitative techniques, in this study, we have conducted interviews. Interviews serve the purpose of comprehending *what people say they do*. For this reason, our research findings are appropriate to understand theories *of* action, but cannot make any conclusions on theories *in* action, that is interviews cannot tell us anything about what professors *actually* do. While conducting interviews, our intention is to understand why there was an instructional transition for those professors who started off their careers mostly lecturing and later decided to include active learning as an integral part of their mode of instruction.

The panel is composed of knowledgeable informants; that is, scholars of Political Science and IR working in Spanish universities, some of whom not only use active methodologies in their courses, but they have also published scientific articles on active methodologies within the discipline. Informants were obtained through a convenience sample which started with colleagues of the researcher and then used snowballing to reach those professional rank categories where the author had no acquaintances in the upper stages of the professoriate career. The sample comprises twelve interviewees selected according to the independent variables of gender and rank, since Hartlaub and Lancaster (2008: 380) have noted these variables have some influence on instructional choices. I also include the years of professional experience.

However, since the situation of the Spanish public system is one of a bottleneck, with professors having an average age of 47,2 (Rodríguez, 2018), years of professional experience do not necessarily correlate to rank. There are people with many years of teaching who are still in the early stages of the academic trophic pyramid. By contrast, rank is a variable of special interest for this study because it very much relates to situations of job security and “ownership” of courses. This is key because situational stability helps dictate if professors introduce modes of instruction other than lecturing and, in general, to innovate. It is for these reasons that rank is our selected independent variable, though we do take note of the years of professional experience of each of our interviewees as a guide. We required a minimum threshold of 2 years of teaching experience. This standard was set so the interviewee could at least compare the experience of one academic year without using active methodologies and another using them. This being said, the interviewee with least teaching experience has been in academia for four years.

It must also be noted that the public and private systems have different career paths and, according to ANECA⁹ standards, a different merit accreditation system.

9. The Spanish state regulates merit to access the public and private system through a process of accreditation dependent on the Ministry of Education via a specialized agency called ANECA.

On top of this, ten different autonomous communities have their own agencies (Andalucía, Aragón, Canarias, Castilla y León, Cataluña, Comunidad Valenciana, Galicia, Islas Baleares, Madrid and Basque Country), some of which are very important in their territories (Cataluña, Basque Country). Therefore, the professional categories for selecting interviewees follow the career path of the public system established by ANECA, the national entity, as has been shown in table 2.

The twelve people interviewed belong to three state universities (located in Madrid, Barcelona, and Granada) and two private universities (neither in Madrid nor in Barcelona). Except for the category of private university (comprising two instructors), the other ten professors worked in public universities. Out of those twelve professors, ten had extensive experience abroad. Both chairs have been visiting professors in top American or UK universities for, at least, one academic year. Associate professors had predoctoral stays between two and six months —one of twelve months— abroad and multiple visiting scholar positions ranging from two or three weeks to four months. Two interviewees had postdoctoral contracts for two years or more either in the UK or a Scandinavian country. One interviewee studied the PhD in the UK and yet another one had done pre-doctoral stays in the UK and France and several visiting scholar positions in other countries. Lastly, another interviewee started her/his teaching in university, in a Latin American country before deciding to study the PhD.

TABLE 3.
INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

| Category | Male | Years of teaching experience in university | Female | Years of teaching experience in university |
|------------------------------------|------|--|--------|--|
| <i>Professor/Chair</i> | ✓ | 30 | ✓ | 20 |
| <i>Civil servant associate</i> | ✓ | 15 | ✓ | 22 |
| <i>Non-civil servant associate</i> | ✓ | 12 | ✓ | 20 |
| <i>Assistant</i> | ✓ | 6 | ✓ | 11 |
| <i>Adjunct</i> | ✓ | 4 | ✓ | 6 |
| <i>Private university teacher</i> | ✓ | 10 | ✓ | 6 |

Source: Own elaboration.

To fully guarantee the anonymity of our interviewees, we have decided not to disclose the institutional affiliations of each participant since it could be possible to trace respondents' identities through their rank and university affiliation.

“The National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA), is an autonomous body whose aim is to provide external quality assurance for the Spanish Higher Education System and to contribute to its constant improvement through evaluation, certification and accreditation”. Available at: <http://www.aneca.es/eng/ANECA>.

All interviews were conducted by the author and the twelve interviewees contacted decided to participate in this research.¹⁰

The open question in the survey has been analyzed using a thematic analysis that followed an inductivist approach based on the themes that emerged from respondent's answer, while the interviews were also analyzed following a thematic analysis but the approach deductive as it was premised on the following categories:

- Role of professor in education
- Role of the student in education
- Conceptions on teaching and learning

Ten interviews were conducted in July and August 2021, while the remaining two took place in December 2021 and January 2022. All were carried out through MEEET and recorded only via audio. All the material was processed manually without the help of any qualitative software.

RESULTS

The use of active methodologies in class

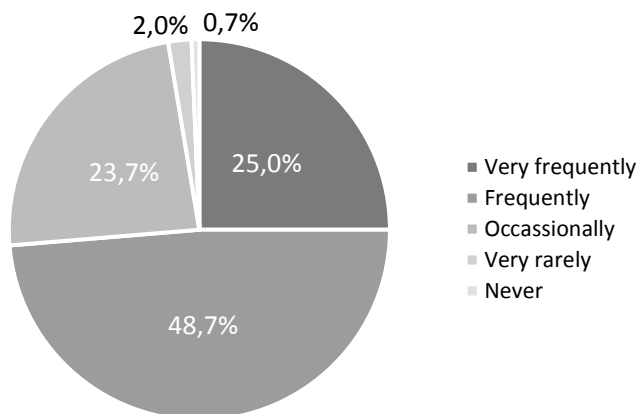
Taking the survey results at face value it would seem using active methodologies is mainstream in the Political Science and International Relations classrooms: 73,7% respondents claim to use active methodologies *Very Frequently* (25%) and *Frequently* (48,7%) versus 23,7% that say *Occasionally* and 3,7% that respond to as *Very Rarely* (3%) or *never* (0,7%).

