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## **Exploring the ways to increase students' participation in the class activities: A review article**

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### **Abstract**

Increasing students' participation in the class activities is the most crucial issue in language teaching. Students' active participation is the evidence that shows learning take place and participation is an assessment of a student's performance. In addition, participation of students in the class activities is the response to teacher- center approach, as it is clear that in teacher center method all the activities are done by the teacher and class is based on teachers lecture. However, in student-center class teacher has the role of an instructor not a lecturer and the students do mostly activities. So it is really important to implement students' participation in class activities especially in Afghan context because it is an important aspect of learning, for this reason this literature review aim is to explore the ways that causes students to participate in class activities more and more. The aim of this paper is to answer the question "How to improve students' participation in class activities?" Therefore, these topics are discussed in the following pages with the perspectives of scholars and researchers: definitions of students' participation, factors that affects students' participation, improving students' participation through active learning methods, exploring the ways of increasing participation, importance of students' participation in language classrooms. Thus, this paper contains learners' problems in participation and how to solve these problems and using the best and useful techniques and strategies that help a teacher to carry on the class based on learners' activities successfully. The finding of reviewed articles showed that, Different studies mentioned different reasons for instance, students' self-efficacy if they have high efficacy and confident they will participate more. This is true because students who do not have confident on themselves they fear of making mistakes and losing face in front of others so do not show their participation in class activities. Next, positive traits of instructor also give a motivational effect on students to actively participate in classroom for example, being supportive, friendly or encouraging learners. Of course this is fact that instructor also plays a very crucial role in learners participation. Furthermore, the other factor found that 90% of students felt that they prefer to participate in discussions in small group as compared with in bigger classroom.

**Keywords:** EFL context, class activities, students' participations

### **Introduction**

#### **Background and Definitions of Students Participation**

Tatar 2005<sup>[17]</sup>, states that active participation of students with discussion in the classroom is important for the purpose of achieving effective learning and plays an important role in the success of education and personal development of students in the future. It is clear that education is the only way of peoples' improvement and plays a vital role in each individual's life. So it means that effective process occurs when both teachers and students interact and participate in the learning activities. Participation between lecturers and students is integral in the process of learning. There are several reasons why participation is important in the process of learning. The main and important reason is that students who are active participants, tends to have a better academic achievements, compared with students who are a passive in participation. As a general term, student engagement describes students' motivation and opportunity to practice, a particular skill. Students' engagement is thought to be a product of many variables, including community factors such as socioeconomic status, early learning experiences, aptitude and interest in the subject matter, the school's climate, and the quality of teaching and teacher interaction (Bloom, 1980)<sup>[1]</sup>. As educators, some of these variables are under our control (e.g., quality of teaching and teacher interaction), while others are not immediately under our control (e.g., socioeconomic status). Clearly, as we seek to improve school quality and enhance students' academic achievement, it is fruitful to focus on the variables that we can change rather than to focus on the variables we cannot change. Some of these immediate solutions involve variables related to the teaching activities that teachers choose. Many scholars have defined teaching activities in different

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ways: Klippel (1984)<sup>[11]</sup> stated that activities should help students recognize themselves in the target language, and for that to occur, the activities have to be meaningful and create students' interest, which will improve their performance. In my discipline it is right because we as teachers cannot improve our learners' participation if we do not motivate them by preparing the materials based on learners' need and interest.

