Reasons for University Students' Non-Participation in Class Discussions

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Abstract
The aim of this study was to determine the reasons for the Hashemite University students’ non-participation in class discussions, and their relation to some variables. To achieve this aim, the researcher designed a questionnaire that consisted of two domains: The first domain was about the reasons related to faculty members, whereas, the second one dealt with the reasons related to students. 401 copies of the questionnaire were properly filled out. The descriptive research method was used. The findings of the study showed that the reasons related to faculty members played a more important role in preventing students from participating in class discussions than the reasons related to students. Also, the results revealed that the main reasons for students’ non-participation in class discussions were: student’s feeling of boredom, student’s preference to listen only, the change of faculty members’ moods, the absence of prior student’s preparation, student’s fear of making mistakes, fanaticism of faculty members to their opinions and ideas, quick anger of faculty members, lack of dialogue instruction, and students' shyness. Finally, the results showed no statistically significant differences in the students’ perception of the reasons for non-participation in class discussions due to the following variables: participation, sex, college, grade point average, and university year.

Keywords: University Students, Non-participation, Class Discussion, Jordan, Hashemite University.

Introduction
Many faculty members at the Jordanian universities strive hard to use teaching methods based on dialogue, discussion, interaction and cooperation instead of indoctrination. But one of the main obstacles which hinder that attempt is non-participation, which many passive students prefer because they tend to play the role of listeners, observers, or even guests. Silent students disturb faculty members because they make lectures boring and less effective, and turn teaching into a form of traditional education (Ebel, 1976).  

Education which depends on dialogue, discussion, participation, debate, collaboration and critical thinking provide students with constructive and positive abilities and skills such as:

- The ability to take responsibility, which comes as a result of training students in problem solving, through free thought and critical mind.
- The spirit of belonging, which results from participation in decision making.
- Thinking flexibility that is enhanced by exposing students to different views, visions, ideas, opinions, and perspectives.
- Criticism, which is built on proofs, evidence and facts.
Courage, which is enhanced by making students reject, or oppose to any idea, or opinion, without paying any price, or being punished

Cooperation, which is strengthened by allowing students to make mutual opinions, suggestions and solutions, through dialogue, in which many cooperating minds take part. (Ali, 1989) In addition, classroom discussion has positive influence on students' learning, motivation, and problem-solving ability. (Nunn, 1992)

So, some researchers considered dialogue as a successful teaching method because it requires active participation and involvement of students in the teaching-learning process of university education. (Zaytoon, 1995) But one of the factors that reduce the positive effect of classroom dialogues and discussion is students' nonparticipation.

Although university education without discussions, especially in human and social sciences, is like fishing without a hook, (Ebel, 1976) most Arab universities limit the scope, volume, and depth of discussion, reduce the chances of interaction and exchange of ideas and opinions, marginalize dialogue culture, restrict students' freedom of speech, and prefer students' tendency to keep silent in classrooms. Consequently, memorization and indoctrination prevail. (Zaytoon, 1995) When students resort to silence and abstain from participation in class discussions, education becomes tedious, monotonous and weak, and staff members are forced to practice monologues instead of dialogues. Lack of students' participation in classroom discussion is a serious university problem that has negative influence and dangerous results. So, it deserves enquiry, research, and investigation.

**Aim and Questions of the Study**

The study aims at identifying the reasons for students' non-participation in class discussions at the Hashemite University in Jordan, and the different variables affecting them, through answering the following questions:

1. What are the reasons for students' non-participation in class discussions at the Hashemite University?
2. Are there statistically significant differences in the reasons for students' non-participation in class discussions at the Hashemite University due to participation, sex, college, grade point average and university year?

**Significance of the Study**

What makes this study significant is the rarity of Jordanian and Arab studies regarding its area of enquiry, in addition to the vitality and importance of its subject. Also, recognizing the reasons for the problem of non-participation in class discussions may contribute to solving it.

**Review of Literature**

Although Arab researchers neglected students' non-participation in class discussions, a number of researchers in the West paid it much attention. The following are some examples:

- Bergquist & Philips (1975) found that the important reasons for non-participation of American universities' students in classroom discussions are:
  A Factors which contribute to one-way communication on the part of the instructor.
  B Certain learning styles which avoid involvement.
  C The lack of certain classroom structures, which encourage participation.