These results should be approached with caution as they are somewhat counter-intuitive to our daily university experience. We hypothesize the following might explain the alleged high use of active methodologies. First, there is probably self-selection bias in the respondent base since it is likely that instructors that enjoy teaching are the ones who have answered the survey. For instance, when conducting the interviews, almost everyone mentioned at some point they enjoy investing time in their students ("The truth is I like students, I like my students, I like devoting time to them". Civil servant associate, female). Second, as lecturing comes across as a *démodé* form of instruction, the self-perception one has of their own teaching performance implies there might be a desirability bias.

10. Interviews were conducted in Spanish and the excerpts included in this paper were translated into English by the author. Although private universities also have adjunct professors, we did not include this category and just focused on full-time faculty in the interviews because we found it redundant to include adjuncts from both the public and the private system as they both share the common feature of holding other jobs.

FIGURE 1.

USE OF ACTIVE METHODOLOGIES IN THE CLASSROOM (Q.6)



Source: Own elaboration.

Lastly, as the interviews show, there might be a misconception of what constitutes active methodologies. Of the twelve professors interviewed, two people (16,7%) thought active methodologies were exclusively related to student engagement and participation with the course, while 10 (83,3%) said it was related to a process of students creating their own knowledge or as some sort of co-learning. Only one instructor (3%) included reflection on the process of learning as a distinct feature of active methodologies. Lastly, one of the interviewees suggested that, in addition to student commitment to the course, a methodology, if it is to be considered active, must be linked to the professional world (non-civil servant associate, male).

In the “engagement” perspective —though not exclusive to it— active methodologies implementation is put into practice without a prior reflection on teaching pedagogy. Active methodologies were included within the repertoire of teaching because it was seen as “enriching”. Surprisingly, one of the instructors did not know what they were about: “[...] it seems to me that they include participation. However, I am no expert in these concepts on teaching and pedagogy. I assume it is something more interactive. I don’t know what the concept means. My answer is, mainly, class debates. I mean to raise questions and present scenarios. This is what I usually do” (Civil servant associate, male)¹¹.

Amongst the instructors that inscribed active methodologies as a process of self-construction of knowledge, their underlying conception of education is constructivist,

11. Given this answer we asked him about specific teaching techniques and this professor in question had been using simulations for years. However, he was not aware that what he was doing was called an “active methodology”.

which they understood as a process of co-learning where you *learn to learn*, and the traditional roles of professor and teacher are reversed: “Active methodologies are a way of reversing the roles. Students are not just listening and absorbing a percentage of what I am saying [...] what is fun and interesting is that active methodologies force you to ‘wake up’ in class and work to activate knowledge. [...] it also sets in motion skills that are not only rational or cognitive, such as artistic or cognitive skills, even surprise” (assistant, female).

Lecturers think that a reversal of the roles implies that students have a say in *what* or *how* they are going to be taught:

[...] I share the syllabus with students, and I give them the opportunity of saying, “ok, we are going to see this”, but we can model it to see what case studies to explore. For example, in Latin America, they want to look at Venezuela [...], so it’s not only the process of learning but *what* we are going to learn”. (Assistant, male).

An active methodology teaches you to learn and is in constant evolution [...]. I think it changes the focus of knowledge. The traditional axis always follows a traditional path, from the professor to the student. The professor knows and the student learns. Active methodologies are bi-directional. I learn a lot because when they learn in a different way, I also learn [...]. [Active methodologies] are about what is important for them and how to reason so they learn what *you think is important*, but from where they want that learning to come from (Adjunct, female).

Interestingly, even as the last two answer state there is a change to a student-centered approach, the professor still holds the upper hand and sets the “menu” that students must choose from. Thus, the so-called change revolves around *how* a certain content is learned, not about *what* they learn.

In this constructivist discourse, there is a variant highlighted by an instructor that contends active methodologies are instrumental to equip students with the skills deemed necessary for the professional world:

[...] students participate in the creation of knowledge and [...] provides them with something useful professionally. I think that something that engages students a lot is still an academic activity. For example, discussing something in depth, which is departing from student’s presentations, let’s say the last book of some scholar. This is very interesting. But, for me, it is not an active methodology. It is an activity with more similarities with research than with the professional world (non-civil servant associate, male).

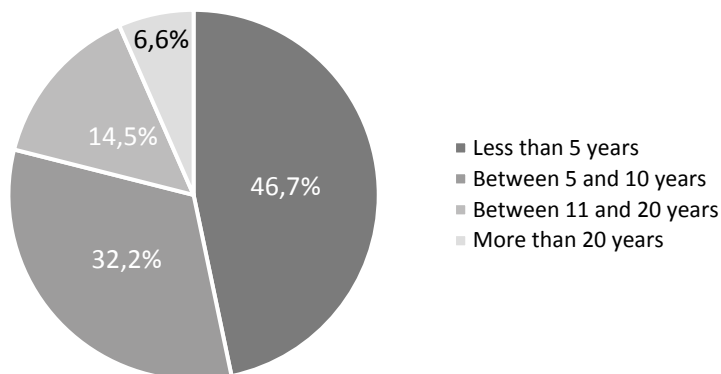
Despite the underlying constructivist approach to education of most of our interviewees, it has already been stated that reflection is not highlighted as a feature characterizing active methodologies. Thus, including a specific metacognitive activity to reflect on the process of learning is rarely included as part of the teaching practice. It must be clarified that when doing simulations, instructors include a debriefing time at

the end, but this is more a way to “close” the class exercise than a constructivist activity to “learn how we’ve learned” kind of scheme.

