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Unpacking Classroom Participation among Undergraduates: The Role of Collaborative Learning and Peer Assessment

Mensah Prince Osiesi[1*]
Malesela Maepa[2]
Cina Patricia Mosito[3]
Heloise Sathorar[4]

AFFILIATIONS

[1,2,3&4]Faculty of Education, Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha, South Africa.

CORRESPONDENCE

Email: Prince.Osiesi@mandela.ca.za*

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Abstract: Classroom participation is a potent predictor of students' learning interest and academic success. Despite the South African government's significant investment and bursaries for students in higher education, poor class attendance, participation, and learning outcomes persist. This study examined the extent of and the relationship between collaborative learning, peer assessment, and undergraduates' classroom participation, as well as the perceived strategies for its promotion. Underpinned by the Scaffolding and Social Learning Theories, the study utilised a survey research design of a non-experimental nature. The population for this study comprised undergraduates who were enrolled in the 2024 academic year at the Faculty of Education, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa. A sample of 315 students was selected using purposive and convenience sampling techniques. A questionnaire titled "Undergraduates' Classroom Participation Factors Questionnaire (UCPFQ)" with $\alpha = 0.71$, 0.83, 0.76, and 0.77 for the four subsections was used for data collection. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics at a 0.05 significance level. Results indicate that over 70% of students reported actively participating in class, over 80% reported learning collaboratively, and over 90% reported being favourably disposed to peer assessment. Collaborative learning, peer assessment, and classroom participation strategies significantly contribute to students' classroom participation, with collaborative learning being the strongest significant predictor ($\beta=0.55$, $p<0.001$) of classroom participation. Strategies for fostering classroom participation were highlighted. The study recommends, among other things, that professional development programmes be provided for lecturers on how to promote collaborative learning, peer assessment, and classroom participation among students.

Keywords: Classroom participation, collaborative learning, peer assessment, undergraduates.

1. Introduction

Educational expectations regarding learning and teaching can be fostered through students' active participation in the teaching-learning process (Arnold, 2021). Classroom participation improves learning conditions and is a priority for schools, governments, and education stakeholders, as it forms the basis for continuous school improvement and planning (Strom et al., 2019). In South Africa, however, low classroom participation among higher education undergraduates has been reported (Halverson & Graham, 2019). Several factors have been attributed to this lack of participation, including poor teacher quality, an unsupportive classroom climate, and students' backgrounds, cultures, and languages (Columna-Pérez, 2020; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Susak, 2016). Other student-related factors, such as collaborative learning and peer assessment, which could impact classroom participation, seem to have been neglected. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to assess the level of and the nuanced relationship between collaborative learning and peer assessment on undergraduates' classroom participation at Nelson Mandela University, South Africa—a university that stands for and promotes humanising pedagogies and philosophy.

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Humanising pedagogy is an educational approach rooted in Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, emphasising the restoration and recognition of the full humanity of both teachers and students (Osiesi, 2024; Salazar, 2013). It is characterised by the creation of a positive, inclusive learning environment that values and respects the individual needs, experiences, and backgrounds of each student beyond mere academic performance (Mapaling & Hoelson, 2022; Salazar, 2013; Zinn, 2016). This approach aims for mutual humanisation, where students are active co-investigators in dialogue with teachers, fostering their critical consciousness and social justice. Key elements of a humanising pedagogy include respect, shared power in the learning process, trust, academic rigor, and the incorporation of students' cultural, historical, and social realities into education (Sathorar et al., 2023). It challenges dehumanising educational practices, particularly those that reduce students to mere objects or standardised data, and instead promotes equity, social resilience, and the development of meaningful teacher-student relationships. Humanising pedagogy seeks to extend humanity through opportunities for creativity, imagination, and interaction, aiming towards a just and democratic society (Delport, 2016). It is crucial for the success of both teachers and students, especially in socially and culturally diverse classrooms where systemic inequities persist (Fataar, 2016).

There are contrasting and contextual views on what defines or influences students' participation in the classroom. Typically, classroom participation entails students' actions during classes, such as asking and answering questions, taking part in lesson-related conversations, giving feedback, and assessing peers. A more expansive definition of classroom participation, encompassing activities that encourage students to engage in more active learning, has supplanted the traditional definition, which was restricted to verbal exchanges (Orwat et al., 2018). Class participation is a multifaceted concept that includes various elements indicating students' involvement in class, including preparation before class (Hard & RaoShah, 2022; Holly et al., 2024), class attendance (Hard & RaoShah, 2022), participation in class discussions and activities (Xu & Qiu, 2022), and engagement with assignments given in class (Tang et al., 2020). Students' (especially those in higher education) classroom participation has proven beneficial to their academic engagement and their tendencies to learn collaboratively (Cajiao & Burke, 2016; Rocca, 2010).

In higher education, collaborative learning has grown in popularity as a social-constructive instructional strategy that supports students' academic performance, social interaction, and learning engagement (Huang & Lajoie, 2023; Li, 2025; Luo et al., 2022; Wang & Huang, 2021). It is an autonomous learning process that occupies a central position in education, as it enhances the social climate, students' social interaction skills and competencies, and academic achievement in schools (Ghavifekr, 2020). Previous research reveals that collaborative learning stimulates higher-order thinking skills, boosts learning motivation, and strengthens interpersonal relationships (Pang et al., 2018). Collaborative learning is a process where each student observes and learns from their peers. According to Ghavifekr (2020), collaborative learning is an instructional strategy that aids in the creation of several motivational guidelines for implementing more effective methods to improve students' comprehension of the taught lesson. By involving students in the learning process, collaborative learning primarily benefits students by boosting their self-confidence, thereby enhancing their interest in learning and motivation, as well as their roles in peer assessment (Adipat et al., 2021).

