

## **Factors influencing classroom participation: A case study of Bhutanese higher secondary student.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Aim:** To find out the factors which influences classroom participation in Bhutanese school?

**Study design:** Semi-structured interview was conducted with prior permission from department head (School principal). 20 students comprise of 10 males and 10 females was randomly selected for sampling.

**Place and duration:** This study was conducted at Chhukha Central School, Chhukha District, Bhutan. It was a yearlong project to fulfill the requirement of research module in post graduate in education at Samtse College, Bhutan.

**Methodology:** Both interviews and observation were used to collect data from the field. Interview was conducted with 20 students comprising 10 males and 10 females from same school to mine the factors that influence classroom participation. The purpose of observation was to identify the forms and level of participation and subsequently to identify the students in terms of active or passive participation in classroom for focus group discussion. Observation was done for a period of 5 weeks' teaching. Their forms of participation were recorded throughout the teaching hours.

**Results:** The findings showed that majority of Bhutanese students were involved in passive participation. In passive participation, students were sitting quietly, writing notes, listening and paying attention. Interestingly, good number of students was also actively involved in asking questions, giving opinion, responding opinion, discussion, making comment and seeking help. The interview data showed that the factors influencing classroom participation were teachers, friends, classroom size, advance preparation and language. However, classroom participation entailed positive benefits in teaching-learning process.

**Conclusion:** The findings would serve as guide or insight for teachers and learners regarding the factors affecting students' participation among school students. This also assist teachers and learners to take into the accounts the way to overcome students' problems such as a fear of participation in the classroom and thus increase motivation.

**Key words:** *Participation, benefits, influencing factors, forms of participation and learning environment.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Classroom participation is very important factor in yielding positive learning outcomes for students and further developing their abilities. Participation means students speaking in the class which consists of asking questions, making comments and joining in group activities [1]. Students who does not participate in aforementioned activities are considered as passive in the classroom [2]. Participation is considered as paying attention, being on task, responding to questions, and participation in group discussion, asking questions, seeking help and making good use of class time. Besides paying attention, giving response and showing respect in the classroom to teacher and other students are also participation [4]. However, in general, classroom participation requires students to interact in the classrooms to indicate that they are learning and paying attention.

"Involvement matters," as [5] points out, and this involvement can occur both inside and outside the classroom. Active involvement in class facilitates critical thinking [6] and facilitates the retention of information that might otherwise be lost [7]. [8] stated that:

The more they participate, the less memorization they do, and the more they engage in higher levels of thinking, including interpretation, analysis, and synthesis [9].

Students who participate also show improvement in their communication skills [10,11], group interactions [12] and functioning in a democratic society [13].

Thus, participation allows students to build on their knowledge, demonstrate they have understood the curriculum, develop confidence, and apply theory.

Furthermore, [3] stated that participating in classroom activities provides a critical opportunity for learning new skills. Class participation helps students to make deep and meaning connection in mind that are very important for learning. Low grade in examination and incomplete home work are an early sign of problem with class participation [2]. [4] also stated that when students rise voices in the classroom, they practice and develop a range of advance thinking skills.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the factors that influence classroom participation. [14] indicated that these factors include classroom size, fear, the perception of faculty authority, student preparation for class, and confidence. However, in the Bhutanese context, literature on this topic is very limited. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to examine which factors in the classroom learning environment affect student participation.

## 2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Over 17 years of my student life I observed that Bhutanese classroom had been teacher-centered and students were hardly open up in the class. Especially, classroom participation is very less and teachers

would hardly encourage students to participate. The essence of participation and the role of teacher in teaching-learning process is hardly being understood. In fact, teachers are oblivious about the factors that affects classroom participation and its impact on students. This study would identify the level of participation in Bhutanese classroom and also to discover the factors that affect students' participation.

### **3. PURPOSE OF STUDY**

Active learning is a part of learning process where the classroom participation is encouraged and students are motivated. All teachers and parents do want their students to involve in active learning scenario because not only is it more interactive, it helps students to overcome shyness, introvert issues, getting friendlier with classmates, etc. but, there are particular students, who, in spite of being intelligent, tend to shy away from this interactive process. It is the duty of teachers and responsibility of parent to nurture their kids to be groomed in better environment. It's all required is a little extra effort from respective stakeholders. Hence, this study was basically to find out the factors that affect classroom participation in Bhutanese context. Authors would like to bring an encouraging and discouraging factors to the notice of teachers.

### **4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.**

The findings would serve as guide or insight for teachers and learners regarding the factors affecting students' participation among school students. This also assist teachers and learners to take into the accounts the way to overcome students' problems such as a fear of participation in the classroom and thus increase motivation. Usually students attempt to avoid class participation to protect one's own self-image by not taking the risk of making mistakes, fear of being laughed at by peers and are negatively evaluated by teachers. Thus, it is important for teachers to create conducive environment to enhance participation in the class.

### **5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

What are the factors that influence student's participation in the classroom?

Sub questions:

1. What are the common factors which promotes classroom participation?
2. What are the common factors which discourage classroom participation?
3. What are the benefits of classroom participation?
4. What are different forms of participation in Bhutanese classroom?

### **6. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Participation is described as an active engagement process which includes preparation, contribution to discussion, group skills, communication skills, and attendance [11]. Participation can also define as "the number of unsolicited responses volunteered" [15], questions and comments [16], and [17] "ideal class discussion". However, Course participation may include readily speaking, thinking, reading, role taking,

risk taking, and engaging oneself and others, and it may occur inside or outside the classroom confines [18].

Participation can take place in many forms in the classroom. Sometimes it is visible as student take on different role within the situation and some of the forms could not be identified by the teacher. However, if the students are mentally engaged in the classroom even though it is hidden, are considered as participation. According to [19] there are many forms of participation includes answering teachers or other's questions, asking questions for better explanation and clarification, making comments, joining discussion, sharing opinion, idea and thought are considered as student's participation in classroom. Furthermore, paying attention, being on task, seeking help, making good use of time, listening, reading and showing respect to teachers and other students are also considered as classroom participation [2]. Students who do not participate as mentioned above are considered to be passive in the classroom.

