

Seminars: Between Students' Perception and Actual Practice

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□ ABSTRACT □

The study's main contribution is highlighting the importance of seminars and their role in helping students improve skills and form their own perspective of the knowledge through experience. More importantly, it gives possible recommendations as to what might be done to have healthy and functional seminars.

The importance of this study stems from the importance of seminars as a pedagogical approach that empowers students to take initiative in their own learning.

This study is conducted in the English department, mainly third and fourth year students, at Tishreen University to investigate students' perception of seminars and their importance and how they are actually run on the ground. This study follows a descriptive approach, which uses questionnaire for data collection and it is distributed to 60 students.

This study concludes that there is a difference between students' perception and their practice on the ground which may indicate that the notion of seminar is good but it is poorly conducted.

Keywords: seminar, students' perception, teaching method, learning.



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الندوة (الحلقة الدراسية): ما بين إدراك الطلاب والتطبيق على أرض الواقع

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□ ملخص □

هدفت الدراسة إلى الإضاءة على أهمية الندوة (الحلقة الدراسية) ودورها في مساعدة الطلاب على تحسين مهاراتهم وتكوين إدراكهم الخاص للحقائق عن طريق التجربة، وتكمن النقطة الأهم بإعطاء توصيات ممكنة لما يمكن القيام به للحصول على ندوة (حلقة دراسية) مفيدة وتحقق الغاية المطلوبة منها، وتأتي أهمية هذه الدراسة من أهمية الندوة (الحلقة الدراسية) كمنهج تعليمي يمكن الطلاب من أخذ زمام المبادرة في عملياتهم التعليمية. تم إجراء هذه الدراسة في قسم اللغة الانكليزية في جامعة تشرين وتكونت عينة الدراسة من (60) طالباً وطالبة من السنة الثالثة والرابعة، وتم الاعتماد على المنهج الوصفي من خلال تصميم استبانة وتوزيعها على عينة الدراسة وذلك للتحقق من إدراك الطلاب لمفهوم الندوة (الحلقة الدراسية) وأهميتها ومقارنة ذلك بكيفية تطبيقها على أرض الواقع. خلصت هذه الدراسة إلى وجود اختلاف بين إدراك الطلاب لمفهوم الندوة (الحلقة الدراسية) وبين التطبيق الفعلي على أرض الواقع والذي قد يشير إلى أن مفهوم الندوة (الحلقة الدراسية) جيد بحد ذاته ولكن هنالك ضعف بتطبيقه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الندوة (الحلقة الدراسية) - إدراك الطالب - طريقة التعليم - التعلم.



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Introduction

A seminar is one of the modern teaching methods that depends on employing novel and creative ideas to improve students' critical thinking and empower them to be autonomous learners as they are considered the essence of the teaching process and its most valuable component. Most importantly, it improves students' skills in various domains such as preparing, organizing and running discussions and, at Tishreen University in the English department, mastering the English language. Seminars pave the way for students to be more competent, confident, intellectual and active and prepare them for real life experiences.

❖ The importance and objectives of the research

The importance of the research lies in the following:

Theoretical importance: this research examines the reality of seminars in the English department and under what conditions they should be run as an important and effective teaching method that contributes to enhance students' abilities cognitively, affectively and socially. Seminars help students develop their speaking, writing and organizing skills, enhance their critical thinking, improve their communication with their peers, etc.

Practical importance: this research focuses on students in the English department at Tishreen University, the majority of whom will be teachers in the future. When these students comprehend the notion of seminar and the objectives of it, that might give them the ability to communicate, listen to and encourage their students to elaborate and express themselves even more in English. The comprehension of the notion of seminar, not only guides students to become effective teachers, but also helps them in any field they enter since they acquire the skills of preparation, critical thinking, running a discussion, raising questions, active listening, etc.

This paper will seek to achieve the following objectives:

1. Determining what a seminar is and its objectives.
2. Examining students' perception of a seminar in the English department (its definition, importance and students' and teachers' role in a seminar).
3. Highlighting students' actual practices in seminars.

❖ Questions of the research

1. What is a seminar and what are its objectives?
2. How do students perceive a seminar, its importance and their role and teachers' role in a seminar?
3. What are students' actual practices in seminars?

