

# Enhancing Student Participation in the Class in the Case of Third-Year Biotechnology Students at Bule Hora University

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to identify factors that influence students' class participation and implementing an action plan as remedy to enhance students' class participation. The study has employed various method of data collection such as questionnaire, checklists, interview, and focus-group discussion. Observation was employed to evaluate the level of students' participation in the class. Based on the class observation or preliminary study in the classroom, most students were passive learner or non interactive class environment during the lesson intervention except very few students. After the data collection and data analysis, action implementation strategies were employed. The results shows that most students participate less due to its language difficulties, fear, shyness, lack of confidence, less class preparation, little or no teachers' attention to what students do at the time of his/her lesson period. Hence, an action strategies like advice, changing the seating arrangement, reinforcement, and other strategies have been implemented. Accordingly, the outcome reveals that most of the students have actively participated during the observation day and after the action research intervention period. Therefore, the action research indicates that the intervention plan utilized has contributed for tremendous change in student's class participation and establishment of positive reinforcement among students.

**Keywords:** Active, Classroom, Enhancing and Participation

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## 1. Introduction

Researchers have noted that one of the most challenging experiences that need intervention in a classroom is the issue of the students' participation in the teaching-learning activity. This is a concern for modern teachers though traditionally, the teacher is an all-rounded provider of knowledge. Although it seems difficult to get students to participate, once they show some signs of participation withdrawal, it's advisable that a teacher tries some techniques to re-attract students' attention to the activity going on in the classroom [3].

The goal of increasing participation, ideally, is not for every student to participate in the same way or at the same level. Instead, it is to foster an environment in which every student has the opportunity to learn and in which the class thoroughly investigates issues and ideas from a range of

perspectives. Some students will raise their voices more than others; this variety stems from differences in learning preferences as well as personality differences. Some students who do not speak in class frequently, for example, are introspective learners who normally build ideas and questions in their heads before speaking; others are shy students who are first uncomfortable speaking in front of groups. Several students who commonly volunteer to help are active learners who typically ponder while speaking. The teacher's purpose here is to create settings in which students with diverse learning styles and personalities can contribute. To achieve this goal, the instructor will need to take extra steps to encourage silent students to speak up and, on occasion, ask the more verbose students to refrain from speaking so that others can speak up [21].

There are numerous advantages to student participation in the classroom. Students who participate in class perform better in school. According to Scepansky and Bjornsen, higher

levels of classroom participation were also associated with slightly higher degrees of openness and mindfulness. Classroom involvement can provide positive signals to students about the kind of learning and thinking that are required for job success, such as growth in critical thinking, active learning, development of listening and speaking abilities, and the capacity to join a structured conversation [17].

Cooper revealed that when students see their engagement being evaluated and graded on a regular and consistent basis, they modify their study habits to be ready for active participation. Students' passion, involvement, and desire to contribute all have an impact on the quality of class discussion as a learning opportunity [2].

Scholars have also successfully argued that the exchange of ideas in the classroom is critical to student learning. Participation in the classroom is critical for student learning since students are not passive recipients of knowledge. To teach themselves, however, individuals must question, discuss, and share their ideas and insights with others. Teachers must be able to communicate their information, manage their classrooms effectively, encourage maximum student participation, and, ultimately, improve students' learning. Classroom participation has been proposed as a means of assisting students in developing critical thinking skills, self-awareness, appreciation for various perspectives, and the ability to be proactive. Students are active and responsible for their own learning throughout class participation [11, 16, 19].

Participation allows students to learn both through their own contributions and through the contributions of their peers. Students acquire experience in thinking through problems, organizing thoughts, forming arguments, testing their ideas in public, evaluating evidence for their own and others' viewpoints, and responding thoroughly to critical and different points of view through conversation.

