

Student Participation as a Reflection of the Teacher's Knowledge, Skills, and Values

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Abstract---Student participation poses a challenging factor in the teaching and learning dimension. However, its importance in reflecting the teacher's professionalism is hardly understood or simply taken for granted. This perception could be attributed to the lack of clarity of the concept of student participation. Various studies have defined it in different ways. This paper examines the multifarious concepts of student participation. The benefits of student participation and the factors which inhibit student participation are highlighted the concept of student participation that is adopted is discussed in relation to the teacher's knowledge, skills, and values.

Keywords---Student participation, knowledge, skills, values

I. Introduction

Effective learning is crucial especially in this century. Education in the twenty-first century places emphasis on student-centredness more than teacher-centredness. The current goals of learning encompass increased engagement and self-direction, wider range of strategies, more reflective approach to learning, better vision of the future as a learner, more learning opportunities with others, and more positive attitude towards learning. Hence teaching has to accommodate the needs of learning. Learning in the twenty-first century incorporates a number of skills. Among the prominent ones identified by the Hanover Research team and that have been adopted in the NRGS (National Research Grant Scheme) Project (NRGS, 2014-2018) are: collaboration and teamwork, problem solving, communication skills, critical thinking, creativity and imagination, and technology literacy. These skills can be developed and acquired through active participation of students. Nevertheless, active participation of students depends to a certain extent on how the teacher conducts the lesson.

II. Definition of student participation

The definition of 'student participation' needs clarification before it can be discussed in relation to teacher's knowledge, skills and values. The term 'student participation' has been used in a variety of ways and for various purposes, depending on the context of the research. Fassinger (1995) defines participation as 'any comments or questions that the students offered or raised in class' (p. 27). Participation is also defined as 'the number of

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unsolicited responses volunteered'' (Burchfield & Sappington, 1999, p. 290). Bippus and Young (2000), refers participation to active involvement in class discussion and avoidance of negative behaviours.

Fritschner (2000) identifies six levels of participation which he develops both student and instructor's perspectives of participation. The levels include (1) breathing and staying awake, (2) being present in class and doing assignments, (3) writing papers that were reflective and thoughtful, (4) asking questions in class, making comments and providing input for class discussions, (5) doing research or coming to class with additional questions, and (6) making oral presentations (p. 354).

Liu (2001) identifies four types of student classroom behaviour: full integration, participation in the circumstances, marginal interaction, and silent observation. Full integration occurs when there is active student involvement in classroom discussions. Participation in the circumstances happens when students speak at appropriate time depending on circumstances such as when they have enough knowledge to contribute. Marginal interaction is exhibited by students when they listen and take down notes and engage themselves minimally in oral discussion. Silent observation is practised when students merely listen and take down notes.

Peterson (2001) prefers to use the term 'course participation' to 'class participation'. He refers course participation to engagement with course material, for example students' documentation of work produced such as portfolios and assignments and shows proof of participation. The students are able to apply what is learned in the classroom to events outside of the classroom. Marks were given for participation, and Peterson reports that students appreciated this opportunity as they were able to influence their participation marks by participating during the course. They became more aware of participating throughout the course.

In an investigation by Crombie, Pyke, Silverthorn, Jones, and Piccinin (2003) on student participation, the students reveal their perceptions of active participation as raising hands more frequently, interrupt more frequently, and intervene for longer periods of time, compared to those who were less active. To some researchers (Craven & Hogan, 2001; Zaremba & Dunn, 2004), classroom participation often involves active listening, thoughtful contemplation, in-class writing, and engagement in class discussion.

In their study, Dallimore, Hertenstein and Platt (2004) discovered a difference in the definition given by faculty and that by students. According to them, faculty considers oral responses as participation while students regard participation as including non-oral responses.

Dancer and Kamvounias (2005) view participation as an active involvement process which comprises five steps, namely, planning, involvement in discussion, collaborative skills, communication abilities, and presence.

Petress (2006) describes participation based on three evaluative dimensions which are, quantity, quality, and dependability. According to Petress, quantity refers to the opportunities given to students to participate constructively; quality of participation is displayed by students interacting in class to show evidence of awareness of what is being discussed; and dependability is manifested when students can be relied upon to contribute relevantly, clearly, and respectfully when they are required to.