Richards and Schmidt (2010) define teaching activities as "any classroom procedure that requires students use and practice their available language resources" (p. 9). In addition, Riddell (2003) describes a group of activities that are useful for fostering language skills, grammar, and vocabulary, as well as the role of the teacher before and during each stage of a given activity. Riddell states before an activity, teachers must identify the most suitable activity based on their class levels, their learners' average ages, class features and time available, and the targeted language aspects. Some suggestions during the activity are as follows: "Be varied in your choice of activities from lesson to lesson. Practice activities need to be carefully selected, and properly set up with instructions and examples. "Practice activities should be as relevant and interesting as possible". Cross (1987 as cited in Kumar, 2007)<sup>[9]</sup> stated when learners actively participate in discussions so learning takes place better than if they only receive the instructions passively. Additionally, Adler (1987 as cited in Colliver, 2000) "all genuine learning is active, not passive". It includes both mind and memory and in this procedure the most important representative is student instead of an instructor. From my point of view how much learners are involved more in activities that much participation increases. Therefore, I can say that using activities in which learners are involved more and more is crucial as; group activities, role plays and many others activities that help a teacher to involve learners. A study by Majid, Yeow, Ying, and Shyong (2010), wanted to explore students' perception of class participation and its benefits, barriers to their participation, and the motivational factors that may improve their class participation found that: majority of the students agreed that class participation was helpful in their overall learning. In addition, according to the findings of this study they stated that 90% of students prefer small classes rather than participating in classes with large number of students. Besides, these students also want their instructors to be friendly and approachable. The major barriers to class participation, identified by the respondents, were: low English language proficiency, cultural barriers, shyness, and lack of confidence.

Previous studies have shown that there are several factors influenced the student's participation in the process of learning. The first factor lies in the personality of the students. Pajares, 1996<sup>[14]</sup> & Schunk, 1995<sup>[15]</sup> stated that "students with high self-efficacy showed better academic achievement and participating more in the classroom". Because self-efficacy trait with displaying more of that curiosity and exploring urge would motivate students to become more active and positive reciprocity. Therefore, learners who have self-high value will also have high level of confidence and will be more active in class discussions. Learners' interest will increase to learn more, ask questions, express their ideas and explain the issues in class. Siti Maziha, Nik Suryani & Melor, 2010<sup>[16]</sup> stated that there are some factors that can cause learners to less participate in class activities such as; low level of students attention in

lectures or fear of making mistakes. In addition, low level of self-confidence, less preparations before coming to class, fear of losing face, fear of being criticized by the instructors and their confusion. Second factor according to Siti Maziha *et al.*, mentioned that both type of learners agreed that teacher has also an important role in class for instance; their positive behavior and way of teaching are two very crucial points that affects students' participation in class activities. Learners want their instructors to be friendly, have information about his/her students and know them very well, do not criticize his/her learners, always be in a good mood and helpful. Therefore, a learner will never feel ashamed or will have fear of participating in class. Furthermore, a skilled instructor will choose those best techniques and methods that will cause and motivate the learners to actively participate without feeling bore.

The influence of classmates or peers can also be a point for participation, as Fassinger (1995)<sup>[6]</sup> stated that "peers as a class trait and categorized them into two, firstly interaction norms (pressure from peers not to speak, the pressure to keep comments brief, peer discouragement of controversial opinions, peers' attention, and peers' lack of respect), and secondly, emotional climate (friendships, students' supports of each other, and students' cooperation)". FGD results for the first active group found that classmates influenced students to be active in classroom. Passive students usually will ask active students to ask questions on their behalf. Active students preferred to sit with their counterparts, so that they can be as active in the class. This study also found that student' perceptions of peer influence on their learning is mostly negative. They do not perceived an active classmates inspire them to learn, but rather just wanted to show off. They considered the domination of active students in talking causing them to feel marginalized and inferior, thus they choose to be passive in the classroom.

The other important factor that affects the students to participate actively in the classroom is the traits and skills of the instructor. Traits that have been shown by instructor, such as supportive, understanding, approachable, friendliness through positive nonverbal behavior, giving smiles and nodded for admitting the answers that are given by students (Siti Maziha, Nik Suryani & Melor, 2010)<sup>[16]</sup>. These positive traits give a motivational effect on students to actively participate in classroom. A study conducted by Siti Maziha, Nik Suryani & Melor (2010)<sup>[16]</sup> which aims to examine the influence of factors that make the participation of undergraduate students in Malaysia found that the traits shown by instructors play an important role in providing incentives for students to participate in class discussions. In an effort to encourage all students to speak up, the instructors can take several steps such as; invite the students to speak up, affirming or valued their contributions matter, give marks/grade for every active participation, be skillful in varieties of teaching techniques, reinforce that it is ok to speak up regardless of what is said to be true or not, be approachable and friendly. All these steps are ways towards creating a conducive classroom environment. Its aims are to transform the classroom into a full integration type of participation whereby majority of the students engaged actively in the classroom activities.