- Crawford & Macleod (1990) pointed out that the reasons for non-participation of American universities' students in class discussions differ depending on their sex. Female students mentioned the following reasons: poorly formulated ideas, ignorance about the
subject and fear of appearing unintelligent to peers. Male students attributed their non-participation to: unpreparedness and fear of negative effects on grades.

- Fassinger (1995) emphasized the role of student traits such as confidence, interest and understanding, and class traits such as size and emotional climate, over instructor traits such as gender in determining student participation in class discussions.
- Howard & Henny (1998) found that there were two major reasons for non-participation of traditional university students in class discussions: their concern with how they appear in the eyes of their classmates, and lack of preparation for class.
- Howard, Zoeller & Pratt (2006) revealed that the factors which contribute to college student non-participation in class discussions were as follows: being shy, not knowing enough about the subject matter, having nothing to contribute, and not well enough formulated ideas.
- On the other hand, Nunn (1996) focused on the factors related to instructors that promote college students' participation in class discussion such as choosing proper teaching techniques, using praise, posing questions, asking for collaboration and using student name.

Method
The research used the descriptive analytic method due to its suitability to the nature of the study.

Population and Sample
The population of the study consisted of the 18764 students of the Hashemeite University in Jordan enrolled in the first semester of 2010/2011. The sample of the study consisted of 410 male and female, randomly chosen, students. They were requested to fill out a questionnaire, of which only 401 copies were properly completed. This is illustrated in table one

| Table 1: Distribution of the study sample members based on their variables |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Participation in Discussions | Participants | Non-participants | Total 401 |
|                             | 174 | 227 | 401 |
| Males | 124 | 227 | 401 |
| Females | 161 | 107 | 268 |
| First | 107 | 211 | 318 |
| Second | 73 | 122 | 195 |
| Third | 60 | 122 | 182 |
| Fourth | Less than 2 | 68 | 136 |
| 2- Less than 3 | 211 | 322 |
| 3-4 | 122 | 244 |
| 4. GPA | 276 | 125 | 401 |

Instrument
The researcher designed a questionnaire to achieve the aim of his study benefiting from his dialogues with students at the Hashemite University about the reasons for students' refraining from participating in class discussions. Also, the researcher gained assistance in this regard from the the following studies: (Fassinger, 1995, Nun, 1996, Howard, Zoeller & Pratt, 2006). The questionnaire consisted of 39 items, organized in two domains: Reasons for non-participation related to students, and reasons related to instructors. Each item required choosing one of the following responses based on Likert's five grading point-scale: Full agreement (5), agreement (4), neutrality (3), disagreement (2) full disagreement (1). The means of the evaluation of the study sample members to the questionnaire items were as follows: (1-2.33) = low, (2.34-3.67) = medium (3.68-5)= high.
Validity of the Instrument

To guarantee the validity of the questionnaire, the researcher presented it to twelve referees and experts, specialized in Educational Foundations and Educational Administration. Based on their comments and viewpoints, the researcher deleted three items out of 42, changed the domains of two items, and made some language and typing corrections.

Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure the reliability of the instrument of this study, the test-retest method was used. The researcher applied it to a sample of 50 students of the study population. Then, it was reapplied to the same sample, two weeks later. The coefficient was (81.6%), which was considered to be suitable for this kind of studies.

Results and Discussion

The Results of the First Question: What are the Reasons for Students' Non-Participation in Class Discussions at the Hashemite University?