Most importantly, the application of active methodologies is done in an informal and non-systematic way. Only three (25 %) of the professors interviewed measured learning outcomes of the activities they implement in class. Here, rank is important as those that include scientific measurement of their teaching techniques are an adjunct and both assistants. Two of them measure knowledge before and after the activity while the latter makes the student take a survey. The most common practice instructors is to grade the activity as part of the final course grade. Others take non-systematic feedback from students: “If you mean an evaluation of the methodology of learning [...], I do not use specific measurement indicators, though I could do it. I ground myself on the subjective impression I get from experience: for instance, how many students participate in a debate in the classroom and the quality of comments and the questions they raise” (Non civil servant associate).

FIGURE 2.

LENGTH OF TIME OF USE OF ACTIVE METHODOLOGIES (Q8)



Source: Own elaboration.

The lack of systematic assessment results from the fact that active learning implementation is a somewhat recent development. Almost half of the survey respondents (46,7 %) declare that they have been implementing them for less than five years, while one third (32,2 %) indicate they have been working with them for the last six to ten years. Only 14,5 % mention their use between eleven and twenty years and a bare 6,6 % for more than 20 years. The findings seem to confirm that the paradigm change is the consequence brought about by the Bologna Process. Our interviews show that professors that have been longer in teaching mention that they started including “intuitively” class dynamics that fostered more student participation but without knowing their attempts were active methodologies (civil servant associate, female).

TABLE 4.

USE OF ACTIVE METHODOLOGIES BY SEX, AGE AND UNIVERSITY TITULARITY

| Data in % | Sample total | Gender | | Age | | | Type of university | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|--------|-------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| | | Men | Women | 20 to 39 years old | 40 to 50 years old | More than 50 years old | Private University | Public University |
| <i>Very Frequently and Frequently</i> | 73,7 | 71,9 | 75,8 | 68,2 | 76,8 | 75 | 77,6 | 69,9 |
| <i>Very Frequently</i> | 25 | 22,5 | 29 | 15,9 | 30,4 | 26,9 | 31,3 | 19,3 |
| <i>Frequently</i> | 48,7 | 49,4 | 46,8 | 52,3 | 46,4 | 48,1 | 46,3 | 50,6 |
| <i>Occasionally</i> | 23,7 | 24,7 | 22,6 | 31,8 | 17,9 | 23,1 | 19,4 | 27,7 |
| <i>Very rarely</i> | 2 | 3,4 | 0 | 0 | 3,6 | 1,9 | 3 | 1,2 |
| <i>Never</i> | 0,7 | 0 | 1,6 | 0 | 1,8 | 0 | 0 | 1,2 |
| <i>Sample (n)</i> | 152 | 89 | 62 | 44 | 56 | 52 | 67 | 83 |

Source: Own elaboration.

Gender

Even though we have no data available to determine whether males or females lecture more, our results show that the difference in the use of active methodologies between men and women is almost insignificant. Males mention that they use them *very frequently* and *frequently* in 71,9% of cases whereas women declare the same thing for 75,8% of cases. On the other side of the spectrum, those that *very rarely* or use them, the answers of men (2,7%) and women (3,4%) are also very similar. Thus, our findings do not seem to go in the same direction as the literature that pointed out the men lecture more (Lammers and Murphy, 2002).

Age

Consistent with the literature, at the beginning of the professional career, instructors use active methodologies less than when they become more experienced. However, the results obtained in this study show a very high use of this mode of instruction in whatever career stage: Among people aged 20 to 39, 68,2% affirm they use them *frequently* or *very frequently* (68,2%) versus the cohort between 41—and 50—year-olds (76,8%) or those above 50 (75%).

Type of university

Private universities are known to pride themselves for their student-oriented emphasis. Therefore, according to expectations, results show they use active methodologies more

(77,65 % say they use them *very frequently* or *frequently*), than in public institutions (69,9%).

TABLE 5.

USE OF ACTIVE METHODOLOGIES BY RANK AND YEARS DEVOTED TO TEACHING

| Data in % | Total sample | Rank | | | Years devoted to teaching | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------------|---|---------|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| | | Chairs and civil servant Associate | Private uni lecturer Non-civil servant associate, Assistant | Adjunct | Less than 5 | Between 6 and 10 | Between 11 and 15 | Between 16 and 25 | More than 25 |
| Very frequently + Frequently | 73,7 | 88,9 | 70,7 | 65,9 | 60,9 | 74,4 | 66,7 | 79,5 | 85 |
| Very Frequently | 25 | 36,1 | 25,9 | 18,2 | 17,4 | 23,3 | 29,6 | 25,6 | 30 |
| Frequently | 48,7 | 52,8 | 44,8 | 47,7 | 43,5 | 51,2 | 37 | 53,8 | 55 |
| Ocasionally | 23,7 | 11,1 | 27,6 | 27,3 | 34,8 | 25,6 | 29,6 | 15,4 | 15 |
| Very rarely | 2 | 0 | 0 | 6,8 | 4,3 | 0 | 3,7 | 2,6 | 0 |
| Never | 0,7 | 0 | 1,7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,6 | 0 |
| Sample (n) | 152 | 36 | 58 | 44 | 23 | 43 | 27 | 39 | 20 |

Source: Own elaboration.

The higher up the rank and the longer the respondent has been in teaching, the more active methodologies are applied. The percentage of chairs and civil servant associates that claim to use active methodologies *very frequently* or *frequently* is very high (88,9 %) whereas for non-civil servant associates, assistant professors/private university instructors the number decreases to 70,7 % and 65,9 % for adjuncts. On the other side of the spectrum, amongst those that do not usually use them, it is only 11,1 % among chairs versus almost one third non-civil servant associates, assistant professors/private university instructors (27,6 %) and adjuncts (27,3 %).

