

Exploring Teachers' Strategies for Encouraging Students' Participation in English as a Second Language Classroom at the University Level

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ABSTRACT

This study explored teachers' strategies for promoting classroom participation in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts in Pakistan. The research aimed to examine how teachers encourage students to actively participate in English-language classrooms and which practices are considered effective in the local educational context. A qualitative research approach was adopted to gain in-depth insights into teachers' experiences and classroom practices. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 5 ESL teachers working at the Department of English, Quaid-e-Awam University of Engineering Science and Technology, Nawabshah, Pakistan. The participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they have sufficient experience in teaching English.

The findings revealed that teachers employed a variety of strategies to enhance student participation, including group discussions, questioning techniques, interactive activities, and the use of local examples to make lessons more relatable. Teachers also encouraged a supportive classroom environment to reduce students' hesitation and anxiety in speaking English. The study highlighted that culturally relevant teaching practices and teacher encouragement play a significant role in improving classroom engagement. Overall, the study provided valuable insights into how teachers in the Pakistani ESL context facilitate student participation and contribute to more interactive English language learning environments.

Keywords: *Classroom Participation; ESL learning, Teachers' Strategies, Educational Context, Classroom Interaction.*

INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a vital role in creating an effective and supportive classroom environment. Their responsibilities extend beyond simply delivering subject knowledge; they are also expected to create conditions that encourage engagement, motivation, and meaningful learning. One of the most important factors in this process is student motivation, as it strongly influences learners' willingness to participate and remain actively involved in classroom activities. Equally important are the teaching strategies and classroom management techniques used by teachers, which significantly shape students' overall learning experiences. Effective educators continuously adapt their teaching practices to meet the needs of diverse learners and ensure that learning remains productive under different classroom conditions (Rindu & Ariyanti, 2016).

One of the major challenges in language classrooms, particularly in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, is encouraging active student participation. Participation refers to students' meaningful involvement in classroom activities through interaction, collaboration, and engagement with learning tasks (Indriani et al., 2016). It goes beyond merely answering questions and also includes taking part in discussions, group activities, peer collaboration, and problem-solving tasks. When students actively participate, they become more confident, motivated, and connected to the learning process. However, low participation levels are often observed in many ESL classrooms, where students may hesitate to express their ideas because of fear, lack of confidence, or limited language proficiency. Such a lack of engagement can negatively affect both learning outcomes and classroom interaction, suggesting that teaching approaches may not always succeed in capturing students' interest or encouraging active involvement. To overcome this challenge, teachers need to adopt instructional strategies that create a more interactive and student-centered learning environment. A teaching strategy can be defined as a structured plan consisting of various activities designed to achieve specific learning objectives (Irikawati, 2017). These strategies may include collaborative learning, interactive discussions, task-based activities, role plays, and practical exercises that motivate students to become actively engaged in the classroom. Recent studies have highlighted the effectiveness of different approaches in improving student participation. For example, Ginting (2021) identified strategies such as problem-based learning, case-based learning, flipped classrooms, and active learning as effective methods for increasing classroom engagement. Similarly, Alfino et al. (2019) found that the Total Physical Response (TPR) technique significantly enhanced students' participation in questioning, interaction, attention, and speaking activities. In addition, Frykedal and Chiriach (2018) emphasized the value of group work, demonstrating that collaborative activities can strengthen both academic involvement and social interaction among students.

These studies suggest that well-planned instructional strategies can positively influence students' participation and overall learning experiences. Nevertheless, much of the previous research has focused on specific teaching strategies or limited educational contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how teachers apply a variety of strategies within particular institutional settings. Furthermore, differences in student backgrounds, university environments, and educational systems indicate the need for further research in diverse contexts.

In this regard, the present study explores teachers' strategies for encouraging student participation in ESL classrooms at the Department of English, QUEST Nawabshah. This context is particularly important because it reflects the challenges and opportunities of language learning within a technologically advanced academic environment. By examining the instructional practices used

by teachers, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how student participation can be effectively encouraged in ESL classrooms and how teachers can create learning environments where students feel confident, involved, and motivated to learn

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how teachers promote student participation in ESL classrooms. Specifically, the research was designed as a case study, which allows for a detailed exploration of a phenomenon within its natural setting, particularly when the relationship between context and practice is closely interconnected (Yin, 2018). The purpose of adopting this design was to examine the instructional strategies used by teachers to foster active student involvement in English language learning. The study was conducted at the Department of English, QUEST Nawabshah. The participants consisted of five English language teachers who had more than five years of teaching experience. These participants were selected purposively, as their professional experience and teaching context were considered relevant to the objectives of the study.