❖ Context and Sample of the study

This study was conducted in the second term of the academic year 2022/2023. The research community was the third and fourth year students of the English department at Tishreen university. The research sample was random and it consisted of 60 students who chose to take part in this study. The focus was on third and fourth year students because they had the richest experience in the department and they were able to provide clear and subtle data on the topic raised.

To better understand the context of the study we should take into consideration the number of third and fourth year students which is approximately 569 (Tishreen University archive, 2023). The academic staff number is important as well, currently there are around 22 members of academic staff teaching in the English department (Tishreen University archive, 2023), categorized as follows: 16 lecturers (PhD holders) and 6 teaching assistants. It is worth noting that only the teaching assistants are responsible for running

seminars. Moreover, the context gets clearer to take a look at the nature and number of seminars in the department. The seminars in the four years are as follows:

- in the first year, there are three different seminars in the second term only, which are language, composition and reading comprehension.
- in the second year there are seminars in composition and language in both terms.
- in the third year there are seminars in composition and American literature in the first term and language and methodology in the second term.
- and finally, in the fourth year there is a seminar in applied linguistics in the first term and teaching methodology in the second term.

It is worth mentioning that even though the English department is literary oriented, as the majority of its modules are literary ones, there is only one seminar in a literary module which is in the first term of the third year. Moreover, the timetables show that students, at best cases, are divided into 4 groups and each group has a two-hour session per week for each assigned seminar.

❖ **Research Methodology**

This study mainly follows the descriptive research which aims "at casting light on current issues or problems through a process of data collection that enables researchers to describe the situation more completely than was possible without employing this method." (Manjunatha, 2019). This methodology focuses more on the "what" of the research subject rather than the "why" of the research subject. Its value is based on the premise that problems can be solved and practices improved through observation, analysis, and description. The most common descriptive research method is the survey, which includes questionnaires, personal interviews, phone surveys, and normative surveys (Manjunatha, 2019). Hence, this study depends on a questionnaire in collecting data.

❖ **Procedures of data collection**

A questionnaire was used to examine the extent to which students shared certain perceptions of seminars and their actual practice on the ground. The 30 items of the questionnaire were adapted by the researcher based on the following studies; (Al'Adawi (2017), Harnish (1995), McCartney (1995), Xing-ju, W (2013)) and they were modified according to this specific context. The questionnaire contained mainly two themes; the first theme handled students' perception and the other handled their actual practice.

The questionnaire was designed on 5-point Likert-scale ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree".

The questionnaire was distributed to 60 students as follows:

- 45 third year students
- 15 fourth year students

After data collection was complete, it was ready for statistical analysis. The results were computed using SPSS, a statistical program for social studies, in terms of the percentages of the students' answers and the mean percentages.

Literature Review

This section provides rich material to address the topic of seminar; its definition; the difference between a seminar and a lecture; its objectives and the roles of students and teachers in the seminar.

❖ **What is a seminar**

Definitions of a seminar and a lecture in the Oxford Dictionary (2000) set the difference between the two. A seminar is a class at a university or college when a small group of students and a teacher discuss or study a particular topic, while a lecture is a talk that is

given to a group of people to teach them about a particular subject often as part of a university or college course. These two definitions imply that in a lecture, students gather in one place to listen to the lecturer who addresses a certain topic and they are mostly receptive. However, in seminars, the process is mutual where students are divided into smaller groups and join the teacher in discussing the topic raised. Next is profound information about the notion of seminar.

The original home of the seminar is the ecclesiastical schools of the Middle Ages. The mediaeval "seminaries" were, as the word implies, veritable seed-plats, institutions whose students would be either religious writers or teachers who were taught to unfold the seed of doctrinal disputation, of theological acumen, and of pulpit eloquence. (Seligman, 1912)

Seligman continued to speak about sciences and stated that the developments happened in natural sciences- mathematical, physical and biological ones- were due to original research and laboratory works and if other sciences would develop they should follow seminars, where:

In the beginning used by a few eminent teachers of philology and history, it spread rapidly, until it has become today the very core of university work. The seminar is to the moral, the philosophical, the political sciences what the laboratory is to the natural sciences. It is the wheel within the wheel, the real center of the life-giving, the stimulating, the creative forces of the modern university. Without it no university instruction is complete; with it, correctly conducted, no university can fail to accomplish the main purpose of its being. (Seligman, 1912)

Next is how two different universities define seminars:

According to Yale University, Seminars are often defined as small, discussion-based courses. Typically, students complete readings and assignments before the class and discuss major themes or topics during class. The flexibility of class discussions stems largely from grounding in the Vygotskyian social learning theory, which emphasizes knowledge and conceptual gain through peer-to-peer dialogue. Vygotsky understood peers to coexist in the "zone of proximal development," -where knowledge could be shared and misconceptions clarified through dialogue (Vygotsky, 1962). Moreover, this kind of semi-public dialogue can facilitate better speaking skills and human reasoning (Hollander, 2002).