Lecturers with more than 25 years of professional experience state that they use them *very frequently* or *frequently* (85 %) versus a decreasing percentage for the rest: 79,5 % for those with between 15 and 25 years of professional experience, 66,7 % for people with 10 to 15 years of experience and 60,9 % of those with less than 5 years of experience. In a middle ground lay people with between 5 and 10 years of professional experience (74,4 %).

These findings are consistent with the literature on professoriate development. Following Nyquist and Wulff (1996: 20) professors go through a process of evolution in different teacher related dimensions: concerns, discourse, approach to authority and students. Regarding the dimension of teachers concerns, instructors undergo three different stages. In the early days, instructors think about self-survival, and they are worried about whether they are going to be liked by students.

From our interviews, we gather they want to know as much as possible of the topic they are going to lecture on. Feeling they “know” enhances their sense of control and security. Since this stage is characterized by self-focus, it’s not possible to go beyond content-grounded and transmission centered classes: “You start off with very dense classes, a lot of content, very prepared. I have evolved towards lighter, less dense, and less structured classes” (chair, male).

The second phase is the skills stage. It is during this stage when instructors focus on teaching methods, what makes for effective teaching, and when they begin to take an interest in assessment and learning. It is then, that instructors start widening their teaching repertoire:

When I started at X university¹², I had already a 10-year trajectory [outside academia, plus 7 years in higher education], so I designed the theoretical and practical classes I saw fit. I was resolved. I was not 21 [anymore] and I did not need to show I had read all of Marx [...]. At 35, at a personal level [...] it’s not the same, you are not so insecure. I think it is both variables, a personal/experiential level, and the level of the course [you are teaching] (assistant female).

In the outcome stage, the focus of attention is on student learning. We believe only two interviewees can be placed in this category, with both at the highest level of the professional career spectrum (chairs) and with more than 20 years of teaching experience. One of the interviewees explains his conception of engagement has stretched beyond the relationship of the student with the course. Now, he includes the link established with the student as one that must be grounded in empathy and that sees the person holistically, not just the role he plays in class. Nyquist and Wulff label this approach as post-socialized because they understand that a “collaborative effort [is] required for student learning to occur” (1996: 20):

I have grown closer to students [...]. It is easier now and far more attractive to approach them, listen to them, talk to them to see what they say, what they think [...].

Active methodologies require establishing relationships with students and these need to be based on trust. You can’t build things with others; you can’t learn when you are departing from mistrust [...]. It is difficult to connect with others because we have no idea of who they are. We do not know their problems or difficulties (Professor, male).

The table shows gender differences. Women are latecomers to the use of active methodologies. 53,2% of women have been using them for less than five years versus 42,7% of their male counterparts. The trend is the same for those using active methodologies for the last 5 to 10 years: 38,2% of men versus 22,6% of

12. To preserve the anonymity of the respondent, we choose not to name the university.

women, although it significantly decreases for instructors with between ten and twenty years of professional experience where men account for 14,5 % and women 12,4 % and no gender differences can be found beyond twenty years of teaching experience.

TABLE 6.

YEARS USING ACTIVE METHODOLOGIES BY SEX, AGE, AND TYPE OF UNIVERSITY

| Data in % | Total sample | Sex | | Age | | | Type of university | |
|-------------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------------|-------------------|
| | | Men | Women | 20 to 39 | 40 to 50 | > 50 | Private University | Public University |
| Less than 5 years | 46,7 | 42,7 | 53,2 | 68,2 | 42,9 | 32,7 | 53,7 | 41 |
| Between 5 and 10 years | 32,2 | 38,2 | 22,6 | 31,8 | 37,5 | 26,9 | 29,9 | 33,7 |
| Between 11 and 20 years | 14,5 | 12,4 | 17,7 | 0 | 17,9 | 23,1 | 11,9 | 16,9 |
| More than 20 years | 6,6 | 6,7 | 6,5 | 0 | 1,8 | 17,3 | 4,5 | 8,4 |
| <i>Sample (n)</i> | <i>152</i> | <i>89</i> | <i>62</i> | <i>44</i> | <i>56</i> | <i>52</i> | <i>67</i> | <i>83</i> |

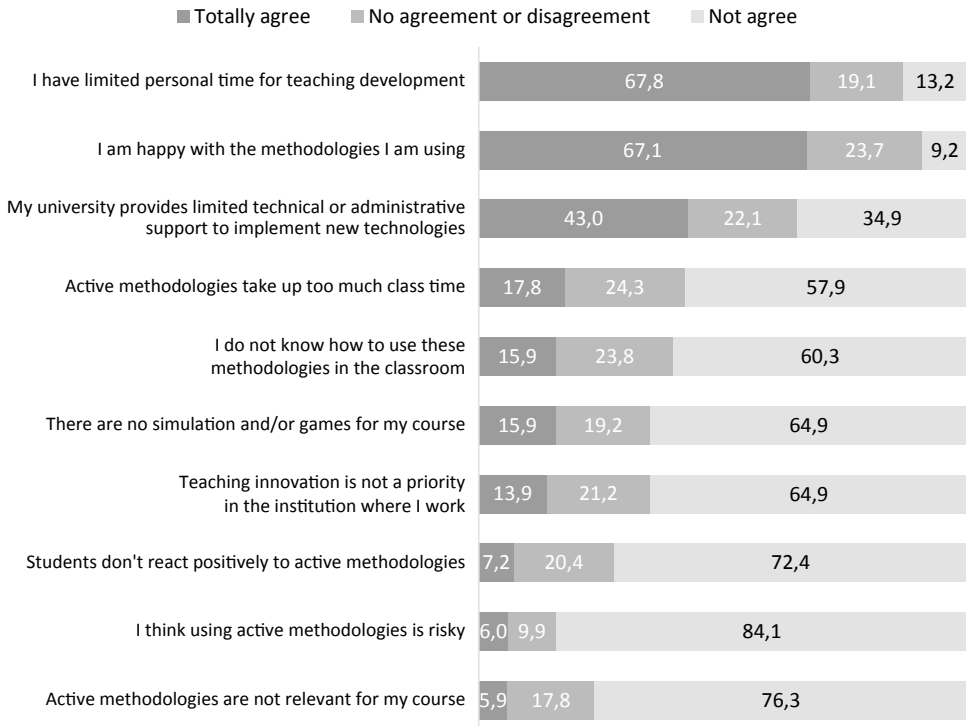
Source: Own elaboration.

