

IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: IS DISCUSSION METHOD THE ANSWER?

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This paper explores the role of discussion method in teaching for improving learning in higher education institutions. Teaching and learning are inseparable. However, teaching becomes effective only when it leads to meaningful learning. The lecture method for teaching dominates the classrooms in higher education institutions and is receiving negative comments from all stakeholders. Discussion method is considered superior by experts as it is more democratic by nature. It is inclusive, participatory and holds the key for empowering learners to be critical thinkers. A descriptive narrative design was employed for conducting the study. Qualitative techniques were employed at several stages throughout the study. Purposive and accidental sampling procedures were used. Semi-structured interviews guide were used for collecting data and ideas from the participants. It emerged that discussion method for teaching in classrooms possesses the power to stimulate quiet and shy-looking learners. It also helps them to open up, think, participate and follow the instructions offered during discussions in the classrooms. It is recommended that the discussion method for teaching be employed because it creates an equal playing field for students to think critically and contribute to lessons.

KEYWORDS: Discussion Method, Higher Education Institutions, Democratic Classrooms, Inclusiveness, Participatory and Empowering

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the success of education is based on the quality of teaching and learning that takes place at the learning settings. Good curriculum reveals that it is the human touch provided by the teacher that engenders good and lasting results produced in the educational institutions (Parkay, 2013). Professionally trained teacher does appreciate that the fostering of learning is what good teaching is about. Gowin and Alvarez (2005) perceive teaching as the achievement of shared meaning. They add that just as teachers cause teaching, students cause learning. Learning is thus perceived as an active, non-arbitrary, voluntary re-organisation by the learner of patterns of meaning. The question to ask then is: Is it always true that teacher's teaching leads to students learning? If even it does, is that type of learning by students meaningful? If the answer is no, then teachers in higher education institutions in particular, need to improve upon their teaching skills to benefit students in their learning endeavours. It appears that many of the lecturers in higher education institutions, today, employ the lecture method of teaching in the classrooms. The lecture method of teaching is the easiest approach in delivering and imparting knowledge to students (Brookfield, 2004). First, a lecturer researches thoroughly on a topic captured in the course outline he/she developed. Second, he/she comes to the classroom with a prepared note or not, and teach the subject to the students through the lecturing approach. The lecture method is good to the extent that it causes students to develop active listening skills in order to benefit from the topic taught, and that is about all. The downside is that it creates dependency syndrome in students because it makes them become passive in their attitude towards learning. The absence of the lecturer in the class room means that the students cannot undertake meaningful learning on their own (Brookfield, 2004).

Although knowledge in society today is vastly more important than before, it is also significant that the knowledge so conveyed by teachers has to be analysed, criticised, and re-examined by divergent views expressed by students to bring about meaningful learning. After all, good teachers have been found to use different methods for delivering best knowledge to their students. This is significant because the 'information society' we find ourselves in requires knowledgeable students. The student role in the technologically advanced global economy is to transform the knowledge acquired into a meaningful one. Hence, the heavy reliance on knowledge in this new age has created veritable explosion in teaching and learning in higher education institutions, in Ghana. Ghana presently has more than 50 higher education institutions (Government of Ghana, 2018), running a number of degree programmes to students. Ensuring meaningful teaching in higher education

institutions does not only means helping students learn new skills in identifying, accessing, and retrieving information, but also enabling them to criticise and utilise information meaningfully. The lecturer's role as the purveyor of knowledge is being changed fast and given new impetus. This approach of helping produce empowered students can be realised through the discussion teaching method. The lecture method creates boredom in students yet dominates our class rooms. Lecturers, therefore, should be playing the role of discussion leadership in our learning settings.

