

Active Learning through Buzz Group Discussions: Fostering Engagement and Skill Development in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the use of buzz group discussions among university students in a classroom-based pedagogical study to boost their involvement and participation in lectures, while simultaneously improving their soft skills as independent learners. Conventional lectures tend to reduce students to passive listening, where they are forced to take notes while content is presented to them. This inactivity not only diminishes their involvement but also restricts the development of essential skills such as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Buzz group discussions provide an engaging option. In buzz group discussions, students form pairs or small groups to talk about a question or topic and must present their findings with justifications. These groups enable students to challenge their understanding, inquire, and feel inspired about the course content. The buzz group technique is thus more effective in teaching than conventional methods, as it actively involves students in discussion and fosters healthy group interaction, ultimately sharpening their communicative abilities. It's particularly effective in larger classes, encourages participation from shy students, and allows for more varied input and responses within a scheduled time frame. This study investigates how buzz group discussions facilitate active learning and the development of soft skills among university students. The results indicate a favorable view of this innovative group discussion approach. Engaging in discussions within small groups is very advantageous. Students realize the improvement in their soft skills, such as communication and teamwork. Group discussion provides them with the opportunity to learn materials actively, creatively, and collaboratively with their peers, developing confidence in expressing their thoughts. This modification of the teaching method makes their learning more dynamic and interactive, which results in better development of their skills.

Keywords: Buzz group discussion, active learning, skill development, higher education, student engagement

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning are dynamic processes influenced by the constantly changing field of education. As John Dewey famously stated, "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself." This view emphasizes that teaching should be seen as more than just conveying knowledge; it should be an engaging and enriching experience that encourages critical thinking and ongoing learning. In the modern classroom, effective teaching strategies will be crucial in creating involvement, participation, and depth in learning.

Active learning is a process that involves the student interactively in education through discussions, solving problems, and hands-on activities, thereby giving an in-depth insight into the concepts and helping in the development of critical thinking. It makes learning active as the construction and application of knowledge is done by the students themselves. Passive learning involves the reception of knowledge by students through lectures, reading, or listening to a presentation without being interactive. This, in return, builds a superficial understanding of the subject matter. Although passive learning is very efficient in delivering basic content, it lacks the depth and application opportunities that are part of active learning strategies.

Normally, lectures are taught in a way that students would listen most of the time and take notes. In this kind of teaching, lecturers are the main source of everything, leaving no room for interaction or participation by the students themselves. As a result, students were less engaged and did not have as many opportunities to discuss

ideas or work collaboratively. They didn't ask questions, share their ideas, or engage in meaningful discussions. Students were not developing important soft skills in critical thinking, effective communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.

In practice, various methods have been tried to increase student engagement, such as incorporating multimedia presentations and posing questions during lectures. While these methods have had some positive impact, we still find that a significant portion of students remain passive and uninvolved. Students learn more effectively when they actively participate and engage with their peers. Research also supports the effectiveness of such collaborative learning methods. For example, the practical insights from Dan Boudreau (Boudreau, 2018) on the use of Buzz Groups in training, further reinforce the potential benefits of this approach. Boudreau emphasizes that group discussions can enhance students' active participation, allowing them to learn from one another and develop critical soft skills.

In a buzz group discussion, students break into pairs or small groups to discuss a question or a topic of relevance for one or two minutes every fifteen minutes. These little, focused discussions on reviewing material previously covered, or preparing students for the next section, serve to sustain attention and promote participation. The buzz groups also enable students to test their knowledge, ask questions, and become motivated about the lecture material (Gibbs & Habeshaw, 2011).

The buzz group technique is thus more effective in teaching than the conventional methods, as it actively involves students in discussion and provides for healthy interaction with the group, and the students improve their communicative skills. This technique works well in larger classes, gets participation from shy students, and allows for more varied input and responses within a scheduled time frame (Helmy, Jufri, & Jufri, 2019). We have found that this supports the efforts to include group activities in our teaching. Therefore, the buzz group discussions strategy employed by dividing them into groups, providing different topics for discussion, and requiring them to present the outcome of their discussions with explanations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contemporary study indicates that the use of discussions that happen in the buzzing groups can always be best approached as a low-threshold active learning technique with the potential to foster participation. Unlike being used independently or primarily as an innovative education technique, the buzz groups have mostly been conceptualized as participation facilitators.