Interestingly, when looking at the intersection between number of years applying active methodologies and titularity of the university, we can see 53,7 % of teachers in public universities have been using active methodologies for less than five years compared to the 41 % pointed out by those in private ones. When looking at the next category, from 5 to 10 years, we see results revolve around one third, not quite reaching it in the case of private universities (29 %) while slightly exceeding it in the case of public institutions (33 %). This small difference is repeated in the next stages, that is, both between 11 and 20 years (11,9 % private versus 16,9 % public) and those using them for more than 20 years (4,5 % private compared to 8,4 % public). In all, the results shed light to the fact that public universities have been using active methodologies for longer. This finding contradicts the assumption of teaching innovation in private institutions.

Although the ten questions are the ones used in Lean *et al.*'s study (2011), we have grouped them into four, not three, different groups:

- a. Institutional factors
- b. Lack of resources
- c. Pertinence of active methodologies
- d. Factors related to the professor

FIGURE 3.
OBSTACLES FOR THE USE OF ACTIVE METHODOLOGIES IN PERCENTAGE (Q. 7)



Source: own elaboration using *Lean et al.*'s questions (2011).

Institutional factors

Question seven shows that more than half of the respondents (64,9%) disagree with the contention that teaching innovation is not a priority in their institution. Just 15,9% have this perception of their institution. From this result, it can be inferred that universities value teaching innovation. This inference is consistent with other studies that point to the importance universities give to the scholarship of teaching and learning, though it is also highlighted how “this area of work is especially vulnerable in times of trouble” (*Krain et al.*, 2015: 148).

Lack of resources

If the inference that universities value teaching innovation is correct, then it is paradoxical that not even half of the sample (43%) agree with the assertion that their

university provides support, technical or administrative (Q3) to implement new technologies whereas more than one third (34,9%) disagree. Therefore, even if teaching innovation is valued by universities, the means available for implementation, according to a good number of the faculty, seem to be insufficient.

Factors related to pertinence of active methodologies

The following questions are grouped according to the pertinence of using active methodologies. Firstly, it is important to highlight that more than half of the sample of Spanish scholars disagrees (57,9%) with the claim that *active methodologies consume too much class time (Q4)*. This contrasts with Bonwell and Eason's (1991: iv) literature revision in which they point that scholars were concerned of "adequately covering the assigned course content in the limited class time available".

Question 10 explores respondents' opinion on whether they find *active methodologies pertinent for their course*: more than two thirds 76,3% disagree with the claim they are *not* pertinent versus just 5,9% that agree with this view. In addition, professors are acquainted with the availability of active methodologies in their discipline as only 15,9% consider *there are no simulations and/or games (Q6)* in their area, whereas 64,9% disagree.

Lastly, only 5,9% agree with the affirmation that *students do not react positively to these methodologies (Q8)*, in contrast to 84,1 that disagree.

In brief, professors see the pertinence of using active methodologies, they do not believe they "consume" an excessive amount of class time, and they think that students react positively to this mode of instruction.

Factors related to the professor

When asked about personal time available for teaching development (Q1), 67,8% agree with the claim they lack the time needed for this endeavor. In addition, the same percentage (67,8%) claim they are satisfied with the methodologies they are currently using (Q2) whatever these might be. Just 15,9% agree with the assertion that they don't know how to use active methodologies (Q5) and only 6% agree with the contention that they *find it risky to use active methodologies (Q9)*.

Overall, the results presented on the obstacles to active learning implementation shed light on agreement percentages below 20% highlighting there are no issues seen as major obstacles, except perhaps the institution's lack of resources. Lack of personal time for teaching development is mentioned, but it does not seem to affect the implementation of active methodologies that, in this sample, is widespread. Paradoxically, in the interviews a significant number of professors pointed to class size as the major obstacle for a proper implementation. Lack of skill of the instructor to teach himself/

herself to apply them properly or student's insufficient interest were also mentioned as major impediments.

Reasons for using active methodologies

The last survey question was open, so respondents could answer as they saw fit why they use active methodologies.¹³

The themes have been ordered according to the number of responses in table 7. It is interesting to see the widespread agreement among more than one third of respondents (56) that active learning methodologies have a capacity to engage students, either by increasing their motivation or their interest either in the course or capturing their attention. The next theme shows that 53 respondents claim students learn more this way.

The rationale underlying this argumentation is that motivated students learn more. These enthusiastic responses of the political science community of Spanish academia contrast with findings in the literature in which professors raised concerns that active learning techniques were inadequate “for achieving higher learning levels with complicated material” (Cooper, 1995; Gerlach, 1994; Lord 2001 quoted in Machemer and Crawford, 2007: 12).

Interestingly, the joined results of several simulations conducted in Spanish universities —both public and private— with individuals in all stages of the bachelor's degree show that when applying this active methodology, students seemed to find concept application the most difficult to accomplish. It seems that, despite the methodology used — “traditional” or active—, students face similar difficulties in their learning (Ferreiro, 2020: 300).

There is also a gap between perception and learning outcomes. Students are as optimistic as their professors about their learning when using active methodologies. However, when actual learning outcomes are measured, the reality is a humbler (*ibid.*). This is an important feature to highlight so we do not raise unrealistic expectations about the learning potential of these methodologies.