To answer this question, the means and standard deviations of the items of the two domains were found. Then, the items were arranged in a descending order depending on their means. The results are summarized and shown in the following tables: (Table Number 2) which indicates that the reasons related to instructors accounted for the highest mean (3.46), followed by the reasons related to students with (3.19) mean, and both domains represent reasons with medium importance, and (Table Number 3) which shows the most important reasons for students' non-participation in class discussions.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of the Domains of the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reasons related instructors</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>.672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Reasons related to students</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.529</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations of the Sample's Reasons for Non-participation in Class Discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Degree of importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student's boredom</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>Student's</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student's preference of listening</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>Student's</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Instructor's changing mood</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>Instructor's</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Student's fear of making mistakes</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>Student's</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Absence of student's prior preparation</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>Student's</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Instructor's fanaticism</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>Instructor's</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Quick anger of the instructor</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>Instructors'</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Instructor's lack of dialogue instruction practice</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>Instructor's</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Student's shyness</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>Student's</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results revealed that the instructors are more responsible for students’ non-participation in class discussions than the students for the following reasons:

1. The students fail to predict their moody instructors’ reactions and responses to their participation, so they prefer to keep silent.
2. Some instructors are biased to their views, to the extent that they do not allow any student to disagree with them. So, some students prefer silence to avoid annoying their instructors who do not tolerate difference.
3. Some instructors can not control their anger, so some students try to avoid irritating, or angering them.
4. Some instructors are accustomed to indoctrination and memorization – based education, so, encouraging dialogue may be considered by them as a waste of time. (Howard, Zoeller and Pratt, 2006)

On the other hand, the following reasons for students’ non-participation in class discussions are attributed to the students themselves:
1. Students’ boredom which results, according to Soraty (2008), from the ineffective evaluation methods, methods of instruction and content of the curricula of the university, and leads to students’ lack of interest in learning, activities, and discussions.
2. Students’ tendency to listening instead of speaking, which may sometimes expose them to punishment. They are obliged to prefer safe passive listening to dangerous active speaking and involvement.
3. Students’ fear of making mistakes, which they have acquired from home, schools and colleges that consider making mistakes as wrong, or even shameful. (Crawford and Macleod, 1994)
4. Students’ shyness, which mainly results from lack of self-confidence. (Howard, Zoeller & Pratt, 2006; Fassinger, 1995)

On the other hand, the results revealed that the only reasons, with low importance, for students' non-participation in class discussions were:
1) Students’ view of discussions as a waste of time
2) Students’ view of discussions as useless chats.

This shows that students' non-participation is not due to their lack of awareness of the value and importance of participation. On the contrary, they appreciate participation, but they object to its administration, environment, and circumstances, and fear their consequences.

Results of the Second Question: Are there Statistically Significant Differences in the Reasons for Students’ Non-participation in Class Discussions at the Hashemite University Due to Participation, Sex, College, Grade Point Average and University Year?

To answer this question, the means and standard deviations were calculated, and the One-Way ANOVA analysis was used. This is shown in (Table Number 4)

Table 4: One-Way ANOVA Analysis of Differences in Seeing Reasons for Student's Non-participation Due to Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Total Squares</th>
<th>Freedom Degree</th>
<th>Square mean</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>.0284</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0284</td>
<td>1.223</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>.0478</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0478</td>
<td>2.057</td>
<td>.0152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>.0486</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0486</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.0647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>.0792</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.0396</td>
<td>1.705</td>
<td>.0183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>1.726</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.0575</td>
<td>.477</td>
<td>.061</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that there were no differences in the students' perception of the reasons for non-participation in class discussions due to differences in the following study variables: Participation, sex, college year and grade point average. This result may be attributed to the similar conditions, circumstances, experiences, environments which the sample's members shared. The variables of the study did not make any differences in their view of the causes of students' non-participation because it is a repeated negative phenomenon practiced in many classes and subjects, by many instructors, and noticed by all students, irrespective of their degree of participation, sex, academic achievement, majors and university year. So, students did not differ in determining its sources.
**Recommendations**

In the light of the results of the study, the researcher would like to present the following recommendations to get rid of the reasons for students' non-participation in class discussions:

1) Concentration on prior preparation for lessons, and proper preparedness for discussions
2) Encouraging students' interaction to avoid passive listening and silence in classrooms
3) Helping students to overcome their fear of participation
4) Strengthening students' self-confidence to overcome their shyness, which prevents them from participating
5) Training instructors in self-control, tolerance, anger management, dialogue, co-operation, diversity respect, negotiation and appreciation of others' opinions.
6) Making teaching exciting and interesting to avoid student's boredom
7) Conducting studies on the consequences of students' non-participation in class discussions.

**References**