

## STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVE LEARNING: AN ALTERNATIVE TO PASSIVE LEARNING

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### ABSTRACT

*This research paper deals with the core issue of learning and offers strategies for active learning as an alternative to passive learning. The problem lies with the passive way of learning which has usually been practiced by the teachers and acknowledged by the students. It offers a detailed experience of the strategies and their outcomes and effects to retain learning by doing instead of only knowing. Currently passive learning has been practiced but we can set an agenda for real learning, controlled by a teacher, but actively done by a learner. Active learning is equal to doing and involving. In this research study, active learning has been practiced in the classroom and through unstructured observation the impacts have been traced and measured on the scales of interest, motivation, learner's autonomy and the level of anxiety. From results and findings it has been derived that active learning strategies are an excellent tool to enhance the level of learning and to make it an interesting, dynamic experience instead of passive and dependent learning. The results of this study reveal that through active learning education will not be a pack of information to the learners but they will involve themselves and get the knowledge by doing things. It argues for the integration of active learning practically in the classrooms and at any learning situation*

**Keywords:** learning, active learning, passive learning, learners' autonomy, student engagement

### INTRODUCTION

Human beings always learn in different ways. These ways can be autonomous or dependent while learning. Autonomous learning is active learning and dependent is passive learning condition. Active learning is not a mechanical learning experience. It is purely a human process which involves heart, soul and mind of the learner instead of relying on mechanical processes. The tale of active learning is not new. Different people have proposed diverse paradigms about active learning. Active learning is a diverse learning process in which students are engaged in a guided activity instead of being silent spectators and passive learners to whom the education is only the transfer of information by the instructor. The concept of active learning has been dealt in multiple ways, beginning from very simple to more complex with mathematical and machine like generation which is not our concern at all.

There are two approaches of teaching, one is surface and the other is deep. Jackson (2009) states that Dewey was an educationist who favored experiential strategies for learning. Kolb supports an experiential learning model and considers learning an outcome of four stage cycle based on experience, reflection, generalizing patterns and application of the information to new experiences.

The examples of learning are everywhere around us. Sometimes learning is a change which comes with experience or interaction with the environment. Teachers also need to redefine their roles (Michael, 2003). The learner is altogether responsible for the learning process. Michael (2003) claims that there are three kind of things which can be learnt. They are declarative knowledge, procedural

knowledge and psychomotor skills. He defines “Declarative knowledge is the “what” of a particular topic. Procedural knowledge deals with “how” to do certain things. Psychomotor skills refer to the ability to do things in the physical world”. (P,6-7)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Sophocles says (as cited in Bonwell, 2000) “One must learn by doing the thing, for though you think you know it-- you have no certainty until you try.”p4. The importance of doing cannot be denied for the process of learning. The probing of the research literature recommends that students must do more than just listen and obey. Doing and understanding are the asset of learning. (Chickering and Gamson 1987).

Garnett (2005) gives some theories of learning, “ The main theories are the Myers Briggs Type Indicator, Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory, the VAK model, the Gregorc model and the Dunn and Dunn Learning Style Inventory.”p10 Our concern is not at all scientific, mechanical or psychological here. We are concerned with the strategies for active learning as an alternative to passive learning.

Breslow (1999) asserts

*The richest definition of active learning I have found comes from Richard Hake, a professor of physics at Indiana University. Hake, who uses the term "interactive engagement," writes that IE methods are "designed in part to promote conceptual understanding through interactive engagement of students in heads-on (always) and hands-on (usually) activities which yield immediate feedback through discussion with peers and/or instructors.(P-65)*

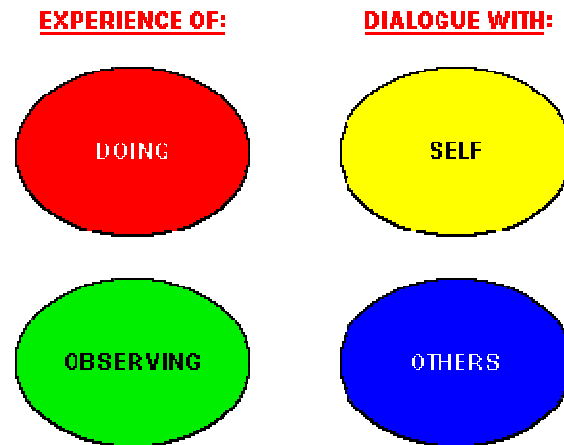
As (ibid) defines and clarifies that the students and teachers do not have same roles in the classroom. A coach and his or her players cannot be at equal level. She argues that no player can become expert while only listening to the hard and fast rules, for success to break the shell and practice the things is a prerequisite. A learner has to face the pangs and difficulties of the process but the result would be all pure with no mixture of impurities.