Apart from the positive qualities shown by instructor to encourage active students' participation in classroom discussion, the skills of the instructor may also affect the classroom environment. For example, a study by

Nurzatulshima, Lilia, Kamisah & T Subahan (2009) on three experienced science teachers through observation in classroom, interview with students and analysis of students' documents for the purpose to explore the way teachers managing their students in order to increase their participation in science practical work showed that student participation in science practical class is high when the teacher divided the students into three to five in a group and delegating the work, patrolling and checking the students' progress during practical session, giving out positive rewards and friendly cooperation from lab assistant in monitoring students. The variety of teaching techniques employed by the teachers will encourage the students to be more active, not feel bored or depressed during the class.

Another important factor that influenced the students to speak up in class is the perception of classmates. One important finding from the study by Siti Maziha, *et al.* on undergraduate students in the classroom of a university in Malaysia found that even behavior of classmates with each other plays a very crucial role in students' participation in class. Furthermore, I can say that "students, who are open-minded, give a motivational effect on other students to actively participate in class". Environmental factor such as the size of classroom also affect the motivation of students to engage verbally in classroom. A study conducted by Shaheen, Cheng, Audrey & Lim (2010) aims to explore the perceptions of 172 postgraduate students from three graduate programmes in the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication & information, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore found that 90% of students felt that they prefer to participate in discussions in small group as compared with in bigger classroom. A classroom equipped with proper lights, fan or air conditioning, and other basic facilities will make students to feel comfortable and may encourage them to participate in the learning activities.

Based on these selected past studies and literature, it can be conclusively proven that being active in classroom discussion will make the students to learn more. However, the instructor and the education provider must take into consideration the factors that stimulate or hinders the students to be active learners in the classroom.

### **Improving Students' Participation through Active Learning Methods and to Establish an Effective Classroom**

The main aim of this paper was to improve students' participation in active learning methods especially in Group Discussions, Active student Response and identify challenges that cause students not to participate in class activities. This usual classroom experience is frustrating for students, instructors and higher education institutions that directly or indirectly hinder to achieve quality education and to produce competent citizens (Kelly, 1998) <sup>[10]</sup>. Today, improving in-class experience or enhancing students' participations is vital for attracting and retaining on-campus students, especially in light of increasing competition for vacancy having been graduated. The challenge has been finding the right tools for increasing student engagement in class without placing added burdens on instructors or restricting their teaching content and style. Hence, this research tries to address the following questions: What are the challenges that delay students' participation in group discussions, presentations and demonstrations? What are the possible solutions for challenges which obstruct students not

to take part in assessments actively? How can we implement (interventions) so as to enhance the involvement of students in group discussions, presentations and demonstrations? The findings were that students do not learn much just by sitting in class listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves. During focus group discussions students emphasized that variety of training evaluation methods should be used in each course to ensure that those who felt uncomfortable or unable to learn from one teaching/learning style (such as lectures with overhead transparencies combined with question and answer) would benefit from other styles. Wherever possible, individual learning outcomes might be addressed with multiple methods in the classroom and in the field, including small-group discussions, video viewing and critiquing, written exercises, debates, role-playing activities of many kinds, chalkboard sessions, and practical exercises as per the nature of the course so as to demonstrate competencies. The said focus group discussion results were consistent with the findings of Mueller (2002) <sup>[13]</sup> about maximizing the mind ware of our human resources and the findings of Kumar (2007) <sup>[9]</sup> about Students' classroom participation for improved learning in English language skills course. I also believe that students can learn better when they are involved in class discussions, whenever they ask and answer questions, when they talk and interact with each other, simply to say that learners must be involved mentally search, investigate and interpret. Furthermore, through active methods as group discussions students can retain information for longer because they share and receive different issues regarding one specific issue.

Heward (1994) <sup>[8]</sup> defines Active Student Response (ASR), as occurring "when a student emits a detectable response to ongoing instruction" (p. 286). In other words, ASR occurs when a student raises his hand, says an answer, writes an answer, or engages in some observable response following a teacher-posed question or other instructional cue. Heward contends that ASR is the best way to conceptualize student participation because it provides the most direct and observable measure of students' response to the curriculum. He contrasts ASR with other measures of student participation, such as allocated instructional time and time on-task, which yield less direct and meaningful measures of student performance. Heward details three low-tech strategies to increase ASR: choral responding, response cards, and guided notes. This practice guide will focus on these strategies, along with high-tech strategies, for increasing students' ASR and engagement with the curriculum.