Data was collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Classroom observations were carried out to examine real-time teaching practices and student engagement. Each teacher was observed in two separate sessions. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher to explore their perspectives, experiences, and the rationale behind their instructional strategies. Furthermore, document analysis was employed through a review of lesson plans and related teaching materials to understand how participation-focused strategies were planned and implemented.

For data analysis, the study followed a systematic qualitative procedure adapted from Creswell and Creswell (2018). The process involved several stages: first, organizing and preparing the collected data for analysis; second, coding the data to identify meaningful patterns; third, developing categories and themes based on recurring ideas; and finally, presenting and interpreting these themes to provide a coherent understanding of the strategies used by teachers to enhance student participation in ESL classrooms.

FINDINGS

This study focused on English language classrooms at the Department of English, QUEST Nawabshah. The participants were five ESL teachers with more than five years of teaching experience, purposively selected for their familiarity with classroom practices that encourage student participation (Etikan et al., 2016). To collect rich and detailed data, the researcher employed multiple qualitative tools, including classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each teacher was observed in two separate sessions, while one in-depth interview was conducted with each participant. In addition, lesson plans and teaching materials were reviewed to understand how participation-oriented strategies were designed and implemented in practice.

For data analysis, the researcher followed a systematic qualitative procedure based on Creswell and Creswell (2018). This process involved organizing and preparing the collected data, coding the data to identify patterns, developing themes and descriptions, and finally interpreting and presenting the findings in a meaningful way.

2. Collaborative Strategies

Collaborative strategies were widely used by the teachers to promote active participation in ESL classrooms. These strategies emphasized peer interaction and group-based learning activities. Collaborative learning allows students to exchange ideas, construct knowledge together, and develop communication skills (Johnson & Johnson, 2017).

Classroom observations revealed that students were frequently engaged in group tasks, such as creating product labels and presenting them to the class. During these activities, students worked together, discussed ideas, and solved problems collectively. Each group presented its work, while peers provided feedback and asked questions.

This approach encouraged meaningful interaction and ensured that every student contributed to the task. As a result, students became more confident, communicative, and actively involved in the learning process (Gillies, 2016).

3. Motivational Strategies

Motivation played a crucial role in enhancing student participation. Teachers consistently used strategies to create a positive and supportive learning environment. Motivational strategies influence learners' engagement and persistence in achieving learning goals (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). In practice, teachers used encouragement, praise, and rewards to motivate students. One teacher created an enjoyable classroom atmosphere by emphasizing that learning English can be fun, while also recognizing students' efforts and progress. The other teacher used verbal praise and occasional rewards to acknowledge student achievements. These practices helped students feel valued and confident, reducing anxiety and encouraging them to participate more actively. When students felt supported, they were more willing to express their ideas and engage in discussions (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

4. Differentiated Instruction Strategies

Teachers also applied differentiated instruction to address diverse learning needs. Differentiated instruction involves adapting teaching methods and materials to suit students' abilities, interests, and learning styles (Tomlinson, 2017). The use of visual aids and real-life materials, such as product labels, was particularly effective in increasing student engagement. By introducing real examples, teachers helped students understand concepts more clearly and connect learning with real-life contexts. This approach enhanced students' interest and participation, as they were able to relate classroom content to their daily experiences (Hall et al., 2015).

5. Interactive Questioning Strategies

Another important approach observed in the classroom was the use of interactive questioning techniques. Teachers asked open-ended and thought-provoking questions to stimulate students' thinking and participation. Effective questioning strategies promote deeper understanding and encourage students to actively engage in classroom discussions (Chin, 2007). By asking questions that required explanation and reasoning, teachers created opportunities for students to share their ideas and perspectives. This strategy fostered a more interactive classroom environment and helped sustain students' attention throughout the lesson.

6. Technology-Integrated Strategies

Given the context of the Artificial Intelligence Department, teachers also incorporated technology into their teaching practices. Digital tools and multimedia resources were used to enhance the learning experience and increase student engagement. The integration of technology in language teaching supports interactive learning and provides diverse opportunities for

participation (Chapelle, 2017). Students were more motivated to participate when lessons included visual presentations, digital content, and interactive tasks. This approach not only captured students' attention but also supported different learning preferences, making the classroom more inclusive and engaging.

