

Enhancing Students Class Participation in the Case of Second Year Horticulture Students

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Abstract

Active student participations in class play meaningful role in satisfying educational objectives and raising students personality. To assure quality of education, enhancing students' class participation has become very decisive as direct personal observation, registrar and departmental documents of students show they have very low performance and interest for class participation. The purpose of this action research is to identify hindering factors for active participation in classroom based teaching learning process and to enhance students active participation in classroom based teaching learning process in Debre Markos University Burie Campus particularly department of horticulture. To conduct this study, descriptive case study design and both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed. The quantitative data are collected from horticulture 2nd year students. Qualitative data was collected through observation and focus group discussion. The data was analyzed by using percentage, frequency and mean. The data obtained through observation and focus group discussion were analyzed using narrative description. The finding of the study revealed that students participation about active participation was low and active participation of students was challenged by different problem like lack of awareness about active learning practices, lack of preparation in advance on the lesson, lack of continuous support from the instructors, lack of sufficient time for discussion, Instructor teaching methodologies, and lack of reward means for active participant students from instructor before the implementation of action plan. Nevertheless, by utilizing the proposed actions like creating awareness about the active learning practices, giving teaching materials in advance for preparation with discussion questions, supporting and encouraging them to participate actively, allocate sufficient time for discussion, improve on student centered teaching learning process and motivating actively participate students the researchers observed improvement on active participation of students. As a result, majority of the students (84.62%) have positive attitude on active participation since they believed that active participation will help them to share new ideas with their friends. Though some students are still inactive perhaps due to different psychological and personal factors that need further investigation; the actions implemented also bring some important changes that enhanced students' class participation.

Keywords: Class participation, Enhancement, Studen

1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Education is a means by which people develop and acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. It paves the way for development and plays vital role (serve as a catalyst) in bringing socio-cultural, economical, technological, political and environmental advancements. However, to achieve these goals or to attain quality education, the teaching learning process at all educational institutions should be supported by strong two way communications (teacher students or student's students) meaning active participation had better observed during the whole course provision sessions (Bonwell& Eison1991; Major and Palmer, 2001). Active learning has attracted strong advocates among educational institutions looking for alternatives to traditional teaching methods (Kumar, 2007).Active learningis generally defined as any instructional method that engages students in the learning process. In short, active learning requires students to do meaningful learning activities and think about what they are doing (Major *et al.*, 2001). While this definition could include traditional activities such as homework, in practice active learning refers to activities that are introduced into the classroom. The core elements of active learning are student activity and engagement in the learning process. Active learning is often contrasted to the traditional lecture where students passively receive information from the instructor.

In any formal education, most of learning activities take place in a classroom. Classroom is a built-in environment where formal learning process takes place. It is an important context where both students and instructor come into contact to share information in their quest for knowledge. For the instructor, classroom time is a golden opportunity to meet face to face with the students, delivering the teaching material effectively with the aim to ensure that students are learning what is being taught. On the other hand, the students are expected to be presence on time and participate actively to absorb, seek and apply the skill and knowledge shared in the classroom or other learning activities. These complementing engagements between lecturers and students do generate conducive classroom environment.

A conducive classroom environment involved two-way interaction between students and instructors. This

type of classroom environment will stimulate learning and makes both the instructor and students feel satisfied, which eventually leads to effective learning process. According to Wang *et al.* (2006), most students can obtain the benefits such as the enjoyment of sharing ideas with others and learn more if they are active to contribute in class discussion. Effective learning process occurred when both instructors and students interact and actively participate in the learning activities. Nevertheless, as we often hear from the academic world, students still do not actively participate or become passive in the classroom despite encouragements and use of various teaching methods by the instructors to stimulate active participation from the students. The concern on the students participation leads a study to investigate the culture of student participation in the learning process.

EPRDF launched a 20 years education sector indicative plan to implement the 1994 national education and training policy, improve educational quality, equity and relevance to achieve the MDGs' and objective of national development plan through supplying qualified work force with the necessary quantity and quality at all levels. Following this new development, Ethiopia board on ambitious expansion by increasing the national enrolment capacity from 90,000-150,000 and universities from 8-35 to ensure equity, access, accountability, relevance and responsiveness to the demands of the Ethiopian people (Semela,2011).