According to Ewens, encouraging classroom participation advocates higher levels of reflective thinking and problem-solving, including application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, and that information learned through discussion is generally retained better than information learned through lectures. Participation, for example, has been shown to have a major impact on critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and enhanced student motivation. Students who actively participate have been found to retain more material after the course and to be more satisfied with the course than students who do not participate. Participation also gives feedback to the teacher on his or her teaching approaches, strategies, and skills, as well as the general professional task forces [4]. Therefore, this study is aimed to do action research to enhance student's class participation among third-year Biotechnology department students at Bule Hora University.

#### *Rational of the Study*

According to Fritschner, one of the biggest disadvantages of students participating in a specific lesson is the nature of the course level [7]. He observed that the majority of the

course materials that teachers produce and present are inappropriate for the students' level of understanding. In this regard, it is recommended to examine the students' readiness and preparation [7, 9]. This is congruent with the findings of this study, which reveal that more of what teachers teach is fairly tough, but never in the sense of its simple-complex arena.

According to research, one-quarter of students in a classroom fear making mistakes, particularly asking/answering incorrect questions/answers [6].

Constantinople revealed that the nature of the classroom size (the total number of pupils in a particular classroom) also impacts students' participation level [1]. This is connected to the finding that students' sitting arrangements are disorganised. This circumstance actually leads to bad classroom management. A teacher cannot easily analyse individual students since there are far too many for him or her to evaluate. A poor seating arrangement is also an impediment when administering a lesson or a test since students can easily discuss their answers with their classmates during an exam, or they are unable to stand on their feet and face the teacher anytime they wish to participate.

Another study found that most students are less engaged simply because they are afraid of other students or the teacher, or they lack the confidence to stand in front of their peers [6, 9]. Another aspect that could be related to the teacher's communication characteristics is the teacher's spoken attention focused on specific students and the teacher's position in a class during lesson delivery. Some teachers positioned themselves at the front, back, or corner, making students fearful [6, 12].

Siti also identified a variety of characteristics that could explain students' participation patterns. Factors such as students' language proficiency, preferred learning styles, personal characteristics, social and cultural expectations, the teacher's personality and rapport with the class, teaching style, students' gender, teacher's and student's perceptions of their roles and the importance of participation in teaching and learning, and the type of learning activity [18].

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Target Group and Study Design**

The target groups of this research are third year biotechnology students which are 53 in number (36 male and 17 female). Third year students were selected because they are more benefited from the result of the research than second and fourth-year students and they are better suited for this action research project due to three facts. Firstly, the researcher has delivered different courses for this specific batch, hence it is easy to identify the academic level of students as higher, medium, and slow participants (learners). Secondly, the specific batch has a basic know-how on the biotechnology subject matter than first and second-year students to make class-based participation, and third, third-

year students could be advantageous for the exit exam if they developed their learning skills through active participation. The fourth-year students finish classes before the research was completed.

For this study the researchers followed analytic and descriptive cross sectional study design because the information was collected from the source by examining or by fact finding. The researchers understood that descriptive research design is important for such type of research because in descriptive type of research descriptive analysis enables to interpret results and the researchers have no control simply and logically over the variables; the researchers can only report what has happened or what is happening. The researcher has also followed qualitative and quantitative research method [14].

## 2.2. Source and Method of Data Collection

The researchers have employed various methodologies. Data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Third-year Biotechnology department students at Bule Hora University were the primary sources of data for this study. This study collected secondary data to provide further references and supplementary ideas. This study utilizes both qualitative and quantitative research approaches because both numerical and non-numerical data were collected through questionnaires, observation, checklists, and interviews. Accordingly, the data collection was carried out for one month in class during lesson sessions.

## 2.3. Sampling Technique and Data Analysis

The researchers have included all third-year Biotechnology department students as samples in this study to reach their desired objective and overcome the problem of student participation in the classroom. Graphs, charts, tables, and percentages were used to analyze the data collected through

interviews and observation.

## 2.4. Ethical Consideration

The author discussed with the department and students and gave them information about the purpose and process of the research and requested them to take part in the study. After determining the students and teachers who voluntarily accepted to participate in the study, official permission was obtained from the department head “participant information and consent form” was signed and they were informed that the information and the name of the respondents are kept confidential.