According to the university of Mannheim, a seminar is a class designed to help students learn and develop their knowledge in an interactive environment. In contrast to lectures, seminars mostly require intense participation from the students, particularly by asking them to give presentations or to take part in discussions.

Concerning preparation and completed readings and assignments done by students before classes, Harnish (1995) continues to assure that a seminar is not an arena for performance to show you've read the text or a reporting session to read your papers. It's more than a class discussion and it definitely is not a time for a lecture from an expert who will tell the group what they should get from this book. There may be places for those activities but not in a seminar. A seminar is a special time for a unique intellectual activity. The exchange of ideas is focused on a source (a book, play or film) and is aimed primarily at getting more deeply into the source.

Thus, a seminar is the heart of the learning process since it unfolds the different aspects of the truth, and gives students freedom to be creative and openly discuss their ideas, it enhances the spirit of scientific independence (Seligman, 1912) and it provokes critical thinking.

❖ **The objectives of the seminar**

Al'Adawi (2017) cited in her research that seminars have been used as a teaching method since Socrates for their value in engaging students in the teaching and learning process. Socrates did not teach explicitly but created situations and raised questions that require students to think and analyse using their higher level thinking skills to understand the underlying meaning of Socrates words. Socrates' classes have promoted intellectual curiosity, independent learning and involved students as a valuable source of knowledge-sharing using their background knowledge to find 'the truth' (Bates, 2016). Thus, students are viewed as contributors in shaping reality and finding truth by bringing their experience, identity, and values into the learning and teaching process (Dewey's principles, cited in Bates, 2016).

Moreover, K. Ann McCartney assured that the overall goal of the seminar is to create a space and time for students' engagement on the idea level (the intellect, the intuitive, the emotions), the individual level (unique perceptions), and the social level (community).

Intellectually, the seminar serves to help students explore a diversity of perspectives, to see the complexity and ambiguity of the content, to help them recognize the underlying assumptions of their habitual ideas and behaviors, to develop higher level critical thinking ability, and to encourage active listening.

Emotionally, the seminar serves to increase students' affective connections to the content, to show students they are heard and that their voices matter and their experiences and thinking are valued.

On the individual level, the seminar helps students to test, expand, revise, create their individual meanings in the context of the group.

Socially, the seminar serves to build relationships with other learners in a way that creates a community of learners who bring knowledge to life with mutual exploration, both consensus and dissensus ("an agonistic framework of conflict and difference . . .") (Trimber, 1989, p.609)

When students engage on these different levels that would make the class more enjoyable, make them more motivated to stimulate arguments with their peers and whet their appetite for further work.

Eventually, a seminar has also an effect on students' skills not only their knowledge of the topic (Padgett, Keup & Pascarella, 2013)

❖ **The role of students and teachers in a seminar**

From the previous literature, it is obvious that seminars are student-centered. Students are responsible for their own learning. Students' job is to do the preparation, the reading, do their own research on the topic, raise critical questions, use their higher level of thinking to understand the underlying meaning of words and ideas, actively listen to their colleagues and support or debate their ideas, and contribute to find knowledge and form their own version of the knowledge.

Regarding the teacher's role, Dewey's Principles emphasized that teachers should not spoon-feed knowledge to their students but create opportunities for experience in which students interact, form and reflect on their knowledge with the help of teachers working as facilitators and guides, which in turn support students' active engagement (Weber, Gabbert, & Patrick, 2007).

More specifically, Harnish (1995), stated that the teacher's role in a seminar is, at best, to be a model of an experienced learner; not to be the focus of attention, or the authority who

will tell you what you should learn. He emphasized not to let the faculty member give a lecture in a seminar and everyone must take responsibility for co-leading and sharing ideas.

