



Application of Pedagogical Learnings - Non-Active Participation of Maritime Students in Class

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ABSTRACT

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Active participation of the students in the classroom greatly enhances learning outcomes. However, students were usually observed to be not actively participating in the class of a maritime course. This paper brings out the challenges and methodologies of addressing this problem, firstly, using individualistic approach by a teacher utilizing common sense and teaching experience. Thereafter, it reviews the pedagogical literature on the subject and discusses applying these pedagogical practices to calibrate and finetune the teacher response to improve student participation.

1. Introduction.

The participation of the students in the class during teaching is a significant enabler in its efficacy. Effective learning process occurs when both teachers and students interact and participate in the learning activities (Abdullah, Bakar, & Mahbob, 2012). Generally, in the teaching experience of most teachers, it is quite common to encounter non-active participation of students as a barrier in achieving learning outcomes. The indifference to the engagements during various learning activities and a general nonchalance attitude inhibits learning outcomes. It is obvious that facilitating students' willingness to raise questions or offer comments in class is likely to enhance their intellectual development (Fassinger, 1995).

However, in this particular study of teaching experience in class, despite greatly improving the interest of the students in the subject over the course of time, their active participation still could not improve significantly.

Therefore, the focus of this paper is to discuss what is the reason for less student participation and how to address it. First,

the challenges in active student participation are identified, then it brings out how the response was designed using common sense and experience. Finally, reviewing pedagogy literature, it discusses & proposes some measures imbibing these pedagogical practices for improving student participation.

The sample for this research utilized a class of students attending a bachelor's degree programme in Nautical Science from a course taught in the first semester.

2. Challenges in Active Student Participation.

The factors influencing participation of the students in college classrooms have been studied by many scholars. These range from those related to class traits, students' traits, and professor's traits focusing on group dynamics in class, individual characteristics of students and professor's action & behavior respectively (Fassinger, 1995).

While the first includes emotional climate, interaction norms, class size and associated group interaction/behaviors, the student traits are defined by their confidence, comprehension, interest, fear, and preparation. It is interesting that the Professor traits are students' perceptions of their inclusiveness, approachability, feedback style, supportiveness, discussion style, and expertness, which may be different than professor's own perception (Fassinger, 2000).

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In relation to the current research study, initial general disinterest in the course was a major factor in making it less appealing to students to actively contribute their efforts. This stemmed from their perceived erroneous notion that the content is not valuable or useful for students. However, additional significant factors were incorrect positioning of the course in the curriculum for beginners while it was more suited for higher semesters and routine lack of interest in all teaching activities of university across a variety of courses. Thus, a combination of factors involving institution - curriculum design, course structure, etc.; students – behavior and perceptions, and teaching - learning activities, contributed towards creating this challenge.

While describing the Constructive Alignment, Biggs (2012) highlights a non-academic student Robert with less commitment and knowledge, who is usually interested in surface learning rather than deep learning. Thus, it could be considered that there were more Roberts in the class than Susans (academic student). Further, referencing from the two learning theories of Constructivism and Phenomenography, Biggs suggests focus on student learning where he postulates an aligned system of instruction combining what we want students to learn, and then teach and assess accordingly, to enable optimizing the likelihood that students will engage in the appropriate learning activities. However, he has also pointed out that for Constructive Alignment to work properly, it needs to be embedded in a supportive culture, at each departmental, faculty, institutional levels and even national levels (Biggs, 2014).

3. Teaching Learning Activities to Improve Active Participation.

3.1. Self-Designed Response.

After a few teaching sessions, the problems inhibiting active participation of students were identified and attempted to be addressed. The self-designed response based on common sense and experience of teaching for a long period, worked towards resolving each of these challenges as follows:

- a. Displaying videos of real-life incidents to generate interest and demonstrate importance of course for seafarers.
- b. Recounting interesting anecdotes from personal professional experience to relate lecture content to practical application.
- c. Designed more group activities with a focus on smaller groups (2 to 3 students) despite practical difficulties due to large class size.
- d. Encouraged self-learning through each student creating their own video presentation on chosen topic of interest from a specified chapter for individual submission and then anonymous collective feedback conducted in class to avoid fear/shame.
- e. Covering brief background of difficult topics requiring prior knowledge, even if not in syllabus, to ensure better understanding and learning of lecture content.
- f. Including informal quizzes after every few lectures to make the classroom atmosphere interesting & enjoyable

for students and also conducive for active participation and work as an assessment tool for calibrating subsequent lectures.

