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From Silence to Spotlight: Energizing classrooms with parliamentary debates

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Abstract

In the evolving technological era, traditional teaching methods often limit student engagement and comprehension. Educators face challenges like declining attention and participation in teacher-centered classrooms. This study examines mini-parliamentary debates to boost engagement and comprehension among students. Using open-ended questionnaires and Padlet reflections, it gathers student perspectives and course experiences. Findings show that debates significantly enhance learning outcomes, increasing participation and motivation. Students value this approach, which fosters critical thinking and active involvement. The study emphasizes the need for continuous pedagogical refinement to address evolving educational challenges and improve teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: Classroom activities; Parliamentary Debates; Student Engagement; Student Participation

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1.0 Introduction

Higher education institutions are undergoing significant transformations, prompting a reassessment of teaching strategies. This shift highlights flexibility, advanced technology integration, and a student-centered approach, driven by technological advancements, changing student expectations, the COVID-19 pandemic, and evolving workforce needs (OECD, 2023). These changes require educators to move away from traditional pedagogies and adapt to modern methods suited to today's educational environment (Garrison, 2017). Students, raised in a digitalized world, have distinct learning needs influenced by technology (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Therefore, educators play a crucial role in fostering student engagement and motivation in this tech-driven era. Effective teaching promotes positive learning habits, provides relevant content, and supports meaningful communication (Hattie, Hodis, & Kang, 2020). Emotional, cognitive, and situational factors significantly impact students' engagement in learning. Additionally, students' beliefs, contextual factors, and interpretations of success and failure shape their learning process, with cultural backgrounds influencing their classroom roles and achievement expectations.

Student performance is influenced by personal traits, social incentives, cognitive abilities, and perceived task value (Feldman & Zimbardo, 2023). Attributes like self-confidence and perceived competence are essential for academic success, and students with high self-efficacy tend to adopt effective learning strategies and create supportive environments (OECD, 2023). Thus, educators should address questions on improving student comprehension and fostering collaboration to create a supportive classroom environment (Anderson & Garrison, 2022).

Traditional teacher-centered methods have limitations, leading to reduced student engagement and understanding. Feedback shows that such methods often fail to adequately address complex concepts, with students preferring interactive, activity-based learning (Hattie et al., 2020). This underscores the need for educators to refine teaching practices to improve student outcomes. Adopting student-centered strategies and continuously evolving teaching methods is vital for preparing students for future challenges (Garrison, 2017). Thus, this study focuses on exploring interactive classroom activities, such as mini-parliament debates, to enhance student participation and understanding.

1.1 Research Questions

Building on the previously highlighted issues, this study seeks to address the following questions:
  a) What factors influence students' motivation to participate in class?
  b) What challenges do students experience when participating in class activities?
  c) How can mini-parliamentary debates effectively enhance student engagement and participation?

1.2 Research Objectives

Based on the research questions above, the objectives of the research are as follows:
  a) To identify the key factors influencing students' motivation to participate in class activities.
  b) To explore students' challenges in engaging with class activities and discussions.
  c) To examine the effectiveness of mini-parliamentary debates as a strategy to improve student engagement and active participation in the classroom.

2.0 Literature Review

Literature review plays a crucial role in research. In this section, key theoretical elements relevant to the study are explored, including Constructivism Learning Theory, Sociocultural Motivation Theory, Astin's Theory of Student Involvement, and research on the Mini Parliament Debate Intervention.

2.1 Constructivism Learning Theory

Vygotsky (1978) argued that learners do not simply assimilate or accommodate new information in isolation. Instead, they actively engage with other peers, mentors, or members of their community to collaborate and participate in shared activities. This interaction fosters not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the development of a learner's identity within a "community of knowledge." In such a community, individuals contribute to and draw from collective experiences and shared understanding, enabling them to grow intellectually and socially.

Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Theory emphasizes that learning is an active, social process where knowledge is constructed through meaningful interactions within cultural and historical contexts. He posited that cognitive processes like thinking and problem-solving originate socially before being internalized. Rather than acquiring information in isolation, learners engage with peers, mentors, and communities, fostering both intellectual growth and identity development within a "community of knowledge."

A central concept is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the gap between independent achievement and what can be accomplished with guidance from more knowledgeable others. Scaffolding within the ZPD supports learners until they gain skills for independent mastery, promoting both specific and broader competencies.

Vygotsky highlighted the role of societal tools, norms, and values in shaping learning. Collaborative activities, embedded in cultural contexts, enable learners to actively construct knowledge while developing socially and intellectually. His theory underscores that education should prioritize creating collaborative, context-rich environments where learners contribute to and draw from shared experiences. By doing so, they become integral members of their learning communities, capable of navigating and applying knowledge within their cultural framework.