Brookfield (2004, p. 209) admits that “of all the methods favoured by adult educators, it is the discussion which has perhaps become enshrined as the adult educational method “par excellence”. Discussion, as a teaching method, seems both inclusionary and participatory. In today's class rooms, teaching through discussion method, may be a useful approach of helping students engage in critical and constructive thinking about issues, problems and challenges in their class rooms. In any case, the real fruit of education is the thought processes that result from the study of a discipline, not the information accumulated. Kimble, et. al. (1954) observes that the extra-mural class students have themselves made it a deliberate policy to act as regular leaders for vernacular discussion groups. The discussion method as an approach to teaching and learning of students in higher education institutions ensures that both teachers and learners involved in the learning activities gained from the cross-fertilisation of ideas, views, suggestions, and experiences that emerge from learning. The learning theory suggests that the student is more likely to learn when he/she actively participates in the learning process. Students sometimes form study groups because they know that by participating in the 'give and take' of a discussion, they will be more likely to remember what is discussed. Breaking students into groups as observed by Imel (1997) to discuss topical issues dear to them, and inviting participation, is a time-proven strategy to help students learn in the class rooms. This study which seeks to find out how discussion teaching method can be adopted by lecturers to make students exhibit democracy, independence and become critical in thinking, used the College of Education, University of Ghana, Legon, as a case study.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It has been observed that the discussion method for teaching provides one of the most promising opportunities to transform students disabling deference into thoughtful independence. Professionally trained lecturers believe that empowering students to critically think through issues under discussion teaching method should be one of the main goals of any class. That in itself informs lecturers' that adopt the discussion method perceive it as a better

approach of training and educating today's students. This is because it fosters democracy, independence, openness and critical thinking. Unfortunately, however, in today's higher institutions of learning, the lecture method seems the first approach that many lecturers' buy into at the class rooms in teaching students. The lecture method however, has received a lot of criticisms, and frowns upon by both students and society at large. It creates boredom and passive attitudes in students since enough opportunities are not created for students to ask thought-provoking questions, critique, comment, as well as challenge some uncritical assertions often made by some lecturers in class rooms. This happens because lecturers often assume that students don't know the subject matter being taught to them.

Some lecturers, sadly, forget that today's students are social-media-savvy learners, who are practically-oriented learners. They buy into hands-on experience and continue to explore new ways of learning. Continually providing students copious notes and information is not the way to go in today's information age and knowledge society we find ourselves in. Merely thinking that students need to be taught new facts cannot help today's students become critical, assertive and independent thinkers. What students need today is an empowering teaching and learning method that will constantly keep them engaging, thinking, reflecting and innovating sufficiently to follow through their dreams and visions in life. Davis (1993) has underscored the fact that initiating and sustaining a lively, productive discussion is among the most challenging activities for an instructor. It appears however that while the advantages of discussion method as a means of teaching may seem obvious, most teachers are not skilled in the use of dialogue and discussion as teaching tools. Sometimes, too, due to little experience and preparation students have had in participating in discussion group due to the domination of lecture methods in the class rooms, they are often unprepared to participate in discussion teaching and learning. On the basis of the above suppositions, the question to be answered then, is: How can discussion method be made an effective approach of aiding students learn meaningfully?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Welty (1989) revealed "that lecturers who are interested in discussion method teaching are probably convinced that improving interactive skills in the classroom will improve [our] teaching" (p. 197). Welty admits that both learning theory and common sense suggest that finding ways to involve students actively in what they are supposed to be learning is a worthwhile undertaking. It is on that basis that lecturers with vast experience are always desirous to promote discussion teaching method in the class room. Yet

lecturers can still do better with discussion teaching method if they allow the students to frame some of the topics earmarked for discussions in the class room. To make discussions teaching method open and democratic to learners, lecturers must put in place small discussion groups of 15 to 20 students to deliberate on a topic. The object, sometimes, is to use the discussions as a means of bringing out both sides of the question. The creation of democratic class rooms is a necessary pre-requisite for embarking upon during discussion teaching. To become and adopt democratic teaching is a joyful celebration in the sense that the needs and views of every student are tolerated. Brookfield (1995) explains democratic teaching in this way:

Teaching democratically does not mean that we cease to speak authoritatively or that we pretend to be exactly the same as our students. Teaching democratically is not to be confused with creating laissez-faire atmosphere of intellectual relativism, where anything goes. What it does mean is that we make an effort to create conditions which all voices can speak and be heard, including our own, and in which education processes are seen to be open to genuine negotiation (p. 44).