Research shows that classroom participation has paramount positive impacts on students. Participation is a way to bring "students actively into the educational process" [8] and to assist in "enhancing our teaching and bringing life to the classroom" [20]. As [8] cited, students are more motivated [4], learn better [21, 22, 23], better critical thinkers [6] and have self-reported gains in character [24] when they are prepared for class and participate in discussions. Other benefits for students includes less memorization, as they are able to learn through discussion and synthesis information more effectively [9] and able to improve communication skills [11]. The explanation and correction on the spot by teachers will help student to understand better and will remain in long term memory [19]. Participation also enable student to develop social skills, improve presentation skills, recall information and improve their scope for quality of work as cited in [19].

There are numerous factors determine participation levels in the classroom and need to be taken into account when determining a strategy that will encourage an active learning environment and therefore raise levels of participation [25].

1. Student trait: As individual differ in personality and not everybody is same. Every student has their own explanation of being passive and active in the class. Confidence is the key trait which holds students from participation [26]. Language is another barrier which discourage students from active participation [27]. [8]Noted that students may not participate in class is because of their own personal fears of feeling inadequate in front of others, and thus choose not to participate. They are afraid of crating bad image in the class. Students participate only if they have important to share [17]. Another factor is your peers, if your peers are familiar and positive, they feel more comfortable to share their opinion [28] also can organize and express thought [26]. Some are just waiting for the teachers to offer an opportunity to participate better in the class.

2. Classroom size: Has direct and indirect impact on classroom. In smaller classroom size, the level of participation has recorded due to the students being more comfortable in setting where as in bigger classroom, less students are likely to have participation due to the fear and anxiety as cited in [25]. In big size classroom, too many students want to talk and there is not time for everyone to say something. Due to the volume of students waiting for the participation and comments, there is insufficient amount of time available for students to participate [26].
3. Course policies: It is an effective method of improving the level of class participation [26]. The course policies including participation in the grading affected the level of participation within the classroom. If participation has a positive impact on a student's grade, they are more likely to participate in classroom discussion [14].
4. Advance preparation for class: Fear is an issue many students face as they may not have sufficient knowledge and may be dealing with insecurities in the classroom. If students do not have knowledge about the subject content prior to the class, they do not feel like to participate in the class [29]. Research shows that the fear of criticizing by the peers and teacher for not being well inform of subject content holds them back from participation [26].
5. Role of teacher: The teacher has significant role to make student to participate within the classroom. The way they make positive relationship with student is critical for them to participate. Past studies shown that effective ways to deal with this include, learning students' names, creating a climate of respect and openness, and allowing students to refer to them by first names [16]. Classes with higher participation levels perceive their teacher to be approachable, inclusive, promoters of discussion, and supportive [14]. If teachers are constantly negative towards students, criticize them, and ignore them, students are less likely to participate within the classroom [17]. If professors are constantly negative towards students, criticize them, and ignore them, students are less likely to participate within the classroom [17]. This is important as the results concluded that teacher-student interaction has the largest direct effect on participation. This type of relationship between the teacher and student will create an environment where the student will feel more comfortable in receiving criticism from professors, increase their confidence, and learn to communicate in a professional manner [5].

Numerous factors influence student participation both directly and indirectly including student traits, classroom structure, and the role of teacher, classroom climate, and confidence. It is paramount that educational institutions and educators focus on determining what factors will positively affect levels of student participation within the classroom. This ensures that all students receive equal opportunity in developing their communication and demonstrating their knowledge as they progress through their education. Participation will not only help students progress in their education but more importantly in their careers by demonstrating that they can develop arguments, communicate thought, and interact in

discussions with their colleagues. As [5] noted “involvement matters” and educators need to ensure a sufficient amount of class time is devoted to developing these skills within students.

## 7. METHODOLOGY

Data was collected from students in Chhukha Central School. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data from the field. The research design was mainly observation on classroom [30] and semi-structured interview [26]. The observation was done on three classes for a period of 5 teaching weeks. The purpose of observation was to identify the forms and level of participation and subsequently to identify the students in terms of active or passive participation in classroom for focus group discussion. Their forms of participation were recorded throughout the teaching hours. Each observation was assisted by a Research Assistant (RA) who had record the behavior of the students. This paper comprehensively discussed the findings from observation.

Interview was also conducted with 10 students comprising 5 males and 5 females from same school. The purpose of interview was to mine the factors that influenced classroom participation. While selecting the sample, both passive and active students were included to have better understanding of factors affecting students' participation in Bhutanese context.

## 8. FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

### 8.1 Students Profile

In this study, Class 1, IX “A” has 38 students, followed by XI Science ‘A’ with 41 students (Class 2) and XI Science ‘B’ with 37 students (Class 3). The total number of female students is 53 and male 63 students.

Figure 1 showed the distribution of students in the three classrooms.