High-ASR teaching techniques are an effective way to improve student engagement and are an important component of evidence-based practice. High-ASR teaching strategies accompany important assumptions: (a) ASR is an alterable variable, (b) teachers can increase ASR in their classrooms, (c) high-ASR strategies facilitate access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities, and (d) schools can create systems to promote high-ASR techniques. Four high-ASR strategies with substantial empirical support are response cards, choral responding, guided notes, and peer tutoring. Response cards involve students simultaneously writing or selecting a response and



then holding up their card on cue from the teacher. Choral responding involves students vocally responding in unison to teacher-presented questions. Guided notes are teacher-prepared handouts that guide a student through a lecture with cues and spaces to write the key facts, concepts, and/or relationships. Peer tutoring is a collection of strategies that employ students as one-on-one teachers of academic content. Research suggests that these techniques not only increase the overall frequency of student responding, but also their correct responding, and in some cases, their accuracy on quizzes and tests, as well as decrease their challenging behavior. Digitally supported strategies, such as student response systems, are also promising techniques to increase student ASR. Key elements to look for in classrooms with high levels of student engagement are classroom organization, whole-class participation, high rates of ASR, teacher feedback, summative evaluation and system support. In addition, a conducive classroom environment involved two-way interaction between students and instructors. This type of classroom environment will stimulate learning and makes both the instructor and students feel satisfied, which eventually leads to effective learning process. I think in class discussion mostly learners have the opportunity to express and share their ideas with others and learn more if they are active to contribute. Effective learning process occurred when both instructors and students interact and actively participate in the learning activities. Nevertheless, as we often hear from the academic world, students still do not actively participate or become passive in the classroom despite encouragements and use of various teaching methods by the instructors to stimulate active participation from the students.

In here some methods are suggested that help to have an effective classroom teaching. According to Chen (2002)<sup>[3]</sup>, the classroom learning problems at present are categorized into two situations. One is the disordered state in classroom atmosphere, where students keep talking, busy with their mobile phones some even playing games. In this situation teachers either repeatedly stop their teaching to maintain the classroom order, or continue their teaching but with continues warning or reminding students not to talk. The other situation is dullness or lack of interest in class, where teachers are actually teaching, but students are quietly doing their business, or they are silent and not answering to responses of teachers, whether the answers are correct is up to the teachers. The dull classroom atmosphere brings the teachers to untold embarrassment and depression. These two situations are seemingly different, but share a common characteristic, as the main component of classroom teaching, the students seldom participate in the classroom teaching activities. The first situation is formal and belongs to dominant disharmony while the second is spiritual dispersal and belongs to false harmonious situation. The English scholar David Hargreaves put for the concept of "false harmony" is his book *Interpersonal Relationship and Education*, a superficially quiet order, but actually it is hard to effectively organize the teaching, forming a "negotiating" situation, where teachers and students make use of their strategies to fight and compromise. This "false harmony" will worsen the teaching effect to a greater extent. In a classroom under the two situations, teachers and students are going on their own, resulting in a continuous drop of teaching effect.

Analysis on Classroom Learning Problems shows that as the main component of learning, why are the students unwilling to participate in classroom learning? Investigations show that there are reasons that are worth attention. The reasons are absence in sense of participation, lack of confidence, influence of traditional teaching methods, influence of teacher's authority, influence of teaching methods, lack of teachers' instruction and a misplacement of teaching relations.

