

# Improving Students' Participation in Active Learning Methods: Group Discussions, Presentations And Demonstrations: A Case of Madda Walabu University Second Year Tourism Management Students of 2014

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## Abstract

Education is a means by which people develop and acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. It paves the way for development and plays vital role (serve as a catalyst) in bringing socio-cultural, economical, technological, political and environmental advancements. The general objective of this study was to improve Second Year Tourism Management Students' participation in active learning methods (especially in group discussions, presentations and demonstrations) and identify challenges that hamper students not to participate actively in class and off class learning sessions.

Descriptive research design was devised and longitudinal research design was employed.

Questionnaires were distributed for all 42 second year tourism management students, and of which 35, were returned (properly filled) and valid for analysis. Secondary and primary sources of data had been used to interpret the results. To analyze quantitative data, descriptive statistical analyses of mean and standard deviation were computed using SPSS version 20.0. The findings of the study revealed that 75% of the students assured that group discussion gives them more chance to participate freely in the class than demonstrations and presentations. The study also indicated that the major challenges that hinder learners not to participate actively in group discussions, presentations and demonstrations were shortage of time, poor academic background, shyness, poor communication skills, requirements for presentations and demonstrations (formal attires, materials) and lack of preparation. The researchers have provided solutions such as to improve the student's attendance, contribution and responsibility for their learning, the first step is to motivate them by calling their name and teachers had better be friendly, sociable and approachable to learners.

It is also helpful that asking students to present material to their peers (with their peers involved in the assessment) would alert all the students to be best presenter or demonstrator of the day which in return increase their subject-specific knowledge; and reinforce their immediate and the wider group's identity.

**Keywords:** Active learning methods, group discussions, presentations and demonstrations and challenge

## Introduction

Education is a means by which people develop and acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. It paves the way for development and plays vital role (serve as a catalyst) in bringing socio-cultural, economical, technological, political and environmental advancements. However, to achieve these goals or to attain quality education, the teaching learning process at all educational institutions should be supported by strong two way communications (teacher  $\longleftrightarrow$  students or student's  $\longleftrightarrow$  students) meaning active participation had better observed during the whole course provision sessions (Bonwell & Eison 1991; Major and Palmer, 2001).

Over the years, scholars, researchers and national reports have discussed the importance of employing active learning instructional strategies to maximize student learning in the college or university classroom, and researchers have proved that active learning has received considerable attentions (Gallagher, 1997).

Active learning has attracted strong advocates among educational institutions looking for alternatives to traditional teaching methods (Kumar, 2007).

When students are actively involved in the learning task, they learn more than when they are passive recipients of instruction (Cross, 1987 cited in Kumar, 2007).

According to Adler (1987) cited in Colliver (2000) all genuine learning is active, not passive. It involves the use of the mind, not just the memory. It is the process of discovery in which the student is the main agent, not the teacher.

Students learn best when learning is active: When they are mentally involved, when they engage in hands-on activities, when they are involved in a process of inquiry, discovery, investigation, and interpretation. Thus, learning is enhanced when students repeat the information in their own words or when they give examples or make use of the information (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, 2000).

When students are passive, their brain doesn't do job of processing effectively or retaining the information efficiently (Biggs, 1999; Hartley, 2005).

This study is undertaken to assess actively participation of second year Tourism Management Students

of Madda Walabu University and thereby to improve their participation in Active learning methods particularly in group discussions, presentation and demonstrations.

### **Problem Statement**

The genesis of this research stemmed from an observation that most of students were often lethargic in their approach to learning in and outside class course provision sessions.

According to some recent studies, an instructor generally or on average says 100-200 words a minute, and a student only hears 50-100—half. Worse yet, in a typical lecture class, students are attentive just 40 percent of the time (Race, 2001).

A study conducted by Juan, Raquel, and María (2010) on competence profile differences among Graduates from different academic Subject fields: Implications for improving Students' education concluded that students retain about 70 of what they hear in the first ten minutes of class, and just 20 percent during the last ten minutes.

Walk into any college/university/high school classroom, unarguably, one can observe that some students concentrating intently on their note taking or on watching the instructor's presentation (Prince, 2004).

This usual classroom experience is frustrating for students, instructors and higher education institutions that directly or indirectly hinder to achieve quality education and to produce competent citizens (Kelly, 1998). Today, improving in-class experience or enhancing students participations is vital for attracting and retaining on-campus students, especially in light of increasing competition for vacancy having been graduated. The challenge has been finding the right tools for increasing student engagement in class without placing added burdens on instructors or restricting their teaching content and style.

Hence, this research tries to address the following questions:

- ✚ What are the challenges that hinder students' participation in group discussions, presentations and demonstrations?
- ✚ What are the possible solutions for challenges which obstruct students not to take part in assessments actively?
- ✚ How can we implement (interventions) so as to enhance the involvement of students in group discussions, presentations and demonstrations?

### **General Objectives**

The general objective of the study is improving Second Year Tourism Management Students' participation in active learning methods (especially in group discussions, presentations and demonstrations) and identifying challenges that hamper students not to participate actively in class and off class learning sessions.