7. Task-Based Learning Strategies

Task-based learning was another effective strategy used to enhance participation. This approach focuses on engaging students in meaningful tasks that require the use of language in real-life contexts (Ellis, 2017). Teachers designed activities such as group projects, presentations, and problem-solving tasks that encouraged students to actively use English. These tasks shifted the focus from memorization to communication, allowing students to develop practical language skills. As a result, students became more confident and actively involved in the learning process, demonstrating increased participation and interaction (Willis & Willis, 2007).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight that teachers at Department of English, QUEST Nawabshah, employ a range of instructional strategies to enhance student participation in ESL classrooms. These strategies, collaborative learning, motivational support, differentiated instruction, interactive questioning, technology integration, and task-based learning, collectively contribute to creating an engaging and student-centered learning environment. First, the use of collaborative strategies aligns with existing literature emphasizing the importance of peer interaction in language learning. Group work and collaborative tasks encouraged students to share ideas, negotiate meaning, and actively engage in communication. This finding is consistent with Johnson and Johnson (2017), who argue that cooperative learning enhances both academic achievement and social interaction. Similarly, Gillies (2016) noted that structured group activities improve students' participation and communication skills. In this study, collaborative tasks such as group projects and presentations ensured that students were actively involved and contributed to the learning process.

Second, motivational strategies played a significant role in increasing student engagement. Teachers' use of praise, encouragement, and rewards helped create a supportive classroom atmosphere where students felt confident to participate. This supports the work of Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013), who emphasize that motivation is a key factor influencing language learning success. Furthermore, Ryan and Deci (2020) highlight that positive reinforcement and a supportive environment enhance learners' intrinsic motivation. The findings indicate that when students feel valued and encouraged, they are more willing to participate in classroom activities and discussions.

Third, differentiated instruction was found to be effective in addressing diverse learner needs. The use of visual aids and real-life materials, such as product labels, made learning more meaningful and accessible. This finding is in line with Tomlinson (2017), who suggests that adapting instruction to students' individual needs improves engagement and learning outcomes. Additionally, Hall et al. (2015) argue that differentiated teaching strategies help accommodate different learning styles, thereby increasing participation. In the present study, the use of authentic materials enabled students to connect classroom content with real-life experiences, which enhanced their interest and involvement.

Moreover, interactive questioning strategies contributed to sustaining student participation. Teachers' use of open-ended questions encouraged students to think critically and express their ideas. This supports Chin (2007), who found that effective questioning techniques promote deeper

engagement and active learning. In this study, questioning not only facilitated classroom interaction but also helped teachers assess students' understanding. The integration of technology also played a vital role in enhancing participation, particularly in the context of the Department of English. The use of multimedia and digital tools made lessons more dynamic and interactive. This finding is supported by Chapelle (2017), who highlighted the role of technology in promoting engagement and interaction in language learning. Technology provided students with diverse opportunities to participate, making the learning process more appealing and effective.

Finally, task-based learning strategies were found to significantly improve students' participation. By engaging students in meaningful and practical tasks, teachers encouraged the use of English in real-life contexts. This finding is consistent with Ellis (2017), who emphasizes that task-based learning promotes communicative competence and active involvement. Willis and Willis (2007) also argue that tasks provide opportunities for authentic language use, which increases student participation. In this study, tasks such as group projects and presentations enabled students to practice language skills actively and confidently.

Overall, the findings of this study are consistent with previous research, which suggests that the use of diverse and student-centered strategies enhances classroom participation. However, this study contributes to the existing literature by exploring these strategies within the specific context of an AI-focused academic environment. The integration of multiple strategies, rather than reliance on a single approach, appears to be particularly effective in fostering active participation.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the strategies used by teachers to enhance student participation in ESL classrooms at Department of English, QUEST Nawabshah. The findings show that a combination of collaborative, motivational, differentiated, interactive, technology-based, and task-based strategies effectively increases student engagement. These approaches create a supportive and active learning environment where students feel confident to participate. Overall, the study highlights that using diverse and student-centered teaching strategies is essential for improving participation and achieving better learning outcomes.

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