

INVESTIGATING TURNTAKING STRATEGIES IN CLASS DISCUSSIONS AMONG ESL ADULT LEARNERS

Noor Hanim Rahmat

*Academy of Language Studies
UiTM Johor Branch, Pasir Gudang Campus, Malaysia
E-mail: patanim@gmail.com*

Sharifah Amani Bte Syed Abdul Rahman

*Academy of Language Studies
UiTM Johor Branch, Pasir Gudang Campus, Malaysia
E-mail: shari348@johor.uitm.edu.my*

D Rohayu Mohd Yunos

*Academy of Language Studies
UiTM Johor Branch, Pasir Gudang Campus, Malaysia
E-mail: droha932@johor.uitm.edu.my*

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Abstract: This quantitative study looked into class discussion strategies used by adult ESL learners. Findings revealed several benefits of class discussions for adult learners. Among some of them are, adult learners practice turn-taking skills in a non-combative environment. The sharing of ideas allowed freedom of thoughts among the learners. On the other hand, adult learners also learn to agree or disagree politely using turn-taking strategies. Finally, the benefits of class discussions may go beyond classroom needs such as improving critical thinking skills among learners. This ability is seen when learners participate in group work and discussions. Learners gain accessibility to participate comfortably in discussions when they are put in a non-combative environment. This will thus give them the freedom to discuss any topics openly. This freedom will further enhance their general participation in the discussion. However, in a normal conversational process, speakers need to learn to speak up and also to give others space to voice their opinions. Learners need the knowledge of turn-taking skills in order to participate actively in the discussion. This turn-taking skills can be taught in ESL classrooms through class discussions.

Keywords: *ESL classroom, adult learners, class discussion strategies, general participation*

INTRODUCTION

According to Bagaric and Djigunovic (2007), outlined communicative competence models and concluded that the “competence to communicate” can be seen from many angles. With regards to Malaysian ESL learners, being able to communicate competently would be the ability to hold

a conversation and be understood by the listener. Hence knowing how to speak and successfully participating in class discussions may require different set of skills in the ESL classroom. The objective of this study is to explore how adult learners behave during class discussions. The researcher will look into how students are influenced by class

discussion, and also how their agreement and disagreement influence their participation. This study is based on the following questions:

(1) Is there any significant difference between gender for class discussion and general participation?

(2) In what ways are students influenced by class discussion?

(3) In what ways do students' general participation influence class discussion?

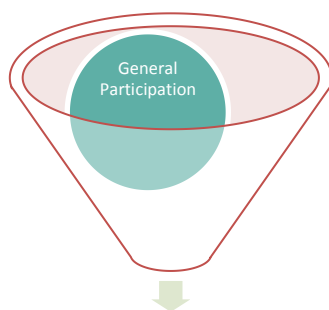


Figure 1: Class Discussions

Figure 1 above shows the theoretical framework of the study. During class discussions, ESL learners are reported to use turn taking strategies to participate in the conversation. This research explores the turn taking strategies employed during general participation, when the learners want to show their agreement, as well as when they want to voice out their disagreement.

According to Barnes (2014), adults' learning can be influenced by two factors and they are (a) the control factor and (b) the diversity factor. When faced with the control factor, adults have an innate need to have some mastery or control over their own lives. They need to be self-directed and take responsibility for themselves. They tend to strongly resent not being able to make choices. They want to take an active, rather than a passive role in their education. We need to seek ways to include them in the planning of their educational experience. We need to consider giving them choices in assignments and projects that will offer a variety of ways to show that learning has occurred. Next, according

to the diversity factor, adult learners vary greatly from one another in terms of experiences and age. The variety they bring to the classroom can greatly enhance the learning environment. By using collaborative efforts and group discussion or projects, adult learners can all benefit from their shared experiences. Interactive dialogue facilitates increased solutions and options over simple private reflection. As educators, we must allow more time for networking among adult learners to share perspectives and experiences. In addition, we need to prepare our presentations to meet the needs of every learning style in the classroom.

According to Weimer (2011), there are several benefits of class discussions. Firstly, class discussions with peers allow learners accessibility. Learners are comfortable talking about issues with their peers no matter how serious or trivial the topics are. Next, class discussions can be done in non-combative environment. For, example, When students answer or try to explain, teachers can see the extent of their

understanding. They can correct (or help the students correct) what the students haven't got right or don't see quite clearly. In addition to that, when teachers ask questions or otherwise seek student input over a topic, they are letting students know something about the importance of certain ideas and information. During class discussions, teachers may allow diversity of ideas when he/she picked controversial topics for discussion. Planned class discussion can also allow students to practice cohesion and focus. Participation gives students the chance to practice using a different vocabulary. Finally, the academic yet friendly environment, may give the students a sense of trust that whatever they discussed openly was only done for the sake of discussion. The learners can feel safe in general discussions, or when they agree with certain issues or disagree over some controversial matters.