Mohd Yusof Abdullah, Noor Rahamah Abu Bakar and Maizatul Haizan Mahbob (2012) show a dichotomy in their definition of student participation in the research they conducted. These researchers classify student participation as

passive and active. The passive type includes sitting quietly, taking notes, listening or doing something else, while the active type includes asking questions, giving opinions, and answering questions (p.517).

In their research on their research into students' perceptions, Siti Maziha Mustapha, Nik Suriani Nik Abdul Rahman and Melor Md. Yunus, (2010) clarify student participation in two ways: firstly, communicating with the lecturer and other students in class, and secondly, being fully involved in classroom activities.

Class participation considers as 'in-class student participation' by Chong (2015, p. 308). The term 'in-class participation' is adopted from Vandrick's (2000) definition which includes speaking in class, asking questions, making comments and participating in discussion.

In view of the multifarious definitions of student participation, from various perspectives, it is imperative that an operational definition be developed for a research to be undertaken. It is more important for a teacher or instructor to have a vivid notion of student participation as this notion will influence the teacher's beliefs about the effectiveness of his or her teaching. This notion will support the teacher's claims about his or her teaching when certain observers comment on the lack of student participation in the classroom.

The importance of participation in the classroom.

Although there are different perspectives regarding the term 'participation', the importance of student participation in the classroom cannot go unnoticed. The teacher or lecturer should be aware of the benefits that can accrue to both students and the teacher or lecturer. De Vita (2000, pp. 173-174) views participation in the following ways; it

- encourages students to engage in a valuable cognitive process whereby they crystalize ideas, subject them to scrutiny, and articulate their own thoughts;
- helps to improve students' listening skills;
- helps students to develop higher-order analysis and evaluation skills by creating a space for the exchange and evaluation of ideas;
- provides an education in cultural diversity and how to turn cultural difference in the classroom into a positive experience for all.

Participation is important as it is linked to positive academic outcomes (Frisby, accessed 2019). In terms of academic performance, students can achieve better results by participating in class. Students exercise a variety of skills and abilities when they participate actively in class. To participate in discussions, for example, students need to listen attentively. Thus, they are able to improve their listening skills. Their oral skills will also improve when they express their ideas verbally. According to Craven & Hogan, (2001) learning becomes meaningful when students are engaged.

In their study, Fakaye and Amao (2013) report of students' higher academic performance in Literature in English due to their participation in class. Other studies which indicate similar results include those by Okafor (1993), Emah (1998), Ogunkola (1999), and Domike (2002). These studies were conducted at school level. A study by Gunuc (2014) of tertiary students in Turkey reveal that students with higher levels of engagement achieved higher academic performance than students with lower levels of engagement. Casuso-Holgado, Cuesta-Vargas, Moreno-Morales, Labajos-Manzanares, Baron-Lopez, and Vega-Cuesta (2013) conducted a study among undergraduates in Spain regarding the association between engagement and academic achievement in health sciences. The findings showed

that academic engagement had a positive influence on the students' academic achievement. A study by in a university in New Zealand (2018) students who showed high engagement had higher achievement than students who showed low engagement.

Dancer and Kamvounias (2005) opine that an increase in the students' participation leads to a decrease in their tendency at memorisation. It enhances their thinking abilities and creativity. These claims are supported by evidence in studies of cognitive learning. Blankestein, Dolmans, Vleuten and Schmidt (2011), for example, discovered that by participating in classroom activities, students were able to mentally retain knowledge for a long period of time. According to some researchers (Nunn, 1996; Menzel & Carrell, 1994), participation enables students to practice verbalising, synthesising, analysing, clarifying, and evaluating information that leads to learning. It gives them the opportunity to practice and improve their oral communication skills (Dallimore, Hertenstein, & Platt, 2008; Dancer & Kamvounias, 2005). Students learn best when they take an active part in the learning process. Learning becomes meaningful when students are engaged (Craven & Hogan, 2001). Participation provides evidence of active learning or engagement that involves learning, critical thinking, writing, appreciation of cultural differences, time management and interpersonal, listening and speaking skills (Howard & Henney, 1998; Peterson, 2001; Petress, 2006).

Viewing from the affective perspective, students become highly motivated when they prepare themselves to participate in the classroom (Garside, 1996). They will come to class better prepared if they know that the teacher will ask them questions.