# 3. Results and Discussion

Based on the questionnaire and observation, the following information were collected and analyzed in table, graph, chart, and descriptive forms. Thus, based on the interpretation an intervention plan has been implemented.

## 3.1. Teaching Method and Strategies

Teaching strategies and methods suggest a way in which a teaching situation can be approached. Generally, a teaching strategy is an outline of all the elements of an instructional lesson, including structure, instruction objectives, and planned tactics. The teaching method refers to the principles and techniques used by teachers to facilitate student learning. These strategies and methods determine the students’ participation and learning in general. As it has been discussed earlier teachers’ role and initiation during the lesson has an indispensable value for students’ participation motivation in the class. Thus, teacher must use different teaching strategies and method based on the type of the topic, students’ educational background and teaching materials and resources [10, 13].

*Table 1. Strategies to Increase Students’ Participation.*

S/NO		Respondents Answer in %				
		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Consider the use of an online poll before the class discussion	2%	4%	11%	21%	62%
2.	Assess students’ prior knowledge	5%	10%	15%	20%	50%
3.	Devise activities that elicit participation	0%	13%	17%	40%	30%
4.	Use jigsaw approach	0%	3%	7%	10%	80%
5.	Keep the students busy	0%	5%	15%	60%	20%
6.	Foster an ethos of participation (shared contribution of ideas)	5%	5%	8%	14%	68%
7.	Let everyone’s contributions are audible	5%	10%	50%	20%	15%
8.	help students teach each other	0%	6%	14%	15%	65%
9.	Allow anonymous questions	0%	11%	23%	45%	21%
10.	Let students a voice and a choice	5%	10%	50%	20%	15%
11.	Place the emphasis on students’ ideas	5%	10%	15%	50%	20%
12.	Redirect questions and answers to other students (whole class)	5%	10%	50%	20%	15%
13.	Encourage students to evaluate their own participation	5%	10%	50%	20%	15%
14.	Provide enough praising responses	5%	10%	50%	20%	15%
15.	Teach students skills needed to participate	5%	10%	15%	50%	20%
16.	Keep the extended content to fit the available time	5%	50%	15%	20%	10%
17.	Consider the teacher’s position in a class	5%	10%	50%	20%	15%
18.	Look into the future by developing and presenting prediction activities	5%	10%	15%	20%	50%

1= Very High; 2= High; 3= Moderate; 4= Very Low; 5= Low

Table 1 show that a regular classroom instructor does not concern him/her- self about the importance of students' active involvement in a lesson (learner-centered approach). They don't recognize the strategies to increase students' participation as part of their professional responsibility to engage students in the lesson or learning activities. It also

seems obvious that the teachers do not give class activities or learning activities to engage them interact in the classroom; only few students engaged in the classroom. Thus, teachers have less or no concern for the students' class participation and on the overall academic development of the students. This has resulted for passive students' activity in their learning.

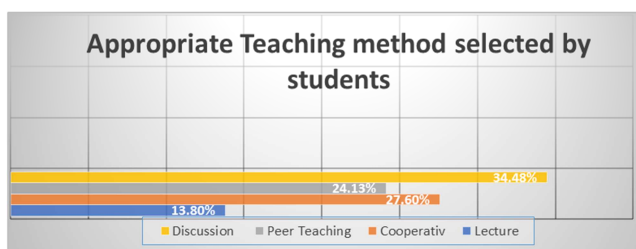
**Table 2.** Observation Checklist for Students' Class Participation.

First week	Number of students participated			Number of students not participated		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Day one	4	1	5	32	16	48
Day two	5	2	7	31	15	46
Day three	5	2	7	31	15	46
Day four	4	2	6	32	15	47
Day five	5	2	7	31	15	46

The total number of third-year Biotechnology department students were about 53 from this 36 of them were male and 17 of them were female students. As it displayed in Table 2 during the five-pilot study days or observation days the following results have been observed. There were very low-class participation and even the students' participation is different from day to day. Most students were passive in class participation while the instructors forward class activities and questions.