At great distance, we see respondents believing “they have a practical/real world dimension” (15). This feature is also highly valued by students that want their university studies to enhance their employment possibilities (Cousinou and Inguanzo, 2020: 265).

We find specially telling themes five (*It facilitates better teaching*) and seven (*I enjoy using them*) because we believe they might depict the instructor has a teacher centered conception of learning, although the repertoire includes active methodologies. It is interesting for future research to see whether active methodologies can be used effectively in terms of learning outcomes by professors holding a different conception of learning or, if alternatively, this inconsistency between teaching beliefs and practices has an impact in students' learning.

13. The category “I do not use them” has not been included in the table because in none of the nine comments there were any reasons provided beyond the claim of not using them.

Professors presume positive reactions from students when using active methodologies (theme six “Students show positive reactions to active methodologies”), and this is one of the reasons why they are used. However, student culture can be reluctant to change: “Students perceive innovative teaching techniques in a negative light—reacting nervously to new approaches that press for greater critical and analytical thinking or perceiving them as signs of faculty laziness in not providing information in the traditional lecture format” (Whadar, 2012; Innoue, 2012 quoted in Krain *et al.*, 2015: 148). This negative perception may be due to students holding more teacher-oriented conceptions of teaching than professors (Pauler-Küpinger and Jucks, 2017). So, if active methodologies are to be implemented effectively, students must be previously prepared. This matter also emerged in the interviews.

None of the respondents mentions problems when students work together. Machemer and Crawford’s study citing Cooper and Gerlach (1994) and Lord (2001) points to the “problem of students lacking prerequisite skills to work in teams” (Machemer and Crawford, 2007:12). On the other hand, Ferreiros’ conclusion (2020) on different simulations conducted in different universities and undergraduate years, shows that students enjoy simulations more as freshmen than as juniors and seniors. Working in groups is precisely what older students dislike.

Theme 8 “Student assessment” (2 responses) shows that respondents find active methodologies a better way of evaluating students. This particular question was quite generalized in the interviews where instructors disapprove of exams as a mode of assessment, either because it prevents professors from making them work throughout the semester as they “gamble everything in a final exam” (chair, female) or because they are an inadequate way of testing learning. Three different interviewees used the expression to “vomit information” in the exam; a very graphic metaphor of something that is not properly mulled over.

When looking at theme 9, *teaching innovation*, we hypothesize from our interviews, that the rationale for providing this answer might be linked to the self-image instructors have of their own teaching practice. There is a narrative among instructors, that does not make distinctions in terms of rank or gender, about how their instructional methods had been questioned by superiors or peers: “I did it as labor of love. I invested time and effort, and everyone told me: ‘why do you waste your time with those things?’. Mind me, it was very symbolic when the dean offered a euro to finance my activity” (chair, female). “When I began [...] implementing my way of work [...], I was looked in a VERY WEIRD way” (adjunct, male).

In addition to the open question, the interviews shed further light as to why professors that started off their careers as content-oriented instructors decided to shift to a model of classes that includes active methodologies. All participants, whatever their professional rank or gender share, to varying degrees, a feeling of *dissatisfaction* with the lecture model that did not work for them when they were students or now as professors. Opinions illustrate a stereotyped, almost caricatured depiction of this mode of instruction ranging from “boring” to “conservative” and “not open to change”: “Most of my professors were just very boring and many were not even up to date with their readings” (Assistant, male).

TABLE 7.
THEMES THAT EXPLAIN THE USE OF ACTIVE METHODOLOGIES. SURVEYS

| Theme | Verbatim |
|---|--|
| 1. Enhances student engagement by increasing motivation, interest and/or attention (56) ¹⁴ | <p>“They stimulate students to incentivize their participation and engagement in learning about the course”</p> <p>“As a way of attracting interest for a course with a significant theoretical workload”</p> <p>“The student learns more and it’s a nicer way of working”</p> |
| 2. It improves student’s learning (53) | <p>“They improve student performance, they collaborate more amongst each other, it improves their leadership skills and self-confidence, they resolve problems better, etc.”</p> <p>“The student learns more and it’s a nicer way of working”</p> |
| 3. They have a practical/ “real world dimension” (15) | <p>“The class should be a space for learning, and you do not learn as much listening than practicing”.</p> <p>“I use practical teaching so students can incarnate actors and policy makers resolving complex problems”.</p> |
| 5. It facilitates better teaching (8) | <p>“I believe in them because of their pedagogical potential”</p> <p>It is an effective way of transmitting knowledge”</p> |
| 6. Students show positive reactions to active methodologies (6) | <p>“Although they sometimes show some reluctance, they end up enjoying these methodologies and they are thankful”.</p> <p>“They are more adaptable and prepare students for their professional life in IR. Students are very happy”.</p> |
| 7. I enjoy using them (3) | <p>“As a professor, I enjoy them [active methodologies] more”.</p> <p>“My job as a professor is more fun and gratifying”</p> |
| 8. Student’s Assessment (2) | <p>“They improve students’ performance [...] and help in a more just student evaluation”.</p> <p>“It allows for evaluating learning in a more pedagogical manner”.</p> |
| 9. Teaching innovation (2) | <p>“For teaching innovation”</p> |
| 1. Other (13) | <p>“To improve”</p> <p>“To adapt to current students”</p> |

Source: Own elaboration(n=150)¹⁵.

14. In brackets, the number of comments in each category.

15. The number of comments exceeds 152 because some comments have been categorized in more than one of them.

There is also a sense that Gen Z has decreased attention spans and professors need to adapt: “The model of lecture that works very well needs engaged students [...] actively listening for an hour or an hour and a half. I don’t think that is the average of students today” (Private university professor, female).

