

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT

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**A STUDY ON ACTIVE LEARNING AND REWARDING LEARNER PARTICIPATION: RURAL INDIAN CONTEXT****MALLIKA A SHETTY****LECTURER****DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT****SAINT MARY'S SYRIAN COLLEGE****BRAHMAVAR****ABSTRACT**

The past decade has seen an explosion of interest among college faculty in the teaching methods variously grouped under the terms 'active learning' and 'cooperative learning'. However, even with this interest, there remains much misunderstanding and mistrust of the pedagogical "movement" behind the words. The majority of all college faculties still teach their classes in the traditional lecture mode. Some of the criticism and hesitation seems to originate from the idea that techniques of active and cooperative learning are genuine alternatives to, rather than enhancements of professors' lectures. This paper explains how 'active learning' and 'cooperative learning' techniques can be used to supplement rather than replace lectures. This paper does not advocate complete abandonment of lecturing as researcher herself is a lecturer. The lecture method is a very efficient way to present information, but use of the lecture as the only mode of instruction presents problems to both the instructor and the students. There is a large amount of research attesting to the benefits of active learning and cooperative learning. The researcher used a questionnaire method. The questionnaire was distributed to 200 final year students of the undergraduate degree courses of Commerce and Management.

**KEYWORDS**

Active learning, Cooperative learning, Lecture method, Instructions, Students

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

**I** hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.

"Active learning" is, in short, anything that students do in a classroom other than merely passively listening to an instructor's lecture. This includes everything from listening practices which help the students to absorb what they hear, to short writing exercises in which students react to lecture material, to complex group exercises in which students apply course material to "real life" situations and/or to new problems. The term "cooperative learning" covers the subset of active learning activities which students do as groups of three or more, rather than alone or in pairs. Generally, cooperative learning techniques employ more formally structured groups of students assigned with complex tasks, such as multiple-step exercises, research projects, or presentations. Cooperative learning is to be distinguished from another, now well-defined term of art, "collaborative learning", which refers to those classroom strategies which have the instructor and the students placed on an equal footing working together, for example, in designing assignments, choosing texts and presenting material to the class.

*Asian proverb***COLLABORATIVE LEARNING**

Recent research suggests that individuals in small groups learn better than they do on their own or in isolation. In light of the research on active learning, this is not surprising, as a small group initiates collaborative learning and its resulting activities: students generate questions, discuss and arrive at conclusions, turn thought into written or oral language, etc.

**COOPERATIVE GROUP ASSIGNMENTS**

This is one more method of active teaching...it includes the following:

**Assigning formal cooperative tasks:** One form of active learning deserves special attention because it overtly places the learners as workers, demands that each process beliefs and construct expression with co-workers, and forces the achievement of a group goal. That interdependence affects three broad and interrelated outcomes: effort exerted to achieve, quality of relationships among participants and psychosocial adjustment. Ninety years of research and 600 studies show cooperative learning results in more high-level reasoning, more frequent generation of new ideas and solutions and greater transfer of what is learned within one situation to another. Cooperative learning groups embrace five key elements: positive interdependence, individual accountability, group processing, social skills, and face-to-face interaction. Typically three to five learners are placed in heterogeneous groups. All cooperative designs have specific objectives, performance criteria and reward systems. In order for them to be successful, teachers must expect to spend time building cooperative skills and enforcing group self-assessment of them.

**Team member teaching:** Knowledge outcomes: like a jigsaw puzzle, each member of the team is assigned a portion of the whole. Ultimately responsible for knowing all, each group member teaches the others about their piece. Learners need explicit preparation in how to effectively communicate information to others.

**Student teams- achievement divisions:** Knowledge outcomes: Learners study the material in heterogeneous groups as above, but instead of taking a test, learners play academic games to show their individual mastery of the subject matter. At a weekly tournament, learners are matched with comparably performing learners from other teams. Assignments to the tournament tables change weekly according to a system that maintains the equality of the competition.