### **Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives of the study include:

- ✚ To identify challenges that hinder students' participation in group discussions, presentations and demonstrations,
- ✚ To enhance the involvement of students in group discussions, presentations and demonstrations,

### **Methods and Materials**

**Location:** Madawalabu University is one of Ethiopian higher education institutions and the university took the name Madda Walabu to dedicate the historical, cultural and political center for Oromo people of Madda Walabu site which far 227km away from Robe town of Bale Zone to south west (Oda, 2015).

**Research Design:** Mixed research approach i.e. both qualitative (focus group discussion and document analysis) and quantitative (mainly using survey questionnaire) was devised due to the fact that mixed research method provides more comprehensive answers to research questions, going beyond overcoming the limitations of a single approach (Spratt, Walker, and Robinson, 2004; Bryman, 2007 & Kothari, 2004).

Longitudinal study design (where investigations and data collections have been undertaken twice in two months) and descriptive method which is best suited to study existing situations, problems and phenomenon was employed.

**Sample size Determination and Sampling Techniques:** Since the total of second year tourism management students were 42, census sampling has been used because most scholars strongly recommended that if the total number of study population is less than 100, it is advisable to use all study population as a whole.

**Data Gathering Instruments:** Questionnaires, focus group discussions and observations were primary sources of information while secondary sources of data were obtained from academic articles, reports and magazines. Questionnaires were distributed for all 42 students, and two different focus group discussions had been conducting with 16 students whom the first focus group discussion had 8 students who were selected based on their high academic performance, and the second focus group discussion had also 8 with medium and low

academic performance. For observation, the researcher themselves are instructors of tourism management students so that they have observed in their normal teaching learning sessions.

**Methods of Data Analysis:** The data collected from primary and secondary sources was tallied, tabulated and analyzed through descriptive statistical tools and descriptive narrations to analysis the data that was gather from the focus group discussions. Qualitative data which was collected from open-ended questions and focus group discussions, which the respondents gave answer by using their own words, was coded into a set of categories thematically.

Quantitative data was analyzed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 20. This computerized statistical analysis will use to compute descriptive statistics measures (frequencies, percentages, standard deviations and mean). The quantitative findings obtained from questionnaires was triangulated by the results of qualitative data originated from respondents' opinions and document analysis. Qualitative data had been analyzed through narration thematically.

### **Data Analysis And Interpretation**

Both primary and secondary data were used to undertake this action research. Primary data were collected via structured questionnaire which has five scale likert items from 1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral, 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree and other close ended and open questions. The very objective of the questionnaire was to identify challenges that hinder student's participation and involvement in group discussions, presentations and demonstration and enhance students' participation in active learning methods.

A total of 42 second year students from department of tourism were considered for this research, of which, 35 questionnaires were appropriately filled and valid for analysis; whereas, the remaining 7 were unreturned and not properly answered .

The findings of the study revealed that 75% of students assured that group discussions gave them more chance to participate in the class freely compared to presentation and demonstrations (mean= 4.56, std.dev=.527). The remaining 25% of students were also interested in presentations and demonstrations, of course, these students were amongst high and medium academic result achievers (mean= 4.02, std. Deviation=.677).

As per the response of the majority of the students, the following factors have been stated frequently as challenges that hinder learners not to participate actively in group discussions, presentations and demonstrations:

- ✓ Shortage of time
- ✓ Poor academic background of students
- ✓ Shyness
- ✓ Poor communication skills in English language
- ✓ Requirements for presentation and demonstration such as formal attire and materials a
- ✓ Lack of preparation.

The focus group discussions and observation results were also similar with findings obtained from questionnaires.

A research conducted by Gallagher (1997) on Problem-Based Learning: Where did it come from, what it does and where is it going, also revealed the same challenges with this action research. According to Chickering & Gamson, 1987 (cited in Gallagher, 1997) learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in class listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to experiences, apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves.

During focus group discussions students emphasized that variety of training evaluation methods should be used in each course to ensure that those who felt uncomfortable or unable to learn from one teaching/learning style (such as lectures with overhead transparencies combined with question and answer) would benefit from other styles.

Wherever possible, individual learning outcomes might be addressed with multiple methods in the classroom and in the field, including small-group discussions, video viewing and critiquing, written exercises, debates, role-playing activities of many kinds, chalkboard sessions, and practical exercises as per the nature of the course so as to demonstrate competencies.

The said focus group discussion results were consistent with the findings of Mueller (2002) about maximizing the mindware of our human resources and the findings of Kumar (2007) about Students' classroom participation for improved learning in English language skills course.

### **Recommendations**

This part the research deals with recommended measures to solve the problems faced by second year Tourism Management Students that are forwarded by the researchers based on the findings. So, the researchers proposed the following solutions for the factors hindering second year Tourism Management Students from participating

actively in discussion, presentation and Demonstration.

- Proper management of time by the students and adopting student centered teaching methods by instructors.
- Academic institutions shall give more attention on quality of Education, especially at lower class level (at primary and high school).
- To enhance student participation by reducing their shyness, it is better if instructors Approaches the students and make friend relationship in class and use encouraging words when they participate. Moreover, it is better if instructors give chance to all students to participate turn by turn.
- Advising the students to speak whatever comes to their mind without consideration of Grammar to enhance their language skill.
- It is also advisable, if the department and other concerned parties fulfill all necessary requirements for presentation and demonstrations (such as Papers, LCD, flip chart and others).
- To make the students ready, the instructors are also required using different methods such as small gifts, and also giving surprise test or Quiz etc.

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