

Study on College Students' Classroom Participation in China

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Abstract

Students' classroom participation greatly affects students' classroom learning quality. At present, in many universities in China, students' classroom participation has the following problems: passive participation, superficial participation, monotonous participation, fossilization of participants, etc. The reasons for the problems are closely related to teachers' teaching concepts, teaching contents, teaching methods and assessment forms. Therefore, teachers should build a harmonious relationship with students, establish a link between classroom knowledge and real life, diversify teaching methods and means, and optimize the way of classroom participation and evaluation. Reform in the above aspects can effectively improve the breadth and depth of students' classroom participation, and ultimately improve the quality of learning.

Keywords

Classroom Participation, College students, Silence.

1. Introduction

Teaching is a two-way interactive process, from which the absence of either party is equally destructive to the harmony of teaching and learning in class. But the participation of students in classroom activities has long been the concern of most teachers, as their involvement is decisive to the achievement of teaching goals. As is always the case, a large proportion of college students are accustomed to "silence" instead of active involvement in the classroom. Only a few students are willing to cooperate in classroom activities. The fossilized and marginalized silent group has long been a problem in China's colleges and universities, which is clearly not in line with the desired goal of education. It is a realistic question for college educators to improve class participation and the resultant effectiveness of teaching.

2. .Current Situation of College Student's Participation

2.1. Passive participation

The primary problem of classroom participation is that many college students are inadequately motivated in learning the course. In cases where the teacher asks questions, or organizes them in discussions and debates, many students just lower their head and keep silent. To ease the awkwardness, the teacher usually calls on some silent students in order to continue the class. In addition, most students never question what the teacher said in class, and they just note down what the professor told them as the material they must memorize after class. It should be said that this situation has a lot to do with the long-term exam-oriented education model, under which, the workload for students is heavy, and understandably many teachers organize teaching activities with themselves as the center to finish the teaching content for this course as scheduled. Few opportunities are available for students to answer questions, join in discussions or participate in other classroom activities. Gradually students develop the habit of listening and taking notes in class. The motivation to participate in classroom activities slowly wears away or gets repressed, even if they have an answer to the question the teacher asks. In addition, classroom participation is also closely related to students' personalities. Some

students are introverted and timid, feeling awkward speaking in public. Some students are calm and reserved, reluctant to speak up in class unless called on. Some students are unconfident in their own professional knowledge, afraid of losing face if they speak. On the other hand, students' participation is also affected by the teaching method of teachers. Impassive teachers are unable to stimulate students' interest in participation.

2.2. Superficial participation

Classroom participation is usually regarded as an important indicator for the effectiveness of learning, but the superficially active classroom participation may not fulfil this purpose. Cognitive activity might not necessarily happen even if students are present and "participating" in the classroom. It is found that even active students in class may not necessarily provide well-organized logical answers but simple one-sided personal opinions. They are generally unable to analyse, interpret, or justify their opinion with reasons. It suggests that a large portion of the student body are in dire need of training of critical thinking. In this case, university teachers need to train students to think innovatively and critically rather than just let them repeat the opinion of others or give an ill-founded point in a discussion. But the accompanying problem is that teachers may not be able to meet the need, as some teachers are not well prepared or qualified for fostering critical thinking skills in an education system where teachers are allowed or encouraged to cover the syllabus through didactic teaching[1]. In a class where knowledge is not systematic, instruction is not inspirational and opinions are not fully exchanged, students' innovative and critical thinking skills can hardly be effectively fostered. The problem is not students' disinterest or lack of ability to think critically but that they are not exposed to a situation where they are required to do so[2].

2.3. Monotonous participation

Classroom participation includes question answering, class discussions, debates, role-play, etc. However, in actual teaching, the most commonly used form of participation is still question answering, which is a combination of Initiation, Response and Evaluation. This teacher-led monotonous interaction takes up most of the class time to deal with basic concepts and simple questions. For college students, this form of participation is obviously less appealing, but more often used for the sake of convenience. Other forms of participation such as classroom discussions and debates are also used but less often, because mostly they cannot yield desirable effect when the teaching materials are either strange or demanding for students to preview before class and have the confidence in the worth of their ideas[3]. Besides, pre-class grouping and preparation within groups take a lot of time, which adds to the stress under an already tight schedule at college. Due to the limited time, the quality of discussions or debates is often unsatisfactory. As for other forms of participation such as role-play and Socratic seminar are virtually rare in the university classrooms of China as many Chinese teachers are still not very accustomed to these student-oriented forms of teaching. In addition, some teachers think that these forms are laborious and demanding in actual teaching. Therefore, the multiple forms of student participation are reduced to the most common question-answer form.