Others report to be just more comfortable taking on a *guide on the side* model: “I am always a companion, never imposing [...]. I have never put myself above students, I have always worked with them in a very collaborative fashion: I am a very close person” (Adjunct, female). “I prefer the term [...] ‘instructor’ you are here to guide, to guide rather than to transmit things” (Private University Professor, male).

This need to depart from a *sage on stage* type of teaching was more acute in adjuncts and private university professors that also decoupled the concept of expertise from that of learning:

The best teacher is not the one with 4 master’s degrees and 7 undergrads, along with honors in all courses. Far from it [...]. You can know a lot about something but, currently, what is required is that you are able to transmit it and you distinguish yourself from the rest. To do this you need to control several methodologies, be creative, in a way. Creativity with empirical knowledge, with a grounding that can be measured, right? (Adjunct, male).

You can be a very good teacher without necessarily being number one in that topic (private university teacher, female).

Many of the interviewees admitted, with different self-justifications, that the reason for including active methodologies as part of their teaching repertoire was due to being overwhelmed by lecture preparation and thinking that introducing such activities was a useful way of eating up class time. Several people used the expression “making a virtue out of necessity”:

The ideal situation is to sit in my house and think of a teaching strategy and put it into practice. My reality is that I teach 30 credits [per year] and I don’t have time for that [...]. So, it’s *making a virtue out of necessity*. This [teaching] needs to go far quicker and it is interesting to construct knowledge in a different way [...]. I think the first time you use an active methodology one believes it’s a way of saving time (Private university teacher, female).

Only those that had studied their PhD or spend a significant period of their formative years abroad as postdocs started their teaching practice with some previous theoretical knowledge on the matter. These pedagogical notions better equipped them to shift their teaching repertoire when they felt sufficiently prepared: “I had been invited to a seminar on how to do videos and I did not want to look ‘*bad*’, so I went. I realized there were possibilities for innovation, but it was not until a year or two later that I could make modifications [...]. That course opened my mind” (Assistant, male).

CONCLUSION

This paper has assessed the state of the art regarding the use of active methodologies in the Political Science and International Relations classrooms in Spain. The article has shed light on the conception professors have of these methodologies and how they are being applied. It is not a discovery to state that there has been a change in terms of the expert knowledge a professor believes they should possess to teach. Many of the instructors interviewed —though certainly more acute in those in the lower echelons of academia—, do not regard in-depth mastery of their area of research as a feature that makes a “good teacher”. This shift towards a *guide on the side* role model goes hand in hand with the increased valorization that teaching should be focused on applied knowledge. After all, the argument goes, information is easily accessible “out there”, so there is no longer a need to absorb information that can be googled.

In relation to the key variables of gender, rank, and years of teaching experience (Hartlaub and Lancaster, 2008) it was found that men use active methodologies slightly more than women, and that more teaching experience and higher advancement in the professoriate career ladder led to more extended use of active methodologies. It is also worth mentioning that even though private universities use these methodologies in the classrooms with slightly greater frequency, it is incorrect to think private institutions innovate more in teaching, since public universities have been using active methodologies over a longer time period.

Our results should be taken with caution. Firstly, the survey response rate is of only 14,42%. This probably explains why the apparent widespread use of active methodologies obtained in this sample is counterintuitive to our daily experience in university.

Second, interviews are conducted with professors that openly favor the use of active methodologies. In any case, even if the results were an accurate picture of our classrooms, the stage of development of active learning is still embryonic. Our qualitative data puts us on our guard and nuances the excess of optimism that could be drawn from the quantitative results. Interviews highlight that not everyone using active methodologies know what they are about. But even when the instructor has an informed idea of how they can enhance student learning, there is barely any measurement of the learning outcomes from deploying these kinds of methodologies. The most common way of evaluating whether active methodologies work is assessing the active learning activity through a grade. There is no assessment *per se* of the mode of instruction rather of the associated deliverable. In the few cases where there is an evaluation of the activity, most often the analysis is based on a non-systematized student perception feedback. Yet we know there is a gap between the perception of learning that students hold and the actual learning outcomes; the latter tend to be humbler than the high expectations they raise. As a result of this lack of assessment, we can say that the existing scholarship is at a level of describing individual experiences, rather than grounding teaching practice in solid scientific research. This is somewhat paradoxical since teaching innovation projects are acquiring an increasing importance across universities. It seems instructors

want to be at the edge of teaching innovation and active methodologies fill this void since they come across as “progressive” while lecturing is perceived as “conservative”, “boring” or grounded on assessment practices that enhance “vomiting information”. Moving forward, more effort should be invested in properly assessing learning outcomes, rather than in the current “try and see” model.

We want to end this paper by suggesting some policy recommendations, ranked in order of importance, that seem *sine qua non* conditions to increase the standards of teaching and learning in the Political Science and International Relations classrooms:

Include teacher training programs as an integral part of the professional career

The minister of Universities, Joan Subirats, has contended (in February 2022) that Spain must end with the “anomaly” (Sánchez Caballero, 2022) of not providing teacher training to future professors and that universities must “stop being the exception” (ibid). Thus, the Future Organic Law of the University System—in effect in 2023—will include teaching courses for assistants during the first of their six years in the post. The form and content of this training is still to be determined, but it will incorporate instruction on teaching methodologies. The innovation units of each university will be responsible for providing this schooling to their staff.

The proposal has not been without criticism. It has been argued that assistants already have quite an extensive teaching experience which is obvious to anyone aware of the average age professors get their first full-time post in Spanish universities. Although there is widespread agreement in the university community on the need for teacher training, many believe that this kind of program should be implemented during the PhD formative years.