This article also mentions some Theories on Classroom Participation. Chen (2002)<sup>[3]</sup> states that it is necessary to realize that the communication and cooperation between teachers and students are important parts for a successful class. Each student is an important participant in classroom learning and is responsible for the contribution to classroom learning. The students' contribution, to a great extent, stems from their participation in classroom activities and their active response to teachers' questions, which is an important channel for acquiring knowledge. In here I want to mention some of the principles based on the researches that have been done in the area for instance, The seven principles for good university education issued in 1987 in US (United States) include encouraging the contact between teachers and students; encouraging the cooperation between teachers and students; encouraging autonomous learning; prompt response; emphasizing the time for learning; expressing high expectations to students; and respecting different talents and learning styles. Xiao (1999)<sup>[20]</sup> even summarized six aspects for low efficiency teaching: unable to maintain classroom orders; unable to properly treat the students; unable to attain the expected classroom effect; no command of the academic knowledge of the courses taught; no efficiency in transmitting the academic knowledge; and no proper acceptance of other's suggestions. Finally, Chen (2002)<sup>[3]</sup> states that in order to establish an effective classroom teaching we need to; design and achieve the objective of classroom, choose and use classroom teaching strategies, put the students in the most favored learning status, maintain expedite teacher-student communication, have good classroom management models and construct the classroom learning community. For Engaging Students teachers have to create classrooms that improve learning because when students are engaged in class, they learn more. It is vital that teachers create the right classroom climate for learning: raising student expectations; developing a rapport with students; establishing routines; challenging students to participate and take risks. These all affect how much their students engage and learn. Overcoming student disengagement is complicated. What is taught and the way it is taught are crucial. But creating a good learning environment in the classroom is necessary too. Teachers must first know what strategies and approaches work best in the classroom and need to learn how to create the right learning climate, and how to respond best accordingly. There is a clear body of knowledge of what works best to create an effective learning environment. It talks about what approaches and techniques work well, and how teachers can apply them in practice. A very crucial issue for teachers is knowing not only what to do, but learning how and when to do it. According to Marzano *et al.* (2003), the common approaches highlighted are the following: High expectations, strong teacher-student relationships, clarity and structure in instruction, active

learning, encouragement and praises, and consistent corrections and consequences.

These six points are divided into two groups the first four are preventive approaches that attempt to avoid behavior problems by focusing students' attention on their learning. The last two are responsive approaches that typically class will have both behaviors the teacher should encourage and those the teacher should discourage. How the teacher responds is critical to whether problems are resolved quickly or fester and become larger. The teacher's responses should include a combination of approval and disapproval. In addition, teachers need to be aware of the evidence about strategies to improve the learning environment. But they need to know not only what to do, but to learn when and how to do it. The process involved in testing different strategies and assessing what works best for different students is not an easy one. This process contains four key steps: the first step is that teachers must know their students and the specifics of any behavior issues, including passive disengagement. Teachers need to be able to identify the conditions that prompt and reinforce behaviors, so that they can tailor effective and efficient responses. A key issue is considering how the teacher's own behavior might be contributing to the problem. Second, teachers should proactively manage the classroom environment, altering or removing factors that trigger problem behavior. They should revisit and reinforce expectations of student behavior and learning in the classroom. If needed, teachers should rearrange the classroom schedule or learning activities to better meet students' needs, or adapt instruction to individual students to promote their engagement. Third, teachers should model and reinforce good behavior. Teaching and reinforcing new skills can increase appropriate behavior and enhance a positive classroom climate. This includes teaching students socially- and behaviorally-appropriate skills, to replace problem behaviors. Teachers can help students to know how, when, and where to use these new skills. And finally the Fourth one is that teachers should collaborate with colleagues and experts to discuss issues and potential solutions. Taking opportunities to observe teachers who have created successful classrooms is important, for example seeing how something is said to a particular student, or how the behavior of another student is tactically ignored.

In addition, different researches that have been done on the area of student engagement discover curricular and pedagogical ideas educators might successfully use to better engage students in learning. Prior to outlining the specifics of our research. Pedagogy should at its best be about what teachers do that not only help students to learn but actively strengthens their capacity to learn." (David Hargreaves, 2004) [4]. Student engagement has primarily and historically focused upon increasing achievement, positive behaviors, and a sense of belonging in students so they might remain in school. Because the focus was high school completion, research on student engagement targeted students in middle school and high school, where disengagement typically becomes a concern (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009) [18], and student engagement was seen as a way to re-engage or reclaim a minority of predominantly socio-economically disadvantaged students at risk of dropping out of high school. Over time, student engagement strategies were further developed and more broadly implemented as a way to manage classroom behaviors. Recently, student

engagement has been built around the hopeful goal of enhancing all students' abilities to learn how to learn or to become lifelong learners in a knowledge-based society and student engagement has become both a strategic process for learning and an accountability outcome unto itself. When we sift the literature for common strategies to improve student engagement in learning, a rather clear pattern of practices has emerged and certain "best practices" were recommended and repeated. The following topics are focused in this article and will use these to elaborate further: (1) Interaction, (2) Exploration, (3) Relevancy, (4) Multimedia, (5) Instruction, and (6) Authentic assessment.

