The effectiveness of applying Discussion Method in language teaching classes.

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Abstract: The more intense the discussion and the more participation by the students, the greater the effectiveness of learning in the process. This method contrasts the Lecture method by relying on the students to interact by discussing their ideas, experiences, and opinions about the information being covered. It is extremely useful in the classroom and on the range or track once a student can relate to the topic being covered either by gained knowledge, previous experience, or a similar model to resource. The guided discussion method is essentially the opposite of the lecture method. The goal is for the Coach to extract, from the students, their *knowledge* in such a way as to "guide" their ideas in the proper direction instead of "telling them" what they should know. This is a departure from a typical pedagogy into coaching and more importantly into education where a long-term and much broader idea of creating a mental model and value systems are accomplished.

Keywords: discussion, lecture method, enhancement, teaching, communicative method.

Introduction:

Teaching methods according to Burden & Byrd (2010) are approaches to teaching and learning in which concepts, patterns and abstractions are taught in the context of strategies that emphasize concept learning, inquiry learning and problem-solving learning. The most popular teaching method, as Eison (2010) claims, is the lecture method. It has been used for years as a means of transmitting cognitive or factual data from a teacher to a group of students (Ganyaupfu, 2013). It presupposes that the teacher is the only expert with all the access at the teacher's disposal, and that the students need or want a large amount of this data in a short time (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2006). This method is one way channel of communication of information since the emphasis is mainly on the presentation of the topic and the explanation of the content to the students (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Students' attention in a lecture appears to fall off fairly steadily after an initial rise, until the last five minutes when it briefly rises again which means that the middle of a talk is less well remembered than the beginning and end (Bligh, 2000). Lecturers' performance also declines over an hour. Lecturing may be less effective than discussion or individual work in class as there is a lack of concentration on the part of students (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Though lectures are much criticised as a teaching method, Paul (2015) reports that universities have not yet found practical alternative teaching methods for the majority of their courses. Students in the age of global technological advancement have an extensive and instant access to information they require with a single click of a mouse, meaning that they expand the

scope of their knowledge whenever and wherever they wish. The lecturer and library are no longer the limited sources of academic learning at university.

Literature Review

What is Discussion? Generally speaking, 'discussion' could be considered an activity which involves written or oral expression of different points of view in a given situation (Cashin, 2011). Also, Brookfield and Preskill (2005: 6) define it as 'an alternately serious and playful effort by a group of two or more to share views and engage in mutual and reciprocal critique'. Proper discussion would assist learner participants to reach a critically informed understanding of the topic, self-awareness and capacity for self-critique, appreciation of diversity, and informed action (Applebee et al., 2003; Parker, 2003). The discussion process is not merely controlled by one individual presentation as the case in the lecture. The lecturer as the discussion leader may try to strike a balance between controlling the group and letting students air their views with no restrictions (Anastas, 2010). Participation in a class discussion can be voluntary to avoid embarrassment of shy or introvert participants and would be achieved by creating a supportive climate (Rotenberg, (2010). 2.2 Discussion in the Classroom The nature of language according to Berns (1984: 5) would be 'interaction as it is an interpersonal activity and has a clear relationship with society. In this light, language study has to look at the use function of language in context, both its linguistic context and its social, or situational, context'. The teaching-learning process involves mutual responses between the lecturer and students as well as amongst students themselves as all should participate and contribute to this process.

Blumberg (2008) claims that interactions during this activity would encourage students to exchange ideas and experiences which run alongside with what is learnt from the lecturer. In a university class, discussion could be among the common strategies which would be used by lecturers to stimulate active learning (Kim, 2004). If the objectives of a course are to promote long-term retention of information, to motivate students toward further learning, to allow students to apply information in new settings, or to develop students' thinking skills, then discussion, as McKeachie et al (2006) claim, is preferable to lecture. Discussion, when used during lectures, is an effective way to facilitate learning (Nystrand, 2006). It can offer the lecturer an opportunity to check students' understandings of the material and comprehending ideas thoroughly through expressing their own viewpoints and questions (Nystrand, 2006). Sybing (2015) reports that discussions provide students with a platform to participate in their learning process. When students are actively involved in using the relevant material, learning would be more interesting for them and students would be more motivated. Classroom discussions are valuable for developing critical thinking when students learn how to arrange their ideas and then present them convincingly (Silverthorn, (2006) Later in life, they may find themselves in situations where they participate actively in social debates (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). However, the authors assume that there are no clear standarised and universal principles which can be used to assess discussion leader's competence or the students' contributions

Classification of discussion method:

There are a variety of different types of discussions that occur naturally and which we can recreate in the classroom. These include discussions where the participants have to:

- *Make decisions* (e.g. decide who to invite to a party and where to seat them)
- *Give and / or share their opinions on a given topic* (e.g. discussing beliefs about the effectiveness of capital punishment)
- *Create something* (e.g. plan and make a poster as a medium for feedback on a language course)
- *Solve a problem* (e.g. discussing the situations behind a series of logic problems)

Some discussion topics may fall into more than one of these categories, but it is useful to consider a variety of formats to which the students can apply the skills they are learning.

