

Class Discussion and Class Participation: Determination of Their Relationship

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Abstract

Generally regarded as important ways for students to engage in class, class discussion and class participation are placed at the heart of the classroom learning experiences. This paper aimed to determine the correlation between class discussion and class participation at Wenzhou Kean University in China. Convenience and purposive sampling of 105 undergraduates of which majority are English as a Second Language (ESL) learners participated in the online survey of this cross-sectional correlation study. Descriptive and inferential statistics have been used in the study to provide in-depth data analysis. Class discussion and class participation had a strong and positive significant relationship indicating that when there is enough time given for a group of three to five students to discuss general and creative topics on questions given by instructors before the discussion, students are more confident to actively participate in class. Finally, this paper gave relevant recommendations to the class instructors.

Keywords: *class discussion; class participation; length of discussion; structure of question, self-confidence, instructors' attitudes.*

1. Introduction

Many students are inactive in their class, which will make the teaching less effective. Class discussion is one of main techniques for educators to increase classroom participation and make more students get rid of shyness to immerse in the English environment. Class participation, on the other hand, given a figure that approximately 58% of first-year students in college indicated extremely when asked “to what degree are you the kind of person who participates in class” (Ahlfeldt et al., 2005). Therefore, examining the issue of class participation is important because class participation remains low in college classrooms. Examining the correlation between class participation and class discussion among the undergraduates is significant because it motivates instructors to comprehend the students’ attitude towards the class structure.

1.1. Literature review

Class discussion is defined as an invisible exchange between students and educators with the purpose of improving students’ learning and their skills (Witherspoon, et al., 2016). It is very useful when teachers want their students to exchange their ideas and show their understanding of the topic because accordingly class discussion can enhance student’ understanding by talking with other classmates, especially in lecture class (Smith et al., 2009). In Kornfield and Noack’s study (2017), speed-discussion was more effective and useful compared to slow-discussion because speed-discussion engaged students dynamically and students can remember the central ideas faster than those who does not participate class discussion. In slow-discussion, students can have enough time to extend their ideas and make everyone to join it. However, if time is tight, the discussion may not get enough time to implement.

Lambert (2015) reported "group size" types as to peer discussion (two students), large group (three to five students) and larger one (more than five students). Brooks and Koretsky (2011) reported that large group size (includes 3~5 students) makes students have more confidence that encourages students’ active involvement in class. Sawyer (2014) reported that creative topic can pique students' interest, have more chances to expand their minds because there are less limitations have engaged students further in the discussion. According to Dallimore, Hertenstein, and Platt’s study (2004), teacher’s guidance which can be seen the structure of class discussion, influences students’ attitudes. There are two main structures, one is putting forward question before the discussion, the other one is putting forward question after the discussion. Dallimore et al. reported that the former structure is more suitable for students because they can grasp the "central idea" of teachers so that the discussion will be more effective.

Anchored on the principles of constructivism that knowledge is socially constructed and learning is an active process (McLeod, 2019), class participation, is considered as an

important teaching strategy because the instructor holds that it increases students' ability of critical thinking. Class participation, according to Dancer and Kamvounias (2005), can be defined as the extent to which students participate or involve themselves in a class, course, etc. In particular, participation involves active student responding, which provides students with an opportunity to demonstrate skills learned in the course and allows instructors to provide useful feedback.

Three significant factors can influence students' class participation reported as openness and enthusiasm, attitudes and behaviors of students in class, and class formality (Roehling et al., 2013). Students were very reluctant to participate in the class when they perceived that the instructors were not open to their divergent opinions and ideas (Roehling et al.) Students' are willing to participate in the class when the class is less formal described as when instructors are warm when they are called in first name basis, rather than their last names (Roehling et al.). Kevin O'Conner (2013) reported that instructors have to show their teaching enthusiasm toward the students to promote class participation. Kevin O'Conner (2013) suggested ways to create a comfortable classroom atmosphere such as students work with teachers to establish the norm of class participation at the beginning of the semester.