(Helmy, Jufri, & Jufri, 2019) had conducted an on-site experimental study to investigate the impact of the Buzz Group Technique on the reading comprehension of grade 7 students in an Indonesian junior high school. As an on-site experimental quantitative design, the total sample consisted of 154 students, who were then randomly divided into cluster random samples through a procedure called cluster random sampling. The respondents in the experimental group were delivered on reading comprehension using the Buzz Group Technique, while those in the control group received conventional instruction. Data were obtained from a reading comprehension test validated for its effectiveness and then analyzed using the independent-samples t-test. The results revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, with the experimental group achieving a higher mean score compared to the control group, indicating that the Buzz Group Technique was significantly more effective in enhancing students' reading comprehension. The present study also highlighted that small-group discussions encourage active participation, increase student engagement, and foster a better comprehension of reading texts, especially among less confident learners.

A peer-reviewed interventional study published in 2024 (Gangwar, Ramakant, Venkatesh, Singh, & Singh, 2024) assessed the comparative efficacy of "buzz session" teaching versus conventional didactic teaching in a crossover study involving 100 first-year medical students. While both methods showed comparable immediate knowledge acquisition, students scored better on knowledge retained 15 days after a buzz session than after a conventional teaching session. Also, students' perceptions were very positive, with 96.3% reporting enhanced confidence and 94.8% reporting enhanced communication abilities, prompting 94.8% to demand additional "buzz session" teaching exercises in medical schooling. This study concludes that since "buzz session" teaching breaks large teaching groups into clusters for solving particular problems, it generates a "livelier"

learning experience that encourages critical thinking and fills a particular gap in preclinical medical teaching that has hitherto remained unattended.

In this paper (Lubis, Wardani, & Harahap, 2023) the authors conceptually and literature-analyze the Buzz Group approach to establish whether it proves effective in facilitating student cooperation and mastering language. They define the method as a technique of small-group discussion, where usually 3 to 4 students are assigned to solve a problem or produce ideas within a strictly limited time. The researchers synthesized multiple recent studies to show how the method effectively improved performance in all of the four language skills: reading, by establishing positive interdependence; speaking, by raising average post-test scores higher than those from traditional memorization; writing, by helping students to express and collect ideas for analytical texts; and listening, by outperforming standard lecturing methods for high self-esteem learners. The authors go further to give a clear indication of the pedagogical procedures for implementation, with an emphasis on the teacher's role in monitoring the engagement and time constraint issues that are likely to activate creative and critical thinking.

This study (Kusumaningsih & Suryani, 2021) aimed to determine the efficiency of the buzz group discussion technique in improving the cooperation ability of fifth-grade elementary school students using quasi-experiments with a non-equivalent control group design. Moreover, this study, carried out at SD Negeri Muncar 01 and 02, used observation, tests, and documentation to find out differences between discussions in small groups consisting of 3 to 4 people using the buzz group technique and large group discussions. The findings have proved that there was a significant increase in cooperation among students in the experimental class, with "Very Good" levels (mean score 37.4), while those in the control class only reached "Enough" levels (mean score 21.5). Finally, statistical tests like the Independent Samples T-test and Paired Samples T-test proved that using the buzz group technique is an efficient way to create an ideal environment for enhanced conceptual mastery prevention due to embarrassment in class participation and domination by a few, common in large group discussions.

This study (Afifah, 2019) aimed to explore the effectiveness of the buzz group technique in enhancing the reading comprehension level of eighth-grade students at SMP Sentosa Bakti Baturaja. Comparing the experimental group, which used the buzz group technique, to the control group showed that the technique significantly enhances student participation and performance. The study showed a marked increase in the average scores, increasing from 71 to 84.6. The statistical test confirmed the findings to be more effective than the conventional way of handling the subject. Finally, the study concludes that the buzz group technique is a very effective approach to achieve total participation, critical thinking, and a deeper level of comprehension through the rapid exchange of ideas between the students.

The study (Ogunyebi, 2025) examined the motivational outcome of the buzz group strategy on the performance level of undergraduate students in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Using a quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test, control group design with a sample group consisting of 120 participants, the study used a specially crafted Science Education Performance Test to collect the data. The findings clearly showed a significant difference between the post-test performance of participants exposed to the buzz group strategy approach in relation to the conventional approach, but not between the retention level of the conventional group. The study therefore recommends that seminars be used to train lecturers in the universities to properly employ the approach to improve the performance of the students.

METHODOLOGY

The approach was applied within this study to examine the effect of buzz group discussions on students' engagement and the development of their soft skills. The approach was aimed at breaking the traditional style of passive lectures and creating a conducive learning setting ideal for the creative field.

A. Participants

The study included only third-year students in the Department of Languages and Communication Studies. All respondents in this study were students enrolled in the Desktop Publishing course during the first semester.