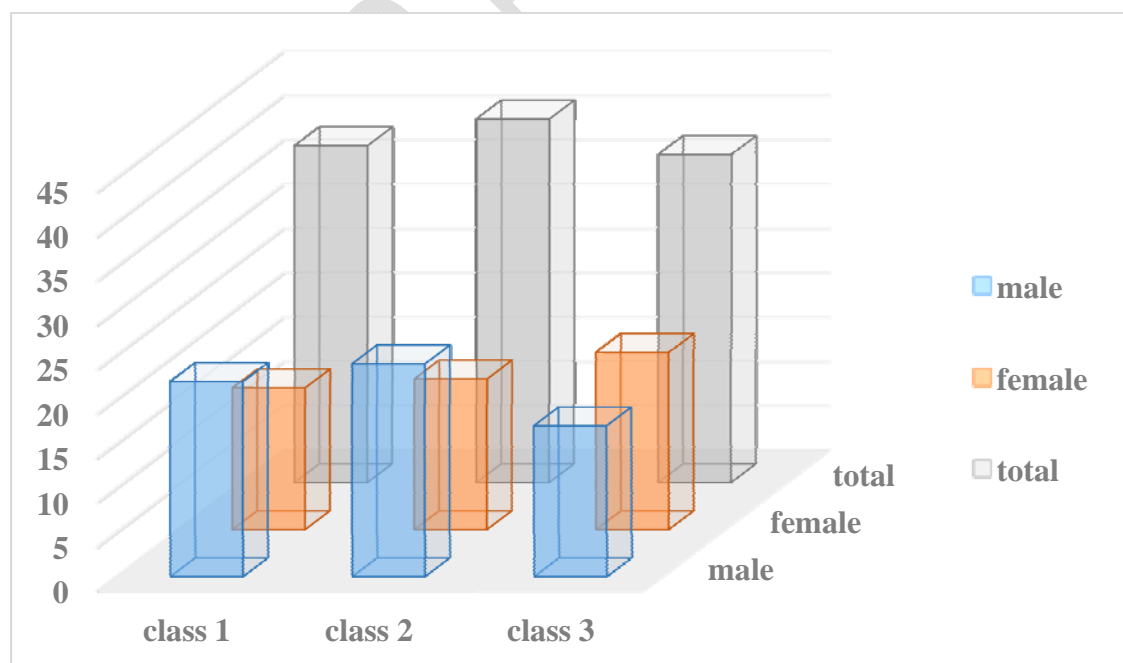


Figure 1. Number of students in three classes and Gender Students Participation

## 8.2 Students participation

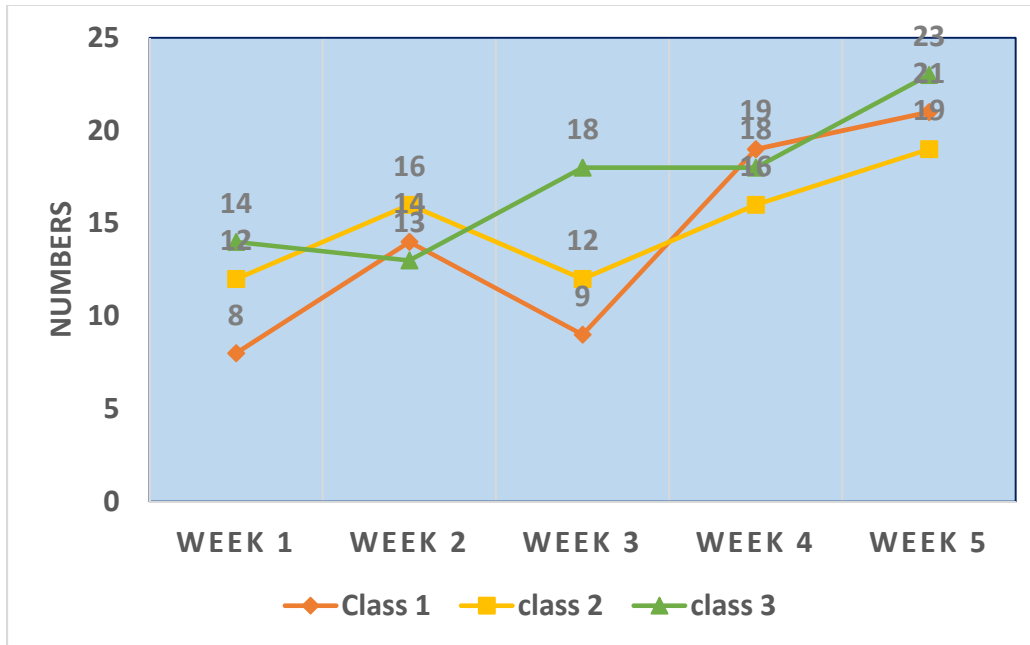


Figure 2. The frequency of active participation by classes

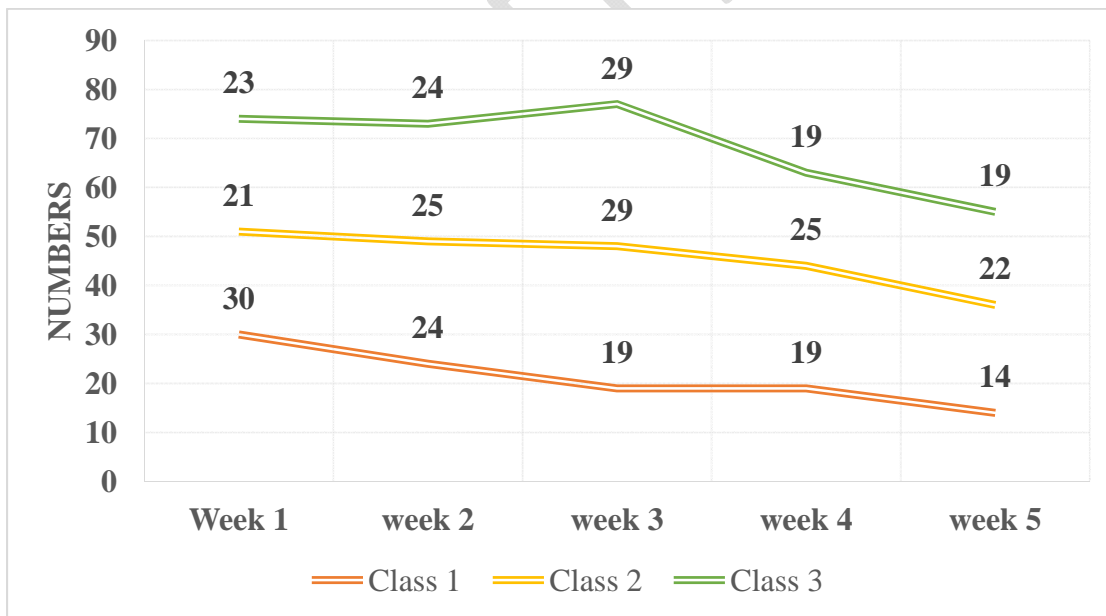


Figure 3. The frequency of passive participation by classes

Observation in classroom was carried out for the first-five weeks of teaching. Overall observation showed that majority of the students were involved in passive participation. However, there were some students