Explanations were given to students by the researcher about the types of teaching method and styles. To be mindful of which method is more appropriate for their learning based on their academic background and learning interest. Finally, learning styles like Discussion, Peer teaching, Cooperative learning style and Lecture method were presented to be opted by the respondents.

According to the response gathered from respondents 34.48% of them choose the discussion method as preferable and easy to grasp knowledge from the lesson, 27.6% cooperative, 24.13% peer teaching and 13.8% lecture method (Graph 1).



**Figure 1.** Teaching style.

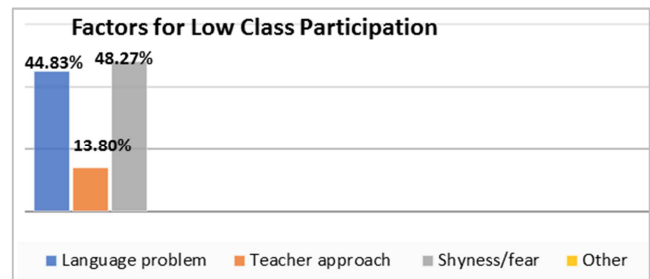
However, most of the instructors uses lecture method which is not liked by students and not appropriate for increasing students' participation in the lesson.

### 3.2. Factors Affecting Students' Participation

For students to achieve positive learning outcomes and continue to develop their abilities, classroom participation is crucial. Participation is demonstrated by paying attention, being on task, and answering questions. Group participation

involves discussion, asking questions, showing respect, and making good use of class time. However, there are different factors that hinder students not to actively participate in the class. Most of those factors are associated with social, economic, psychological, and physical aspect of the students [15].

Based on the focus group discussion made with the Biotechnology department and department's teachers, different factors that determine students' participation have been identified and prioritized. These were the medium of instruction language problem, inconvenient teacher approach, shyness/fear, economic problem, health disorder, destruction sounds, students' class disturbance and others (Graph 2). Accordingly, students were requested to choose main factors that hinder them not to participate actively during the lesson time.



**Figure 2.** Level of classroom participation.

The class observation and students' response display that the level of Third-year Biotechnology department students' class participation is at medium level. The main factors for low class participation were: first shyness and fear, second language problem or medium of instruction and the third unwelcoming teacher's approach.

#### 3.2.1. Seating Arrangement

According to Harmer, the types of seating arrangements determine the course of students' class participation. Hence, if students seating arrangement is made appropriately with their educational background and the classroom size, they would be able to interact with each other in a more active way [8].

The class observation shows that the seating arrangement

in the classroom was not suitable for classroom participation. Thus, most of the students (68.97%) were not comfortable by the seating arrangement. Therefore, most students seat at the middle and back seats. The other factor why students choose the back and dislike to seat at the front seat was due to lack of confidence and shyness for the questions and activities forwarded by the instructor.

### 3.2.2. Students' Preparedness

Preparation for the class is an important activity for a student enrolled in higher education. Students' preparation for class allows them to actively participate in the learning that occurs in class. The course preparation, for instance, can serve as a inspiration as well as a guide for students to engage in active learning using higher cognitive skills outside the classroom [20].

Students' preparedness is important because it increases students' motivation and interest in the classroom and outside classroom. Thus, the more students prepared or read for the lesson before the class, the better perform their class activities and homework.

Chart 1 indicates that most students do not read and not usually prepared the lesson they were going to learn. Only about 31% of the students know the lesson before the class or know the chapter and topic they will be taught on the next session. The majority students, that was about 55% will never read or get prepared for the next class. Therefore, only few students who got prepared were actively engaged in class participation.