Most university lecturers value content and theory and feel that the most effective way to teach is to communicate the content-laden, theoretically-based lectures (Brookfield, 1995). Many lecturers, today, have become what we call 'the sage on the stage.' We talk and talk and rarely give students the opportunity to ask pertinent questions for clarifications of the points raised during lecturing. At any rate, we must all process information before we can make it our own. Such processing, however, requires interaction on the part of lecturers and students in the class room. Wassermann (2010) observes that to have a productive classroom discussion, those that enable students to invent, create, imagine, take risks, and dig for deeper meanings, there should be in place a climate in which students feel safe to offer their ideas. This observation is significant here. Lecturers can create safe learning climate by being mindful of the essential conditions of interactive teaching. Wassermann offered five of such conditions, including the fact that lecturers should listen, attend, and apprehend what students say, and clarify what students mean during discussions. In doing this, however, he/she should give students time to think and say what is on their minds. Lecturers should show appreciations to students' ideas expressed during discussion, for we have come to ascertain for many years that a major barrier to productive classroom discussion is teachers' natural tendency to judge, evaluate, and approve or disapprove of students' contributions (Rogers, 1961).

Lecturers should accept lack of closure; after all, the need for certainty seems to be part of human make up. Lecturers should not talk too much to curtail students' brain power and come to terms that the key elements of

effective classroom discussion are not present every moment of every teaching day, and, thus need to balance their classroom instructions. In any case, the art of teaching requires being clear about the goals we set and using teaching strategies that are in concert with those goals, thus, consistently connecting our means with our ends. The goal here is to bring teaching strategies into sync with the teaching objectives for that lesson. Thus, productive classroom discussions are an excellent means when the objective is to promote students' intelligent habits of mind. Davis (1993) also asserts that lecturers can ensure effective discussion in class rooms when they guide students to keep the discussion focused, repeat the key point of all comments or questions for the rest of the class, take notes and also be alert for signs that the discussion is deteriorating. Davis adds that if students are having trouble communicating, lecturers should avoid making remarks. They should also prevent the discussion from deteriorating into a heated argument. When the discussion travels its full length, the lecturer should bring closure to the deliberation, and also remember that not all students are comfortable with extended direct eye contact.

Beginning a presentation in a class room with questions and discussions has been hailed by Meyer (1986) as one best approach of stimulating students to open up to learning. This approach creates an atmosphere of anticipation and inquiry. Professional teachers sometimes bounce questions back to students to enable students know that the teacher has confidence in their abilities. It reinforces the practice of raising questions and provides opportunities for students to develop their own critical thinking faculties. Questions are entry point to the discovery of knowledge and key to intellectual growth. The question to be asked is: What sort of question types should lecturers be encouraging the students to pose to themselves, and to their lecturers? Although the effects of question depend on tone, voice level, and speed of delivery, facial expression, bodily movement, eye contact as well as content, but recall questions do little to stimulate discussion and inquiry. Questions that generate real discussion pose problems and encourage students in the formulation of judgements.