Activities involving group work, which require active participation of students will encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning. Participating in group discussion will enable students to be actively involved in the learning process. Students learn to respect each other's views and also each other when they work in cooperative groups. They are also able to share ideas and information that will contribute to their academic competence, achievement, as well as socialisation. Furthermore, they are able to develop collaborative and team-work skills. When students experience the enjoyment of participating in the classroom, they will be more motivated to participate in classroom activities. When students become more motivated (Junn, 1994) and they will learn better (Weaver and Qi, 2005) and become better critical thinkers (Crone, 1997).

Student participation can also cause the teaching and learning process to change from that of teacher centredness to that of student centredness. According to Greeson (1988) student-centred classrooms are more likely to have higher levels of student participation than teacher-centred classrooms.

In spite of the benefits that can accrue by participating in the classroom, many students remain passive or non-committal. Asian students, particularly, choose to remain passive or dormant in the classroom when a lesson is being conducted. Some will participate when called upon by the teacher, but most will remain silent. Like many other Asian students, Malaysian students are highly influenced by culture and tradition that they remain passive in class. Studies have been conducted to discover the reasons behind the low participation of these students (e.g Faizah & Choo, 2010; Siti Maziha et al., 2010; Noor Harun Abdul Karim & Mohamed Ismail Ahamad Shah, 2012; and Mohd Yusof Abdullah et al., 2012).

Factors affecting classroom participation.

Research has shown that student classroom participation is influenced by a number of factors. Kenny and Banerjee (2011) categorise three main factors that influence classroom participation of university students. They are (a) student characteristics, (b) lecturer characteristics and (c) classroom climate.

Student characteristics

The student's personality plays an important role in determining participation in the classroom. A student with high self-efficacy will show excellent academic performance and will participate more in the classroom. Self-efficacy is defined as 'the term used to describe a person's belief that he/she has the ability to perform a particular activity or behaviour' (Galyon, Blondin, Yaw, Nalls & Williams, 2012, p. 233). Hence, if a student's self-efficacy is high, he or she will be motivated to participate in class activities. He or she will have the confidence to speak up and participate actively in the classroom. Students with low self-efficacy will be restricted by their own dispositions and hence assume passive roles in the classroom.

Lecturer characteristics

The second factor concerns the instructor or lecturer. The lecturer's behaviour, teaching methods, and classroom management ability affect student participation (Rocca, 2010). A lecturer who remembers students' names, share personal experiences with students, are humorous and friendly are viewed favourably by students. Siti Maziha Mustapha et al. (2010) consider the lecturer as the most influential factor in determining student participation. Lecturers who were supportive towards students' responses and did not mind mistakes made by students encouraged student participation. Students felt comfortable as they were not reprimanded for making mistakes. Other qualities of the lecturer which were favourable to the students and engendered their participation include 'having a sense of humour, being open-minded, approachable, nice, friendly, and flexible in allowing students to challenge each other's opinion and accept a different point of view' (Ibid, p. 1081). Supportive and familiar classmates also influenced the students' participation. The lecturer's teaching methods that can actively engage students in classroom will increase student participation.

III. Classroom climate

Another factor that influences student participation is classroom climate. Classroom climate is defined as the physical setting in the classroom and structure of the course (Rocca, 2010). The colour of the wall of the classroom, the arrangement of furniture, lighting and room decorations can affect student participation (Yang, Becerik-Gerber, & Mino, 2013). Class size also influences student participation and attendance (Rocca, 2010). In large class, students tend to be reluctant to participate for fear of slowing down the delivery of course content by the lecturer, negative reaction from peers and lecturer, and a desire to remain anonymous (Kenny & Banerjee, 2011; Rocca, 2010).

In their study, Debele and Kelbisa (2017) consider classroom atmosphere as the main factor of participation in class activities. According to them, classroom environment is important in the development of self-esteem and self-confidence. Hyde and Ruth (2002) found that students were more likely to participate if the classroom climate was supportive.

Factors that inhibit classroom participation

Based on Siti Naziha et al.'s (2010) study, the factors which discourage classroom participation are firstly, the relationship among students. In their study the students identified some negative attitudes of their classmates. These included being noisy to the extent of causing disturbance to others in the class, displaying distasteful behaviour, and being uncooperative.

Secondly, the lecturer's negative characteristics such as poor teaching skills, being unapproachable, and impatient deterred students from participating.