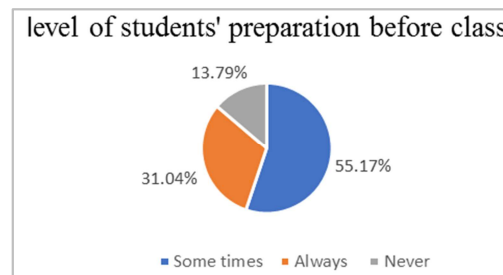


Figure 3. Preparedness.

### 3.2.3. Instructor's Role for Class Participation

Teachers' primary responsibility is to assist and guide students in enhancing their knowledge through classroom instruction and presentations. They are also responsible for planning classes, grading papers, maintaining classroom discipline, meeting with parents, and collaborating with colleagues and other school personnel. Furthermore, teachers are expected to carry out several other tasks in the classroom. The role of teachers is to create healthy, active environments, act as counsellors and mentors, provide role models, and address problems [5].

From the total number of first year students 89.66% of them strongly agreed that their instructors motivate and initiate them to participate actively in class participation. However, some suggested that few teachers do not encourage and motivate students in the class participation rather they blame and criticize students' performance which affects students' learning interest.

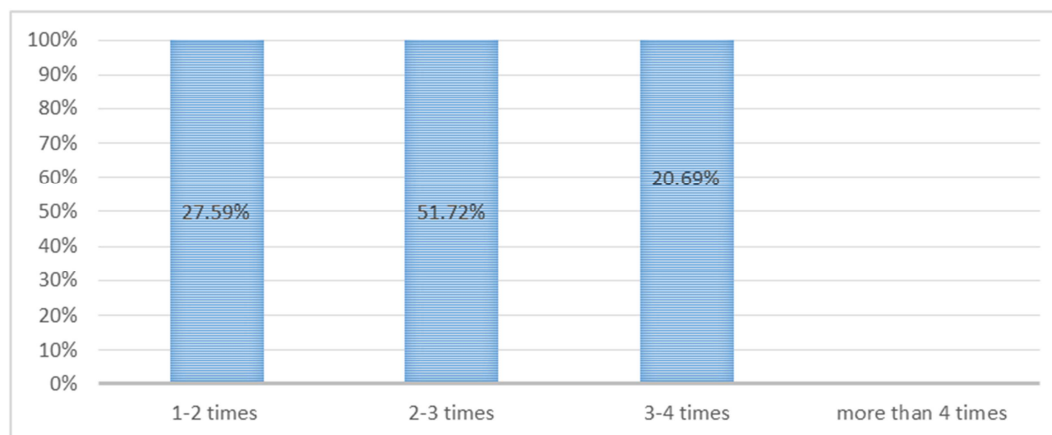


Figure 4. Frequency of question and activities provided by the teacher per class.

Graph 3 indicates that most of the instructors who teaches the Third-year Biotechnology department students did not provide activities or ask questions more than four times in a class. About 51.72% of them give three class activity questions, about 20.69% four times and bout 27.59% two times. Therefore, throughout the instruction time per class only maximum of four activities or questions are provided by the instructors so this would limit the level of students' class participation. Even some instructors never forwarded class activity question per their class instruction, and they never give opportunity for students to ask question and to reflect on the lesson.

The respondents have suggested that if their instructors encouraged students in class participation, they would participate actively, the desired learning objective would be attained, or they would easily grasp knowledge from the lesson delivered. Specially instructors should have to support students who require special needs treatment. Teacher should give time for class discussion besides other teaching methodologies, give freedom for students to alter out their idea and understanding on the daily lesson, letting them to use local language while facing problem expressing their idea during discussion, the instructor should give enough time for student to talk, and discussion points and questions should be

giving on the pieces of sheets and arranging debate on important lessons to encourage students' confidence.

