

Chapter 2

Accounting and Finance Students' Perceptions About Active Learning in an Economics–Lecture Classroom

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ABSTRACT

In higher education there is an increasing trend from teacher-centered to student-centered learning environments, wherein active learning experiences can play a decisive role. This chapter assesses how students perceive the use of active learning techniques within the lecture framework, traditionally accepting students as passive listeners. A survey was distributed in the undergraduate course of Accounting and Finance - evening classes, at the end of the semester, to evaluate and help refine the active learning approach conducted in an economics course. Students reported an overall positive response towards active learning, which helped them to focus, engage, and learn. They especially value the lectures as interactive learning experiences. Students' appraisal regarding the usefulness of key implementation rules like the what, when, who technique on slide-written instructions, as well as the variety of active learning activities tested, revealed the designing and testing of active learning events need improvement.

INTRODUCTION

Active learning shifts the focus from teacher - centered learning to student - centered learning. According to Bonwell and Eison (1991), involving students in doing things and thinking about the things that they are doing can be referred to as active learning. Thus, through active learning techniques, students are engaged in more than passive listening and more emphasis is placed on higher - level thinking tasks such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

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Research shows that active learning is essential for enhancing student learning (Prince, 2004). Other related outcomes include higher academic achievement (Freeman et al., 2014), increased retention and development of higher - order thinking skills (Trego, 2016). In a systematic literature review of the affective responses to active learning by undergraduate students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses, Borrego et al. (2018) find that students' affective responses to active learning are overwhelmingly positive. However, there are many obstacles associated with the use of active learning. Apart from global barriers to change what is educational tradition, there are specific difficulties in designing and testing time - intensive active learning activities, in adequately covering all the syllabus with activities perceived as taking too much time in the classroom, and in students lacking the necessary skills for active learning strategies that work (Felder & Brent, 2009). Moreover, student resistance to active learning has been identified as a critical barrier to the adoption and continued use of active learning (Froyd, Borrego, Cutler, Henderson, & Prince, 2013; Henderson & Dancy, 2007).

While active learning techniques can be more effectively implemented in active learning classrooms (Drake & Battaglia, 2014; MacLeod, Yang, & Shi, 2019) or, eventually, flipped classrooms (Brame, 2013; Roach, 2014), modifying traditional lectures to incorporate active learning in the classroom has long ago been identified as an alternative, even in large classes (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Cavanagh (2011), for instance, argues that at least every 10-15 minutes' lectures should be punctuated by learning activities. Lumpkin et al. (2015), in turn, have examined the literature on a diversity of instructional practices and from these chosen exploratory writing activities and small-group discussions as learning strategies to intersperse with short lectures. Transforming the passivity of a traditional lecture - based large class by adding short activities that most students or all of them will do can make a substantial difference in the learning process with a minor impact on the syllabus and should not take much time (Felder & Brent, 2009). Furthermore, letting students know the benefits of using this approach can help change the small fraction of the class that do not engage in active learning. Indeed, both explanation and facilitation strategies do help reduce negative student response (including resistance) to active learning (Finelli et al. 2018; Nguyen et al. 2017).

Nevertheless, how the students perceive or value the use of active learning techniques within the lecture framework needs further study. This chapter gauges' students' attitudes toward both active learning principles and outcomes. To that end, an 11 question Likert - type inventory, as well as responses to open - ended questions were taken at the end of the semester of an economics course, and to first - year students of Accounting and Finance - evening classes.¹ The remainder of the chapter is organized as follows. The next section briefly overviews the topic, by presenting both major advantages and strategies in the practice of active learning. Then, the focus of the chapter describes the key features of the course - lecture and active learning approach at study, followed by a brief description of the survey and analysis of the main results. The chapter finishes with future research directions and major conclusions.

BACKGROUND

There are many broad definitions of active learning and at the core is the evidence that to learn, students need to do something. To consider something active learning, students must be doing something other than just listening to a lecture or reading a PowerPoint. Lecture does have its place and can be dynamic and engaging in and of themselves. However, active learning is often contrasted to the traditional lecture and can thus be defined as “anything course - related that all students in a class session are called upon

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