Useful sub-skills for students: There are a number of different sub-skills which students will need to be able to successfully and effectively participate in a group discussion. Students need to develop the ability to:

Analyze: This skill can be developed by giving students the topic individually and asking them to brainstorm or mind-map all of the possible sub-topics they could speak about. The students can then swap their notes and assess or analyse the relevance of each of the sub-topics their partner has included. Together, the students then draw up a fresh list or mind-map and discuss how the sub-topics might be linked together, along with examples or reasons for any arguments they might have.

Persuade: This skill comes in useful when students need to make decisions on how to do something (e.g. which candidate should get a job). A fun activity to develop this skill is to give groups of students this topic and ask them to decide on the profile of the perfect candidate, creating a list of 7 adjectives. The students are then re-grouped and asked to persuade the other members of the group that their selection is the best while compiling a second, negotiated list. The group members who retain the most from their original lists are the winners. Note down useful phrases that you hear the students using while doing this task and discuss these at the end for future reference.

Control emotions This can be practiced by giving the students a fairly controversial topic, such as 'Friends are more important than family' and asking the students to decide whether they agree, disagree or have no opinion, making notes on their main arguments to support their viewpoint. Divide the students into groups ensuring that there is a mix of views within each group. Explain that for this discussion, the aim is to keep their voices low and try to control their emotions as far as possible. Monitor and give feedback on these areas.

Support One of the most important things for this skill is for students to learn when it is and isn't appropriate to interrupt and how to do it. Very often students will talk over each other in an effort to get their point across and forget to listen.

To practice this, you can get your students to make a list in small groups of when it is and isn't appropriate to interrupt other speakers. They should include things like 'not appropriate during the middle of a point, if the speaker has not said very much previously, or when you are feeling angry and liable to say something you'll regret'.

It is appropriate when the speaker has been dominating the discussion for too long, what the speaker is saying is completely irrelevant to the topic, or you don't understand the point he / she has made'.

You can then give them or elicit a list of phrases which they might use to interrupt politely (e.g. 'Can i just add something here?', 'Sorry I'd just like to clarify something,' etc.) The students then write five of these on slips of paper (one per slip) and have a group discussion on a given topic. The aim is to use all of the language on their slips. When they have used a phrase, they put the slip in the middle of the table. The other students in the group judge whether the interruption was appropriate / polite. If not, they take the slip back and try again.

Use functional language Depending on the types of group discussions that you plan to do with your class, it is useful to draw up a list of useful functional language for the students to refer to. This could include phrases for functions such as 'Giving reasons', 'Giving your opinion', 'Agreeing and disagreeing', etc. You can either make up the list yourself and distribute it or get the students to do this. For each group discussion, you can then refer them to the appropriate section of the list and give them a few moments to consider the language before beginning the discussion.

Managing group discussions in ESL classes: There are several key things to consider when setting up group discussions in the classroom to ensure that they run successfully.

- Give the students some **planning time** either individually or in small groups. Don't just give them the topic and say 'go'! It is often useful to discuss some associated vocabulary or functional language that they might find useful
- **Choose topics** which you are confident your students will find interesting.
- Get them to brainstorm some ideas for discussions they would like to do and use this as a starting point
- **Ensure a balance** between input and practice
- Use a **variety of styles** / types
- **Vary group size** and procedure some companies does selection group discussions with very large groups of people – over ten in some cases. If your students will be facing these types of group discussions in the future make sure they get some practice doing them. It can also be useful to mix classes of students so they have practice doing discussions with people they don't already know.
- Encourage **group discussions outside** class time

Give students some extra feedback forms to use to give each other input on how they perform in group discussions outside of class.

Giving and encouraging feedback can take several forms and it is a good idea to vary the way it is given. Students can observe each other doing group discussions and give each other feedback on the specific areas of input that you have covered (ideally using a feedback form that you have created).

- Additionally, students can do a 'Reflective group feedback exercise' where at the end of the group discussion they discuss how effective each of the participants was during the discussion. Again, giving them some focused questions to guide this stage will help them.

