

Improving Students' Learning in Group: In the Case of 2016 Graduating Class 3rd Year Rural Development and Agricultural Extension Students on the Course Value Chain Management in Agriculture

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Abstract

Education is base for every development agenda. Exerting effort on the education development is one of crucial issues throughout the world. Improving education quality in Ethiopia is currently needs applying different student centered teaching learning methods with aim of achieving worthwhile output. The objective of this study is to identify the major factors that affect the implementation of students' group discussion, to examine the attitude of students towards the implementation of group discussion and to suggest possible solutions that can improve students' group discussion in the course value chain management in agriculture. Group discussion is one of methods to improve students learning. Graduating class students in Wolaita Sodo University under the College of Agriculture, department of Rural Development and Agricultural Extension on the course Value Chain Management in Agriculture is used to test the teacher and students performance on the use of group discussion. Large class size, low interest of some students on group learning, dominance of group discussion by high achievers, seating arrangement style, shortage of resources are some of major factors that affect the implementation of students' group discussion. For the specific subject under study, the result indicated that, the subject matter instructor performing well in the student centered learning by using group work, pair work and assignment. The possible solutions to improve the group learning are applying gallery walk teaching for large class size, providing awareness on group learning importance by some experts and responsible bodies, providing teaching materials before the lesson in groups and if possible individually, motivating the students to participate in the class room and provide the students various tasks and let them do by themselves first and then group discussion as per need and also arrange tutorial classes.

Keywords: Group Learning, Teaching Methods, Value Chain Management

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a mechanism by which human beings gain knowledge, skills, abilities, values, etc. (Wondimu, 2007). It is also considered as the chief means of acquiring the essential knowledge and skills of life. That is, education helps people to acquire skills that make their lives more interesting and enjoyable. Currently, education has become increasingly more important than ever before. This is because education enables human being to learn the skills they need for every activity such as a newspaper, writing letters or managing their money (Ellington H. et al, 2005).

Teaching methods are the means of transmitting the content of subject matter to the students (Khan, 2004). The quality of education depends on the quality of teaching methods and facilities of the schools. In educational setting, there are two methods of instructions. These are teacher centered (traditional method) and student centered method (active learning method). In school setting, education helps students to increase their ability to think logically and develop their own individual knowledge and intellectual skills (TGE, 1994). Thus, any educational institution aims at producing intelligent, responsible, well informed citizens who take an active role in the world around them. For these reasons, educating people is believed to be necessary for a given country in general and an individual person in particular.

Traditional method (teacher centered method) is teaching method where the teacher plays more active and dominant roles in directing and controlling the whole instructional process. In this method, there is very little room for the involvement of the students. The teacher taught and the students listen to him/her passively. However, in the new teaching method (student centered method); students play more active and dominant roles in their learning. In the active learning method, students are expected to actively participate in all stages and steps of teaching learning process (Aggarwal, 1996).

In student centered method, students gain knowledge, skill and attitude in their own; and the teacher plays only a facilitating role. Where the students actively involved in the teaching learning process, teacher gave them the opportunity to discover or apply ideas by themselves. In fact, teaching could be most effective where teachers could select learning materials according to the needs of students and use the methods which involve learners in various classroom activities. One of the methods which enable learners to involve in student-centered

teaching learning process is group discussion. Each subject and grade level has its own specific teaching techniques that are particularly relevant to long period of time. Group discussion learning system breaks a lot of problems in teaching learning process because learners could share idea, custom, tradition, experience, belief, etc. However, various factors can affect the improvement of students' group discussion. Some of these factors are large class size, seats arrangement style, shortage of time, etc. Thus, the researchers in this study emphasizes on the strategies that improve the students' group discussion in teaching of the course Value Chain Management in Agriculture at Wolaita Sodo university, particularly 2016 graduating class 3rd year Rural Development and Agricultural Extension department students, college of agriculture. It is because of this reason that the researchers are interested in this study to identify the major strategies for the improvement of students' group discussion and forward possible solutions for these problems.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The educational and training policy of Ethiopia recommends the use of students' group discussion in teaching-learning process. In this new method of teaching, the students would not only receive information from the teacher but they also search information by themselves. There are multi-dimensional problems in the effective implementation of teaching methodology in general, and group discussion in particular. The nature of subject needs group discussion or cooperative learning to share ideas, belief and tradition among different ground originated students. The dominant problems that have been in the Wolaita Sodo University on students are lack of interest in the involvement of group discussion and sometimes large class size. This situation initiated the researchers to conduct and ultimately to take effective action over the problem.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are:

