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Promoting Active Participation of Students in Regular Classroom

Sharma Ankita[1*] and Verma Richa[2]

Department of Home Science, Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed University),
Dayalbagh, Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India – 282005
ankita.s2612@gmail.com[1] and torichaverma@gmail.com[2]

ABSTRACT:

In the traditional teaching class the students are passive listeners, they may be mentally active but tend to remain primarily as receivers of information. The result is that their attention tends to drift away from classroom teaching. However if the teaching process of classroom is such where students are engaged in action and activity, their attention and understanding can be improved. When students speak up in class, they learn to convey their thoughts in a way that others can understand. It provides the opportunity for students to receive input from fellow students. Class participation is a valuable learning tool for teachers also as it gives them a more accurate idea about the understanding of students regarding the concept being taught. The purpose of increasing participation is to create an environment in which all students have the opportunity to question and explore the concept in depth, from a variety of perspectives. A teacher can increase participation by designing activity based teaching such as, play way method, using student generated questions, connecting the problems to real-life situations and encourage students to talk about the topic with one another and with the teacher. Use of verbal and non-verbal cues by the teacher increases the willingness and zeal in students to participate in classroom and create a conducive learning environment. It is believed that classrooms are richest when all voices are heard. Hence teaching learning can be enhanced by promoting active participation.

KEYWORDS: class participation, active participation, students, classroom

***Corresponding Author:**

Ankita Sharma,

Research scholar, Department of Home Science,

Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed University), Dayalbagh, Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India – 282005

E Mail - ankita.s2612@gmail.com , Mob. NO. - 09557881873.

1. INTRODUCTION

In formal education, most of learning activities take place in a classroom. Classroom is a built-in environment, where formal learning process takes place. Active class participation involves the thoughtful engagement by students with the core concepts of the course, and reflective engagement with classmates for learning and social development. Active participation in class is a significant aspect of student learning mathematics. When students speak up in class, they learn to convey their ideas in a way that others can understand. When they ask questions, they learn how to attain information to increase their own understanding of a subject matter. Wade (1994)[1] explained class participation as, where all students participating, learning, and listening to others' ideas, comments, and questions.

Learning cannot be achieved by transmission of knowledge from teacher to student and via dissemination of written materials. Instead, meaningful knowledge is created through a 'process of discoursing', and by students assembling content into meaning through interaction with it. Students of mathematics do not learn much just by sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing course content. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves.

A significant defensible assumption of active classroom participation is that students learn better by being engaged in learning which can be facilitated through action and reflection with others.[2]

According to Bruffee (1984)[3], meaningful learning takes place in an environment in partnership with others, in which learner observe, try, reflect and ultimately internalize thought processes. Students who interact with others learn better and have superior understanding than those who have been instructed through simple repetitive reinforced performance. High participation is useful when it is accompanied by interesting and challenging mathematics[4].

The Professional Standards for Teaching Mathematics (1991) claims, that student's learning of mathematics depends upon a great extent on their teachers using "mathematical tasks that engage students' interests and intellect". Such tasks, when executed well in the classroom, helps in development of students' understanding, maintain their inquisitiveness, and invite them to communicate with others about mathematical ideas.

The purpose of escalating participation is not to have every student participate in the same way or at the same rate. Instead, it is to form an environment in which all participants have the opportunity to learn and in which the class discovers issues and ideas in depth, from a variety of viewpoints. The teacher's goal is to create conditions that enable students of various learning preferences and personalities to contribute. Class participation is a valuable learning tool for teachers. Through students' questions teachers learn what they don't understand, and can adjust their instruction accordingly.

2. IMPORTANCE OF ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN CLASSROOM

a. ***Better expression-*** Class participation is an essential aspect of student learning. When students participate in class, they learn to communicate their ideas and doubts in a way that others can understand. When they ask questions, they learn how to obtain information to enhance their own understanding of a topic.

b. ***Develops creativity and critical thinking***- It develops students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and that it promote natural creativity and curiosity. It facilitates acquisition of knowledge and communication skills.

c. ***Develops good relationship with teacher and fellow students***- Active classroom participation enhances teacher-pupil interaction which is very important to create positive attitude in the learner and improves their performance. Active participation provides the opportunity for students to receive input from fellow students.

d. ***Learning tool for teachers-*** If students participate in classroom activities it becomes a valuable learning tool for teachers, as it gives them a more accurate idea about the understanding of students regarding the concept being taught[5].