- You could also try video-taping the group discussions and playing sections of these back to the class to analyse. Some students find this extremely useful.
- Finally, monitor the groups yourself and make notes for feedback on whole groups or individual performances. Keeping a record of these will help you and the students to see where they have improved.

Encouraging student participation

- **Create an inclusive discussion environment.** Group members will be more likely to contribute to a discussion if they feel they are in a safe, comfortable environment. Here are some general strategies for achieving this:

See the teaching tip on classroom management: creating an exclusive environment   for more ideas on this issue.

   o   at the beginning of term, use an icebreaker activity and ask students to introduce themselves and describe their interests and backgrounds so they can get to know one another

   o   as the facilitator, you should also learn all of your students' names (using name cards may assist you and your students in accomplishing this task)

   o   arrange the seating in the room, if possible, into a semicircle so that the group members can see each other

- **Allow students to ask questions or share ideas in class anonymously, or without "speaking out"** — circulate note cards for students to write questions or comments, or to answer your questions, perhaps anonymously, and collect and address them. You can also encourage students to ask questions in the learning management system, which you can then respond to either in class or online.

- **Give students low-stakes opportunities to think and discuss content** – this is a "tolerance for error" approach. Students sometimes need to get it wrong, take risks, or try out different ideas to learn.

- **Facilitate smaller discussions among students before you ask students to share with the entire class.** Many students need some time and space to try ideas out with one another first. This also gets many more students talking.

- **Facilitate smaller activities before discussion and questions start, so that students have time and space to compose their thoughts**. For example, to help them prepare for discussion, give them the opportunity to write or solve problems quietly for a few minutes. You might even consider asking students to pass these ideas around the room to share with one another, as long as you have warned them in advance that you will do so.

- **Use online resources and content management systems to extend class discussions**. Students won't all get the chance to contribute in a large lecture, so offer the opportunity somewhere else. Students should be given many different opportunities and spaces in which to participate (and to be graded for participation).

- **Have students take turns writing down questions and answers on whiteboards or on large flipchart paper**, and then post the notes around the classroom for future reference—keep them up all term – build running answers to pertinent and revisited questions.

- **Positively reinforce student contributions.** You can emphasize the value of student responses by restating their comments, writing their ideas on the board,

and/or making connections between their comments and the discussion at large. Also be sure to maintain eye contact and use non-verbal gestures such as smiling and head nodding to indicate your attention and interest in students' responses.

- **Use a "token system" to encourage discussion.** Distribute three pennies or poker chips to each student at the outset of the discussion. Each time a student speaks, a penny/chip is turned in to the facilitator. The goal is for students to spend all their pennies/chips by the end of the session. This system can be useful for limiting students who dominate the discussion and encouraging quiet students to contribute.
- **Silence in the classroom is okay** – it is actually good – and if you become comfortable with it, students will too.
- **Limit your own involvement.** Avoid the temptation to talk too much and/or respond to every student's contribution. After you ask students a question, count to at least five in your head before answering it yourself. When you ask students a question, if you really want them to think and be able to give an answer, be willing to wait for it. Try to encourage students to develop their own ideas and to respond to one another (that is, peer interaction). You might also sit someplace other than the "head" of the table.
- **Balance students' voices during the discussion.**

Here are some strategies for dealing with problem group members who can affect the level of student participation:

1. Discourage students who monopolize the discussion by implementing a structured activity that requires each group member to be involved, avoiding eye contact with him/her, assigning a specific role to the dominant student that limits participation (e.g., discussion recorder), or implementing time limits on individual contributions.

2. Draw quiet students into the discussion by posing non-threatening questions that don't require a detailed or correct response, assigning a small specific task to the student (e.g., obtaining information for next class), sitting next to him/her, or positively reinforcing contributions he/she does make.

3. Clarify confusing student contributions by asking the student to rephrase/explain the comment, paraphrasing the comment if you can interpret it, asking the student probing questions, or encouraging him/her to use concrete examples and metaphors.

Conclusion:

It would not be unusual to state the fact that good teaching expectedly leads to good learning. It has been reaffirmed that lecturing could be an essential means for communicating knowledge at university. Yet, learners may need more participation in class to consolidate their learning. The method of teaching preferred by students could have a great impact on the outcomes that would be eventually achieved by them at the end of a course. Lecturers, therefore, may bear a huge ethical responsibility towards themselves and their students by choosing the most effective method of teaching. The study indicated that the discussion method improves students' ability to think and could be more tempting to learning than mere listening to a lecture. It may also assist in fostering intellectual growth, individual expression

and character development. It offers students opportunities to exchange thoughts and views with each other and heightens language proficiency through constant reinforcement and use.

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