Christensen (1991) provided a typology of questions that as a professional teacher find helpful in teaching students in class rooms. They include open-ended, diagnostic, information- seeking, challenge or testing, action, priority and sequence, prediction, hypothetical, extension and generalization questions. For instance, action question such as "What needs to be done to implement the government's anti-corruption agenda?" can be posed to students during a discussion of a topical issue on the 'Effects of corruption on Ghana's economy'. A professionally trained lecturer will always endeavour to

vary the kinds of questions posed to students to provoke active participation in class discussions. On a fundamental level, questions permit a lecturer using discussion teaching and learning method to stimulate students to think about and analyse the day's exercises. In any case, language is one of the most powerful tools available to lecturers. Lecturers can use language to stretch students' curiosity, reasoning ability, creativity, and independence. One effective way to do this is by asking open-ended questions—those with no single right or wrong answer. Instead of predictable answers, open-ended questions elicit fresh and sometimes even startling insights and ideas, opening minds and enabling lecturers and students to build knowledge together. Discussions provide means for testing and exploring the validity of students' comments. Lecturers tailoring of questions to individual students' needs and interests, and to the needs of the entire class, enable them to manage the levels of students' involvement in the teaching and learning endeavours.

Lecturers' undertake a number of facilitating roles that seek to invite students' participation in meaningful learning in the class rooms. Effective leadership exhibited by lecturers is often the difference between effective and ineffective discussion. In any case, one of the major goals of discussion is to teach students how to talk to each other. If their questions and comments are mostly addressed to the lecturer, it means that the students are not learning to talk to each other. As a lecturer plans for class rooms discussions, he/she should take some time to think about his/her facilitating role. He/she should also consider training a corps of student moderators so that students can develop the leadership skills associated with moderating discussions. Lecturers should use the following broad guidelines, understanding that factors such as participant experience, nature of the topic and setting of the discussion may differ from one discussion to the next. Lecturers in class rooms should endeavour to begin the discussion effectively and fairly. What it means is that the lecturer is responsible for introducing the topic of the discussion and reviewing the expectations for the discussion, including the ground rules and goals for the discussion. Second, every good lecturer endeavours to encourage every student to take part in the discussion. If there are participants who dominate the discussion to the exclusion of others, the lecturer is responsible for trying to move the talk to other students often by introducing new topics or points of view. Third, lecturers should periodically summarise the path of the discussion to help participants get a sense of where they have been and what remains to be discussed. Fourth, the lecturer should ensure that the moderator is responsible for timing the discussion, including informing participants about remaining time left. This, in a way, will help the class use its time effectively, including saving time for closing thoughts, if those are planned

parts of the discussion. Fifth, at the end of the discussion, the lecturer should ensure the students reflect on its progress if the moderator summarises the course of the discussion, including major points, action items and resolutions. The moderator should pay particular attention to the lines of discussion that were wrapped up and the ones that remained open at the end of the discussion, as those latter lines will be fruitful topics for subsequent discussion. The researcher next turns his attention to the method designed for the study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to find out how discussion method could be made more effective as an approach of aiding students learn meaningfully. On the basis of the above issue raised, the specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify guidelines that foster effective discussion based teaching and learning.
2. Find out the types of questions that provoke students to open up to discussion based teaching and learning.
3. Identify facilitation roles that enhance students' participation in meaningful learning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Students formed the sampling units and unit of analysis in the design. The study used a descriptive-narrative design. Qualitative characteristics were adopted at several stages throughout the study. Convenience procedure was adopted in selecting the sample. The names of the accessible students, who were 60 in number, were compiled and serially labelled on pieces of papers. They were put into a container and reshuffled and 30 of them were randomly selected for the study. This sample size of 30 respondents out of the accessible population of 60 was representative in terms of the institution under study. The researcher's intention was to understand, analyse and describe how discussion method can improve teaching and learning in higher institutions of learning. The researcher adopted these sampling procedures to identify the meaningfulness of discussion teaching and learning to students. The researcher's intention was, therefore, to get a deeper insight into how the respondents assessed the guidelines, question types posed to them, and the facilitating roles adopted by lecturers during class rooms discussions.