This cohort of students numbered about 110. Such a large class provided a good environment in which to try out the buzz group method as an efficient way of sustaining participation and eliciting responses from shy students who would otherwise remain mute in a whole-class lecture.

B. Buzz Group Intervention

Being the design-based field, that Desktop Publishing is, involving the application of creative knowledge, the buzz group technique was used to promote innovative as well as effective discussion. These steps were followed in the buzz group technique:

- **Organizing the Participants:** The 110 participants were formed into buzz groups with a composition of 5 to 6 members.
- **Topic Assignment:** A specific topic was presented to each group and was designed to provoke discussion.
- **Collaborative Discussion:** The students are encouraged to discuss the subject within their groups, giving them a chance to question their knowledge and learn more about the subject.
- **Documentation:** The groups were tasked with documenting important points on a sheet during the discussion, which included reasons for their conclusions.
- **Mandatory Participation:** To improve communication skills, a mandatory participation requirement was implemented in which each member of the team had to take an active part in this discussion.
- **Direct Observation:** The teacher performed direct observation exercises during the session. The main focus of the direct observation exercises was on levels of participation as well as the health of the group.
- **Submission and Feedback:** Groups handed in the written sheet at the end of the session, while students provided feedback for the learning experience.

C. Data Collection and Evaluation

The assessment of the teaching modification involved qualitative and quantitative data sources.

Direct Observation: The engagement levels and the students' ability to assert their thoughts confidently during the group process were observed during the activity.

Quantitative Feedback Survey: A structured survey was administered to the participants to measure their perceptions of the activity. The survey evaluated four key areas, such as activity perception, soft skill development, peer learning and method sustainability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the data collected from the surveys and observations will be examined to evaluate the impact of the buzz group activities on the learning and engagement of students during a traditional lecture.

Results

The results obtained from this exploratory classroom-based investigation clearly show a very positive response to implementing buzz group discussion activities on the Desktop Publishing course. Students were able to demonstrate a marked shift from passive to active learning, thereby improving their levels of necessary soft skill development. The data has been obtained from a total of 92 students.

Figure 1 shows the students' general perception of the buzz group technique as a learning tool. Data indicates that nearly half of the participants (48.9%) found the activity "Interesting," while an additional 42.4% categorized it as "Effective". Combined, over 91% of the cohort viewed the transition away from conventional lectures as a positive change. This indicates a strong perception that the buzz group discussions as a learning activity are a positive measure. A major portion of the group characterised the activity as interesting or effective, indicating that the technique effectively broke the lecture routine and engaged the students.

How did you find the buzz group activity?

92 responses

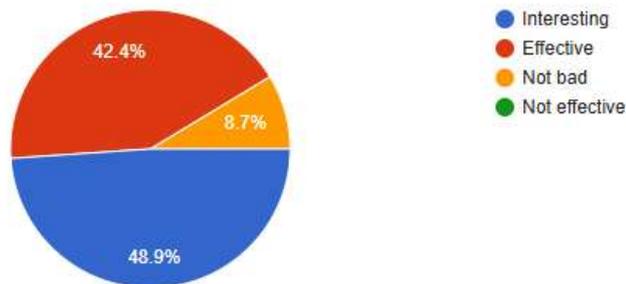


Figure 1: Students' general perception of the buzz group activity

One of the major aims of the current investigation was to evaluate whether buzz groups can aid in improving essential soft skills, including communication skills, teamwork, and leadership. However, the outcome turned out to be remarkable, with a tremendous response rate of 91.3%, in which the students proudly asserted that they were able to develop these skills in the group settings. But a minute number of students (8.7%) were unsure about this, while none of them found that these skills were not developed in total, which is shown in Figure 2. Although these results were based on self-reporting rather than validated measures, such results imply the possibility of group or interpersonal-collaborative practice occasions within the domain of structured small groups of interactions.

Were you able to improve your soft skills when working as a group?