**Performance judging design:** Skill outcomes: Here learners first study how to develop and apply appropriate criteria for judging performance on a skill, such as writing an essay, giving a speech, or constructing a tool chest. They test their cooperatively developed criteria on a product produced anonymously by someone else. Then the learners are assigned the task of creating their own product for other members of the team to review.

**Clarifying attitudes design:** Attitude outcomes: the teacher prepares an attitude questionnaire, usually a multiple-choice inventory. Each learner selects from the range of alternatives those that most accurately represent his or her views. Next, teams meet to reach agreement on one of the alternatives which represents the soundest action in a particular circumstance. They examine the differences between previous attitudes and discuss together how each may want to be consistent with the agreed-on description of the soundest attitude.

**REWARDING LEARNER PARTICIPATION**

Support learner actions with effective, well-timed positives: All teaching moves learners into areas of risk and incompetence. So often the job of a teacher is to find nascent deftness when it is easier to notice the maladroitness. The methods chosen to administer those positives, however, send messages about what is important to achieve. Are learners supposed to work toward external approval or their own performance? Are grades the true reward? Or are learners supposed to learn to enjoy the quest itself? Teachers answer these questions through the manner in which they support improvement.

The best rewards are not contrived but foster personal reflection and independence and actually work, that is, learners maintain new abilities or do better. Effective teachers support emerging initiative, cooperation and perseverance with well-timed positives in these forms:

**Avoid praise:** Praise, the expression of judgment, is less successful in rewarding learner performance than the techniques listed below. It tends to foster approval seeking rather than independence. Examples: "good question", "That's a nice weld."

**Description:** Describe objectively those aspects of learner performance which need support, avoiding a personal evaluation: "that's a topic we need to discuss", "That weld is even", etc. State a culturally accepted conclusion a group of dispassionate observers would concede: "that's a pertinent question", "That weld is just like the book".

**Narration:** Detail the action a learner takes immediately as it occurs. Narrations usually begin with "you..." example: "you're raising an issue that needs discussion", "You're obviously trying to fit the pieces together".

**Self-talk:** Talk about your own thoughts or prior personal experience. Example: "I have wondered that, too", "Questions like that have always intrigued me."

**Nonverbal or vocal sounds:** Smile, Wink, Thumbs up, Gestures of excitement and success. "Wow!", "indeed-do." whistles.

**Personal feelings:** Describe your emotional reactions as a participant learner, a member of the group, expressing deep, genuine, personal feeling. "What a joy for me to listen to this discussion!" "I get discouraged, too."

**Intrinsically-phrased reward statements:** Positive expressions about emerging learner performance and achievement highlight internal feelings of self-worth and self-satisfaction (without praise, which is an extrinsic judgment). Enjoyment – "that was fun!" "I get pleasure from that, too". Competence – "you did it!" "that is mastered!" Cleverness – "that was tricky", "creative". Growth – "you've taken a step forward", "Change has occurred!"

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The lecture method is a relatively poor instructional approach for maintaining student attention (Blight, 2000). Research findings suggest that student concentration during lectures begins to decline after 10-15 minutes (Stuart & Rutherford, 1978). A summary of the different types of evidence offered to support this assertion is provided by Blight (2000). Recently, Wilson & Korn (2007) have both reviewed this literature and questioned this claim, (i.e. largely by raising legitimate methodological and interpretive questions about the early yet often cited studies done in this area). Their critique, however, does not challenge the consistent findings of recent research demonstrating that when compared to traditional 50-minute classroom lectures, interactive lectures produce superior educational outcomes. For example, over twenty years ago, empirical research comparing lecture methods versus discussion techniques was summarized in the report 'Teaching and Learning in the Classroom: A review of the Research Literature' prepared by the National Center for Research to improve post-secondary teaching and learning (Mckeachie, et al., 1987). The review concluded that, in those experiments involving measures of retention of information after the end of a course, measures of problem solving, thinking, attitude change or motivation for further learning, the results tend to show differences favoring discussion methods over lecture (p. 70). Hake (1998) reported the results of one study involving 62 introductory physics courses. Compared to traditional lecture-based instruction, instructional approaches that promoted interactive engagement produced dramatic student gains in conceptual and problem-solving test scores. Springer et al. (1998) similarly reported a large meta-analysis of studies examining small group learning in SMET courses (i.e., Science, Math, Engineering and Technology). Compared to traditional lecture-based instruction, various forms of small group learning produced higher achievement test scores, more positive student attitudes and higher levels of student persistence. Knight & Wood (2005), in an article titled 'teaching more by lecturing less', report the results of a study completed in a large, upper-division biology lecture course. When compared to students' performance when the course was taught using a traditional lecture format, students who were taught with (a) in-class activities in place of some lecture time, (b) collaborative work in student groups, (c) increased in-class formative assessment and (d) group discussion were observed to make significantly higher learning gains and better conceptual understanding.