Previous Studies

Kasem (2018) conducted a study to investigate students' oral participation in the English department at Tishreen University, and the factors affecting it. Her sample of the study was participants from second and fourth year students and some of the faculty members. She used a mixed method for data collection; observation in classes, questionnaire distributed to students and interviews with both students and teachers. She questioned the role of seminars in improving students' oral participation and concluded that:

Both lecturers and students perceive seminars as the appropriate place where students can participate freely. However, observations of some of seminars show that the numbers of students are much more than those in classes because attendance is given marks. However, with this huge number of students, seminars cannot function properly and take their role as a place where students can participate and improve their spoken language. This is supported by what the lecturers mention in the interviews that the seminars are not run well either because of huge numbers of students or because the absence, in most cases, of the experienced staff who are capable of running the classes in an interactive way. (2018, P.107)

WANG Xing-ju, ZHAO Lin and GAO Gui-feng (2013) conducted a study in Chinese graduate education. They chose 30 students who had similar results and similar ability, then they divided them into three groups in average. They were trained by three different teaching methods. The three teaching modes were the traditional teaching method, seminar method, and traditional lecture method combined with the seminar method. A year later, they could draw the conclusion that the lecture method and seminar bonding was better than the traditional lecture method and the single seminar method.

They stated that in the traditional teaching method the teacher played a leading role and students got all the knowledge. But in this method the students lost their ability to be creative and to initiate their learning. Seminar teaching method was a kind of research type teaching method. This method made students more initiative and creative. The combination of the traditional lecture method and seminar emphasized the teacher's leading role and played the students' initiative. The case study showed that the combination of these two methods was better than others.

Al'Adawi (2017) conducted a study to highlight students' perceptions about the value of implementing seminars as a teaching and an assessment method in a children's literature course- designed to explore Children Literature genres and how they could be taught in children schools- in a college of applied sciences (XCAS) in Oman. It was run for a whole semester of 15 weeks. This study was conducted in spring of 2015. She used two methods of data collection- observation and questionnaire to gather information. the researcher provided an overview of the course explaining to students the objectives, teaching mode and assessment procedures of the course. Students were informed that they would be required to prepare for a seminar instead of a topic presentation. They were told they would have to raise questions and organize discussions in which the audience had a very important role. Students were given instructions on how to run seminars then they were given the chance to become seminar leaders and pre-assign the readings.

Findings indicted the positive effects of seminars in enriching classroom learning and students' responsibility for their own learning which could be achieved through training for teachers and students. The majority of students perceived seminars as a good method of

teaching that engaged them actively in critical thinking by raising questions on literary texts, sharing ideas and improving their communication and presentation skills. Lack of training and awareness of the effectiveness of seminars in engaging students in learning, as well as insensitivity to context, participants' learning histories and oversight of the significance of considering logistics in seminars were some of the limitations of this study.

Results and Discussion

30 items are examined in the questionnaire. These items are divided into two main themes: items about students' perceptions and items about students' actual practices in seminars. *Students' perceptions* theme is divided into three sub-themes; students' perception of what seminars are, students' perception of the importance of seminars and students' perception of their role and the teachers' role in seminars. Tables below present quantitative data; the percentage of answers in detail for each item and the percentage of means. The mean shows the general direction of the responses (i.e. agree or disagree) where items with 60% or more of the mean percentage have students' agreement, while statements with less than 60% of the mean percentage have students' disagreement. These means are referred to when necessary to clarify the ideas.

❖ The first theme: students' perceptions

A. Students' perception of what seminars are

Table 1: The percentage of answers and the percentage of means to students' perception of what seminars are
N= 60

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	agree	Strongly agree	Mean Average*
Seminars and lectures follow the same teaching method.	8.3	66.7	16.7	0	8.3	46.66
In a lecture, students are gathered together into one lecture hall and receive the information from the lecturer.	0	8.3	25.0	41.7	25.0	76.68
In seminars, students are divided into smaller groups to talk, discuss and explore certain topics.	8.3	0	0	58.3	33.3	81.6
Seminar is an interactive teaching method that students discuss with each other and the teacher certain topic in a democratic and harmonious atmosphere.	0	0	16.7	58.3	25.0	81.66
Seminar time is devoted for students' discussion and activities.	0	0	33.3	41.7	25.0	78.34

The source: prepared by the researcher using SPSS

N= the number of students who finish the questionnaire

5 items, exploring students' perception of seminar, are examined in this section of the questionnaire. As can be seen from the table above, students are aware of the difference between lectures and seminars as two different teaching approaches where in lectures there are huge number of students attending at the same time and place and they are just

* mean average = $(8.3*1+66.7*2+16.7*3+0*4+8.3*5)/5=46.66$.