#### 4. Action Proposed and Intervention

The educational quality and high-level students' performance are the cumulative results of the day-to-day activities of students in the class and their school environment. Therefore, to attain the desired learning objectives teachers should know and identify the level of their students' performance. Particularly those factors that encourage and affects students' participation in the classroom should be diagnosed. Accordingly, this study has investigated the level of history and heritage management first year students' participation, constraints not to actively engage in class participation and possible solutions. This information has been gathered using observation in classroom, interview with students and teachers, questionnaire, and other supportive literatures as secondary data. Based on the finding obtained, the intervention plan was designed to take corrective actions in the next phases.

The following action or interventions were proposed based on the finding obtained from the research:

1. Managing the seating arrangement.
2. Forwarding brainstorm for every topic in the session.
3. Giving counselling and advice.
4. Providing reading assignment.
5. Applying participatory teaching style.
6. Discussion with instructors on the finding and intervention plan at department level.

Based on the data analyzed, and results obtained the following actions and interventions have been used to increase students' class participation. The level of students' participation was very low before the intervention so that different activities have been used depending on the fore mentioned constraints for class participation and important remedies.

1. The seating arrangement that had been used in the class was not convenient for class discussion and for implementation of active learning style. Therefore, the seating arrangement was re-established based on their cooperative learning group facing each other. Consequently, the group would be composition of high, medium, and slow learners so that peer discussion and teaching have been implemented and the instructor also monitored and managed the class easily.
2. Brainstorming has been used to assess students' prior knowledge. As a result, student has got the chance to say some thing or activate their participation before the introduction of the lesson by the instructor. In the middle of the lesson after long instruction or

discussion, ice breaker has been used to refresh student's mind, to get their attention and to avoid boringness and dizziness.

3. Advice have been given for students about how to study, how to attain their future career, how to avoid stress or afraid (shyness) in the class, how to build confidence and self-esteem; and the benefit of class activity for their academic performance and enhancing knowledge.
4. Reading assignment have been given for the students on the next session with instruction like preparing question, set the central idea or concept of the lesson and then reflects in class when the lesson intervened. After the class debate was arranged and students actively participated on the lesson.
5. Role play and Jigsaw teaching style are used to enhance students' class participation. Subtopics from the session were designed by Jigsaw and role play teaching method then students were actively involved in class participation.
6. The other intervention activities which were implemented to increase students' class activity were through redirecting questions. Questions asked by students towards instructor were forwarded to students thus students would try to respond and discuss. Therefore, this trend has great capacity in promoting active students' participation.
7. Discussion has been made with teachers who are providing other course for Third-year Biotechnology department students. Accordingly, the following points were discussed: the role of positive reinforcement for active class participation, how to allot enough time for class participation to maximize benefit of class participation, how to make good approach and facial expression which determines the level of students' class participation. To increase students' participation the instructor should abandon traditional teaching method like lecture and relay on students' centered teaching style. Instructors should also avoid using hard English words instead it is better to use simple language and communication.

#### 5. Evaluation of Action/Intervention

Based on the action plan the above intervention activities have been performed in class with students and teachers. Thus, the level of students' class participation has been increased dramatically. According to the data obtained in three frequent days during intervention days and after intervention days, it attested the successfulness of the strategy and the attainment of this study (Table 3).

*Table 3. Class observation during and after intervention.*

Third week after pilot study or observation	Number of students participated			Number of students not participated		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
During intervention						
Day one	9	4	13	27	13	40

Third week after pilot study or observation	Number of students participated			Number of students not participated		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Day two	12	8	20	24	9	33
Day three	17	9	26	19	8	27
Fourth week/ After intervention						
Day four	27	12	39	9	5	14
Day five	29	13	42	7	4	11
Day six	29	13	42	7	4	11

According to the above table, students' class participation has grown tremendously starting from the intervention days and after the intervention periods. This indicates that the level of students' class participation is much associated with different factors such as conducive learning environment, teaching strategy, students learning style, students motivation and teachers commitment as well as approach to students.