Other reasons that prevented students from participating were feelings of apprehension, as they were afraid of making mistakes. In such a case, Weaver and Qi (2005) expound that students may not like to participate in class because of their own fear of feeling inadequate in front of their peers and the lecturer. Their nervousness and lack of confidence in communicating prevent them from participating. Their lack of confidence may stem from their inadequate preparation of the course content or their poor proficiency in the language that is required. In this study (Siti Najihah et al.) the students had to use the Arabic language to communicate. Myers and Rocca (2000) discovered that when lecturers challenged their students verbally, the students became defensive. When they felt the lecturers were aggressive, they were less likely to participate (Rocca, 2009).

Class size seems to have an effect on student participation. Weaver and Qi (2005) feel that lectures very often are conducted in large classes. Hence there are fewer opportunities for student participation. Large classes are inevitable in universities. Therefore, lecturers must find ways and means to encourage participation regardless of class size (Gleason, 1986).

The type of course can also influence student participation (Rocca, 2010). Crombie et al. (2003) feel that students are more likely to participate in communication classes than those in other social or the natural sciences.

Based on the evidence obtained from research, it is obvious that getting students to participate can present real challenges to both students and lecturers. Although the responsibility of participating is placed on the students, it is ultimately the instructor who develops a course for participation to occur. It is incumbent upon the instructor to facilitate student participation. Rocca (2010) opines that student participation is the responsibility of the instructor. Fassinger (1995) argues that increasing the time for student participation would allow the instructor to gain insight into the students' progress and understanding. The instructor or lecturer, thus, has to find alternative and innovative ways of engaging the students in the teaching and learning process. It is intended in this research study to enable the instructor to innovate through use of technology to engender classroom participation.

How does the students' participation reflect the teacher's knowledge, skills and values?

It is undeniable that classroom participation benefits students and studies have shown that participation improves students' performance. Nevertheless, student participation needs to be encouraged by the teacher and it can be triggered off by the teacher through her or his knowledge, skills and values. The knowledge, skills and values can be manifested in the teacher's performance in class. Students can discern the teacher's knowledge, skills and values as a lesson progresses and hence react according in the classroom.

According to Barge (2012), the teacher's professional knowledge encompasses subject-matter knowledge (content to teach), pedagogical knowledge (how to teach), curricular knowledge (what to teach), learner knowledge (whom to teach) and cultural/community knowledge (sensitivity to settings where one teaches).

In this paper the teacher's knowledge encompasses knowledge of the subject matter, the students and teaching techniques. The skills include pedagogical skills, personal skills, and interpersonal skills, while values refer to concern for students, belief that all students can learn, and respect for diversity. It is suggested that the teacher's knowledge, skills, and values can be discerned through the students' participation in the classroom.

Student participation that is warranted in this paper refers to oral and written performance. Whether student participation is considered as active or passive, the evidence is clearly seen in the students' oral or written performance. In an oral-oriented lesson, verbal responses are required by the teacher. Students are able to respond appropriately when the teacher's stimulus in the form of a question or directive is clearly understood. The answers forwarded by the students show the extent the lesson has been understood and the teacher's knowledge about the subject taught. The students' responses are not simply acknowledged or accepted but are evaluated by the teacher. Even if a response is accepted or acknowledged, the teacher elaborates on the answer by providing examples or instances of the issue at hand to ensure that all the students in the classroom understand the point or issue. In this case, the teacher

shows her pedagogical skill in handling classroom discourse. The way the teacher structures her verbal responses indicates the values she advocates. In order to encourage students to answer her questions, for example, the teacher might speak in a tone that is pleasant to the ears of the students. She might also use words which are encouraging and not those which will intimidate students. She might also provide sufficient prompts to motivate students to voice their opinions.

The manner in which the teacher responds to the students' written work will also affect the students' participation. Students will be motivated to write well when the written work is fairly evaluated by the teacher. Students expect copious comments from the teacher to improve their work. The teacher's comments show the extent the teacher expects the students to write. The students subsequent work will show the quality of work that reflects the teacher's knowledge of the subject matter, her skill at handling the students' written performance and the values she has in encouraging the students to perform well.

