

EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO INCREASING ENGAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS IN EFL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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Abstract. *This article discusses factors that increase participation rate, reasons for low student involvement, students' preferred activities and other relevant elements in EFL contexts.*

The main aim of this article is to answer the question "In what ways can teachers encourage students participate more in classroom activities?" considering concepts of some scholars. To answer this question, a questionnaire was conducted among higher education students, and classroom observations were organized to see participation level after using interactive methods. The study found that interactive activities such as group discussions and quizzes significantly increased participation, while fear of making mistakes was the primary barrier to participation. After implementing interactive methods, most students became highly and moderately active, highlighting the importance of interactive teaching methods to foster greater student involvement.

Keywords: *Active participation, interactive approaches, classroom activities, involvement, learning outcomes.*

Introduction

It is clear that, unlike young learners, adults tend to participate less actively in classroom activities. Observations and prior researches show that students' passive participation affects their learning outcomes and future careers as active participants are likely to succeed more in both their academic and personal life. Despite the introduction of many innovations in education system, some institutions still rely on traditional, teacher-centered methods without engaging activities, which leads students to become passive participants and causes them to lose interest in the learning process. Therefore, nowadays, higher education students' participation is considered as a crucial concern in teaching. Although, many researchers have explored why students do not actively take part in activities and how their engagement can be improved, this issue has not been widely examined in the context of EFL classrooms. For this reason, this article focuses on this area and tries to present a clearer understanding of the topic.

Literature review

In previous research, scholars have discussed that higher education students' lack of participation in EFL classroom activities negatively affects their learning outcomes, and what can be used to involve them in lessons. According to Alexander Astin (1984), student involvement is directly connected to academic achievement, explaining that the more students actively participate in learning activities, the more they are likely to achieve better academic results. About reasons for low participation Gul Ahmad Amirzai (2020) highlights that students with low self-confidence often worry about making mistakes and being embarrassed in front of others, which reduces their

participation in classroom activities. Students show active participation when they work in groups and take part in discussions, and those who are not active in discussions still keep their attention on the learning process (Barus et al., 2022). In EFL contexts, classroom participation happens when students are actively involved in lesson-based tasks such as brainstorming, games, quizzes, surveys carried out during class time within the institution, as well as activities like group discussions, debates, role plays, simulations, collaborative creative writing, presentations and speeches (Crosthwaite et al., 2015).

Methodology

This study used a mixed-method approach to find ways to increase students' participation in EFL classes. Data were collected using a questionnaire and classroom observation, and participants were a group of university students. The questionnaire included questions about factors that influence participation, reasons for low participation, students' preferred activities and other relevant questions. After collecting questionnaire data, interactive teaching methods like group work and classroom discussion were applied in the classroom and students' participation was observed during these activities. The questionnaire data were examined using simple statistics like percentages, while observation results were analyzed by identifying changes in students' behavior.

Results

The findings of questionnaire about the factors that increase participation showed that interactive activities were considered the most effective factor for improving classroom participation, chosen by 30% of the participants. Group work was identified by 25% of students as a helpful method for becoming more active during lessons. In addition, 20% reported that digital tools, such as quizzes and online tasks improved their engagement. Teacher encouragement was viewed as an important factor by 15% of respondents, while 10% emphasized the role of a positive classroom atmosphere in supporting active participation. Results of reasons for low student participation indicated that 35% of students experienced lack of confidence during EFL lessons, and 25% of the participants stated that boring classroom students reported fear of making mistakes while speaking English in classroom activities. 15% of students mentioned language difficulties as a reason for low participation, while a smaller number of students connected participation problems with low motivation. The results also showed students' preferred classroom activities in the EFL classroom. 30% of students preferred quizzes, while 25% considered group discussions as the most engaging activity. Games were preferred by 20% of participants, and 15% chose role plays. Presentations were selected by 10% of students. Classroom observation results after applying active learning methods demonstrated noticeable changes in participation. 50% of students became highly active classroom activities. 30% showed moderate participation, while only 15% students remained low participants. A very small number of university students continued to stay passive during lessons.

Discussion

The findings suggest that traditional teacher-centered methods may limit students' participation in EFL classes. Interactive activities such as role plays, games, and group discussions help students speak confidently in English.

These activities are also useful to create a positive and supporting atmosphere where students are willing to participate. The results of this study revealed that lack of confidence is the main factor influencing participation among university students in the EFL classroom. Most of the students hesitate to speak English because they were afraid of making mistakes or being judged by their coursemates.

This finding aligns with the view of Stephen Krashen (1982), who explained that anxiety can negatively affect language learning and classroom communication. The study also showed that students are more interested in interactive classroom activities like quizzes, games, and group discussions. These activities encourages learners feel more comfortable and motivated during English lessons. This result supports the ideas of Lev Vygotsky (1987), who highlights the importance of interaction and collaboration in the learning process.

In EFL classrooms, communication-based activities can create more opportunities for students to practice the target language actively. Another important finding was the improvement in participation after the use of active learning methods in the university classroom. Observation results demonstrated that many students became more involved in discussions and interesting tasks.

Conclusion

This study investigated effective ways to improve students' participation in a university EFL classroom. The findings showed that many students faced problems such as lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and low interest in traditional classroom activities. At the same time, the results revealed that active learning methods, including quizzes, games, role plays, and group discussions, helped students participate more actively during lessons.

The practical significance of this study is that it provides useful approaches for EFL teachers in higher education. With the help of interactive activities teachers can build a friendly and encouraging environment. These methods may also improve students' confidence, communication skills, and motivation to use English in class.

Based on the findings, I recommend that university teachers should use more student-centered teaching method in EFL classrooms instead of relying only on traditional lecture methods. Teachers should also encourage students to participate without fear of making mistakes.

Future studies can involve larger groups of students from different universities to gain broader results about classroom participation in EFL education.

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