**Interaction:** Respectful relationships and interaction – both virtual and personal – are shown to improve student engagement. Students today are intensely social and interactive learners. Those surveyed by Willms *et al.* (2009) [18] stated that they want to interact with people both within and beyond the classroom and school environment. Today's learners want to connect and communicate constantly and want an environment to support these connections. Educators from "older" generations might see forms of communication such as computer chatting or texting "as the opposite and the antithesis of contact," but for the Net Gen it "allows interaction with a variety of people and material" (Windham, 2005, p. 5.7) [19]. Dunleavy & Milton (2009) [5] asked students what their ideal school would look like and what learning environment increases engagement. Students listed three criteria that correlate to the concept of interaction: (1) Learn from and with each other and people in their community, (2) Connect with experts and expertise, and (3) have more opportunities for dialogue and conversation. Windham (2005) [19] suggests, "Students should be given the opportunity to interact with faculty and researchers outside the confines of the curriculum and to develop meaningful relationships with them. Facilitating such expanded relationships requires a shift from vertical to horizontal classrooms – no longer the sage on the stage, teachers are learning alongside students, helping them actively construct their learning experiences and knowledge. It is worth noting that students expect and respect challenging, rigorous, disciplined, positive, and safe learning environments. Willms *et al.* (2009) [18], in *Transforming Classrooms through Social, Academic and Intellectual Engagement*, suggest one factor of relationship building that stands above others: "the importance of a positive classroom disciplinary climate. Students who describe their classroom disciplinary climate as positive are one and a half times more likely to report high levels of interest, motivation and enjoyment in learning" (p. 35).

**Exploration:** Today's learners ask for the opportunity to explore and to find solutions and answers for themselves (Windham, 2005) [19] states, just as we want to learn about the Web by clicking our own path through cyberspace, we want to learn about our subjects through exploration. It's not enough to accept the professor's word. We want to be challenged to reach our own conclusions and find our own results. The need to explore is implicit in our desire to learn. As Brown (2000) [2] says, "Learning becomes situated in action; it becomes as much social as cognitive, it is concrete rather than abstract, and it becomes intertwined with judgment and exploration" (p. 6). If the environment in which learners explore is sterile and lacks context, there is a

chance transference of knowledge will not occur beyond the classroom. Such exploration is also tied to learners' requests to move past classrooms: students often ask to take their research and learning into the larger community and into the fields they are studying. Seeing how "a thing works in real life" is more engaging than reading about it in the class.

**Relevancy:** One common prerequisite for engaging learners is "relevancy." Today's learners ask that their learning apply to real-life scenarios whenever possible as opposed to being theoretical and text-based. "The work students undertake also needs to be relevant, meaningful, and authentic – in other words, it needs to be worthy of their time and attention" (Willms, *et al.*, 2009) [18]. Students, themselves, clearly want their work to be intellectually engaging and relevant to their lives. 07) Further he suggests that activities and curricula must have the following factors to engage learners: (1) Relevancy: the topic connects with students' interests and concerns; (2) Responsibility: students have genuine control over what, why, how, and when they organize their learning; and (3) Reality: solving problems or making progress genuinely matters to someone.