This was an exploratory and descriptive study which gathered data through semi-structured interviews and the results were presented qualitatively in terms of themes and in simple percentages. The data collected from closed-

ended questions was also analysed using percentages. The responses from the open-ended questions were summarised, organised and interpreted in the form of tables. A descriptive-narrative approach was also adopted to analyse some of the responses. The study sought the views of students on the guidelines that foster effective discussion and the type of questions that provoke students to open up to teaching and learning. Lecturers' facilitation roles that enhance students' participation in meaningful learning were also examined. The analysis as clearly explained, was performed on the data following the steps recommended by Creswell (2012, 2013), Chilisa (2012), Marshall and Rossman (2011) and Chilisa and Preece (2005).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In all, from the twenty-eight students in the College of Education, the majority (64 percent) of the respondents being males and remaining (36 percent) represented the female respondents who participated in the study. In terms of age, the majority (61 percent) of the respondents fell within 18-30 years bracket, indicating that they are young adults. More than half (58 percent) of the respondents were undergraduate students.

Institution of Guidelines to Foster Discussion Based Teaching and Learning

On whether lecturers institute guidelines to foster discussion based teaching and learning in class rooms, the respondents mostly ranked occasionally and frequently for the four guidelines put in place which students were asked to rank from lower level of 1 to higher level of 4. Table 1 presents the results as ranked by the respondents.

Table 1

Ranking Guidelines that Foster Discussion Based Teaching and Learning.

Guidelines	Never (1)	Seldom (2)	Occasionally (3)	Frequently (4)	Total (%)
Lecturers use discussion method in class	4%	15%	55%	26%	100%
Lecturers make you feel safe during T/L	-	15%	41%	44%	100%
Lecturers encourage students to ask questions	-	11%	32%	57%	100%
Lecturers show appreciation to students' input	4%	7%	37%	52%	100%

Note: Multiple responses were made N = 28 Source: Field Data, 2016

From Table 1, respondents indicated that lecturers frequently (57 percent)

encouraged students to ask questions during discussion-based teaching sessions in the class rooms. Less than half (32 percent) of the respondents admitted that lecturers occasionally encouraged them to ask questions during discussion-based teaching sessions. As to whether lecturers use discussion method in class rooms, more than half (55 percent) of the respondents said lecturers occasionally adopt discussion teaching approach in the class rooms. Though efforts were made by lecturers in using discussion method in teaching in class rooms, more of that is required to make students deeply reflect and think critically on topical issues before expressing themselves. That notwithstanding, nearly half (44 percent) of the respondents admitted that lecturers frequently make them feel safe during discussion teaching sessions in class, and that in itself is good, because it has the power to empower quiet and shy-looking students to open up and speak, perhaps with sense, in the class rooms. The good news, too, was that more than half (52 percent) of the respondents admitted that lecturers showed appreciation to the input in terms of contributions they made in class rooms during discussion of topical issues. The findings confirm Brookfield (2004) assertion that of all the methods favoured by adult educators, it is the discussion which has become enshrined as the adult educational method “par excellence.” This should be expected because majorities (61 percent) of the respondents were young adults, and they prefer to actively engage in teaching and learning endeavours that is interactive, dialogical and conversational.

More so, discussion as a teaching method seems both inclusionary and participatory. The quiet, shy-looking and unassuming students are encouraged to share their views on topical issues under discussion teaching and learning sessions. It also means that the discussion method is a useful approach of helping students engage in constructive thinking about issues, problems and challenges not only in the class rooms, but the society at large. In any case, Christensen (1991) has made us understand that questioning, listening and response shine best in the classroom. Thus, as questions are posed during discussion teaching, and students actively listen, it impacts positively on responses offered by students in the class rooms. It has to be added, however, that student's appreciation and mastery of questioning, listening and response are not only important in the class rooms, but also to the decision making in the larger society as well.