Over the years, scholars, researchers and national reports have also discussed the importance of employing active learning instructional strategies to maximize student learning in the college or university classroom. Consider individually or collectively the following succinct observations and/or recommendations: Lectures alone are too often a useless expenditure of force. The lecturer pumps laboriously into sieves. The water may be wholesome; but it runs through. A mind must work to grow (Elliot, 1869). Faculty should make greater use of active modes of teaching and require that students take greater responsibility for their learning (study group on the conditions of excellence in American higher education, 1984).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Both primary and secondary data have been used for the purpose of this study. All the 856 students of Saint Mary's Syrian College, Brahamvar constitute the population under study. However, the researcher has used a sample of 200 students under the simple random sampling method. The questionnaire was distributed to all the 200 final year students of the undergraduate degree courses of Commerce and Management. All the students responded to the questionnaire, the response rate being 100%. All final year students were selected for the research, as they will be in a mood of being the final year students and also the seniors-most students of the college. Personal interview was held with the faculty members with regard to the idea of implementing active learning in the class.

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

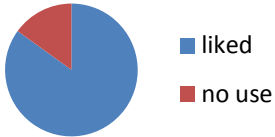
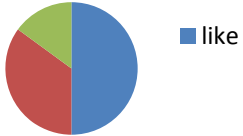
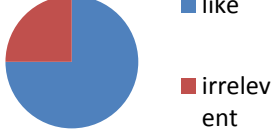
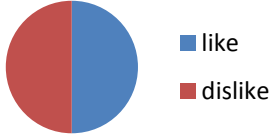
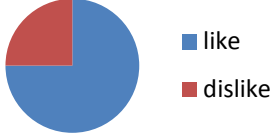
The researcher used two groups for her study i.e. final year B.Com. and final year BBM. The researcher has been teaching the subject of Financial Management, a practical oriented subject with theory in final year B.Com. class and she has been teaching the elective paper of Financial Management in final BBM, which is entirely different with a vast syllabus as compared to the paper of final year B.Com.

The active learning technique adopted for the first group was: News reading in the class by a group of five members each based on their roll numbers, seminars by five group members, group is based on their own choice. The active learning technique adopted for the second group was: seminars for a group of five each, where members are chosen on the basis of their roll numbers and a group of five members each of their choice was formed for solving the problems in old question papers, each member is allotted with the individual task of solving one question paper. Seminars for both the groups were on general management and commerce subjects. At the end of the semester, the person who read the news very clearly and honestly and the good seminar were awarded with chocolates, pens, etc. and the good group was awarded with positive appraisal in the last class.

After implementing this when we collected feedback about this method at the end of the Vth semester, 75% of the students reported that they liked this type of teaching- learning process.