who were actively participating in the class. For all the classes, the active participation was low in first week of observation, and had observed an increase in the frequency of active participation in the following weeks. As for the class 1, the active weeks were week 5, week 4 and week 2, with 21, 19 and 14 times respectively. Observation for class 2, the active weeks were week 5, week 4 and week 2, with 19, 16 and 16 times respectively students participate actively in the classroom. For class 3, active weeks were week 5, week 4 and week 3 with, 23, 18 and 18 times respectively. Most of the students are involved in passive forms of participation in the classroom. For class 1, 30 times students were involved in week 1, followed by 24, 19, 19 and 14 times in week 4, week 3, week 2 and week 1 respectively. Observation for class 2 and 3, passive participation of the students was found to be maximum in week 3 in both the classes with 29 times. Figure 2 and 3 showed the frequency of active and passive participation by students throughout the observation weeks.

### 8.3 Forms of participation

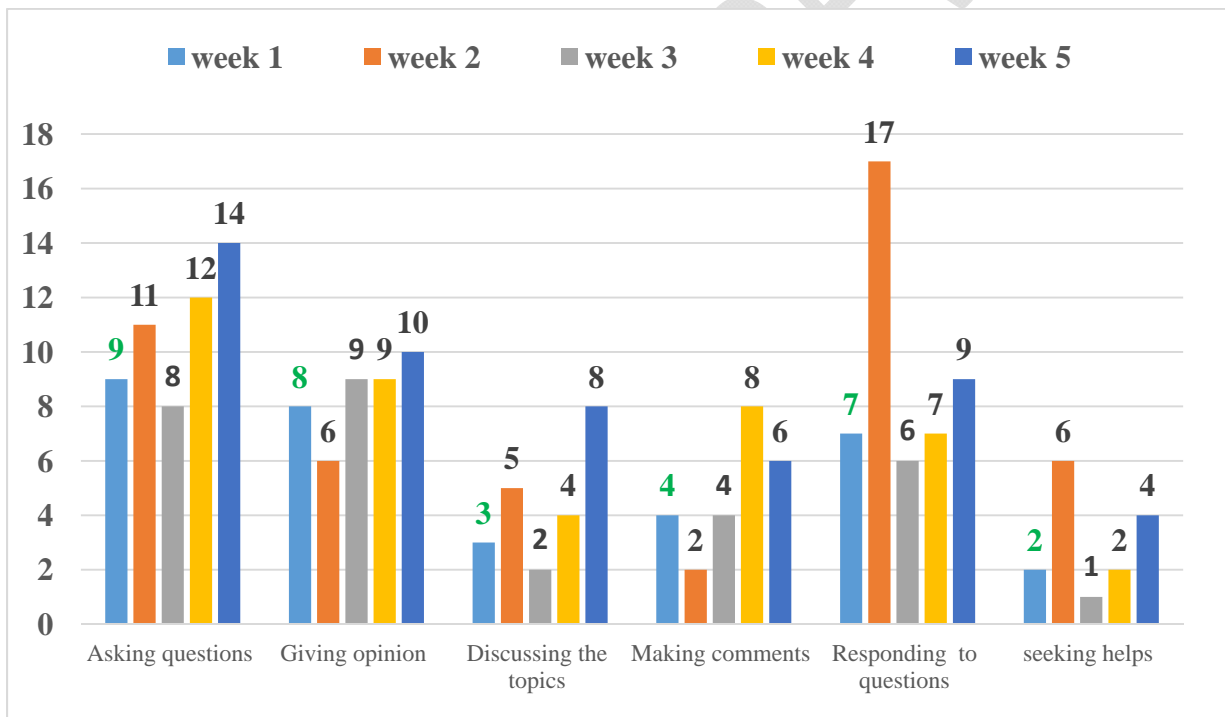


Figure. 4. Forms of Active Participation by class 1.