Class discussions allow real-world communication to take place. Bagaric and Djigunovic (2007) defined communicative competence as the ability to communicate in real life situations; instead of just the classroom settings. This does not only refer to the informal mode of communication, but also the use of different turn taking strategies for communication. Firstly, the informal atmosphere during the class discussion encourage general participation among the learners. They learn certain skills like introducing a topic, bringing other people into a conversation, and if they are not capable of doing so, they learn from their group members how these skills are done. Next, learners also learn to keep the discussion moving, give their opinion, or even get further information.

The study by Carlson (2006) looked at "honour" level 10th grade world

History class at a public school in St. Paul, Minnesota. The research focused on students' participation in classroom discussions. A survey was carried out and the data is compared with the learners' grades to see if there were any relations participation, learning styles and overall assessment. Findings suggested that the students with higher assessment scores were found to participate more in class. There were little correlation between learning styles and teachers' participation ratings.

Davis (2013) looked at adult learners' ability to participate in strategic classroom discussion. He explored the use of classroom discussion for extending critical thinking and content comprehension among students. The findings suggested that adult learners are self-directed and independent, with a wealth of experience from which to draw when learning, and a need to see immediate relevance in their education as it relates to their current social roles. They also found brainstorming of ideas useful as the activity could help them highlight key issues. They benefit from being directly involved in the development of their learning activities, and often seek help from others they see as more knowledgeable when they approach new tasks.

METHOD

This is a qualitative research. Participants are taken from adult distance learning degree classes. A questionnaire is used as the instrument. It has four sections: section A is the demographic profile, section B is the general participation, section C is the agreement and section D is the disagreement. Analysis of data is done by SPSS to reveal significant differences and frequency of responses by the participants.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Research Question 1-Is there any significant difference between gender for class discussion participation, and general participation?
Class discussion

Table 2- Results of Independent T- Test comparing male and female in Class Discussion

Results		Independent T-Test				
		<i>n</i>	<i>x</i>	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Class Discussion	Male	13	2.01	.66	.34	.74
	Female	34	1.94	.62		

**T-test significant is at .05 (2 tailed)*

Table 2 indicates the result of mean score and standard deviation between male and female on class discussion. ($x = 2.01$) for male and ($x = 1.94$) for female. The Independent T-Test comparing between male and female

reported that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean score ($t(45) = .34$), $p = .74$ at the 0.05 level. This means the participation of male or female learners will not influence the flow of the discussion.

General participation

Table 3-Results of Independent T- Test comparing male and female in General Participation

Results		Independent T-Test				
		<i>n</i>	<i>x^s</i>	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
General Participation	Male	13	2.00	.50	-1.91	.06
	Female	34	2.28	.46		

**T-test significant is at .05 (2 tailed)*

Table 3 indicates the result of mean score and standard deviation between male and female in General Participation. ($x = 2.00$) for male and ($x = 2.28$) for female. The Independent T-Test

comparing between male and female reported that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean score ($t(45) = -1.91$), $p = .06$ at the 0.05 level.

Research Question 2-In what ways are students influenced by class discussion?

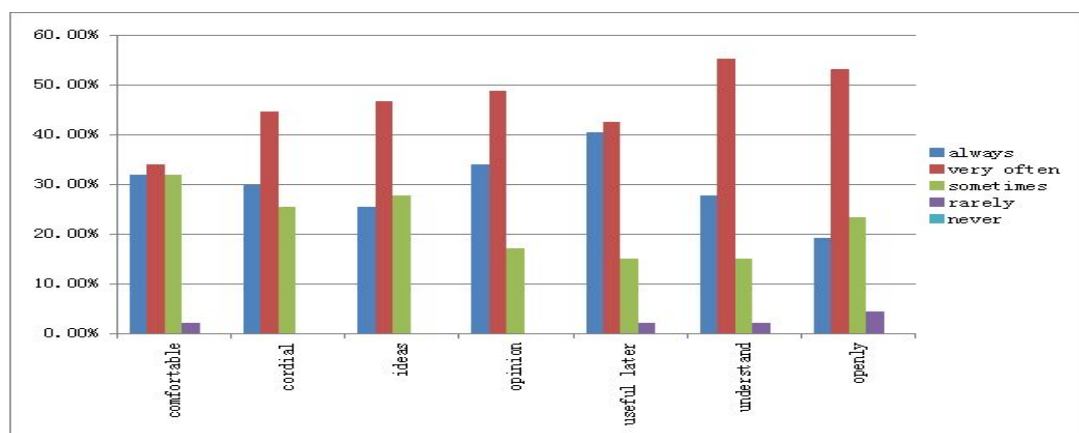


Figure 4. Percentage for class discussions

Figure 4 above shows the percentage for class discussions for adult ESL learners. The highest frequency among the participants is that they felt the topic that they discussed would be useful to them later (always-40.4%). This is followed by “listen to different to different opinion of others” (always-34%). Next, the participants agreed that class discussions allowed them to

understand issues around them (very often-55.3%). They also felt that the discussions allowed them to discuss issues openly (very often-53.2%). These findings are agreed by Barnes (2014) who also felt that adult learners benefit from the shared experience, hence, they value a variety of opinions and they felt topics brought up could be useful for them in the future.