STUDENTS' RESPONSE TOWARDS ACTIVE LEARNING (n = 200)

Activity	Students' response
<p>News reading:</p> <p>85% liked it (got general knowledge) 15% said, no use (hate to write and can't read)</p>	 <p>■ liked ■ no use</p>
<p>Seminars:</p> <p>50% liked it (are bold students) 35% disliked it (stage fear) 15% said, no use (not interested)</p>	 <p>■ like</p>
<p>Practical's worked out by groups:</p> <p>75% liked it (benefit of group learning) 25% said it's irrelevant (partiality)</p>	 <p>■ like ■ irrelevant</p>
<p>Lecture method:</p> <p>50% disliked it (boring, feeling sleepy) 50% liked it (with examples interesting)</p>	 <p>■ like ■ dislike</p>
<p>Reward system:</p> <p>75% liked it (motivates them) 25% partiality disliked it</p>	 <p>■ like ■ dislike</p>

The news reading by group and discussing the issue in the class for 15 minutes liked by most, it helped those who did not read news papers and it helped them to have a general awareness about the external environment and help them to improve their reading skill and familiarize with certain business jargons. The group seminars helped them to develop their personality by eradicating stage fear. Getting students in groups, especially in large classes, was seen as a way to help them in socializing. Role-play was done by students in the case of case laws in Business Law class.

**DISCUSSION**

It is very difficult to impart active learning even though it has got advantages: a) It does suit the UG course because of the time constraint under the semester system; b) In undergraduate courses, the students expect everything from the teachers; c) Co-operative learning is only suitable to final year students whereas the first year students may not be knowing each other, and hence, resist the attempts to form groups and they form groups by themselves; d) It may disturb the classroom environment and disturb other classes, if classes are located close to each other; e) Highly distractive students take advantage of this activity; f) Suitable for courses with less number of students in a class; and g) Practical subjects like mathematics, statistics, etc. cannot be taught under this method. Some common barriers to instructional change include: a) The powerful influence of educational tradition; b) Faculty self-perceptions and self-definition of roles; c) The discomfort and anxiety that change creates; d) The limited incentives for faculty to change; e) Certain specific obstacles are associated with the use of active learning including limited class time; a possible increase in preparation time; the potential difficulty of using active learning in large classes; and a lack of needed materials, equipment, or resources; f) Perhaps the single greatest barrier of all, however, is the fact that faculty members' efforts to employ active learning involve risk--the risks that students will not participate, use higher-order thinking, or learn sufficient content, that faculty members will feel a loss of control, lack necessary skills, or be criticized for teaching in unorthodox ways.

However, active learning can be used: a) As a substitute to the main subject; b) Such practices can be followed occasionally; c) Every chapter cannot be taught through active learning process; d) Student interest also matters a lot in this learning process.

## CONCLUSION

The reform of instructional practice in higher education must begin with faculty members' efforts. An excellent first step is to select strategies promoting active learning that one can feel comfortable with. Such low-risk strategies are typically of short duration, structured and planned, focused on subject matter that is neither too abstract nor too controversial and familiar to both the faculty member and the students. Faculty developers can help stimulate and support faculty members' efforts to change by highlighting the instructional importance of active learning in the newsletters and publications they distribute. Further, the use of active learning should become both the subject matter of faculty development workshops and the instructional method used to facilitate such programs. And it is important that faculty developers recognize the need to provide follow-up to, and support for, faculty members' efforts to change. Academic administrators can help these initiatives by recognizing and rewarding excellent teaching in general and the adoption of instructional innovations in particular. Comprehensive programs to demonstrate this type of administrative commitment (Cochran 1989) should address institutional employment policies and practices, the allocation of adequate resources for instructional development, and the development of strategic administrative action plans. Equally important is the need for more rigorous research to provide a scientific foundation to guide future practices in the classroom. Currently, most published articles on active learning have been descriptive accounts rather than empirical investigations, many are out of date, either chronologically or methodologically, and a large number of important conceptual issues have never been explored. New qualitative and quantitative research should examine strategies that enhance students' learning from presentations; explore the impact of previously overlooked, yet educationally significant, characteristics of students, such as gender, different learning styles, or stage of intellectual development; and be disseminated in journals widely read by faculties.

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