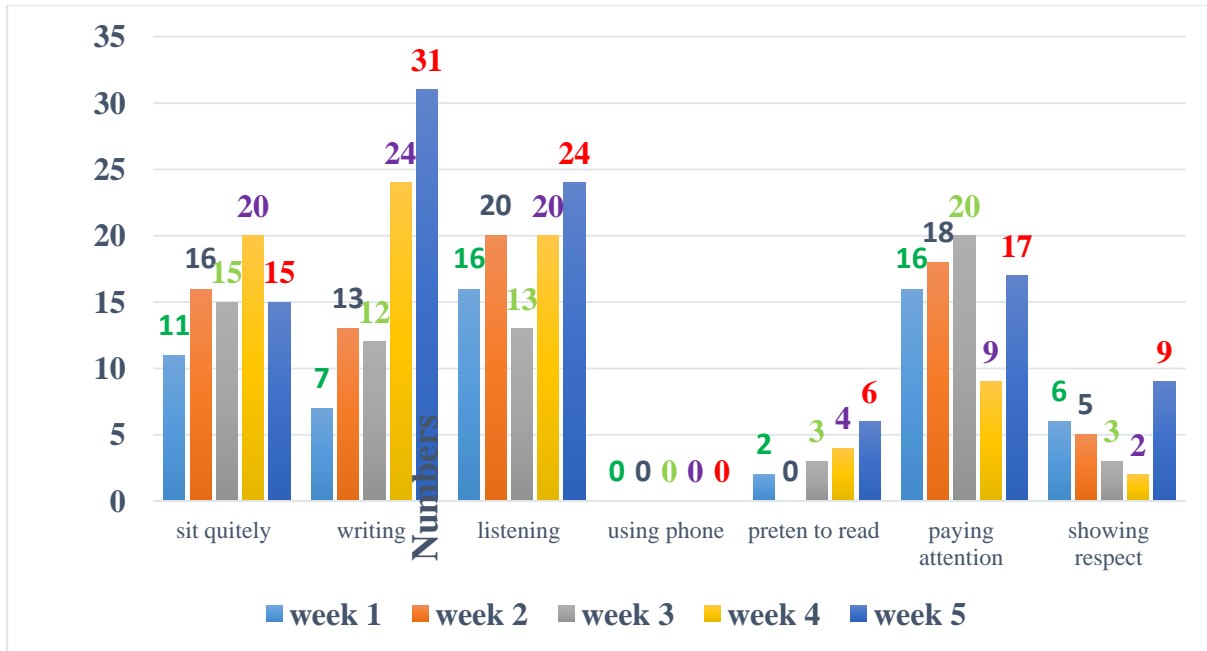


Figure. 5. Forms of passive participation by class 1.

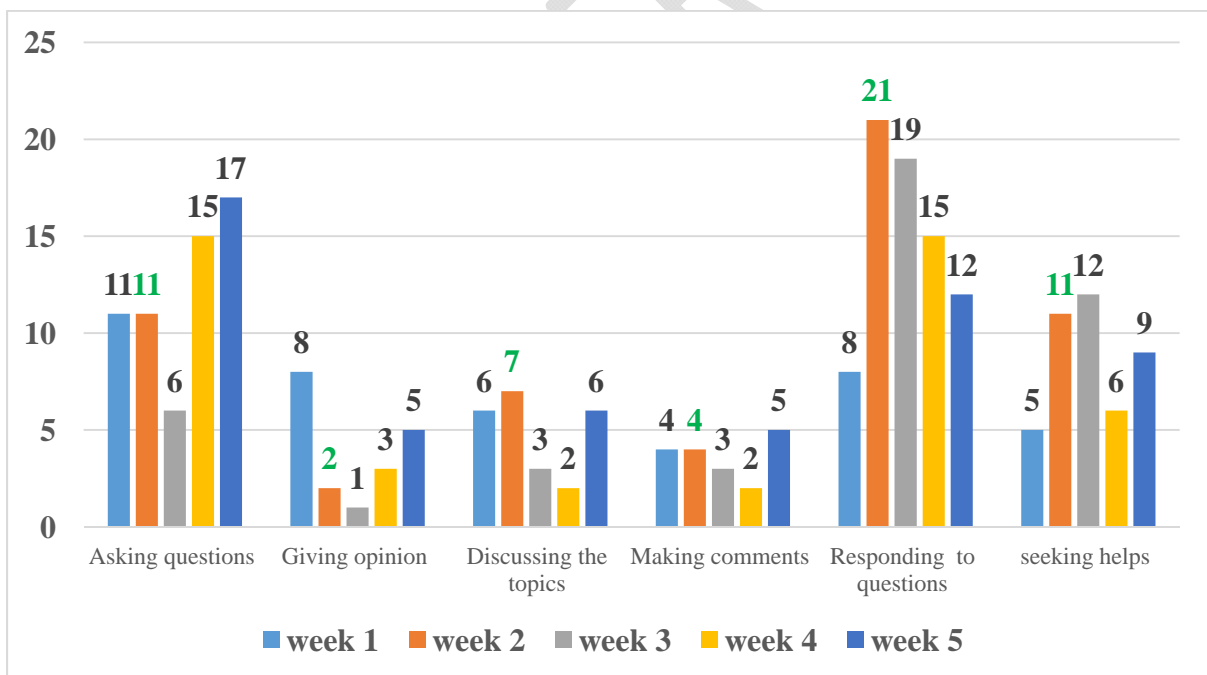


Figure. 6. Forms of active participation by class 2.

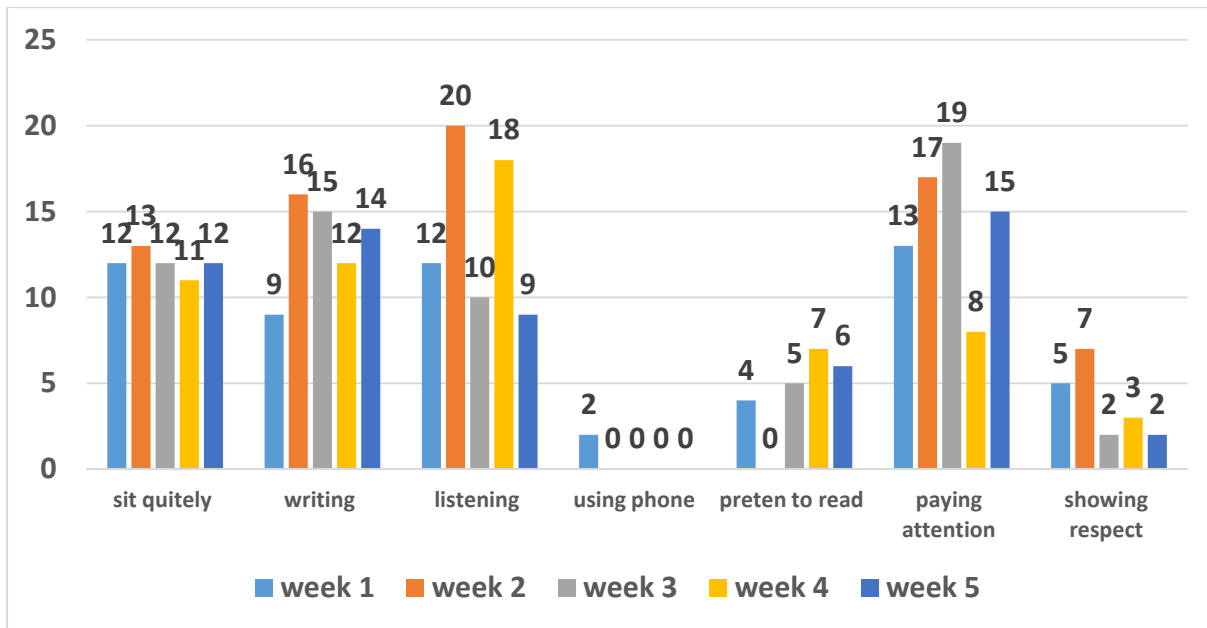


Figure .7. Forms of passive participation by class 2.