- g. Short revision of few minutes after each group activity to encourage correlation and remembrance through reinforcement

The aim for designing these activities was to make the class experience more interesting and content more relevant to real-life scenarios so that the students can relate to the course in a much better way. The response to these activities from the students was mixed. The attendance in the class drastically improved to the highest level among all courses taught in the department, demonstrating enhanced interest of students in the course and even those students who regularly skipped classes of other courses, started attending this class.

However, the trigger of this interest could not be clearly discerned, whether they liked the lecturer attributes or the course. Though, it was felt that the students liked the storytelling about experiences by the teacher, videos of real events and explanations about relevance of lecture content in them. At the same time, this high attendance did not improve the participation of students in class discussions, group work and other activities with the exception of the quiz, which witnessed a high response. Interestingly, the students were happy attending the class but remained wary of active engagement.

3.2. Review of Higher Education Literature - Student Participation.

Though the author has been teaching professional courses for mariners for a considerable period of time, there was limited exposure or knowledge about educational or pedagogical literature and associated theoretical concepts related to teaching and learning at university level. Incidentally, this situation is quite common in maritime education where many teachers are qualified mariners and seafarers but not necessarily higher academic or university degree holders. Therefore, the response strategy to deal with the challenge of non-active participation by students in class, was designed through experiential learning. However, after attending the pedagogy courses on various relevant topics, this issue of non-active student participation in class offered newer insights to the author in the light of knowledge gained.

While studying 'interest' as an important motivational variable for academic performance, Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000), brought out that when students are interested in an academic topic, they are more likely to go to class, pay attention, become engaged, take more courses, as well as process information effectively and ultimately perform well. According to Harackiewicz, Smith, and Priniski (2016), promoting 'interest' therefore can contribute to a more engaged, motivated, learning experience for students. They also highlight that students may have less interest in introductory courses in higher education and use of collative factors (novelty, surprise, humor) can grab students' attention, but can also appear gimmicky. In contrast, context personalization interventions meet individual students

where they are and create interest in course topics by association to their own unique personal interest.

Rocca (2010) has brought out the differences in defining student participation which range from comprehensive engagement process encompassing preparation, contribution to discussions, group skills and communications skills & attendance, to simply the number of unsolicited responses volunteered by students in the class. However, she also brings out that ideal class participation could be in which almost all students participate and are interested, learning, and listening to others' comments and suggestions. Interestingly, some studies have shown that faculty and students have different definitions of student classroom participation and this also affected students behavior in the undergraduate classrooms (Fritschner, 2000) (Mustapha, Rahman, & Md.Yunus, 2010).

The students believe that verbal participation or voluntary speaking out in class was not the only parameter to measure student participation and attendance and active listening, sitting in their seats, doing the assignments, and being prepared for class also displayed their active engagement. However, the professors included asking questions in class, making comments, oral presentations and providing input for class discussions as more appropriate indicators of student participation than coming to class, taking notes, and doing assignments. The quality of student participation has also been highlighted for effecting learning instead of just quantitative measure of engagement in class (Petress, 2006).

Therefore, generation of interest of students and then encouraging increased participation in the class through appropriate strategies need to be synced to ensure good results.

Some of the best practices to improve student participation in class include respectful interaction between teacher & student, opportunity for students to explore solutions beyond classroom teaching, relevancy of subject in terms of real life applications rather than being theoretical & abstract, use of multimedia & technology tools for engaged learning, engaging & challenging instruction (pedagogy & curriculum), and assessment for learning rather than standardized testing assessments (Amirzai, 2020).

Incidentally, the teachers shall also look for other forms of participation in class like 'para participation', where the students though remaining silent, display their interest through nonverbal gestures to communicate agreement with faculty or enthusiasm towards subject matter, or by informally conversing with faculty before or after the class, and encourage it as a positive outcome (Weaver & Qi, 2005).