Recently there have become changes in academia in the last previous years or so is the shift from lecture-based classes to courses that encourage a student-centered approach as per the direction from Ministry of Education. Action research can be used to understand practice; how to make practice better; realize how to accommodate outside change in one's practice and recognize how to change the outside to make practice better. It has been blamed that active student participation in higher educational institutions using classroom facilitates have limitation both in terms of acquirement of knowledge and development of problem solving skills regardless of there is very little empirical evidence to either confirm or deny this perspective. Recent literature on higher educational institution give considerable focus on the limitations of the lecture method of teaching and the need for more active student's participation in the classroom (Harry and Lang, 1997).

Suter (2011) states the potential contributions of action research by teachers and asserted that classroom teachers who conduct such research are reflective practitioners who can make exemplary contributions to instructional improvement. Action research described as being about the improvement of the understanding of practice and the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place.

Bruns (2006) suggests that student participation in class should be grade; if left ungraded, part of the motivation that students need is lost and part of the record that the lecturer can use to facilitate individual student learning is not developed. Hammond (2002) emphasizes that students' effective participation is a direct outcome of their individual preparation before the class. Teachers can an important role in encouraging participation whereas Frei (2002) suggests that student participation is a function of the ability by the teacher to create a supportive environment for participation. The way of teachers' teaching approach matters more along students learning interest and teaching learning environment as well as administration.

Statement of the problem

Participation in classroom activities play meaningful role in satisfying educational objectives and raising students personality. Enhancing student's participation in different domains of classroom activities needs to be searched and studied to uncover its fact to know its characteristics and advantages. Effectiveness in learning depends up on teachers' ability to select appropriate time considering learners experiences and preferences (Firdissa, 2005). This implies that learners are the chief central foci of classroom instructional planning. Their beliefs and motivation to learn their preferences and expectation should direct their instructors to design instructional strategies in general, and that of particular classroom activities in particular (Derebssa, 2004).

Different literature recommends that active learning is the best instructional approaches in involving students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing. It implies learners' active participation, involvement and thinking and doing what they think and sharing responsibilities for their learning rather than passively absorbing the supposedly rich contents provided by their instructors (Firdissa, 2005).

Carrying out action research on enhancing class participation is timely and essential to improve students' participation in classroom based teaching learning process. Among many alternatives to assure quality of education, enhancing students' class participation has become very decisive. As direct personal observation, registrar and departmental documents of students show they have very low performance and interest for class participation.

Therefore, the researchers planned to identify the determinant factors that why students' class participation of second year horticulture students is low and to make intervention based on the findings of the study.

Research questions

The main research questions to be attempted in this study are the following:

1. Why students are not well participating in classroom based teaching learning process?
2. What could be the possible approaches and solutions to enhance student class participation?

Objectives of the Study

General objective

1. To enhance students' class participation in the case of second year horticulture students.

Specific objectives

1. To identify hindering factors for active participation in classroom based teaching learning process
2. To enhance students active participation in classroom based teaching learning process.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Location

Burie campus is under Debre Markos University which is one of Ethiopian higher education institutions. Burie campus is located North West of Addis Ababa with 411 km and 152 km away from South Bahridar.

2.2. Research Design

The researchers employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches that enable to obtain the required data along with cross-sectional descriptive design and focus on gathering qualitative data using questionnaires, focus group discussion and direct personal observation during class. Description type of research used to describe phenomenon since the researchers had prior knowledge and exposure about problems and information needed to explain situations regarding low students class participation.

2.3. Sample Size Determination and Sampling Techniques

Since the total of second year horticulture students are 26, all students were participated in the research because most scholars strongly recommended that if the total number of study population is less than 100, it is advisable to use all study population as a whole.

2.4. Data Collection Instrument

The required data was collected both from primary and secondary sources using focus group discussion, questionnaires, direct observation and document tracing about students. The use of more than one data collection techniques in a single study helps the researcher to substantiate the strength and corrects the defect of any one source of data. Based on this idea the researchers employed variety of tools to gather information about the practice and challenges of student active learning. The instruments assessed students perception towards active learning, the role to improve class participation, challenges and possible strategies to enhance class participation. Both close ended and open-ended types questionnaire was used to collect data from students about their perception, roles and problems encounters the effectiveness of active learning. The questionnaire was a 5-point liker scale; ranging from Strongly Disagree (represented by 1), Disagree (2), Undecided (3), Agree (4) and Strongly Agree (5). This, five liker scale works for variables of assessment, attitude, training and input (Appendix).