1.2. Conceptual Framework

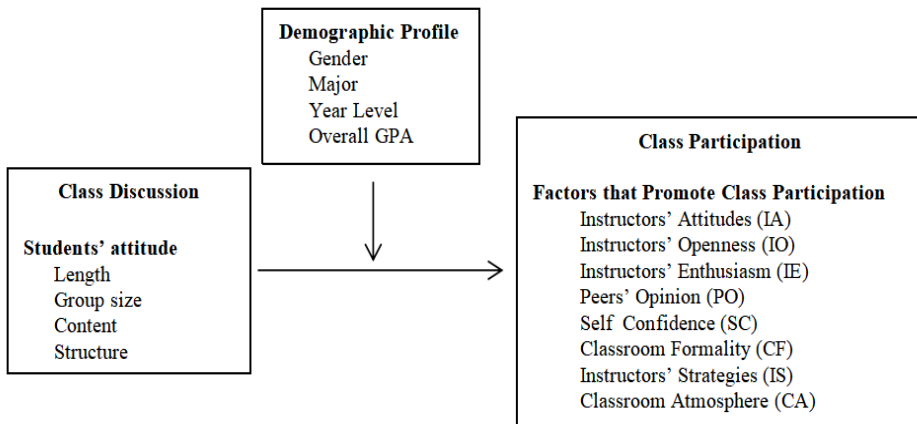


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

2. Methodology

Descriptive-correlational design was used in the study to determine the correlation between class discussion and class participation. The study was conducted at Wenzhou-Kean University (WKU) in China. Having the status of Chinese-American jointly established

higher education institution, English Immersion Program (EMI) is applied across curricular programs to adopt to the American educational system.

Convenience and purposive sampling composed of 105 respondents represented 4% of the study population. Online questionnaires posted through the survey website named Wenjuanxing and shared to QQ or WeChat was used in the study. Extensive review of the literature and peer critiquing was used to establish the validity and reliability of the research instrument. A four-point attitudinal Likert scale was applied to describe respondents' attitudes and their preferences. Numbers closer to 1 represented strong disagreement (SD) and numbers closer to 4 represented strong agreement (SA).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Students' attitude towards class discussion

Table 1 presents the students' attitude towards class discussion in the aspects of length, group size, content, and structure. For the length of class discussion, students prefer the long-discussion ($\bar{X}=2.51$), but their answers fluctuate greatly. Results showed students preference as follows: for group size the 3~5 people in one group ranked first ($\bar{X}=2.51$); for content the "general and creative content discussion" ranked first ($\bar{X}=2.97$) and second ($\bar{X}=2.85$) respectively. For the structure of discussion, students prefer to discuss when professors give questions before discussion ($\bar{X}=2.96$).

Table 1 - Students' attitudes toward Class Discussion.

Item No.	Descriptive statements	Mean X	SD	Scaled Response
1.1	I prefer long-discussion. (enough time)	2.51	.983	Agree
1.2	I prefer short-discussion. (time is limited)	2.38	.897	Disagree
2.1	I prefer one on one discussion.	2.41	.886	Disagree
2.2	I prefer 3~5 people in one discussion.	2.51	.785	Agree
2.3	I prefer 5~10 person in one discussion.	2.20	.934	Disagree
3.1	I prefer academic discussion.	1.96	.842	Disagree
3.2	I prefer business discussion.	2.08	.749	Disagree
3.3	I prefer general discussion.	2.97	.859	Agree
3.4	I prefer technical discussion.	1.86	.789	Disagree
3.5	I prefer casual discussion.	1.96	.865	Disagree
3.6	I prefer creative discussion.	2.85	.917	Agree
4.1	I prefer professors to put forward questions after discussion.	2.05	.801	Disagree
4.2	I prefer professors give the questions before the discussion	2.96	.795	Agree
Students' attitudes toward class discussion		2.51	.854	Agree

The result on respondents' preference on long discussion does not support the study of Kornfield and Noack (2017) that reported students' preference for speed discussion. However, respondents' class discussion preferences on other indicators support the findings of Brooks and Koretsky (2011) large group size (3-5 students); Sawyer (2014) creative topics for discussion, and Dallimore et al. (2004) structuring of questions be given before the discussion.