Classroom discussions is acknowledged as a preferable method for an increase in students' participation (Anastas, 2010). A strong and positive relationship was found between class discussion and class participation when sufficient time is given by the instructor for creative topics (Echiverri, Haoyu, & Keer, 2020). Further, while using classroom discussion as active learning strategy, calling on a student whose hand was not raised (i.e., cold calling) to increase the number of students participating in the discussion, can be done fairly extensively without making students uncomfortable (Dallimore, Hertenstein, & Platt, 2013).

Chang and Brickman (2018) bring out that several integrated theoretical frameworks have been espoused within educational psychology to explain the different constructs (motivational, social, and cognitive) that influence the achievement effects of group work. However, for in-class collaborative learning exercise, smaller groups are more appropriate due to shorter amount of time available to complete a group task and greater opportunity for every student to participate (Burke, 2011).

Further, the instructors need to encourage 'working as a group' rather than 'working in a group' as the former leads to 'collaborative learning' where all students contribute & work together on common task while the later only involves 'cooperative learning' due to all students working individually on separate parts of the group assignment to accomplish the group task (Chiriac, 2014).

4. Discussion.

The problem of students not participating actively in the class necessitated examining it more holistically than focusing on the disinterest of the students. Preliminary response strategies based on experiential teaching were successful in increasing the attendance levels in class, however, the overall participation in class activities inside the classroom did not increase significantly.

The review of educational literature provided a better framework for evaluation and appropriateness of the response strategies affecting student engagement. Incidentally, some of these were unknowingly utilized in the self-designed response, in achieving results similar to those mentioned in the theoretical concepts.

The role of 'interest' is central to the overall motivation of students in learning and lack of interest would greatly impact their active participation not only inside the class but also in overall approach or engagement during the course. It was interesting to note that use of personal experiences and anecdotes, correlating to the 'gimmicks' mentioned in the educational literature, resulted in generating interest. However, as they were not matched or combined with any context personalization interventions for individual students, the overall outcome was not as desired.

Therefore, increased interest led to improved attendance but not to increased participation. Incidentally, an interesting aspect was the composition of the class, which was brought out during interaction in the inaugural lecture whereby the students were from different academic backgrounds and thereby envisaged a variety of future careers. However, unfortunately, this information was not utilized to customize the lecture or course contents, making it appealing and interesting to all students. Thus. the lectures in the class were primarily intended for students becoming seafarers rather than choosing a variety of other maritime careers, e.g., fishing, offshore, boating, shore based maritime industry, etc.

The difference in the perceptions of the students and teachers about what constitutes active participation enables understanding of the issue in a better perspective as it discourages

narrow focus - only on verbal interactions inside the classroom, for evaluating student participation. Recognizing the concept of 'para participation' and encouraging such participation is essential in not only supporting such students to ensure effective learning but also facilitating some of these students to progress to more verbal interactions after getting greater confidence.

The learning activities also influence the student participation in class. Though planning more discussions in class could also improve participation in class, it may not be feasible in a basic level course. However, the use of 'cold calling' provides an interesting option to explore for encouraging silent students to participate. Frankly, such a strategy was usually avoided earlier as it was considered that it may instill fear & embarrassment and discourage them from attending class. However, this was an incorrect pedagogical approach. Thus, judicious use of 'cold calling' could be effectively utilized.

Using creative topics and collaborative learning through working as a group in a group work also generates better class participation. The use of smaller groups in group work in class is also found appropriate, which incidentally, was utilized in self-designed response in the class. Underlining the relevancy of the subject in terms of real-life applications rather than being theoretical & abstract, also enables students to relate to it and encourage participation.

The use of multimedia & technology not only as a learning tool for better learning, but also to highlight interesting aspects or phenomena could also be helpful. Interestingly, videos of real-life incidents to generate interest and demonstrate the importance of the course were utilized and received good response from the students.

Conclusions.

The use of appropriate response strategies which comprehensively address the aspects of the class, the students, and the teacher, will result in solving the challenge of non-active participation of students in a classroom. Contextualizing the content for students, encouraging para participation, exploring 'cold calling' for promoting confidence in students, choosing creative topics for group work in smaller groups, underling relevance of content to real-life applications and using multimedia & technology are some of the methods that can be utilized to promote better student participation. I must also state that the opinions and assertions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the University.

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