The numbers (1,2,3,4,5) in the equation represent the choices where strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, etc.

recipients, taking notes after the lecturer who is the sole arbiter in the class. However, in seminars students assure, as the average of means show 81.6% and 81.66%, that students are divided into smaller groups and their participation is effective and productive. Both lecturers and students are coworkers where the teacher is here the friend and the equal and they work in a supportive and comfortable atmosphere. After all, seminar is about students and all students seem to comprehend and agree with this understanding of the concept of seminar.

B. Students' perception of the importance of seminars

Table 2: The percentages of answers and the percentage of means to Students' perception of the importance of seminars
N=60

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	agree	Strongly agree	Mean Average
Seminars help to improve students' skills of research, organizing ideas and discussing them.	0	0	25.0	50.0	25.0	80
By frequent participation in seminars, student's spoken language gets improved.	8.3	8.3	16.7	16.7	50.0	78.36
Discussions during seminars will contribute to enrich student's understanding of the topic presented.	0	0	0	58.3	41.7	88.34
Seminars positively affect student's communication skills. It is a team work. All students communicate to generate as much ideas as possible.	0	16.7	16.7	41.7	25.0	75.06
Sometimes after certain discussion new ideas and concepts can threaten students' already established meanings.	0	8.3	41.7	25.0	25.0	73.34
In seminar, students hear points of view or ideas that never occur to their minds and that widen their horizon.	0	8.3	58.3	8.3	25.0	69.94

The source: prepared by the researcher using SPSS
N= the number of students who finish the questionnaire

Seminars encourage students to be independent learners who are responsible for their own development. Thus, students agree on the importance of seminars on different levels; cognitive, linguistic, social and individual. The first three top items in terms of average mean are related to students' individual and linguistic levels with average means 88.43% ,

80% and 78.36%. Seminars help students gain better understanding of the material discussed by expanding their knowledge and help them improve their research skills and by frequent participation students get to improve their spoken language. Next on the list comes the social importance as seminar is a teamwork, where students get to know each other, work together to explore different aspects of knowledge and clarify misconception. Then comes the cognitive importance where discussions in seminars help students develop higher critical thinking by exposure to different points of views which might be original and provoking.

C. Students' perception of their role and the teachers' role in seminars

Table 3: The percentage of answers and the percentage of means to Students' perception of their role and the teachers' role in seminars

N=60

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	agree	Strongly agree	Mean Average
Students are the most valuable element in a seminar.	0	8.3	8.3	41.7	41.7	83.36
Students' role in seminars is preparing in advance, speaking, communicating their ideas, raising questions and debating when they have a different thought or point of view.	0	8.3	0	58.3	33.3	83.26
In seminars, teachers raise critical questions for students to debate.	0	0	25	41.7	33.3	81.66
The teacher's role in seminars is a facilitator, plays guidance and instructional role on how students share ideas and express themselves.	0	8.3	0	75	16.7	80.02
Teachers in seminars encourage students to participate and improve their speaking proficiency level.	8.3	8.3	16.7	33.3	33.3	74.94

The source: prepared by the researcher using SPSS
N= the number of students who finish the questionnaire

All students seem to be aware of their role and their teachers' role in seminar. They mostly agree that they are the most important party in the seminar and they are supposed to do all the work of searching, preparing, communicating, debating, etc. Moreover, students agree that their participation happens under the supervision of the teacher where her/his role is supporting and guiding one. The teacher enhances and pushes forward students' own participation by providing the suitable environment, asking debatable questions, guiding them in how to participate and share ideas, helping them improve their English and not trying to dominate or control the class.