Question Types Posed by Lecturers to Students during Discussion Session

Open-ended questions such as: “What social issues are facing today's graduates from our universities?” and “What is the greatest facing the youth today?” were posed to students. Diagnostic questions such as: “What is your analysis of youth unemployment problem in Ghana?” and “What conclusion can you draw from youth unemployment data in Ghana?” were also asked. Information-seeking questions sometimes posed include: “What is the

percentage of the youth population in Ghana?” and “What does it tell you as a student?” In terms of challenge (testing) questions posed, the following were considered: “What conclusions can you draw from the unemployment situation confronting the youth of Ghana?” and “What strategies must be put in place to address the challenge?” “How will you implement the strategies you come up with?” and “what will be the likely result?” were some of the action questions posed. Hypothetical and questions of extension sometimes posed to the students include: “What would have happened to unemployed youth without these strategies?” and “What would have been the likely effects?” and “what are the implications of such strategies on youth unemployment in Ghana?” and “What will be the overall effect of such strategies on youth unemployment in Ghana?”

On whether varieties of question types were employed during discussion teaching and learning sessions in class room, all (100%) the respondents were in the affirmative. When respondents were asked to rank in order of importance least asked (1) and most asked (2) question types posed by lecturers to students during discussion teaching sessions in class rooms, the responses that emerged are presented in Table 2 explicitly.

Table 2

Ranking of Question Types Posed by Lecturers to Students.

Question Types	Least Asked Questions (1)	Most Asked Questions (2)	Total (%)
Open -ended questions	38%	62%	100%
Diagnostic questions	52%	48%	100%
Information -seeking questions	17%	83%	100%
Challenge (testing) question	44%	56%	100%
Action question	63%	38%	100%
Hypothetical question	52%	48%	100%
Questions of extension	58%	42%	100%

Note: Multiple responses were made N = 28 Source: Field Data, 2016

The use of question types during discussion teaching cannot be underestimated, and that exactly the study demonstrates. From Table 2, the majority (83 percent) of the respondents indicated that information seeking (recall) questions were mostly posed to them during discussion sessions in class rooms. This is not good enough, especially when it is contrasted to action (63 percent), hypothetical (52 percent) and extension (58) questions which possesses the power to make students develop critical thinking skills were least asked in the class rooms. The findings amply demonstrate that lecturers largely fail to pose questions that have extraordinary ability to stimulate students

learning. More than half (62 percent) of the respondents indicated that lecturers used open-ended questions during discussion teaching sessions. Indeed, Small (2009) asserts that a question is considered open-ended when it is framed in such a way that a variety of responses or approaches are possible. Although open-ended questions are designed to uncover students understanding and misunderstandings, but if equal weights are assigned to other question types in class rooms as lecturers did to information-seeking question type, many of our students would become powerful independent thinkers with positive effects felt by the larger society. As lecturers, the responses we get from discussions are used to inform instruction because we learn from how our students think, rather than to make evaluative decisions. It also reveals what students know how they apply their knowledge. Interestingly, while diagnostic questions had a little more than half (52 percent) of the respondents admitted that they were least asked by lecturers, more than half (56 percent) of the respondents revealed that challenge questions were most asked by lecturers during discussion teaching at class rooms. It demonstrates a sign that students are gradually, but surely developing the skill of responding to thought-provoking questions posed to them in class rooms.

On whether the questions posed by lecturers to students make them develop critical thinking skills, nearly all (96 percent) the respondents were in the affirmative. However, if you juxtaposed this finding to the types of questions posed by lecturers to students you can arrive at a conclusion that students are not sufficiently encouraged to reflect, think and innovate with new ideas, views and suggestions during discussion teaching in class rooms. As to whether the students think through questions posed to them, all (100 percent) the respondents were in the affirmative. The finding amply demonstrates that the discussion teaching possesses the power to make students develop critical thinking skills, and eventually, become innovators. Lecturers, however, need to vary the question types posed to students to make them extend their imaginative thinking skills. Nearly all (96percent) the respondents were in agreement that views expressed by colleagues during discussion teaching make them refine inputs and contributions they make in class rooms. That is good because no one head is a repository or a fount of all knowledge and wisdom. We learn better when we share ideas among ourselves, after all knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers.