The benefits of active learning are acknowledged in higher education. According to Guthrie and Carlin, ( as cited by Martyn, 2011 ) the modern students are obviously active learners, lecture courses and the world of lecturing is somehow getting out of touch for them. Chickering and Gamson (1987) encourage active learning and consider it a good practice for the sake of learning. They give seven principles for active learning which are very much acceptable in USA. These principles encourage the response system and interaction between faculty and students. It results in a reciprocity between the teacher and student. It results in useful techniques and good feedback. It brings effective results for time saving and results in high expectations. It is excellent for diverse dynamic and excellent learning ways. Student engagement is a significant factor for the promotion of active learning. The basic definition of engagement given by (Jackson 2009) is “to bind by a pledge to do something, to participate, to take part in a venture, to connect or interlock with”(p.4)

AAC Task Group on General Education claims (as cited in Bonwell, 2000) “The sort of teaching we propose requires that we encourage active learning and that we become knowledgeable about the ways in which our students hear, understand, interpret, and integrate ideas”.(p.3)

Therefore the research literature tells us that active learning strategies are to be practiced for the real and authentic learning. Chikering and Gamson, (1987) reflect that the students should relate each and every learning experience with their past experiences instead of only vomiting out the already learnt material. They should have an active learning experience instead of only sitting in the class participating and practicing nothing. (Bonwell, 2000)

FINK (1999) gives a model of Active Learning as follows:



## DESIGN OF RESEARCH

The tool of data collection was unstructured personal observation with certain parameters in the mind of the researcher i.e. level of interest, level of motivation, level of learner's autonomy and level of anxiety. The population was 20 learners in the classroom. The learners were from graduation class. The active learning strategies were practiced for six days. The data was collected, de codified and analyzed. The class of communication skills from the summer camp in a college was selected. The data was collected from this class. The duration of the class was one and a half hour daily. The researcher went there and practiced active learning strategies herself for three days and observed another teacher using active learning strategies as well through unstructured observation so that this observation may not be biased and subjective.

The strategies through which the data was collected were asking questions, involving students, pair work, group work, assignments, creating dialogues for certain contexts, class discussions, group discussions, communicating in life like situations, learning by doing, involving and knowing.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

On day one the class was started not in a typical way of passing and transmitting all the knowledge. The students were involved as much as possible by using the strategy of asking questions and prompting responses by actively involving them. The topic was a general introduction of communication skills. First the students were bit shy and reluctant in answering the questions and giving responses. It was observed that the responses were only single words and phrases. But they were at least saying something. On asking questions they were responding and trying to answer it seemed to be a new thing to them to think and give their expression to each and every idea. On the same day they were assigned the task of writing one passage on a single topic i.e. If you do not understand ask.

On the second day the learners were asked to introduce themselves so that they may understand and practice the skill of doing. The strategy of pair and group work, was employed, the students were in pairs and discussed their end of examination. The thing which was observed here was the students were not very reluctant and shy like day one. They participated in each and every activity in a jubilant manner. They were articulating some of the utterances quite comfortably. They felt excited to do

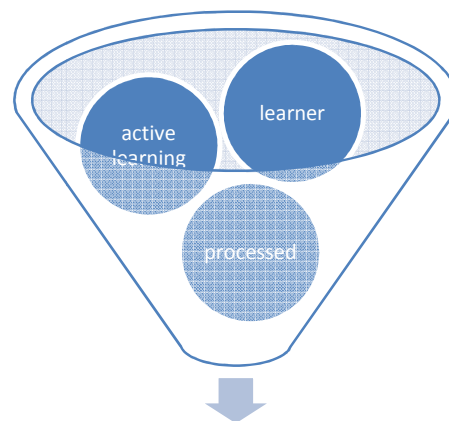
involve themselves in this creative activity. They also discussed some useful topics in group work. The thing which was observed i.e. if they were observed by the researcher they used to be over conscious. To remove this concern they were invited on the stage and discuss their group activity over there.

On third day they were introduced with the concept of haggling and they created a random dialogue in twos and threes. Throughout this session they were involved in doing and knowing. As far as this day was concerned they were quite confident and engaging in dialogues very smoothly. This refinement of learning was an on going process which was a healthy experience to observe.