**Multimedia & Technology:** When it is simply not possible to move past the classroom to speak with and learn from experts in the field, technology helps students interact globally with people and events. Technology brings learners accessible and relevant subject matter and experts and is a tool for engaged learning. Both students and researchers issued a common call for new tools in the classroom toolbox, expanding beyond standard computer stations and overhead projectors to facilitate deeper research and learning and to build relationships among learners and experts (Brown, 2000) [2]. Barnes *et al.* (2007a) synthesized a list of multimedia tools from the literature; but, these represent only a few of the technological methods that can help students engage their learning, explore, and construct new knowledge. Their list includes Web Quests, blogs, wikis, YouTube, video documentaries, and a variety of other multimedia projects. Such examples show how students might incorporate technology into autonomous learning activities while ensuring time is devoted to information literacy and higher-order, critical thinking skills. Multimedia and technology (cameras, video, and video editing, projectors, Smart Boards, sound recording equipment, animation and gaming software, and the ubiquitous PowerPoint™) have proven helpful in engaging students in learning about subjects, in exploring ways to present their learning, and in helping students control their learning. Brown (2000) [2] calls these rich learning environments learning ecologies. "An ecology is basically an open, complex, adaptive system comprising elements that are dynamic and interdependent.

**Engaging and Challenging Instruction:** Two aspects seem to encourage engagement – engaging pedagogy and engaging curriculum. According to the research, we need to change how we teach as well as what we teach if we are to engage learners – moving from didactic to constructivist pedagogy. Constructivist instruction requires strong respectful relationships and safe learning environments, especially as teacher-student relationships shift from expert-disciple towards peer-based collaborative learning. Several authors note that this shift might require an uncomfortable

change in locus of control over process and, at times, content. Given the freedom and sense of safety to do so, "Students can find material that challenges the faculty member's worldview and expertise; they can uncover stories and research results that the faculty member has never heard about. It can be uncomfortable when the instructor no longer controls the subject matter the students will use" (Windham, 2005, p. 8.16) [19]. Creating an engaging learning environment includes ensuring students feel able and safe to challenge teachers as part of the learning process. It also means students will need to learn interpersonal skills to engage in dialogue respectfully and constructively, as well as learn the subject content. Students want more autonomy to engage in and design their own learning (Glenn, 2000; Carlson, 2005) [7]. They want to learn and utilize their learning preferences and styles and want support to do so. The research call to change our pedagogy is clear, but the ways we can change are still being developed.

**Assessment for Learning:** Assessment for learning (AFL) calls for teachers to use formative assessment practices to monitor student success and engage in regular sharing conversations with students about how they are learning. AFL is noted to increase student engagement and is more about "learning for further development" and less about "marking to standard expectations" or meeting externally dictated accountability measures. I think standardized testing often leads teachers to teach to the test instead of to learner's needs, interests, and abilities. Many researchers recommend alternatives to standardized testing. Student portfolios were the most frequently suggested method for assessment for learning because they actively helped learners explore and articulate what they wanted to learn and how they would demonstrate they learned it. To elaborate, students' engagement Barnes, cite Glenn (2000) [7]: "Net Geners need self-directed learning opportunities, interactive environments, and multiple forms of feedback, and assignment choices that use different resources to create personally meaningful learning experiences" (p. 2).

## Conclusion

The articles, which are used for literature review, were related to the question findings ways to explore students' participation in class activities. Different studies mentioned different reasons for instance, students' self-efficacy if they have high efficacy and confident they will participate more. I agree because students who do not have confident on themselves they fear of making mistakes and losing face in front of others so do not show their participation in class activities. Next, positive traits of instructor also give a motivational effect on students to actively participate in classroom for example, being supportive, friendly or encouraging learners. Of course this is fact that instructor also plays a very crucial role in learners participation. Furthermore, the other factor found that 90% of students felt that they prefer to participate in discussions in small group as compared with in bigger classroom. A classroom equipped with proper lights, fan or air conditioning, and other basic facilities will make students to participate more, unfortunately, it is very difficult in Afghanistan because the size of the class is large and there are more than 40 students in the class. So sometimes, it is very difficult for instructors to involve all the learners in class activities. My only suggestion in this case is decrease number of students in

classes if not possible than provide activities that all the learners can take part for instance group works or discussions. To elaborate I want to say that students' participation shows that learning has taken place. In addition, students' active participation can be a response to teacher-centered classes or teacher talk. Therefore, participation of students is one of the very crucial issues nowadays in teaching and learning especially in afghan context where students have different problems such as; low confidence especially in learning English as a foreign language, class size, and interaction outside of the class is not possible, less facilities and many other reasons.

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