2.2 Sociocultural Motivation Theory

Maintaining a consistently high level of motivation is essential for effective teaching and learning (TnL). For students to thrive, they must be cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally engaged, actively participating in class activities. Motivation typically arises from self-

awareness or individual consciousness, which drives, directs, and sustains behavior. Factors influencing self-awareness include basic desires, needs, incentives, fears, goals, social pressures, self-confidence, interests, curiosity, beliefs, values, and expectations. Motivation can be categorized into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in activities for their inherent satisfaction, while extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards or punishments. While debates exist regarding these forms of motivation, intrinsically motivated students find activities naturally fulfilling without external incentives. Nevertheless, extrinsic motivation can be valuable, offering incentives to explore new areas, initiate actions, or persevere in tasks. Educators must nurture intrinsic motivation while effectively leveraging extrinsic motivation by identifying key motivational factors. Once these factors are recognized, educators can apply appropriate motivational strategies, including behavioral, humanistic, cognitive, social-cognitive, and sociocultural approaches.

This study emphasizes the sociocultural motivational approach, developed by Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky, in contrast to other motivational frameworks. The sociocultural approach highlights the significant impact of societal and cultural factors, such as language, art, social norms, and structures, on the learning process and cognitive development. This approach is inherently intrinsic, as it encourages active participation in learning communities while preserving individual identity through collaborative group activities. Given its focus on social interaction and community engagement, the sociocultural approach aligns closely with this study's objective of enhancing student motivation.

2.3 Astin Theory of Student Involvement

The Astin Theory of Student Involvement, proposed by Alexander Astin, underscores the importance of student engagement in fostering academic success and personal development. The theory asserts that students' intellectual growth and overall progress depend on their active participation in both academic and extracurricular activities. Astin categorizes involvement into two dimensions: input and output. Input includes students' personal characteristics, demographics, and prior knowledge, while output encompasses academic achievements and personal growth resulting from engagement.

The theory is built on five principles:

a) Involvement requires psychological and physical energy investment.

b) Engagement levels vary among students and evolve over time.

c) Involvement is measurable both qualitatively and quantitatively.

d) Development correlates with the quality and quantity of engagement.

e) Academic success is directly linked to involvement levels.

Astin highlights the role of the learning environment in promoting engagement, particularly through faculty-student relationships, peer collaboration, and extracurricular participation. These interactions enhance academic performance, personal growth, and social integration. Supporting this, studies by Akbari et al. (2016) and Bond et al. (2020) found that active participation in campus activities, collaborative learning, and strong interpersonal skills correlate with higher academic achievement and personal development.

The theory also stresses the need for institutional support, advocating for inclusive, nurturing environments that encourage student success. By fostering meaningful interactions, promoting diversity, and creating supportive educational settings, Astin's framework empowers students to achieve academic excellence, personal fulfillment, and social well-being.

2.4 Mini Parliament Debate Intervention

Mini-parliament debates involve structured discussions where participants argue for or against a specific motion or topic, fostering the development of critical thinking and the ability to construct well-reasoned arguments (Zare & Othman, 2015). Modeled on parliamentary systems used in national legislatures, these debates follow set rules and procedures, providing a formal yet interactive platform for learning.

Participation in parliamentary debates requires students to engage deeply with complex issues, analyze diverse viewpoints, and explore multiple dimensions of the topic (Oros, 2007). To prepare, students must conduct thorough research, gather relevant data, and synthesize their findings into clear, rational arguments. This process not only enhances their understanding of the subject matter but also sharpens their research and analytical skills. Additionally, debates help refine essential communication skills, such as organizing ideas logically, articulating thoughts clearly, and presenting arguments persuasively (Oros, 2007).

Parliamentary debates also promote active involvement by assigning specific roles, such as speakers, moderators, or judges, ensuring that every student participates meaningfully in the learning process (Nchac, 2023). The interactive nature of debates encourages students to engage with their peers, exchange ideas, challenge perspectives, and collaborate effectively. By discussing real-world issues and current events, debates make classroom learning more relevant and engaging (Heywood, 2008). This connection

to practical applications not only enhances comprehension but also motivates students to take an active interest in the subject matter (Oros, 2007).

Incorporating parliamentary debates into classroom dynamics creates a vibrant learning environment that fosters critical thinking, effective communication, and active engagement (Palczewski & Rowland, 2007). Beyond improving subject knowledge, this approach equips students with transferable skills valuable in academic, professional, and civic contexts (Zare & Othman, 2015). By combining structured discourse with collaborative learning, mini-parliament debates enrich the educational experience and prepare students for real-world challenges.

