


Chapter 3

Active Learning Techniques as Pedagogical Interventions to Enhance Academic Performance in Large Classrooms: A Case of Selected State Universities in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the potential of active learning techniques as transformative pedagogical interventions to address learning challenges and enhance educational outcomes. The chapter begins by contextualizing the challenges of large classrooms that often hinder meaningful interaction and personalized feedback. It then examines the theoretical underpinnings of active learning, drawing from constructivist theory. Through an analysis of various active learning techniques, the chapter demonstrates how these methods can be adapted to large classroom environments. The chapter also addresses the role of technology in scaling active learning in large classes. However, the research also uncovers notable challenges in implementing these interventions. Despite these challenges, the chapter argues that integrating active learning in large classrooms is both feasible and beneficial with appropriate

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institutional support. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining classroom observations, surveys, and interviews with both students and lecturers in state universities in Zimbabwe. Data is analyzed thematically.

INTRODUCTION

The quest for inclusive education demands pedagogical practises that address varied student needs, especially in large classroom environments. Large classrooms are common in many educational institutions, particularly in resource-constrained settings (Biggs 2003). While they increase access to education for more students, they also pose substantial barriers to effective teaching and learning. As a result, academic performance in big classrooms suffers, especially among kids who require additional attention (Rocca 2010). These issues include diminished individual attention, low student engagement, and logistical constraints that prevent tailored feedback from being delivered (Cooper 2018).

State universities in Zimbabwe have the traditional issues of big class sizes and limited resources. This chapter investigates the deployment of active learning strategies in Zimbabwe's state universities, evaluating their usefulness in big classes and their role in establishing an inclusive curriculum.

UNDERSTANDING ACTIVE LEARNING

Active learning is a pedagogical approach that emphasizes the active engagement of students in the learning process, rather than their passive reception of information. First conceptualized by Bonwell and Eison (1991), it encompasses instructional strategies that require students to participate in activities that involve doing and thinking critically about what they are doing. This method promotes a reciprocal relationship between action and reflection, facilitating deeper cognitive processing and knowledge construction.

Rather than relying solely on traditional lecture-based instruction, active learning incorporates techniques such as group discussions, problem-solving exercises, case analyses, collaborative projects, and reflective writing. These methods encourage learners to apply concepts, analyse information, and engage in higher-order thinking. As noted by Prince (2004), active learning involves any instructional method that requires students to engage meaningfully with content, fostering autonomy and deeper understanding.

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