❖ **The second theme: students' actual practices in seminars****Table 4: The percentage of answers and the percentage of means to Students' actual practices in seminars**

N=60

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	agree	Strongly agree	Mean Average
I participate in seminars because the number of students is much less than their number in lectures.	0	16.7	41.7	41.7	0	65.06
I am more engaged and active in seminars than in lectures because the environment in seminars is more comfortable and supportive.	8.3	33.3	25	8.3	25	61.62
I like seminars because I feel free to share my ideas and learn from others as I actively listen to their contributions.	0	8.3	33.3	25	8.3	51.6
I attend seminars only because my attendance is compulsory and graded.	50	8.3	16.7	25	0	43.34
Seminars are our space to discuss and improve our spoken language.	0	25	16.7	25	33.3	73.32
Seminars are related to the lectures, deal with the same topics mentioned earlier.	8.3	8.3	16.7	16.7	50	78.36
The number of seminars a week is enough for us as students to improve our spoken and cognitive skills.	16.7	50	0	16.7	16.7	53.4
Seminar time is enough for us all to take part and discuss.	0	41.7	25	8.3	25	63.32
There are always presentations in seminars.	0	16.7	8.3	25	50	81.66
When doing a presentation I get in-depth knowledge of the subject I present.	8.3	16.7	0	41.7	33.3	75
I am willing to do presentation even if my English is not good.	8.3	16.7	33.3	8.3	33.3	68.26
I participate in seminar because I have enough ideas about the topic and I read the assigned reading.	8.3	0	8.3	33.3	50	83.28
As a student, I am more likely to participate in seminars in translation, composition, and linguistics, rather than seminars in prose, drama or poetry.	25	25	25	8.3	16.7	53.34
All students participate in seminars and there are no students dominating the discussion	33.3	41.7	0	16.7	8.3	45

The source: prepared by the researcher using SPSS
N= the number of students who finish the questionnaire

After exploring students' perception of seminar which seem to be mostly positive, here in this section we will discuss students' actual practices in class and see if there are any differences between perception and practice.

The statement "I participate in seminars because the number of students is much less than their number in lectures." does not get great agreement as the percentage of mean is 65.06%. As can be seen in the table above 41.7% of the students are not sure of their participation this could be because the number of students is still considered large in seminars.

The statement "I am more engaged and active in seminars than in lectures because the environment in seminars is more comfortable and supportive." does not get students' consensus as the mean average is 61.62%. As can be seen above, 33.3% of the students disagree with the statement and 25% are uncertain. Here we can see the contradiction between students' perception of their role in seminar and their actual practice on the ground. This could be because of the big number of students and the fact that they lack motivation to take part and may be seminars are not run well because of the absence of experienced staff who are able to manage the class professionally and provide the suitable environment for participation.

Next on the list, " I like seminars because I feel free to share my ideas and learn from others as I actively listen to their contributions." does not get students' agreement as the percentage mean is 51.6%. The table above shows that 33.3% of students are uncertain. This could also be related to the way seminars are run and how much the teacher controls the class, judges and criticizes students which might affect their will to participate. In other words; there is no actual contributions of students because of not providing the comfortable and supportive environment.

Even though most students do not engage in seminars, still they disagree with the statement, "I attend seminars only because my attendance is compulsory and graded." where 50% of students strongly disagree with it. This might either reflect their perception of the importance of seminar and their desire of being able to engage more actively in such classes or their attempt to protect their self-image by giving a good impression about themselves.

"Seminars are our space to discuss and improve our spoken language." this statement gets students agreement with average mean 73.32% as it contributes to their belief of the role and importance of seminar compared to lectures. The table above shows that 33.3% of the students strongly agree with the statement. This could happen if participation takes place on regular pace.

The statement, "Seminars are related to the lectures, deal with the same topics mentioned earlier." gets students' agreement with mean average 78.36%. This means that seminars are just practical sessions intimately linked to the theoretical classes run for the same modules which might threaten its essence as a place where new topics and ideas are introduced to widen students' horizon and add various, new, provoking ideas to their already existing ones.

Students disagree that the number of seminars a week is enough for them as students to improve their spoken and cognitive skills as the average mean is 53.4%. As can be seen in the table above, 50% of the students disagree with the statement. As mentioned earlier in **Context and Sample of the study**, one session a week is not enough for students to practice speaking and moreover improve their cognitive skills.

Even though the mean average, 63.31%, shows that students agree with the statement "Seminar time is enough for us all to take part and discuss." still 41.7% of students show their disagreement. As mentioned in **Context and Sample of the study**, two hours a week are not sufficient to engage all students in intellectual and speech improvement environment. Those who agree might take all the time by participating and dominating the class.