- ❖ To identify the major factors that affect the implementation of students' group discussion
- ❖ To examine the attitude of students towards the implementation of group discussion
- ❖ To suggest possible solutions that can improve students' group discussion in the course value chain management in agriculture and others

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Importance of Group Discussion

According to Aggrawal (1994), group discussion is a set of individuals who share a common idea that is who are interdependent in the sense that an event which affects one members is likely to affect all. Callahan and Clark (1988:138) also stated group discussion as opportunities to learn from their peer-groups through communication.

2.2. Teachers Role in Group Discussion

As cited in educational psychology (2008:58), teachers' role should be from group organization to require of students discussion product. The following important points are advisable to group discussion; Train students in group discussion with short simple tasks, Have students practice moving into and out of the group quickly, group member can be set together prior to the activity to make the transition from the whole class activity to students group and back again with little description., Give students a clear and specific task to accomplish in the group, Specify the period of time students are allowed to accomplish tasks, Require that students produce a product as a result of the group discussion and support them in feedback.

2.3. Factors Affecting Effective Group Discussion

According to Biruk (2008), teachers have different view and ideology on factors affecting students' classroom participation. One group remember child mind as an empty vessel or tabularize and the other group accept and recognize them as a creative mind. Thus, teachers view affects group discussion. According to Paulos (2008), factors affecting effective group discussion are low motive student and teachers towards group discussion and school related problems. As Jacking (1996), the students' group discussion methods are influenced by the conditions of classroom size, their academic ability and the individual difference that existed among them.

3. Materials, Methods of Data Collection, Sampling Design, Sample Size and Data Analysis

The materials that the researchers used for this study include paper, ruler, pen and binder. In order to get the reliable data for the study, the researchers used the questionnaire and class room observation methods of data collection. In this method, the researchers prepared questionnaires for randomly selected students. The questionnaires included both open ended and close ended questions. The main objective of the questionnaire was to obtain reliable data from the respondents' on the course value chain management in agriculture under study.

This method of data collection involves direct presence of the researchers to the study area (in this case 2016 graduating class 3rd year RDAE students) from whom the data was collected. The main reason for using

this method is due to the direct observation is better and tangible than indirect information provided by the other external body.

It is difficult to involve all students in the study because of time, money, and material constraints. For this reason, the researchers selected 2016 academic year graduating class 3rd year RDAE students purposively. Accordingly, twenty five (25) students were selected from 53 students of the sample section by using lottery method of simple random sampling technique.

To collect reliable information, the following procedures were followed: The researchers distributed the questionnaire to the selected students with the necessary instruction and observed the classroom to obtain the real data. After collecting all the necessary data through questionnaire and classroom observation, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. Moreover, qualitative analysis was made to analyze and interpret the data from classroom observation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter mainly deals with the analysis, interpretation and presentation of the collected data. All questionnaires distributed to the respondents were filled and returned to the researchers. Then, the data was analyzed, summarized and presented as follows with the necessary interpretation.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Students

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Students

No.	Items	Alternatives	No. of respondents	% of respondents
1	Sex	Male	15	60
		Female	10	40
	Total		25	100
2	Age	16-20	-	-
		21-25	25	100
		>25	-	-
Total		25	100	

As it is indicated in table 1 above, from the total respondents, 60% are male and 40% are female. On the other hand, the above table indicated that all of the respondents are in the age interval between 21 and 25 years old.