Interviews show that the reason why professors choose to use active methodologies for the first time is their need to shorten lecture, and to consume classroom time. Left to their own devices, instructors try to do things to the best of their ability. Some self-train, but more commonly instructors learn through trial and error. It goes without saying that experimentation without some previous theoretical knowledge on what is to be achieved can result in a poor application of active methodologies and puts student learning at risk. Even if junior faculty are not able to immediately apply to the classroom what they’ve just learned, training is key to provide knowledge on how to proceed for the future when they feel capable of putting into practice what they have learned. Back in 1990, Boyer’s seminal article made a call to make teacher training a necessary requirement for PhD candidates. Let’s follow his advice! Let’s not wait until they hold an assistant position in their late thirties!

Overall, we contend this future law proposal is insufficient. Teaching excellence is not something that you learn once and you are set for life. We do not apply this rationale to research. Quite the contrary, the PhD is the first piece of research one does in a professoriate career. If university professors are both researchers and teachers, the same logic should apply. However, there is no system of incentives to become a

better teacher. Investing time in teaching does not increase scholar prestige, nor does it impact salary increase. Certainly, there is improvement in making teacher training compulsory, but teaching excellence cannot be achieved unless there is a valorization of instruction as an integral part of a professoriate career.

Overhauling the current system is a titanic task. Let's start with short-time measures and enrich the future law by making ANECA require in *all* different level accreditations (yes, civil servants and chairs too!) that the candidate meets the following requirements:

- A number of teaching hours experience¹⁶.
- A number of teaching training hours completed for each professoriate category.
- Several publications in teaching within the discipline of expertise.

Lastly, make those units of innovation in universities more than course providers and establish routinized class observations as a way of fostering teaching excellence for *all* faculty. Right now, we only know what happens in classes through student evaluations. And, no, student evaluations cannot be taken as the measure of teaching distinction, the reasons for which are not pertinent in this article. Suffice it to say there is abundant literature that explains the biases of this evaluation method.

Remove obstacles to implement active learning

There is sufficient evidence that active methodologies enhance student learning better than lecture, but for this advantage to play out, they need to be properly applied. It has been seen that the obstacles concerning its application go beyond the instructor and should be addressed institutionally. Results shed light to the fact that universities are concerned with teaching innovation, but they do not put the necessary means to live up to their expectations. Professors on their part believe active methodologies are a pertinent mode of instruction and that students mostly react well to them. However, they claim to have no time for teaching development. Rightly so, we believe, if investing time on teaching improvement does not pay off in terms of career advancement.

The call for including the scholarship of teaching and learning as part of a professoriate career cannot become a reality if higher education institutions do not have an incentive to go along this path. Student retention is certainly one of them. Bearing in mind Spain's low natality rate, it goes without saying that in a not so far away future, Spanish universities will be struggling against each other for students. Offering active methodologies as an integral part of courses might win the hearts of our youngsters.

16. This measure is already in place.

In addition, it is our contention that ANECA, when validating programs from different universities, should include that institutions provide *compulsory* teacher training—which most already do on a voluntary basis—and, most importantly, a path of professional advancement grounded on teaching excellence as a basic requirement to meet quality standards.

Rehabilitation of the lecture model

Given the sheer number of students per course both in public and many private universities, it does not seem reasonable to predict lecturing is going to disappear any time soon. Our interviews show that lecturing's bad reputation is based on a stereotyped and simplified notion of what this model can do for students. Certainly, lecturing can be performed poorly. Overcoming this deficiency and training scholars to excel in lecturing is a challenge that lies ahead if we want to improve the quality of student learning. What is at stake is sufficiently important not to fall under the spell of obsessively trying to innovate for the sake of it. Rather, good teaching should be grounded on sound scientific knowledge and following García-Pérez (2021) on best practice.

To outcast the hegemonic model of instruction with pejorative tags and consider what we do most of the time as long bygone is an unnecessary burden.

For the sake of the future generations, let's improve our mostly used model and work for a brighter methodological future where blended modes of instruction combining lecturing and active methodologies at a level of tested excellence become the new tide of the day. Let's join Boyer's call to action and provide the scholarship of teaching and learning the place it should have in a professoriate career!

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APPENDIX

Q1. Sex

- a. Men
- b. Woman
- c. Other

Q2. I work in a university of -----titularity

- a. Public
- b. Private
- c. University School¹⁷
- d. Other (specify)

Q3. Professional rank

- a. Catedrático (professor)
- b. Profesor titular (associate)
- c. Private university professor
- d. Profesor contratado doctor (permanent assistant)
- e. Profesor ayudante doctor (assistant).
- f. Profesor asociado (adjunct)

Q4. Age

- a. 20 to 30 years old
- b. 31 to 40 years old

17. En español, colegio universitario.

- c. 41 to 50 years old
- d. 51 to 60 years old
- e. More than 61

Q5. Years devoted to teaching

- a. Less than 5
- b. Between 6 and 10.
- c. Between 11 and 15
- d. Between 16 and 25
- e. More than 25

Q6. Do you use active methodologies in class:

- a. Very frequently
- b. Frequently
- c. Occasionally
- d. Almost never
- e. Never

Q7. You can see a list of claims related to the main obstacles when implementing active methodologies. Provide the extent of your agreement to each one of them (*totally agree, no agreement or disagreement, not agree*).

- I have limited personal time for teaching development
- I am happy with the methodologies I am using
- University provides with support (eg, technical or administrative to use new methodologies, active methodologies take up too much class time).
- I do not know how to use these methodologies in the classroom.
- There are no simulation and/or games for my course.
- Teaching innovation is not a priority in the institution where I work.
- I think it is risky to use active methodologies.
- Active methodologies are not pertinent for my course.
- Active methodologies take up too much class time.
- Students don't react positively to active methodologies.

Q8. How many years have you been using active methodologies?

- a. Less than 5 years
- b. Between 6 and 10 years
- c. Between 11 and 20 years
- d. More than 20 years

Q9. Why do you use active methodologies?

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