3. WAYS TO PROMOTE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS IN CLASSROOM

Studies indicate that students who continue to remain passive members of the classroom, as a result do not capitalize on the benefits of participation[6]. So it is the responsibility of teacher is to provide a supportive and encouraging environment that helps students to feel comfortable, confident, and less fearful in expressing themselves. There are few points to be considered by teachers for active participation of students while teaching mathematics:

3.1 Shaping the Environment

3.1.1 **Show enthusiasm –** Teacher should be enthusiastic for teaching. If the teachers are not enthusiastic about what they are teaching, students will also not take interest in class. Teacher should show students how interesting and fun mathematics can be. Create activities that engage students in mathematics learning. Once the students see that teachers are excited to teach them, then they will be excited to learn.

3.1.2 **Classroom arrangement -**Arrange the classroom in a way that encourages active engagement. Furniture of class should be arranged into a circle or "U" to ensure that students can see, and speak to, one another. Extra space must be given for the relocation of furniture according to the activities conducted in the classroom.

3.1.3 **Classroom communication -** Clear the expectation from students to participate in class. During the first interaction with the students, the teacher should explain about class participation including calling on students who do not raise their hands and sometimes asking frequent contributors to allow others to have a chance. Teacher should also ask students to make any changes to improve the teaching strategies or activities on a regular basis.

3.1.4 **Learn and use students' names-** Students will be more engaged if teacher perceives them as individuals, rather than as anonymous members of a group. Encourage students to learn one another's names, as well; this strategy will increase the possibility that they will address one another by name and direct their comments to one another.

3.2 Planning

3.2.1 **Assign the responsibilities:** Inform the students, goals for class participation (e.g., everyone participate in discussions) and ask them to come up with a list of guidelines that will help the class reach this goal, such as "do not interrupt others when they are talking to teacher" and don't criticize the person." Put this list on notice board of class. Students who feel invested from the beginning in making the discussions successful will be more likely to work together to increase participation. Ask students to submit anonymous comments on class participation as well as suggestions on how to get more people involved; often, they will enlighten problems with the classroom dynamics that teacher may not see their self. Encourage students to lead discussions or to submit discussion questions before class. Provide guidance and assess student performance on these tasks.

3.2.2 Use a variety of teaching methods: Teacher should use variety of teaching methods including lectures, discussions, and small-group activities for mathematical concepts. During class aside time to ask and answer questions, ask students to solve a problem, or to discuss an issue. Pause every 15-20 minutes for this purpose. When students learn to expect these opportunities for discussion or questioning, they will listen more actively to the teacher.

3.2.3 Effective communication with visual teaching aids- When teaching students a new concept or topic, use a teaching aid. It helps teachers to get point across as well as students to focus on what they are learning and in turn get them to participate. Smart-boards, overhead projectors, power-point presentations, charts, posters etc. can effective teaching aids to involve students in class because it is hard for students to listen and actively participate when there is not a visual aid to focus on.

3.2.4 Let them teach each other- Set some guidelines and then let them teach each other. Especially when reviewing before a test, divide the class into groups and give each group a topic. Encourage them to do interesting activities like- evaluate tests of each other, design review games, etc. and evaluate each group on the accuracy of their content, the creativity of their approach, and how well they work together as a team.

3.2.5 Monitor class participation- Monitoring will help to determine who is and who is not participating, and learn whether a particular student is improving. A simple way to keep track of student participation is to keep a seating chart on teacher's desk and place check marks next to the names of those students who do contribute.

3.2.6 Keep students busy- Re-create classroom as a place where students are busier than teacher. Give them worksheets, activities, discussions, and projects. That doesn't mean teacher to sit around, teacher will still be busy, moving from student to student or group to group, correcting, evaluating, or providing feedback. But now everyone is busy and involved. Research shows that students who are more engaged in class learn better[7].

3.3 Listening and Responding

3.3.1 Use verbal and non-verbal cues to encourage participation- Teacher should not rely on the same volunteers to answer every question. Respond to frequent volunteers in a way that indicates that their responses being appreciated, but want to hear from others as well. Move to a part of the room where quiet students are sitting; smile at and make eye contact with these students to

encourage them to speak up. When frequent volunteers speak, look around the room rather than only at them to encourage others to respond.