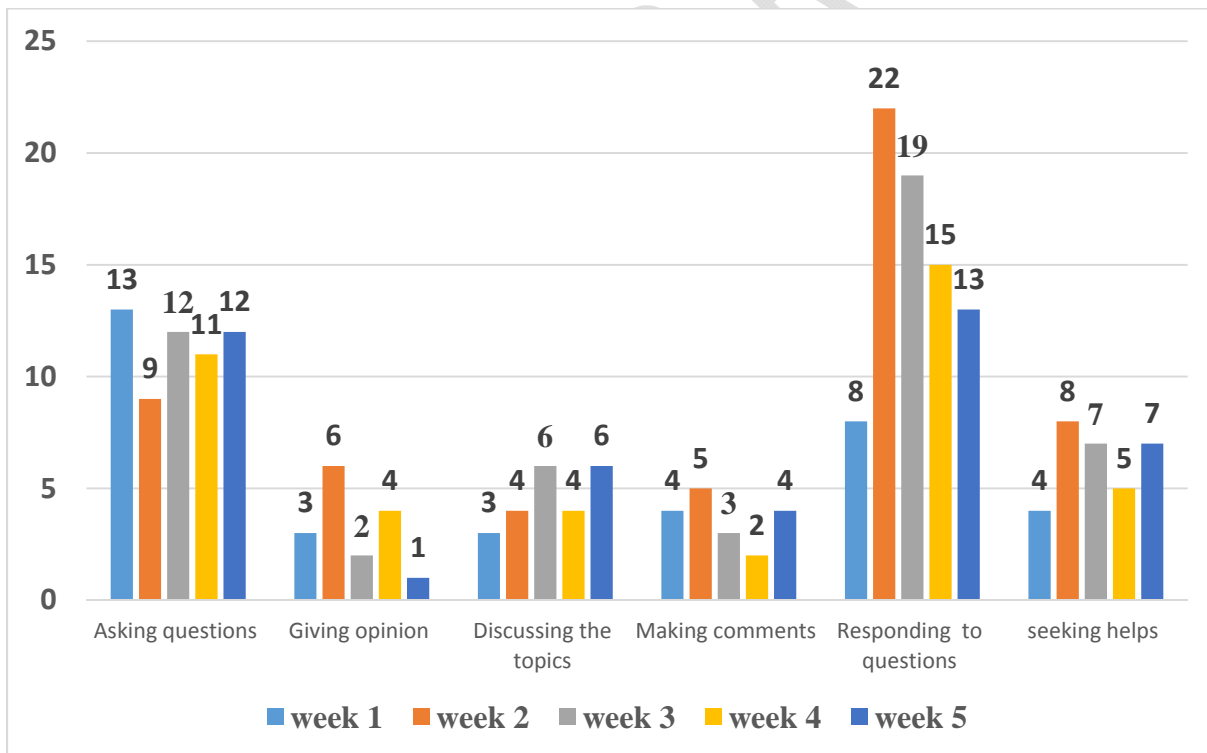
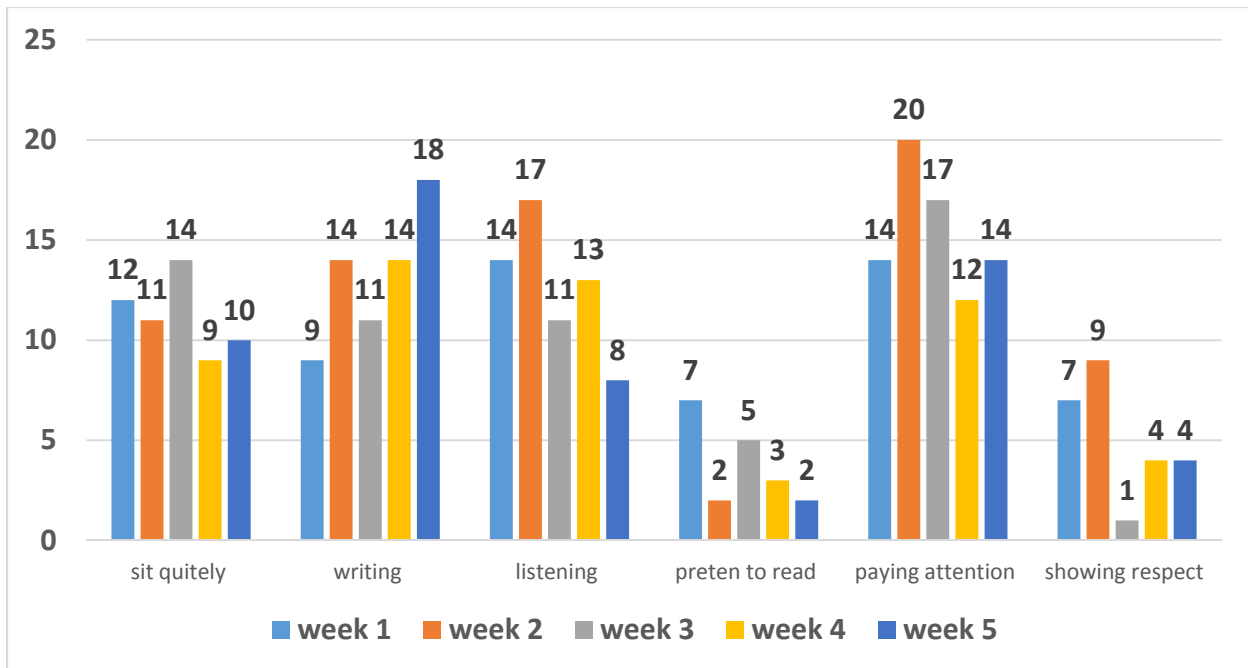


Figure 8. Forms of active participation by class 3.