4.2. Type of Teaching Method used by the instructor

Regarding to the type of teaching method used by the instructor, the student's response is shown in table 2 below that, of the total respondents, 32% of the students responded that their teacher uses student centered teaching method during teaching learning process; majority (60%) of the students said that their teacher uses both student and teacher centered teaching methods in the class; only 8% of the students answered that their teacher uses teacher centered teaching method in the class. This result indicates that the teacher is trying to do his best in using student centered teaching method so as to improve students' group learning method but still it requires further participatory teaching methods more to be considered.

Table 2: Type of teaching method

Teaching Method	Frequency	Percent
Student centered	8	32.0
Teacher centered	2	8.0
Both	15	60.0
Total	25	100.0

4.3. Frequency of Using Student Centered Method in the Course Value Chain Management in Agriculture

During the survey, students were asked how often their teacher use student centered method to teach the value chain management in agriculture course. As indicated in table 3 below, 28%(7), 68%(17) and 4%(1) of the students responded that their teacher uses student centered method to teach value chain management in agriculture course always, sometimes and rarely respectively. These figures show that, the teacher is in good stand to let his students to participate on the course matter he taught them so as to promote group learning and also he has to continue to improve his way further.

Table 3: Frequency of using student centered teaching method by the teacher

Frequency of using student centered method	Frequency	Percentage
Always	7	28.0
Sometimes	17	68.0
Rarely	1	4.0
Total	25	100.0

4.4. Type of Active Learning Methods for Learning the Course Value Chain Management in Agriculture

During the survey, students were asked about the type of active learning methods used for learning the course value chain management in agriculture. The result in table 4 below shows that almost all 96 % (24) of the students answered that their teacher uses group work, pair work and assignment for learning value chain management in agriculture course. Only 4% (1) of students said that the teacher uses only group work for learning value chain management in agriculture course. From this figure, it is possible to say that the teacher handled the course matter in participatory/active learning method so as to make the teaching learning process inclusive.

Table 4: Type of active learning method

Type of active learning method	Frequency	Percent
Group work	1	4.0
group work, pair work and assignment	24	96.0
Total	25	100.0

4.5. Frequency of Learning Value Chain Management in Agriculture course in Group

During the survey, students were asked about the frequency of learning value chain management in agriculture course in a group. Accordingly table 5 below shows that, majority 72% (18) of the students said that their teacher sometimes uses group learning during teaching learning process. The remaining 28% (7) of the students responded that their teacher always use group learning (group work such as group discussion). Thus, the teacher has to increase the frequency of teaching his students in group so that his students as well as his performance would be improved and thereby the improvement in efficiency of our country working forces to improve the country's the whole activities performance.

Table 5: Frequency of learning value chain management in agriculture course in a group

No.	Frequency of learning value chain management in agriculture in a group	No. of respondents	% of respondents
1	Always	7	28
	Sometimes	18	72
	Rarely	-	-
	Total	25	100

4.6. Motivation by the teacher

All students 100% (25) responded that their teacher motivates them to learn the course value chain management in agriculture in a group. According to their response, the degree of motivation varies. As depicted in table 6 below, majority 56% (14) of the respondents have responded that their teacher motivates them always and the remaining 44% (11) of respondents said that their teacher motivates them sometimes, to learn through group discussion. On the other hand, none of them responded that their teacher motivates them rarely to learn the lesson through group discussion. This figure tells that, the teacher is highly initiated to motivate his students to teach as well as let them to learn by using one of active learning methods.

Table 6: Students' response about the frequency of motivation made by their teacher

No.	Motivation made by the teacher	No. of respondents	% of respondents
1	Always	14	56
	Sometimes	11	44
	Rarely	-	-
	Total	25	100

During the survey, students were asked about their interest on group discussion. The survey result revealed in table 7 below shown that majority 76% (19) of the students responded that their interest on group discussion/learning is high. This shows that their attitude towards group discussion can be said excellent; the remaining 24% (6) of the students responded that their perception towards group discussion is medium. Therefore, group discussion as method of active learning process has to be taken under consideration.