2.5. Procedures of Data Collection

The researchers informed both the campus and the department about the issues and also research group make clear the idea for the student to engage freely to the action research. Researchers engaged in the class room from data collection to the intervention to improve students' participation.

2.6. Methods of Data Analysis

Quantitative data analyzed through percentage, mean and frequency. Percentage was utilized to analyze and determine different characteristics and personal background of the respondent. Frequency was utilized to analyze and describe students perception towards active learning, the role to improve class participation, challenges and possible strategies to enhance class participation. The data obtained through observation and FGD were analyzed using narrative description (qualitative methods of analysis).

3. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This section presents the analysis and results of the research findings. The organization of raw data into systematically verified information employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were carried out with percentage, mean and frequency but qualitative data have been narrated the phenomenon of teaching learning process from active participation perspective based on the skills and knowledge of researchers.

A total of 26 second year students from department of horticulture were considered for this research, all questionnaires were appropriately filled and valid for analysis. Regarding the sex of students, 22 (85%) were males and the remaining 4 (15%) were females.

Table 1. Background Information of the respondents

Sex	No
Male	22
Female	4
Total	26

Student's perception towards active participation

The table contains questioners designed to collect data on the perception of students towards active participation. Questions were carefully designed and administered in such way each participants of the study choose the idea that most appropriately match with their feelings as strongly agree (5) & agree (4) to show their agreements with the ideas of the questioner, and disagree (2) & strongly disagree (1) to show there disagree with the ideas of the questioner and (3) to undecided, when they face difficulties to agree or disagree with the ideas of each questioners. Accordingly, each questions of the questioner were analyzed as follows.

Before class room intervention students' perception has been analyzed. Students perception towards active class participation are presented in Table 2.

Majority of the respondents (84.62%) realized that active participation in a classroom helps them to share new ideas with their friends, 26.92% of respondents believe that they participate only to get mark and 26.08% of respondents also realize that participation in the classroom contribute nothing for their success and 42.31% realize that participation in the classroom is time consuming.

Table 2. Analysis of data obtained through questionnaire about students perception in active learning practices

NO	Students Perception in active class participation	Level of agreement (Number (%))					Mean
		SD	D	U	A	SA	
1	Active participation in a classroom helps students to share new ideas with their friends	2(7.69)	1(3.85)	1(3.85)	11(42.31)	11(42.31)	4.08
2	Students participate only to get mark	5(19.23)	11(42.31)	2(7.69)	7(26.92)	1(3.85)	2.54
3	Participation in the classroom contribute nothing for students' success	8(30.77)	8(30.77)	3(11.54)	6(23.08)	1(3.85)	2.38
4	Active participation is time consuming	2(7.69)	7(26.92)	2(7.69)	11(42.31)	4(15.38)	3.31

Where: A = agree, D= disagree, SD= strongly agree, U= undecided

Factors Affecting Active Participation of Students

Factors affecting active participation of students are presented in Table 3. From the table, 73.08% (50.00+23.08) of respondents have interest in active participation. Some 15.38% respondents indicated students' interest in active participation is very low and 11.54% indicated the prevalence of low interest in active participation among students. From this, one can conclude that there is a variation of interest for active participation in the classroom. This also showed that the prevalence of gap on students knowledge about active participation even though majority 84.61% (46.15+38.46) of the responded that students have knowledge/ understanding about active learning practices. This indicates that still some students did not have aware about active learning practices and the implication is that there is need for awareness rising program for the students in the classroom to help all learners have common understanding of active learning practices among all students.

Among all, factors indicated in item number 8, 3, 1,6 and 4 have high effect in hindering student's participation. This means Students awareness of active learning practices (mean=4.12), Insufficient support and follow up from teachers (mean=3.62), Students interest in active participation (mean=3.54), Instructors does not allocate sufficient time for discussion (mean=3.50) and Instructor teaching methodologies (mean=3.50) are highly affected active participation.

From the Table 3 for item three, 69.23% (23.08+ 46.15) of the total participants did not get sufficient support and follow up from instructor. Instructor continuous encouragement will enable students' to participate in the class discussion. Frei [6] also suggests that student participation is a function of the ability by the teacher to create a supportive environment for participation.