**Figure 9. Forms of passive participation by class 3.**

Simply defined, participation in classroom is the acts of involvement in the class activities. In this research, the acts of involvement in class activities were operationally defined as active participation and passive participation. The act of active participation includes asking questions, give opinions and discuss about the related topic lectured. Passive participation refers to the acts of writing notes, sit quietly, listening to lectures or doing other things.

The result of the observation showed that class 1 were actively involved in asking questions, giving opinion, responding opinion, discussion, making comment and seeking help. Among all, students were confidently participated in asking and responding questions either being asked by friends or teacher concerned. In the passive forms of participation, maximum students were passively involved in the classroom as shown in the *figure 5*.

In class 2, throughout the observations students were actively involved in asking questions and responding questions being raised in the classroom. Interestingly, significant number of students were sitting quietly, writing notes, listening and paying attention.

In class 3, students were actively involved in responding questions from teacher and friends and also confidently raised questions to the floor based on the subject matter. In passive forms of participation, students were sitting quietly, writing notes, listening and paying attention.

Over all, in the Bhutanese school classroom students were actively participate in question answering and significant numbers of students were simply listen, write notes, pay attention and sit quietly.

Concept of classroom participation understood by the students

This finding revealed that the definition of classroom participation understood by students. It is very important in yielding positive outcome for students and developing their future abilities. Student #1 defined classroom participation as, "is the platform where the students can take part in classroom activity when teacher asked them the questions and provides chance for them to express their opinion". Students #2 & #9 said, "Giving instant response without hesitation or is the state of being an active in the class". Students #3 #4 #7 #6 #10 gave same opinion as it is a platform for student to keep actively engaged and build confident and improve speaking skills. However, there are many ways through which you can render your participation during teaching learning activities such as asking questions, responding questions and sharing opinion. To sum up their points, classroom participation is defined as students taking part in classroom activities which consists of asking questions, responding questions and sharing opinion.

#### **8.4 Factors influencing classroom participation**

The interview data showed that the factors influencing classroom participation are teachers, friends, classroom size, advance preparation and language.

**Teacher:** the positive trait of teacher impacted classroom participation. All participants reported that supportive teacher welcome more active participation and do not mind when students make mistakes. Participants #1 and #2 reported that teacher should be frank and understanding so that the students feel comfortable enough to share their answers or thoughts since they do not need to fear being scolded for answering wrongly. This is clear in the following remarks which a student made, "I can participate more when my teacher remains friendly in the class and correct my mistakes without stating any negative remarks .....which indeed depress my self-esteem in the class!" (#1).

A teacher with sense of humor who cracks lots of jokes to relate with content knowledge can make learning fun and participating (Mustapha et al, 2010). The four out of 10 (#4#9#10#3) participants noted if a teacher has a sense of humor while teaching then students feel comfortable to share their thought and opinion. "Teacher should be approachable, nice and frank in the classroom to provoke classroom participation or should able to draw curiosity among students so that students will participate in classroom by asking more questions" (#9).

Another stirring factor was to impose more questions upon students to enhance classroom participation. "Yes, when teacher ask question then more number of students will actively participate in teaching learning process. However, the role of a teacher is to encourage and motivate students by making friendly environment." (#8, 4). Participants #5 has rightly stated "If the teacher is strict and precise, we feel hesitate to answer or participate".

Above all, teacher should be humorous, approachable, nice and frank in teaching learning process to welcome more classroom participation.

**Friend:** Friend is another factor which determine the classroom participation. If the friends in the classroom are supportive and familiar, the classroom participation would likely to increase. For example, if a friends are supportive and encourage the peers, then the number of participants will increase otherwise, they will passively give attendance in the class (#1). This was supported by two students: “friends are the best teacher who will entertain and taught in the best way” (#9) and “when my friends motivate me I feel more comfortable to participate in the class” (#4). Another student described “friend should accept others’ mistake instead of insulting or laughing at them” (#2). Instead of encouraging if their peers discourage by teasing when they make mistakes that would rather discourage their peer from classroom participation (#6). Participant #9 has raised the concern about the disparity between high and low performing students. When friend and teacher differentiate between high and low performing students, “I feel low and cannot give my best to class as a result, that will hamper my result at an end”.

**Classroom size:** Eight out of ten participants consented that classroom size affects the level of participation in Bhutanese classroom. In larger size classroom, there was not a sufficient amount of time to have the opportunity to participate. Student #3 noted “too many students want to talk and there will not adequate time for everyone to say something”. Due to larger number of students wanting to participate and the length of time they consume while participating, there was an insufficient amount of time to participate. However, if the size of the class is small more number of students are likely to participate. Student #7 & #9 stated, “I feel more comfortable to share my thought and feelings when the classroom size is small”. In larger classroom size, students feel nervous and could not participate. # 5, 7.

**Advance class preparation:** Students who prepared in an advance for the class can participate extensively. Students noted that they felt more comfortable to express their opinion and thought if the content being taught were familiar. Student # 10 described, “I can raise my voice without any fear in my mind if I know the concept of what we are supposed to be studying”. Other two students further consolidated, “if we are unprepared then the fear of making mistakes while expressing concept may limit our participation in the class” #8 and “advance preparation gives confident to participate in the class” # 3.

**Language barriers:** All students expressed their opinion that they did not feel comfortable to express their thought in English. Student #5 noted, “I am worried on looking at the standard of my English. It is very difficult to phrase my thought in sentences”. Student #1 noted, “While speaking English I used to make lots of blunders so I am anxious to be criticized by my peers”. “It is all because of poor speaking language among Bhutanese students, handful of people who are good at language can repeatedly participate in the classroom”, #7 & 10.