Table 7: Students' response towards their interest of learning in a group

No.	Students' attitude towards learning in a group	No. of respondents	% of respondents
1	Highly interested	17	76
	Medium	6	24
	Low	-	-
	Total	25	100

Table 8 below shows that of the total respondents, almost all (96% (24)) of respondents have answered that they actively participate in classroom group discussion and only 4% (1) of respondents have replied that they do not participate actively in the classroom during the group discussion. From this figure it is possible to say that, majority of the students may be active to participate in group discussion if the teacher play great role by initiating students and also letting them to become interested in group discussions by using different mechanisms of active learning methods.

Table 8: Students' response about their participation in group discussion

No.	Item	Alternatives	No. of respondents	% of respondents
1	Do you actively participate in the classroom while your teacher is using group discussion?	Yes	24	96
		No	1	4
	Total		25	100

4.7. Factors affecting group learning/group discussion

At the time of survey, students were asked about the presence of factors affecting group learning. As shown in table 9 below, majority 84% (21) of the respondents have replied that there is a problem that affects their active participation in the classroom during the teaching learning process. The remaining 16% (4) of the respondents replied that there is no problem that affects their active participation in group learning.

Table 9: Factors affecting group learning/group discussion

No.	Item	Alternatives	No. of respondents	% of respondents
1	Is there any problem that affects you not to actively participate in the group discussion?	Yes	21	84
		No	4	16
	Total		25	100

Accordingly, the following factors were mentioned by all 100%(25) of the respondents both for low participation of students and low application (implementation) of group discussion during teaching learning processes such as Large class size, low interest on group learning, dominance of group discussion by high achievers, seating arrangement style, shortage of resources.

4.8. IMPROVING STUDENTS' GROUP DISCUSSION

4.8.1. Action Plan

Actions which were proposed to solve the factors that affect students' learning in a group are as follows: providing handouts to the students ahead of time and let them read individually and in group during the classroom, motivating the students in the teaching learning process, giving the students various tasks and let them work in groups, advising the students to have good perception towards student centered learning method, developing classroom management techniques and developing effective and efficient utilization of time.

4.8.2. Implementation of the Action

Based on the action plan, the students were given various tasks such as class works, home works, assignments, and group discussions. The students were highly motivated to do the various tasks they were given. Besides, they were given an opportunity to present their work to the whole class. The researchers also attempted to advise the students to improve their participation and to have good perception towards group learning. Furthermore, the researchers prepared a lesson plan before coming to the class so as to develop effective and efficient utilization of time. Prior to the implementation of other several activities, the researchers have divided the total students into groups and provided the students with handouts in each group so as to make students read and write (understand) by themselves and come with doubts (critical questions) to discuss with the teacher in classroom.

4.8.3. Action Evaluation

During the first week of action implementation, students' participation in active learning method was perceived to be low. But, after the commencement of implementation, the researchers observed progressive changes in students' participation during teaching-learning process due to the application of different teaching methodologies, such as motivating students to participate in teaching learning process and giving various tasks like class works, home works, group discussions and others. As a result, students' participation in the classroom was increased; students became highly motivated (interested) and showed good performance in their learning.

Generally, students developed their attitude towards the importance of group learning.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1. Conclusion

As the findings of the study show, different factors affect the implementation of students' learning in a group. These factors include large class size, seating arrangement style, shortage of time, lack of adequate teaching-learning materials, and low participation of students. The results of this study have revealed some possible solutions for solving the problems that influence the application of group discussion during value chain management in agriculture course. Accordingly, actions like supplying adequate teaching materials, wise use of existing classrooms, developing class room management techniques, and managing and using the time effectively were suggested to promote the effective implementation learning in a group.

5.2. Recommendation

On the basis of the findings and the conclusion drawn above, the following recommendations are forwarded by the researchers:

- ❖ To overcome problems related to large class size, the teacher should prefer teaching method like gallery walk which is compatible for large class
- ❖ To promote the effective implementation of learning in a group and to have high interest towards this method, the students and the teacher should be given awareness on its importance by some experts and responsible bodies.
- ❖ The students should be given teaching materials before the lesson in groups, if possible individually regularly.
- ❖ Teacher should motivate the students to participate in the class room
- ❖ Teacher should provide the students various tasks and let them do by themselves first and then group discussion as per need and also arrange tutorial classes.

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