2.4. Fossilized participants

The best classroom participation is that every student can actively participate in the class and get exercise and improvement. However, in traditional classroom teaching, due to the limitations of class size and teaching time, it is not easy to achieve this. In each teaching interaction, teachers can only give a small number of students a chance to participate in a limited time. It's up to the students to fight for it, and from the teachers' perspective, the hope is that new faces will get involved every time, creating a virtuous circle. But the reality is that a small number (four or five) of students accounted for more than 50% of the interactions in classes per session[4]. And these students form an almost fixed group of participants, with the

following common characteristics such as sufficient prior knowledge, outgoing personality, and communication skills. Expectations are placed on them whenever classroom interaction is required. Fellow students count on this group to transfer their pressure when the class is silent. This leads to polarization of class participation, with only a few active participants fossilized and most of them marginalized in classroom activities, which is obviously not in line with the goal of college education.

3. Solution to Participation-related Problems

3.1. Rapport between teachers and students

Some researchers argue that students' perceived rapport with teachers and classmates is related to the perception of classroom connectivity. They further state that harmonious teacher-student relationship and classroom connectivity work together to improve student engagement[5]. Teachers should put down their haughty airs and reshape the roles of teachers and students. Teachers should not pretend to be superior and frightening authorities in front of students, and students should not reduce themselves to obedient servants. Teachers should respect and appreciate students, discuss with students as equal partners, and allow students to argue or reserve different opinions. Teachers should strengthen communication and exchange with students, participate in students' class activities, narrow the psychological distance, eliminate their strangeness and fear, and finally create a democratic, relaxed and harmonious classroom atmosphere. In time students can participate in classroom interaction with a more relaxed and active attitude.

3.2. Connection between courses and real life

In a survey conducted by Susak, the way the professor delivered classroom content affects students' willingness to participate "as they would be more engaged in classes where the theory was related back to real-life situations, which would give them an opportunity to apply their knowledge" [6]. The content of the course should not be just book knowledge, but real-life stuff that is connected with reality. Otherwise, it is difficult for students to keep their interest in listening to the class, let alone actively participate in the class. Therefore, teachers should carefully prepare sufficient and interesting teaching content and highlight the connection between knowledge and reality. Through classroom design, students are introduced into open reality-related topics which stimulate students' interest. In dealing with such questions, the teacher should guide students in using existing knowledge to comment and solve practical problems, and cultivate students' critical thinking skills. As a result, the accuracy and logic of students' classroom statements will be greatly enhanced. The overall quality of classroom participation can also be improved accordingly.

3.3. Diversity in teaching

Diverse teaching methods can effectively improve students' classroom participation and greatly increase students' learning efficiency. Teachers can use a variety of teaching methods, such as case teaching, project teaching, flipped classroom, etc., to provide students with more opportunities to participate in classroom activities. Teachers should carefully design teaching steps and clarify teaching objectives. Students should be informed of learning tasks and learning requirements in advance, so that they have sufficient time to prepare. In this way, students will have sufficient time to collect data and make courseware before participating in classroom activities, and they will be more confident and methodical in class participation. After the students has made a presentation or answered a question, the teacher can organize the students to give feedback, and finally the teacher comments on his or her work. In this way, a closed teaching loop with students as the main participants is formed. In this process,

students' team spirit and enthusiasm for participation can be fully displayed, their self-confidence greatly satisfied, and their creativity maximized.

3.4. Appropriateness in assessment

Scientific and reasonable assessment methods should not ignore students' personality differences. The process assessment scheme should be conducive to stimulating the enthusiasm of all students to participate and avoid over-amplifying the difference in performance caused by personality differences. Particular assessment should be given to introverted students to evaluate their classroom participation. For example, students who are relatively silent can be asked to write and submit their answers to questions discussed in class later, which is assessed as well and counts toward their final assessment. In this way, it not only encourages classroom participation, but also takes into account fairness for both active and silent students. At the same time, teachers should encourage students who are not active or willing to participate actively in class activities, enhance their confidence, and gradually develop the habit of active participation.

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