Facilitation Roles that Enhance Discussion Based Teaching and Learning

On whether lecturers start discussion based teaching by first setting the ground rules, more than half (64 percent) of the respondents were in the affirmative. That in itself demonstrates that the lecturers ensure that the students get settled properly before they start the teaching and learning sessions. It further makes the students become attentive and focused to the overall discussion endeavours in the class rooms. Lecturers' starting the teaching and learning

session with a problem related to the topic under study is one surest approach of arresting the attention of students for the lesson. The students can be asked to brainstorm among themselves, and the key ideas they come up with are captured on the board. It goes a long way to resonate in students that their views are respected. On the question of whether students follow through the instructions offered during discussion teaching, two-thirds (71 percent) of the respondents, indicated yes. The findings confirm Meyers (1986) assertion that if a lecturer begins a discussion teaching with a problem or a question related to the topic for the day, it helps students settle down and focus their attention. The result provides ample indication that when students are made to settle down properly for a lecture, they psychologically and mentally give all their attention to the teaching and learning endeavours at the class rooms. This is a matter of great importance, if, indeed, we want to produce students who can imagine, reflect and think critically and independently as well. On whether quiet and shy-looking students are encouraged to participate in the learning activities, nearly two-thirds (68 percent) of the respondents, responded in the affirmative. This is one strong side of discussion if only lecturers fairly distribute questions and do everything possible to control the dominant students from hijacking the entire discussion teaching and learning activities. Thus, greater participation, involvement and inclusiveness are ensured if students are sufficiently encouraged to open up and talk during discussion sessions at class rooms. It means, therefore, that the discussion method of teaching possesses the power to engender the 'can-do' spirit in both students and lecturers not only in the class rooms, but in the larger society as well. On how the discussion method can empower students to actively participate in teaching and learning activities, students offered multiple responses as Table 3 explicitly summarizes it.

Table 3

Discussion Method Empowering Students Participation in Teaching and Learning.

Discussion Method	Percentage
Boost students interest, contributions and communication skills in T/L	82
Encourages students research, reflection and confidence in becoming involved in T/L	79
Increases students retrieval rate of information during teaching and learning sessions	36
Promotes understanding by offering opportunity for seeking clarification of issues	36
Students become practical in approach to learning	18

Note: Multiple responses were made N = 28 Source: Field Data, 2016.

According to Table 3, majority (82 percent) of the respondents admitted

that discussion method of teaching and learning possesses the power of boosting students' interest in a course they offer. It also enhances their contribution and communications skills in class rooms. This is significant to the extent that students become attentive and focused when they develop interest in a particular course. Their psychological and mental capacities become invigorated and heightened such that they remain focused on whatever subject matter taught them, after all, interest and desire are the foundation of motivation. Lecturers can get much from students when they build their motivation and commitment up, and discussion method possesses the power to do just that. Indeed, as students continue to interact among themselves and that of their lecturers, their contributions as well as their communication skills improve for the better. In any event, communicating is the ability to listen, to hear, and to persuade. Effective communication displayed by students in class rooms enables them to be understood properly by their lecturers. Indeed, students learn better when they are deeply involved in learning endeavours, and that exactly is what discussion method of teaching seeks to do. A Native American saying sums it up best: "Tell me and I'll listen; show me, and I'll understand; involve me, and I'll learn." (Useem, 1998 cited in Evers, Rush & Berdrow, 1998). More than two-thirds (79 percent) of the respondents indicated that the discussion method possesses the power of encouraging students research, reflection and confidence of getting involved in teaching and learning in class rooms. This is an important observation because students want to make a mark or difference in class rooms and can only excel in their academic endeavours only if they research on the subject matter, and topics earmarked to be treated in class rooms. Less than half (36 percent) of the respondents respectively asserted that discussion method increases student's retrieval rate of information and also promotes understanding and offers opportunity for seeking clarification of issues during teaching and learning in class rooms. These two observations made were very significant, however, did not receive much premium from the respondents, but that does not in any way make them less important when it comes to what discussion method seeks to offer to both students and lecturers in our learning settings. In a similar vein, less than a quarter (18 percent) of the respondents indicated that discussion method makes students become practical in their approach to learning. This observation is equally important; however, it received less response. That notwithstanding, students, in particular should come to realisation that the discussion method possesses the power to engender meaningful learning in them in tertiary institutions of learning, only if lecturers adopt it.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper explored how discussion method can largely help improve teaching and learning in higher education institutions, taking into