3.0 Methodology
Meeting the predetermined research objectives requires employing a suitable methodology. As a result, this study utilized two approaches to address the research question. Firstly, an open-ended questionnaire method via Google Forms was employed to investigate students' perceptions regarding the mini parliament debate class activities, which aimed to enhance their comprehension and participation in class. Additionally, Padlet was utilized to elicit student reflections regarding the overall course assessment and activities.

3.1 Data Collection Procedures and Analysis
To achieve comprehensive data saturation among all respondents, this study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection. A mixed-method approach was utilized, incorporating tools such as Google Forms and Padlet. The research sample consisted of 27 students from the Public Policy course. Participants spent approximately 10 to 15 minutes completing the questionnaire, took part in a 1 hour and 30-minute Mini-Parliament Debate session, and allocated an additional 10 to 15 minutes using Padlet for reflection activities. The gathered data was analyzed through descriptive and thematic analysis techniques. The thematic analysis process of this study referred to Braun and Clarke (2006). This process includes six steps which include familiarization (review of the data obtained), coding identifying text, generating theme, reviewing theme, defining and naming theme, and writing up the results.

4.0 Findings and Discussions
The findings discuss quantitative data (Google Forms) and descriptive analysis for the data analysis of the collected data in this section. Overall, a total of 27 students were enrolled in one course. The demographic details of the students are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic details of students

Demographic Profile		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	9	33.3
	Female	18	66.7
Semester	≥ 3	20	74
	≤ 3	7	26
College	College A	14	51.8
	College B	6	22.2
	College C	4	14.8
	College D	2	7.4
	College E	1	3.7
Course Status	Major	15	55.6
	Minor	12	44.4

(Source: Ma'dan, M, Sohaimi, N. S. & Johar, A., 2024)

From the demographic data in Table 1, all respondents were between two and four semesters. The students have completed all activities and assessments challenging their understanding of the course, so several responses have been collected accordingly.

4.1 Descriptive analysis
Table 2 provides a summary of student's perspectives on the course. The first inquiry focuses on students' understanding of the course before engaging with related subjects. Most students demonstrate a moderate understanding of the material, with some expressing satisfactory comprehension. In terms of their views on applying the course's theoretical topics taught using traditional methods, the majority report satisfaction with this approach.

Table 2. Students view regarding the understanding of the traditional method of delivery

Students View	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Moderate	Satisfied	Very satisfied

View 1	0	2	9	8	8
	(0%)	*(7.4%)*	*(33.3%)*	*(29.6%)*	*(29.6%)*
View 2	0	0	6	10	11
	(0%)	*(0%)*	*(22.2%)*	*(37%)*	*(40.7%)*

4.2 Thematic Analysis from Padlet

For this data collection process, three students were selected to provide the necessary information to evaluate whether the research questions could be effectively addressed. The study aims to determine whether the students' responses to the posed questions align or diverge. Participants were asked three questions about their experiences in the related course, with their responses collected via Padlet. A link containing the three course-related questions was shared with them, and all three students successfully provided their feedback. Despite potentially differing in their learning perspectives, their responses were effectively captured. Table 3 below summarizes key excerpts from the Padlet responses.

Table 3. Excerpts data from the Padlet

Questions	Student A	Student B	Student C
Method of delivery What are your thoughts on the instructor's teaching approach?	*".... The traditional method used is effective, but some topics require more detailed explanation...."*	*".... I have enjoyed the lectures well, but it takes time to understand on concept..."*	*"Activities in class will improve student understanding in addition to lecturer-based delivery..."*
Assessment Did you encounter any challenges while collaborating in a team for assessments?	*"....The members of my group worked together to complete the assignment.."*	*"...Working with others was difficult at first, but eventually, I was able to work well with the team."*	*"....difficult due to lack of collaborative support and public speaking nerves..."*
Class activities Which class activities have been most effective in improving your understanding of the course?	*"....Class activities are highly engaging and provide opportunities for exchanging opinions...."*	*".... I have thoroughly enjoyed participating in every class activity with my classmates..."*	*"The mini-parliament debates have been the most impactful aspect of my course learning.."*

This study aimed to gather students' perspectives on a course using Padlet to allow them to articulate their views, evaluate outcomes, and highlight effective teaching strategies. Students' feedback was instrumental in identifying challenges and refining approaches to enhance learning. For example, some students initially perceived teamwork as challenging, but they noted that it became manageable with effort and time. One student highlighted that Mini Parliament debates were particularly effective in fostering understanding of course topics, as they encouraged interaction during class discussions. Overall, students reflected positively, expressing satisfaction with their broadened knowledge and appreciation for the course's insights.