Student participation in class can reflect the teacher's knowledge. The knowledge that is relevant here is content knowledge of the subject taught. The students' correct responses to the teacher's questions will indicate the knowledge they have imbibed from the teacher's lesson. Students may also raise questions because they have not understood what was taught or because they need further clarification or there could be a contradiction to what the teacher had said. These questions may probe more into the knowledge that the teacher possesses. Some questions may be controversial and require critical thinking on the part of the teacher. Hence, the teacher should be ready to deal with such matters. However, students seldom ask the teacher questions in class. Observational studies in six high schools by Dillon (1988) and of tutoring sessions with college students by Graesser and Person (1994) revealed that

students asked few questions, and even fewer in search of knowledge. This phenomenon seems to be universal (Graesser and Person (1994). Graesser and Person attribute this phenomenon to students not wanting to draw attention to themselves or teachers not encouraging students to ask questions. Whatever the case, this phenomenon forms part of the teacher's knowledge about the students' disposition and attitude towards his or her teaching. Barge (2012) claims that teachers who have strong content knowledge can help students to construct and internalise knowledge by asking high-level questions, being engaged in the lesson, being involved in inquiry-based learning and exploring alternative explanations. Such responses from the students reflect the teacher's knowledge of the subject matter.

Chu (2013) investigated five graduate students' perceptions of asking questions in the classroom in an American university. The study revealed the factors that influenced the participants' motivation to ask questions were the American teacher's classroom behavior, the equal teacher-student relationship and the professor's personal charisma. It was discovered that some of the teachers were very enthusiastic and their enthusiasm encouraged the students and as a result the students asked questions more frequently and their classroom participation increased significantly.

With regard to the teacher's skills, the most important is the pedagogical skill as this forms the teacher's main responsibility. Pedagogical skills depend on the teacher's pedagogical knowledge. Barge (2012) contends that subject matter knowledge and instructional strategies or pedagogical knowledge are complementary and interdependent.

In the United States, Scott Freeman, Sarah L. Eddy, Miles McDonough, Michelle K. Smith, Nnadozie Okoroafor, Hannah Jordt and Mary Pat Wenderoth (2014) did a meta-analysis of 225 studies, culled from particularly unpublished dissertations, and conference proceedings, and peer reviewed sources that compared student performance in undergraduate STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) courses conducted using traditional lecturing to active learning. Freeman et al. defines active learning as learning that 'engages students in the process of learning through activities and/or discussion in class, as opposed to passive listening to an expert. It emphasises higher-order thinking and often involves group work' (Bonwell, 1991, p. iii). They discovered that the average examination scores in the active learning sections were higher than scores in traditional lecturing classes.

Murray and Lang (1997) reveal results of two studies conducted which indicate better student performance when topics were taught by active participation than by lecture.

Student-centredness can be effectuated through certain instructional strategies. The teacher can do this in the following ways:

- listen to students' problems and present students with alternatives in order to solve these problems, instead of providing them with direct solutions.
- listen to students' opinions regarding a certain topic and acknowledge them.
- answer any question raised by students regarding a topic taught.
- Guide any students' attempt at providing a correct answer, such as, using prompts.
- Provide feedback that will keep the students talking or giving opinions. The students' response is termed as 'uptake'

The teacher naturally exudes values that he or she possesses through his or her teaching skills. The teacher's sensitivity to the students' emotional state, that is, of anxiety, apprehension, or fear will enable the him or her to select appropriate teaching strategies so as to reduce such feelings. Students' active engagement in activities and their commitment to complete tasks given by the teacher indicate the students' confidence in the classroom practices and the classroom atmosphere created by the teacher. Students need to be psychologically safe in the classroom. Teachers who are caring, respectful, supportive, and encouraging can create a safe environment in the classroom. One way to build this safe environment is to have rapport with students and between students (Frisby, Berger, Burchett, Herovic, & Strawser, 2014). The ability to build this rapport is discerned through the teacher's instructional practices (Myers, Horan, Kennedy-Lightsey, Madlock, Sidelinger, Byrnes, Frisby, & Mansson et al., 2009).

IV. Conclusion

The literature reviewed has revealed that students show participation in class in various ways. The extent to which they participate depends on a number of factors, most of which are within the teacher's control. The teacher seems to be the pivotal point around which participation revolves. Both the teacher and students need to understand what participation constitutes as the degree of participation depends on the engagement, expectation, collaboration and responsibility of both parties.

It is imperative for the teacher to elucidate the importance of classroom participation to the students. It has been suggested that marks be awarded for participation in class. However, this has to be done with discretion as it may put some students at a disadvantage. Students who are active and vocal may gain some advantage over the others. There should, therefore, be a cooperative effort by both the teacher and the students to agree on certain ways of stimulating participation. For this to happen, sufficient training should be given to potential as well as experienced teachers to encourage student participation. It is crucial that that this training be incorporated in teacher development programmes so that the professional development of teachers is enhanced.

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