## 6. Conclusion

The educational quality and high-level students' performance are the cumulative results of the day-to-day activities of students in the class and their school environment. Therefore, to attain the desired learning objectives teachers should know and identify the level of their students' performance. Particularly those factors that encourage and affects students' participation in the classroom

should be diagnosed. Accordingly, this study has investigated the level of Biotechnology department third year students' class participation, factors that affects students' class participation and possible solutions. This information has been gathered using observation in lessons class, interview with students and teachers, questionnaire, and other supportive literatures as secondary data. Based on the finding obtained, the intervention plan was designed to take corrective actions such as managing the seating arrangement, forwarding brainstorm for every topic in the session, giving counselling and advice, providing reading assignment, applying participatory teaching style and setting discussion at department level with instructors on the finding and intervention plan. Therefore, after the intervention plan a tremendous change in students' class participation have been observed and students have shown improvement in their academic result and career.

## Appendix

*Table 4. Observation checklist for students' class participation.*

First week	The number of students who participated			Number of students not participated			Remark
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Day one							
Day two							
Day three							
Day four							
Day five							

Assessing the strategies, a regular classroom teacher uses to increase students' participation.

*Table 5. Observation Checklist.*

S/NO	STRATEGIES TO INCREASE STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION	1	2	3	4	5
1.	Consider the use of an online poll before the class discussion					
2.	Assess students prior knowledge					
3.	Devise activities that elicit participation					
4.	Use jigsaw approach					
5.	Keep the students busy					
6.	Foster an ethos of participation (collective contribution of ideas)					
7.	Ensure that everyone's contributions are audible					
8.	Let students teach each other					
9.	Allow anonymous questions					
10.	Give students a voice and a choice					
11.	Place the emphasis on students' ideas					
12.	Redirect questions and answers to other students (whole class)					
13.	Ask students to assess their own participation					
14.	Provide enough praising responses					
15.	Teach students skills needed to participate					
16.	Keep the content bite-sized to fit the available time					
17.	Consider the teacher's position in a class					
18.	Look into the future by developing and presenting prediction activities					

Rating Scale: 1= Very High; 2= High; 3= Moderate; 4= Very Low; 5= Low

### Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed primarily for soliciting information for action research entitled “Enhancing student participation in the class in the case of third-year Biotechnology students”. So, you are kindly requested to give the right answer you think, subsequently it contributes a lot for the success of this study. Thanks in advance for your corporation.

Put the “X” mark in the box provided.

1. Which teaching style is more appropriate to participate in classroom?

Lecture Cooperative Discussion Peer teacher

Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your level of classroom participation?

High Medium Low

3. What hinders you to participate in the classroom?

Language problem Teacher approach

Shyness / fear Peer influence

I am afraid I might ask the wrong question or give the wrong answer

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Is the seating arrangement convenient for classroom participation?

Yes No

5. Where do you sit in the class?

Front seat middle seat Back seat

Why \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you read or prepare yourself for the next lesson before you come to class?

Always Sometimes Never

7. Is the classroom convenient for class participation?

Yes No

8. Do the teacher motivate you to participate in class (positive reinforcement)?

Yes No

9. Is the subject's topic suitable for classroom participation?

Yes No

10. How many times per period does your teacher forward questions for classroom activities?

1-2 2-3 3-4 Null

11. Does your teacher give you an opportunity to talk in class?

Yes No

12. Can you easily understand what the teacher is teaching?

Yes No

13. Do you believe that students' class participation have benefit for the student?

Yes No

14. Why do you think that your participation in the classroom is very low?

.....  
.....  
.....

15. How do your teachers could increase your class participation?

.....  
.....  
.....

16. What is expected from you to participate in the class?

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.....  
.....

### Interview Questions for Teachers

This questionnaire is designed primarily for soliciting information for action research entitled “Enhancing student participation in the class in the case of third-year Biotechnology students.” So you are kindly requested to give the right answer you think, subsequently, it contributes a lot to the success of this study. Thanks in advance for your corporation.

1. Why do you think students' participation in the classroom is very low?

.....  
.....



2. What do you expect from the teacher that will motivate students to participate in the classroom?

3. What is expected from students to participate in the class?

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