## **8.5 Factors discouraging classroom participation**

The investigation into the factors discouraging classroom participation helps to provide an insight on keeping them active. In general, there are three factors which discourage classroom participation. They are teacher, friends and classroom environment. The most influential factor is teacher. Student #4 stated,

"If a teacher is good, motivating and decent, we shall look open them as model. A bad teacher with the hostile attitude who doesn't teach well and always insulting student impedes learning. A teacher should be consistently progressing".

An immediate friend in the classroom affects participation of other students by the way some people behave in the class. Many of the students interviewed expressed their displeasure regarding having classmates who do not know when to keep quiet. For instance, student #8 elaborated, "I feel irritating when some students make unnecessary noise which disturbs my concentration". If the students are disturbing, teasing, dis-organized and incorporative, it would be difficult for other students to render their contribution in classroom discussion.

The physical setting of the classroom is another factor discouraging student's participation. It should be conducive to impress students to learn. Students reported, "if the size of the classroom is large then the students sitting at back cannot see the notes given on the board and information are always vague and when the information are not clear students could not give their best in classroom discussion. As a result, students sitting at back may fall in to sleep or some even exhibit distractive behaviors" # 9, #5 and #2. Student #3 elaborated, "I observed that students fall into sleep if the classroom size is small because of the congested sitting arrangement. In small size classroom, all tables and chairs are placed together...comparatively large number of students in a class is another factor of discouraging classroom participation". Above all, the physical layout is very influential in discouraging classroom participation.

### **8.6 Benefits of classroom participation**

Student reported that classroom participation entailed positive benefits in teaching-learning process. Participation helps students to clarify their doubts and makes their class time more interesting. Students #6 noted, "I feel happy when more students participate in asking questions, expressing opinion, answering teachers' questions and responding instruction. Such interactive sessions are very meaningful where we get lots of information". Student #4 reported, "I will understand better if I will participate in the class". Student #8 noted, "in fact, classroom participation is the first step to overcome nervousness and anxiety. We can able to inculcate confidence through repetitive classroom participation. Besides, we can also improve our speaking skills". The most important point noted by student#6 & 4, "Through participation, we will become critical thinker". Hearing wide varieties of perspectives from students, the classroom participation has innumerable benefits to students and also to the success of teacher.

### **8.6 DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study showed that significant number of students are not active participants in the classroom. The majority of students are found saliently listening and taking notes. Nonetheless, there are comparatively less students involving in an active class participation such as discussion, asking questions, responding, giving opinion and seeking help. This finding was supported by [30].

This study is very important for the teachers to identify the behaviour of students in natural setting. Understanding the behaviour of students helps them to create conducive environment to motivate students in classroom. According to [9], “conducive class environment encourages student participation, enthusiasm and willingness to learn and a participative environment in the classroom stimulates learning, sets the momentum and makes both the lecturer and student feel satisfied” as cited in [30].

The interview findings revealed that factors influencing classroom participation are teachers, friends, classroom size, advance preparation and language. The majority of students inclined to participate when the teachers are approachable [16] but the negative remarks of teachers also exhibited poor participation in class [8]. In this study, students mentioned if the teachers are frank, understanding and approachable then they feel comfortable to participate. Secondly, friends are another factor which influence classroom participation. In this study, students noted peers encourages their friends to participate and accept others mistakes instead of insulting or laughing at their mistakes as affirmed by [16, 30].

The classroom size is very controversy finding of this study. The majority of students noted that classroom size affects classroom participation. In large classroom size, there is no sufficient time for all students to participate and students lose confident to share their opinions with the fear of making mistakes. However, [30] the size of classroom in the class does not so clearly affect their participation. For those who are extravert, environmental elements do not significantly affect their willingness to ask questions and giving opinions. For passive students, they do not like to be in big audiences and difficult to assimilate themselves with bigger crowd compared to active students. This clearly showed that classroom size is important to encourage passive students to be active in class. However, the current study found that both (passive and active) students in the class were affected by the classroom size. This finding was supported by [26] where the size of the classroom affects active classroom participation.

Students who prepared for class by completing readings and reviewing material being discussed were more likely to participate in the class. They are more confident and assured of giving right opinion to teachers [26]. Similarly, in this study students expressed that they can participate more actively in the class if they are to be prepared in an advanced. Finally, language is another setback which hindered active participation in Bhutanese classroom. It was found that poor language has impacted in classroom participation [26].

## **10 RESEARCH LIMITATION**

1. The first limitation of this study include the sample being not sufficiently diverse. The diverse sample would have included multiple school while sampling so that findings would have affect to bigger magnitude.
2. The authenticity of the study depends on the honesty and interest of participating student. Sometimes, participants are not interested or willing to share about their teachers and often landed up by giving an inadequate accounts of classroom participations.

3. Author has collected only student's perspective and left teacher's perspective which would be further enriching to mine how participation unfolds within classroom.

The aforementioned limitations of the study rendered an opportunity for future researchers to explore factors affecting classroom participation in Bhutanese context.

## **11 CONCLUSION**

Learning is an interactive process which involved active participation from both the teachers and students in the classroom. An understanding on the behavior of the students in the classroom will help the teachers to identify the passive students and plan ways to encourage them to actively participate in the classroom. Both teacher and students must actively engage in the classroom to create a more fun and meaningful learning experiences. The next step of this study will be to explore the reasons which may contribute towards the student tendency and willingness to participate in the classroom. Above all, this study gives an insight for teachers and students regarding the factors affecting students' participation among school students. This also assist teachers and learners to take into the accounts the way to overcome students' problems such as a fear of participation in the classroom and thus increase motivation.

## **15. ETHICAL APPRVAL**

Authors have sought ethical approval from the Department of Research and External Relation (DRER), Royal University of Bhutan, Samtse college of Education.

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