3.2. The factors that influence the class participation

Table 2 presents the six indicators used to measure the factors that influence class participation as follows: "instructors' attitude", "instructors' openness", and "instructors' enthusiasm"; "peers' opinion", and "self-confidence"; and "class formality".

Table 2 - The Factors That Promote Class Participation.

Item No.	Descriptive statements	Mean X	SD	Scaled Response
1.1	I think instructors' attitude influence my class participation	3.20	.786	Agree
1.2	I think instructors' openness influences my class participation	3.16	.774	Agree
1.3	I think instructors' enthusiasm influences my class participation	3.10	.798	Agree
1.4	I think peers' opinion influences my class participation	2.95	.731	Agree
1.5	I think self-confidence influences my class participation	3.13	.784	Agree
1.6	I think class formality influences my class participation	3.19	.752	Agree
2.1	I think useful instructors' strategies can promote class participation.	3.13	.773	Agree
2.2	I think a comfortable classroom atmosphere can promote class participation.	3.19	.786	Agree
Factors that promote class participation		3.16	.780	Agree

Among the eight factors, the instructors' attitude is evaluated as the most significant one in shaping the undergraduates' participation ($\bar{X}=3.20$), while the factor of peers' opinion is the least important ($\bar{X}= 2.95$).

3.3. Class discussion and class participation Correlations and Practical Implications

To establish relationships of independent and dependent variables, researchers used Bivariate Correlational analysis as shown in Table 3. Findings showed that there is a strong positive correlation between the class discussion and class participation ($r = .674$) at the .05 level of significance.

Table 3 - Bivariate Correlation of all Variables

	Instructor's attitude	Instructor's openness	Instructor's enthusiasm	Peers opinion	Self- confidence	Class formality	Instructor's strategies	Comfortable classroom atmosphere	Class participation
	r	r	r	r	r	r	r	r	r
Length	0.671	0.603	0.617	0.640	0.707	0.601	0.668	0.642	0.795*
Group Size	0.724	0.677	0.701	0.702	0.728	0.475	0.700	0.679	0.673*
Content	0.758	0.727	0.653	0.690	0.690	0.524	0.595	0.663	0.663*
Structure	0.703	0.715	0.680	0.659	0.783	0.536	0.665	0.690	0.679*
Class discussion	0.714*	0.681*	0.663*	0.673*	0.727*	0.534*	0.657*	0.669*	0.674*

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

When individual dimensions of class discussion and overall class participation were considered, length and class participation had the highest correlation ($r = .795$); whereas, when individual dimensions of class participation and overall class discussion were considered, self-confidence and class discussion had the highest correlation ($r = .727$).

When designing class discussion for WKU students who are English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, it is suggested that instructors consider students' preference for enough time to discuss, group composition of 3-5 students, and general and creative topic with questions be given before the class discussion. The incorporation of these conditions in organizing class discussion enhances students' self-confidence that encourages students' class participation.

It cannot be ignored that the area on course content ($r = .663$) and class formality ($r = .534$) ranked lowest in the correlation between class discussion and class participation. Top priority to address these shortcomings suggest that when students are engaged in general and creative topic discussions, the instructors need to manifest openness and enthusiasm. When students perceived that instructors are open and enthusiastic to students' divergent opinions and ideas, the students are more participative. Also, first name basis in calling students will make students feel more comfortable in a less formal classroom setting.

3.5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Since the relationship between class participation and class discussion is significantly positive, class participation improvement is dependent on the class discussion engagement. Students of three to five in a group when given enough time to discuss general and creative topics will likely enhance students' confidence that encourages active class participation.

Based on findings, the status quo of the Class Discussion and Class Participation is necessary to tailor fit instructors' efforts in class improvements. Armed with these data, whereby

strengths and areas that need improvements are identified, the instructors will better meet the students' learning needs. Since the primary goal is to improve class effectiveness, the following instructional strategies are thereby recommended: A. Provide enough time in class discussion; B. Give questions before class discussion; C. Organize group size composition of three to five students; D. Introduce more general and creative topic for class discussion; E. Instructors' manifest positive attitudes of openness and enthusiasm to create a more comfortable classroom atmosphere; F. Use first name basis in calling students to make the class less formal

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