Table 3. Respondent's views for items related with factors affecting active participation of students

N O	Factors Affecting Active Participation of Students	Level of agreement (Number (%))					Mean
		SD	D	U	A	SA	
1	Students interest in active participation	4(15.38)	3(11.54)	0 (0.00)	13(50.00)	6(23.08)	3.54
2	Lack of awareness about the benefits of active participation	5(19.23)	10(38.46)	1(3.85)	8(30.77)	2(7.69)	2.69
3	Insufficient support and follow up from teachers	1(3.85)	6(23.08)	1(3.85)	12(46.15)	6(23.08)	3.62
4	Instructor teaching methodologies	0(0.00)	9(34.62)	1(3.85)	10(38.46)	6 (23.08)	3.50
5	Lack of reward means for active participant students from instructor	4(15.38)	2(7.69)	1(3.85)	18(69.23)	1 (3.85)	3.38
6	Instructors does not allocate sufficient time for discussion	3(11.54)	5(19.23)	0(0.00)	12(46.15)	6 (23.08)	3.50
7	Uncomfortable seating arrangement of students	2(7.69)	7(26.92)	0(0.00)	14(53.85)	3 (11.54)	3.35
8	Students awareness of active learning practices	1(3.85)	1(3.85)	2(7.69)	12(46.15)	10 (38.46)	4.12
9	prepare in advance on the lesson	1(3.85)	7(26.92)	2(7.69)	12(46.15)	4 (15.38)	3.42

Where: A = agree, D= disagree, SD= strongly agree, U= undecided

As stated on the above Table 3, majority of respondents (69.23%) agreed that instructor did not allocate sufficient time for discussion, 30.77% of respondents disagreed that the instructor allocate sufficient time for discussion.

Majority of respondents (73.08%), there is reward mechanism to encourage active participants in the forms of bonus marks, participation mark and appreciation for participants but the remaining 23.07 % agreed there is no any reward means to encourage active participants whereas the remaining 3.85 % of respondents did not decide about reward mechanism of instructor towards class participation. Some scholars like Bruns [4] suggests that student participation in class should be rewarded.

As depicted on the above Table, 61.53% (46.15+15.38) of the total respondents prepare in advance before they come to class. Even if they prepare in advance on the lesson but they do not always actively participate in the class perhaps due to lack of confidence and carelessness. Hammond (2002) emphasizes that students' effective participation is a direct outcome of their individual preparation before the class

Suggestions, observation and focus group discussions

As per the students suggestions individually and in focus group discussions as well as some session observations by the researchers, we have identified the following major challenges that hinder successful implementation of active participation of students.

- a. Lack of awareness about active learning practices
- b. Lack of preparation in advance on the lesson
- c. Lack of continuous support from the instructors
- d. Lack of sufficient time for discussion
- e. Instructor teaching methodologies
- f. Lack of reward means for active participant students from instructor

Proposed action

Based on the analysis results, the following planned measures should be taken:

- a. Creating awareness about active learning practices
- b. Giving teaching materials in advance for preparation with discussion questions
- c. Supporting and encouraging them to participate actively
- d. Allocate sufficient time for discussion
- e. Improve on student centered teaching learning process using different active teaching methods like cross over group, jigsaw, micro teaching, hot seating, group discussion, and presentation.
- f. Motivate students to participate through incentives as a form of reward like mark, applaud etc.

Implementation of the Action Plan

As recommended and planned by the researchers, the instructor has taken the following actions to enhance student class participation:

- Activity-1- Created awareness about active learning practices for Students.
- Activity -2- Gave students the teaching materials in advance with discussion.
- Activity -3- Supported and encouraged them to participate actively.
- Activity -4- Allocated sufficient time for discussion.
- Activity-5- Applied different active learning methods.
- Activity-6- motivated students to participate through incentives as a form of reward like mark, and applaud.
- Activity -7- Informed in advance about the forthcoming sessions to prepare in advance and actively participate in the class.

Evaluation

After implementing the proposed actions recommended by the researchers, the research team members found the implemented strategies bring some important changes such as enhanced students participation, applied various active learning methods by the instructor, allocated sufficient time for discussion, motivated students by instructor and students came with well preparation in advance.

Despite that some students are still passive perhaps due to different psychological and personal factors that need further investigation; the actions implemented bring some important changes that enhanced students' class participation.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Student's level of participation is highly affected by different factors such as in advance preparation, delivery of teaching material in advance, applying different active teaching methods by the instructor and availability of different rewarding means.

As a result, majority of the students (84.62%) have positive attitude on active participation since they believed that active participation will help them to share new ideas with their friends. Though some students are still inactive perhaps due to different psychological and personal factors that need further investigation; the actions implemented also bring some important changes that enhanced students' class participation.

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