consideration guidelines that foster effective discussion teaching and learning, question types that provoke students to open up to discussion teaching and learning and lecturers facilitating roles that enhance students' participation in meaningful learning. The researcher's personal observation as a lecturer in higher education institution sufficiently informs him that the lecture method heavily dominates our class rooms. However, it has received massive criticisms based on how it is practiced. Some of the lecturers who adopt lecture method of teaching in our class rooms are not very critical when lecturing, hence lecturing method is perceived as a worst kind of banking education. As a professionally trained teacher, the researcher is better positioned to explore to ascertain how discussion method can aid students to undertake meaningful learning. The findings of the study indicate that lecturers occasionally and frequently institute guidelines during discussion sessions in class rooms. Thus, lecturers make students feel safe during discussion sessions, call on students to ask questions and equally show appreciation to diverse views expressed by students in class rooms during discussion sessions. Although discussion method is occasionally practiced in class rooms, appropriate question types that will stimulate students to foster critical and independent thinking skills were least asked, except challenging and information seeking questions which were mostly asked. That is not good enough if we truly want to empower sufficiently students to undertake meaningful learning in the class rooms. Yet discussion method in teaching possesses the power to boost not only students' interest and communication skills, but also to encourage them to develop skills in researching, reflecting and building their confidence and motivation up to learn. Indeed, discussion method at its best has an extraordinary ability to stimulate learning. The findings make it imperative that lecturers in higher education institutions adopt the discussion method of teaching and learning to sufficiently empower today's students to become creative and innovative in their learning endeavours.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

In order to address the institution of appropriate guidelines to foster effective discussion teaching and learning in the class rooms, it is recommended that lecturers:

- Should extensively interact and brainstorm with students to arrive at convincing learning guidelines that would benefit all the parties involved in discussion teaching and learning sessions in the class rooms;
- Should consider the benefits that can be derived from discussion method of teaching and learning to the students in particular and effort has to be made by lecturers to largely adopt the discussion method in teaching and learning in the class rooms of our higher education institutions.

In order to improve on question types that provoke students to open up to discussion teaching and learning in the class rooms, it is recommended that lecturers:

- Take into consideration the interest and concerns of students to inform the kind of question types posed to them during discussion teaching and learning sessions in the class rooms.
- Should consciously involve students in framing the question types that possesses the power to stimulate sufficient students' participation in discussion teaching and learning sessions in the class rooms.

In order to improve upon the lecturers facilitating roles that enhance students' participation in meaningful learning, it is recommended that lecturers:

- Should pace at the rate of the students such that they will all flow together. In doing so, the comprehension and competencies in research skills, communication skills and meaningful learning would be promoted in students.
- Should encourage students to seek for clarifications on issues raised and, thus, become intellectually sceptical at learning settings. In doing so, they would build their motivation, commitment and confidence levels up, to become independent learners and thinkers not only in the class rooms, but the society at large.
- Finally, lecturers must learn fast to move from being the 'sage on the stage' to the 'guide on the side'. By so doing, they can help students to see the need to stop thinking like students, and start thinking like learners, in their lifelong learning drive.

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