On fourth day they were joined by another teacher and they were also being observed over there. They were given some topics and they have to think for a while and speak on their relevant topic. There was an amazing progress which was observed that the students were communicating with an ease. They were quite confident and satisfied. There were no marks of hesitation and reluctance. One thing should be remembered that the students were from a government college with a rural background having mediocre educational and academic career. And the strategies for active learning were working very well. We can gain implied meanings and conjecture that these strategies can work wonder when applied on an urban setting on the students who have more exposure.

On fifth day they were engaged in a discussion about culture. Students were divided into two groups and there was a face to face discussion. One group became an exponent of eastern culture and the other was supporting western culture. There were cross questions even they involved the teachers in the discussion and debate over culture. It was an emblem that they were able to discuss the wider terms and concepts like culture. On seeing their growing interest they were given another reflective topic on the women education and the results were incredible because of the reflective and thought provoking discussion of the students.

On the last day they were asked to share their views regarding the experience of this communication skills classroom sessions. Every one of them shared the views and participated, some of the comments were positive in the sense that they themselves observed and acknowledged that they were unable to communicate in full sentences and they were just uttering simple words and phrases before this experience but gradually they were involved in the experience of knowing, involving and doing. Some of them were saying that they are better able to see and express themselves now. They expressed that it was a new experience of learning and they learnt a lot more and they were thankful to the teachers who planned the things for them in a novel way. One student reflected that day one she felt that it would be very difficult but it became interesting and rewarding.



Long Lasting Effects and Outcomes of Doing.

## FINDINGS

The findings imply that the long lasting effects of learning can be attained when the active learning is processed or the learners engage themselves in this process. There were some scales of observation although it was unstructured but it was based on certain parameters in mind while observing. These scales and parameters were the level of interest, motivation, learners autonomy and level of anxiety. The results according to these scales are following.

### Level of Interest

As far as the level of the interest is concerned, the learners were interested but on day one they were a little bit confused because of the new style of learning. On the rest of the days their level of interest daily increased and improved. They were willing and happy to do each and every classroom task. An important thing here is unresolved that there was only one student who was not interested in any activity, an individual and marked case.

### Level of Motivation

On another scale of motivation the learners were not motivated on the first day. They were silent spectators and not motivated to do activities by themselves. As the time passed they were themselves involved and motivated. There was a huge development on the level of motivation. The students themselves felt that on day one they were passive and now they want to gain something from this challenging environment.

### Level of Learner's Autonomy

At this level the learners were feeling very happy that they were able to learn at their own. They felt themselves free to learn and gain so many things.

### Level of Anxiety

There was a great anxiety on the day one because of a new way of learning. All the learners were a little bit confused about what was happening and what would happen there. Gradually as a result of active learning strategies and the regular practice the level of anxiety reduced and vanished at the end of the day.

Descriptive Presentation of Data Through Tabulation

Learners' #	Interest	Motivation	Autonomy	Anxiety
All learners	\	\	\	\
1	/	/	\	\
2	/	/	\	\
3	/	/	\	\
4	/	/	\	/
5	/	/	/	/
6	/	/	/	/
7	/	/	\	/
8	/	/	\	\
9	/	\	\	\
10	/	/	/	/
11	/	/	/	/
12	\	/	\	/
13	/	/	/	/
14	/	/	/	/
15	/	/	\	/
16	\	/	/	/
17	/	/	/	/
18	\	\	\	\
19	\	\	\	\
20	\	\	\	\

Tally Marks:

\ for negative or low level./ for positive or high level.

Explanation of the Tally marks and Table :

\ (backward slash) indicates the particular points where the level of performance was low.

/ (forward slash) indicates the particular points where the level of performance was high.

## CONCLUSION

From this research and the practical application of the strategies of active learning it has become evident that active learning can be processed and implemented for real, dynamic and vibrant learning and it can be successfully offered and channelized as an alternative to passive learning. All the results show that active learning should be acknowledged, promoted and practiced for the betterment of our level and ways of learning. From the data analysis and discussion it can be asserted that active learning can be recommended as a vibrant learning experience. This is the high time to think and implement the strategies for active learning as an alternative to passive learning. This research negates the presupposed idea that Asian students only listen and obey. It stands for the cause of all the learners who want to learn and make it an authentic process instead of promoting passivity and just a transmission of knowledge. This research invites the attention of the authorities to recommend active learning for the institutions. It can benefit the future researchers and would be teachers for the cause of learning. It can change the typical ways of learning into a learning experience which is integrating and not falling apart at any level. This research study promotes the practical use of active learning skills and strategies and offers itself as an addition in the theory and practice of learning.

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