3.3.2 Give students time to think before respond for questions- Give students 5-10 seconds to think and formulate answer. If 10-15 seconds passed without anyone volunteering an answer and the students are giving confused looks, rephrase the question.

3.3.3 Listen carefully to students' questions and answer- Teacher should not interrupt after identifying what the student is going to say or ask. Often, well-meaning and enthusiastic instructors make incorrect assumptions and leave their students' actual questions unanswered or misrepresent what the students had planned to say.

3.3.4 Provide specific, encouraging, varied responses- Point out what is helpful or interesting about student contributions. Pick up on comments that were made but not discussed. Ask follow-up questions to prompt students to clarify, refine, and support their ideas. When a student gives an incorrect answer, respond in way that challenges the student to think more deeply or to reconsider the evidence.

3.3.5 Redirect comments and questions to other students- Encourage students to respond to one another. Provide students with a model of civil discourse by demonstrating respect for, and interest in, the views of others.

These strategies can be effective to provide reflective learners and shy students a means of developing ideas that they can then contribute to the class.

4. BENEFITS OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION

The benefits include developing their communication skills[8], demonstrating that they understand the curriculum, and can develop valid arguments in dialogue with their peers[9]. Crone (1997)[10] noted that if a student is participating in an active learning environment, they have the opportunity to become critical thinkers and in turn will be less passive.

Other benefits of participation for students include less memorization, as they are able to learn through discussion and synthesize the information more effectively[11], they are more motivated[12], improve their ability to communicate orally[13], build confidence, and learn by being able to apply theory to their own lives. Participation provides students' and teachers' feedback to each other also.

5. BARRIERS IN PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS

Active participation in maths class allows students to build on their knowledge, demonstrate understanding of the curriculum, and develop confidence[14]. Students who actively participate in class also show improvement in their communication skills[13], group interactions[15], and functioning in a democratic society. With so many positive benefits associated with classroom participation, students struggle with participation due to factors that relate to their personal traits, as well as the formal and informal structures of the classroom environment[16].

5.1 ***Personal traits of students-*** As individuals, everybody is differing in personalities. Confidence is a key trait that students struggle with and has a direct effect on participation[16]. Students deal with fears of not being smart enough to address their class and therefore hesitate on providing insight on subject matter due to pressure[17].

5.2 ***Preparation for class-*** Research shows that some students reported to not be participating in classes if they did not prepare on the subject matter prior to coming to class, therefore did not feel comfortable engaging in discussion[18]. Students worried that they would be criticized by both their peers and teachers, for not being well informed on the subject matter.

5.3 ***Classroom size-*** Logistics of the classroom do matter and affect classroom participation. Classroom size has shown to have a direct and indirect impact on participation[16]. In small classroom, higher levels of participation have been recorded due to the student being more comfortable in an intimate classroom setting and therefore having less anxiety[6]. Auster & MacRone (1994)[19] argued that classrooms with over 40 students had low participation rates.

5.4 ***Role of educators*** **–**Educators or teachers play an important role in engaging students in their classroom. Teachers are seen as the leaders of authority within the classroom, the way they build their relationships with students is critical in getting them to participate [1, 16, 17]. Teaching authority can hinder participation and studies have shown that effective ways to deal with this include, learning students' names, creating a climate of respect and openness, and allowing students to refer to them by first names[20]. Classes with higher participation levels perceive their teachers to be approachable, inclusive, promoters of discussion, and supportive[8].

6. CONCLUSION

Classroom participation is a significant part in a student's education and the achievement of positive learning outcomes. Educators play a pivotal role in encouraging participation by accepting all

contributions made in class as important. Providing strategies to students in direction of overcome their fear of speaking in class, and making constant effort to relate the topics to the students' life make students feel more involved. By striving to provide a more supportive, non-threatening and open learning environment, educators would make students feel comfortable in letting their voices be heard. Teachers can enhance class participation by: designing space to invite participation, giving crisp guidelines, including technology and providing lessons with real life applications. Teachers might not be able to motivate all students to participate in class, but they can create a learning environment where students feel comfortable in taking intellectual risks, which often lead to academic success.

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