The results of this study have provided insights into various aspects that address the research questions. First, the study identified several internal motivational factors that drive students to engage more actively in classroom teaching and learning. Furthermore, while exploring the challenges faced during the activities, it was found that students initially struggled with collaboration in group tasks. However, this challenge was overcome as they found the mini-parliamentary debate activity engaging, which boosted their enthusiasm and encouraged greater participation in classroom activities.

Findings suggest that several factors, including personal characteristics, social motivation, cognitive traits, perceived task value, and cost-benefit assessments influence student achievement. Personal characteristics like autonomy, self-belief, and self-confidence significantly impact learning outcomes. Students who believe in their ability to succeed are more likely to engage in goal setting, effective learning strategies, and progress tracking. Social motivation of how students interact with peers and mentors plays a crucial role in their participation in learning activities. Similarly, cognitive motivation, driven by intrinsic enjoyment or interest, fosters deeper engagement in learning.

Goal setting was identified as crucial for maintaining focus and directing efforts. The perception of effort versus the benefits also heavily influenced motivation. Educators can enhance education quality by understanding students' interests and motivations, creating engaging lessons, and fostering intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation was found to be key in sustaining student engagement and enjoyment.

Group work activities significantly improved students' understanding of course material. Although students were initially hesitant about collaboration, participation in intervention activities encouraged responsibility and performance in group settings. Research supports the effectiveness of group work in promoting knowledge acquisition and academic performance (Gillies, 2003; Johnson &

Johnson, 2004; Baines et al., 2007). Group dynamics, often termed "authentic group work," leverage collective contributions to achieve shared goals, supporting both individual and collaborative learning.

Mini Parliament debates stood out as an effective intervention, motivating students to participate and simplifying complex topics. This led to improved performance in subsequent assessments. Well-designed learning materials and engaging activities helped students overcome challenges and fostered their intrinsic drive to succeed.

This study highlights that addressing motivational factors and implementing collaborative, engaging teaching methods can significantly enhance student outcomes. Educators can boost students' participation, dedication, and overall academic success by creating supportive, interactive environments.

5.0 Conclusions and Future Recommendations

In conclusion, educators must adopt effective teaching strategies to enhance both instructional quality and student outcomes. Traditional methods alone are insufficient, and interventions that create a supportive classroom environment are essential. These should include group activities, technology integration, and innovative approaches that better engage students and support their development. This study provides a framework for educators to design interventions aimed at improving teaching and learning.

The study's findings indicate that teaching methods, a positive classroom atmosphere, well-designed assignments, and additional activities influence student motivation and engagement. However, the study has limitations, such as a small sample size of 27 students and a focus on a single course, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the study mainly explored short-term engagement and did not examine long-term effects on student motivation and achievement.

The study contributes to the field by highlighting the importance of diverse teaching strategies for fostering student engagement. It emphasizes the need for a variety of approaches to support learning. Future research could focus on the long-term impact of these interventions, their effectiveness across various subjects and student populations, and the influence of cultural or contextual factors on student engagement and motivation.

Acknowledgments

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study contributes to the field of higher education by addressing the challenges of adapting teaching methods to meet the demands of a dynamic, technology-driven educational environment. It emphasizes the limitations of traditional teacher-centered approaches and explores innovative, student-centered strategies, such as the Mini Parliament Debate intervention, to foster engagement, collaboration, and deeper comprehension.

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Annex 1

Feedback from students on Mini Parliament Debate Activities through Padlet

c. I found that mini-parliament was the best way to help us understand what we were learning in this class. We can work as a team, say what we think, and boost our self-esteem by sharing our ideas and hearing what other people think and understand. As we tend to talk in 2 ways communication.

d. I think we should keep doing mini-parliaments for every topic. Even more so with the harder ones. Dr. also able to checks on us to see if we understand the topics or not. And I'd like to suggest that before Dr. cover on teaching us about a new topic, students could make a mind map to get a quick idea of what the subject is about.

c. To be honest all the activities that done by our lecturer been most effective in improving my understanding of this subject. for example, debate, discussion in groups while in OL write the reviews and many more. in my opinion i think activities like parliament debates are one of the most benefiel activity to the public policy students. this is because they could improve their communication skills and gain their brave to share their ideas. this activity also teaches us to working together to discuss about the policies and help to increase our understanding in this subject.

- The activity class that helped me a lot in understanding topic 4 was the mini parliament. Where each group is given a theory to defend and debate why those theories are the best theories applied in Malaysia as a policy maker. In the mini-parliament, I was able to find out about the advantages and disadvantages of the theories that were debated by my group and other groups.