92 responses

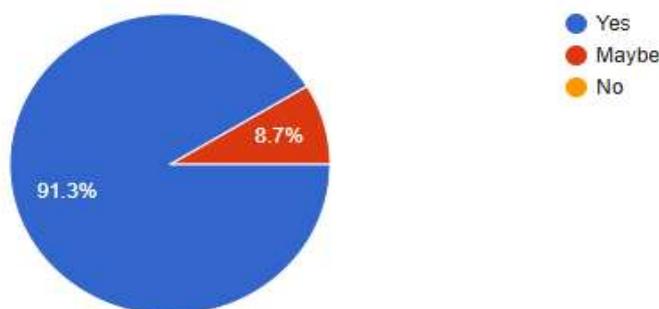


Figure 2: Impact on soft skill development

The nature of the Desktop Publishing course, which focuses on applying creative knowledge, makes peer interaction particularly valuable. According to Figure 3, 90.2% of students felt they were able to learn effectively from their peers during the discussions. This high percentage reflects the "dynamic and interactive" environment created by the buzz group technique, which allowed students to pool their creative ideas and offer varied input within a scheduled timeframe. This collaborative process ensured that the vast majority of students moved beyond passive reception to active, creative learning. Classroom observations supported this perception, which showed the sharing of ideas, solving problems, and providing justifications among the groups.

Were you able to learn from others when doing group discussion?

92 responses

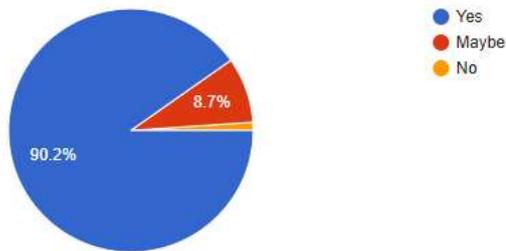


Figure 3: Peer learning and collaboration

The final evaluation focused on the long-term viability of this teaching method from the students' perspective, which is indicated in Figure 4. An overwhelming 95.7% of respondents indicated that they would like to continue using buzz group discussions as a method of learning. This suggests that the students found the method significantly more advantageous than traditional pedagogical approaches. The strong desire for continued use highlights the success of the intervention in fostering a healthy group interaction and an environment where students feel active and creatively involved. This is evidence of students embracing the approach as a general learning process rather than an isolated intervention.

Would you like to continue this method of learning?

92 responses

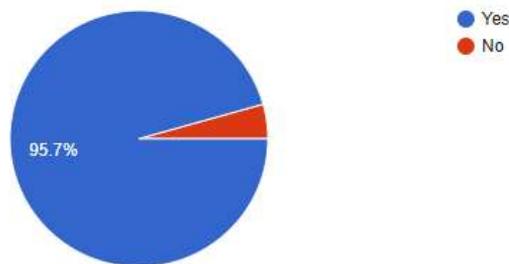


Figure 4: Sustainability of the teaching method

DISCUSSION

The findings from this preliminary investigation support the claim presented previously. That is, buzz group discussions are an effective engagement-enhancing activity for a large classroom at a university. Here, we did not claim a definitive learning outcome; instead, the data illustrate the process by which passive recipients become active participants.

The positive engagement trends observed align with prior studies that identify buzz groups as a means of increasing attention and involvement, particularly in large classes (Helmy, Jufri, & Jufri, 2019). Consistent with (Lubis, Wardani, & Harahap, 2023), this study found that time-bound, task-focused discussions encouraged equitable participation and reduced dominance by a small number of students.

The kind of soft skills obtained as perceived in this regard, especially concerning communication and teamwork skills, is in alignment with the obtained outcomes compared to those obtained in other related academic studies, such as those conducted in (Kusumaningsih & Suryani, 2021) and (Afifah, 2019). Notably, compared to the experimental designs that relied on achievement tests and scaled measures, in this case, the data relied only on perception data and observations. As such, these findings are best considered indicative rather than constituting conclusive evidence of the development of skills.

The nature of the Desktop Publishing course appeared to have meaningful consequences for the value of interacting with peers. The course appeared to allow such students to share design ideas and support the decisions taken to create something artistic. This again supports arguments in the literature that buzz group discussions are particularly suitable for subjects requiring idea generation, reflection, and dialogue. The present study contributes to the practice-informed evidence that buzz group discussions can enhance classroom engagement and build conditions conducive to soft-skill practice. This line of inquiry might, in the future, be further strengthened through triangulation with perception data through performance indicators, artefact analysis, structured observation rubrics, or validated engagement and soft-skill measurement tools.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that traditional lecture-based instruction often leads to passive learning and a stagnation of skill development, whereas the implementation of buzz group discussions significantly revitalizes student engagement and offers a practical strategy for enhancing student engagement in large undergraduate classes. By transitioning to a collaborative model where students work in small groups of five or six to synthesize specific topics, the classroom environment shifts from passive observation to active participation. The findings indicate that this methodology not only ensures universal contribution but also fosters essential soft skills, including leadership, active listening, and organizational management for a larger group of learners. Ultimately, the feedback confirms that engaging students through structured group activities is a highly effective strategy for improving both their academic involvement and their professional competencies.

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