

Improving Students' Learning in Group: The Case of 2016 Graduating Class Rural Development and Agricultural Extension Students, College of Agriculture, Wolaita Sodo University

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Abstract

This study was conducted in Wolaita Sodo University to investigate the major factors that affect the implementation of students' learning in group in the College of Agriculture. In this study, both primary and secondary data sources were used to collect the primary and secondary data respectively. For this study, the 2016 graduating class Rural Development and Agricultural Extension students were selected by purposive sampling technique. Accordingly, twenty five (25) students were selected from 53 students of the sample section by using lottery method of simple random sampling technique. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 20) was used to analyze the data. The findings of this study revealed that large class size, seating arrangement style, shortage of time, lack of adequate teaching-learning materials, and low participation of students are the major factors affecting the implementation of students' learning in a group. In this study, constructing additional classrooms, supplying adequate teaching materials, developing class room management techniques, and managing and using the time effectively were suggested to promote the effective implementation of learning in a group.

Keywords: Group Discussion, Group Learning, Active Learning: Wolaita Sodo University

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

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 news paper, 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).

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 and belief. 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 and others.

Thus, the researchers in this study emphasized 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 RDAE department students of agriculture college. 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/reflections for these problems.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Description of the Study Area

The study was conducted in Wolaita Sodo University which is located at 380 km south of Addis Ababa via shashemene and 154 km away from the regional capital, Hawassa. The university was established in 1998 E.C. and the WSU has about 42 departments in the regular program and also it has a total of about 11553 regular students and about 1000 instructors in this academic year.

Methods of Data Collection

In order to get the reliable data for the study, the researchers used the questionnaire and class room observation methods of data collection.

Sampling Design and Data Collection

Sample Design

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.

Data Collection Procedure

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.

Data Analysis

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.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Type of Teaching Method used by the instructor

Regarding to the type of teaching method used by the instructor, 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.

Table 3.1: 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

Frequency of Using Student Centered Method

During the survey, students were asked how often their teacher use student centered method to teach the value chain management in agriculture course. Accordingly, 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.

Type of Active Learning Methods

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 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.

Frequency of Learning in Group

During the survey, students were asked about the frequency of learning value chain management in agriculture course in a group. 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 will be improved and thereby the improvement in efficiency of our country working forces to improve the country the whole activities performance.

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. The result showed that 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.

During the survey, students were asked about their interest on group discussion. The survey result revealed 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.

Students' Participation in Group Discussion

The survey result revealed 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.

3.2. Factors affecting group learning/group discussion

At the time of survey, students were asked about the presence of factors affecting group learning. 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 group learning. 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. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

Different factors affect the implementation of students' learning in a group. The findings of this study revealed that large class size, seating arrangement style, shortage of time, lack of adequate teaching-learning materials, and low participation of students are the major factors affecting the implementation of students' learning in a group.

Recommendation

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

- ✚ 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.
- ✚ To overcome problems related to large class size, the teacher should prefer teaching method like gallery walk which is compatible for large class
- ✚ 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
- ✚ The students should be given teaching materials before the lesson in groups.

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