Research Question 3- In what ways do general participation influence class discussion?

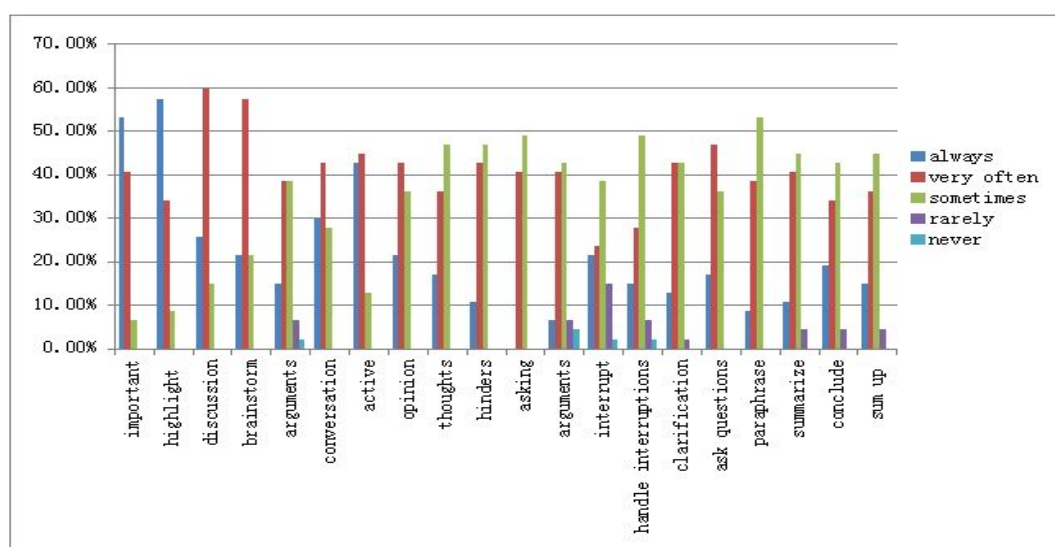


Figure 5. Percentage for general participation

Figure 5 shows the percentage for general participation. This finding reveals that the adult participants felt that in a class discussion, introducing the topic is always (53.2%) important. Next, they also felt that the introduction of the topic at the beginning of the discussion, always (57.4%) helped them highlight key topics to be discussed. In addition to that, they felt very often (59.6%) allowed others to give their opinions. They also felt that by doing so, they allowed their peers to brainstorm ideas (very often-57.4%). The study by Davies (2013) also reported similar findings where adult learning used brainstorming activities to help them focus on key issues.

CONCLUSION

Figure 6 shows the summary of findings. This study reveals that very often, class discussions encourage learners to trust group members to listen to their opinions of issues, and allow the cohesion of many different opinions. It also encourages the introduction of a diversity of ideas in a non-combative environment. This non-threatening environment thus allows the accessibility of opinions among group members.

In addition to that, through general participation, participants learn to bring in the opinion of other people. They also learn to seek clarification when they

were unclear about certain issues. They also learnt to give opinions, introduce topics or even get further information in the group setting. Subsequently, they also learn to interrupt conversations to

get their opinion heard, or to keep their discussion moving. Finally, they learnt to paraphrase another person's idea as well as close the discussion.

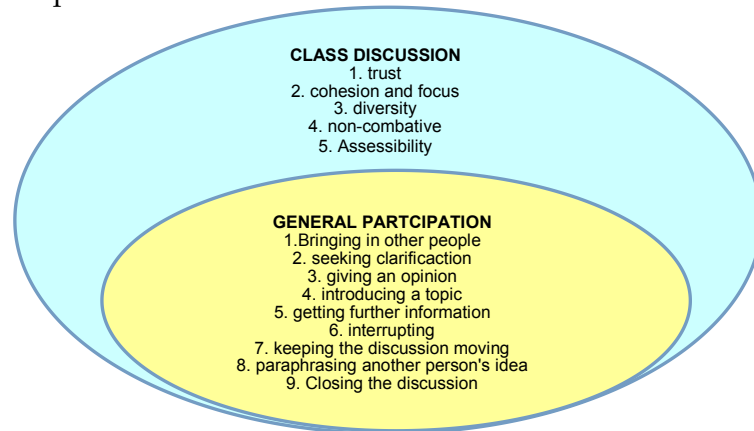


Figure 6-Summary of Findings

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