The majority of students, with the average mean 81.66%, agree that there are presentations in seminars which might depict the reality.

With the average mean 75%, students agree that they get in-depth knowledge of the subject when they do presentation. Doing presentation is not an easy task, students need to search the topic, draft it, prepare it and be courageous enough to step forward and present it.

Since our study takes place in the English department, not only in-depth knowledge of the subject contributes to presentation, but other factors do like mastering the language and having strong personality. The following statement "I am willing to do presentation even if my English is not good." gets students' agreement with mean average 68.26%. With students being 33.3% uncertain and 33.3% strongly agree, this indicates that only self-confident students are open to experience speaking in public even with poor English.

The statement, "I participate in seminar because I have enough ideas about the topic and I read the assigned reading." gets students' agreement with average mean 83.28%. As can be seen in the table above, 33.3% of the students agree and 50% of the students strongly agree with the statement. The key component for students' participation is their preparation in advance.

Students disagree with the statement, "As a student, I am more likely to participate in seminars in translation, composition, and linguistics, rather than seminars in prose, drama or poetry." with average mean 53.34%. Despite the fact that there is only one seminar in literary module, students are aware that literary topics can open the door for discussion because they are all about points of view and there is no correct answer. Hypothetically students are responsible for presenting novel ideas and contradicting pre-existing ones.

Finally, we can see that 33.3% of the students strongly disagree and 41.7% disagree with the statement "All students participate in seminars and there are no students dominating the discussion". This indicates that some students dominate the class and speak most of the time because either their English is good or they have strong personalities. This intimidates other students and prevents them from participating. On the one hand, this could be attributed to the lack of time the teacher has; two precious hours a week are not enough to encourage the students who do not want to talk to participate. On the other hand, it could be related to the teacher's lack of techniques of managing the class.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study concludes that there is a difference between students' perception of seminar and their practice on the ground. They think positively about seminar, but the environment and practices destroy its course. To have effective and healthy seminars is conditioned not only by the teacher but also by the students who should be willing and motivated to make use of this opportunity. Also It is conditioned by changes within the department itself. Next are some suggestions to improve the reality of seminars.

1. In its essence, teaching is a performance art. In classroom paradigm, the teacher has the responsibility to communicate as well as entertain and engage. The role of the teacher is not only to impart knowledge to students. Teachers need to be resourceful and skillful to

be able to run a seminar properly by engaging students more and without drifting into lecturing. That is why it is really important to prepare teachers and teacher-assistants and make them follow a course on how to teach before they enter any class and have contact with students.

2. The numbers of seminars a week are insufficient for students' participation. Students do not get the desired benefit from one session a week. Since seminar is considered the place where students participate and improve their interpersonal skills; speaking, listening, questioning and discussing, so there should be more than one session a week for each assigned seminar.

3. The few number of teaching assistants has its effect on seminars. First, it makes the teachers really exhausted and affects their will to manage a class discussion. Second, it makes it difficult to divide students into more groups and have seminars with even smaller number of students which all affect the class environment and students' participation. To face this problem, the department could use the help of its MA students to teach in seminars after providing them with the appropriate training.

4. Seminars are not follow up classes and they are not held to discuss and clarify points and topics discussed in lectures as it is the case. The genuine purpose is to stimulate producing new ideas, novel suggestions and to leave with more questions than the ones the students entered with.

Leaving the seminar with more questions than you came with, or being somewhat confused and overwhelmed with new ideas, is a sign your seminar is working. You will come to realize in seminar that a great book is not something you read once and then feel satisfied that you have learned all you can learn from it. Rather, a great book is one which stimulates continuing intellectual curiosity and which demands from you a re-reading and a continuing discussion of it-maybe for the rest of your life.(Harnish, 1995)

Based on the previous mentioned points and based on students' tendency to participate more in literary seminars; There should be more seminars related to literary modules to open the space for more reasoning and thinking.

5. Since preparing in advance gives readiness for the mind and learning becomes structured, lecturers should give the required materials earlier so students could read and search for the different aspects and form their own understanding before the class and be ready to participate and debate. Interactions in seminars help to empower students by making them feel more in control of their own learning.

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