Peer assessment, which is uncommon in higher education, is one of the novel approaches to evaluating students, particularly in South Africa, where the challenges of massification have become an issue (Msiza et al., 2020). The feedback process, in which one or more evaluators (either a single student or a group of students) provide scores or descriptive evaluations of the output of one or more assessed items, is referred to as peer assessment. This method is based on peer relationships and student interactions (Strijbos & Wichmann, 2018). According to Topping (2017, p. 1), peer assessment is "an arrangement for students to consider and specify the level, value, or quality of a product or performance of other students of equal status, then learn further by providing detailed feedback and

debating their judgements with peers to achieve a negotiated agreed outcome." Research on peer assessment is still being conducted worldwide (Ashenafi, 2017). It offers a fresh perspective on education while addressing some shortcomings of conventional classrooms (Yang & Wang, 2023), helping students take an active role in assessing their peers, thereby improving feedback and learning efficiency (Alzaid, 2017; To & Panadero, 2019).

Formative in nature, peer assessment seeks to foster learning, develop understanding, and encourage the acquisition of more advanced skills such as sharing responsibility, introspection, collaboration, and dialogue. Peer assessment has been affirmed as a mechanism for promoting psychological safety, diversity, and collaborative classrooms (Ashenafi, 2017; van Gennip et al., 2010). As reiterated by Arnold (2021), it is a better measure of students' participation in the classroom. Burgess et al. (2021) argue that peer assessment conveys to students the value of their contributions to the group's work, while collaborative learning encourages them to think more deeply for themselves and learn from one another (Huang & Lajoie, 2023). Limited research has simultaneously investigated the interplay of collaborative learning and peer assessment on classroom participation, particularly in the South African context. This study intends to fill this gap by examining the level of classroom participation among students, the extent to which collaborative learning and peer assessment influence students' classroom participation, and the strategies perceived by students for promoting classroom participation.

1.1 Problem statement

Amidst the government's substantial investment and bursaries for students in higher education in South Africa, issues with low class attendance, limited academic engagement, and poor academic outcomes persist (Chiramba & Ndofirepi, 2023; Swanepoel et al., 2021; Mkhize & Ramrathan, 2021). Scholars and researchers have attempted to address this concerning trend, yet it appears to remain unabated. Could it be that student-related factors are critical in tackling these issues? Against this backdrop, this study investigates the level of classroom participation among students, the extent to which gender, collaborative learning, and peer assessment influence classroom participation, and the strategies perceived by undergraduate students for promoting classroom participation in this context.

Essentially, this study intends to proffer answers to the following:

- What is the level of classroom participation among the sampled undergraduates?
- What is the level of collaborative learning among the sampled undergraduates?
- What is the level of peer assessment among the sampled undergraduates?
- What is the relative contribution of collaborative learning, peer assessment and classroom participation strategies to undergraduates' classroom participation?
- What are the perceived dominant classroom participation strategies among the sampled undergraduates?

2. Literature Review

This section presents a review of the literature regarding the variables under investigation. Specifically, section 2.1 reviews the literature on classroom participation, section 2.2 reviews the literature on collaborative learning and classroom participation, section 2.3 reviews the literature on peer assessment and classroom participation, while section 2.4 outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

2.1 Classroom participation

Students' classroom participation enhances communication, increases collaboration among students, and encourages dialogue between students and lecturers (Adebola, 2024). It also serves as feedback and encourages shy students to speak up, potentially leading to improved academic performance

(Bahmanbijar et al., 2019). It fosters social integration by providing opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to interact, collaborate, and learn from one another (Lämsä et al., 2021); helps develop teamwork skills among students (Järvenoja et al., 2022); and increases students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning (Adebola, 2024; Du et al., 2025). According to Orwat et al. (2018) and Precourt and Gainor (2019), class participation entails students' engagement and understanding of the learning and instructional materials, giving them the opportunity to demonstrate a wider range of skills (Richardson, 2015) and enhancing their learning outcomes (Precourt & Gainor, 2019). It includes all elements that indicate evidence of student participation, such as engagement in class activities and attendance at lectures, which motivate students to learn continuously and improve their performance (Tang et al., 2020; Xu & Qiu, 2022).

One of the most important measures of students' participation in the classroom is active learning (Holly et al., 2024; Yao et al., 2024). Susak (2016) examined the factors affecting business students' class participation in Croatia. Findings indicate high levels of participation among the sampled students. The study also found that student traits, logistics, classroom climate, and the lecturer's role impact students' participation in class. Aziz et al. (2018) examined the factors influencing classroom participation among secondary school students in Lahore, Pakistan. Findings reveal a high level of classroom participation among the students. According to the study, male students participated more in class due to their higher self-esteem, while the participation of female students was influenced by their motivation to learn. Yao et al. (2024) used an index system to measure classroom participation among 59 college students in an international logistics course. The study focused on students' behavioural, cognitive, and emotional participation, as well as their learning outcomes (knowledge acquisition, ability improvement, and quality enhancement). Findings of the study indicate a high level of students' classroom participation, with classroom participation being significantly positively correlated with learning outcomes. Stronger positive correlations were found between behavioural participation and knowledge acquisition, cognitive participation and ability improvement, and emotional participation and quality enhancement. Furthermore, the study revealed that classroom participation and learning outcomes are not related to students' gender, class, or leadership roles in class. Using a Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) approach, Du et al. (2025) investigated the affective, perceived behavioural control (PBC), and subjective norm (SN) aspects influencing active learning among secondary school students in mathematics classrooms. The findings demonstrate that increasing student participation in class is facilitated by creating a conducive learning environment and a strong positive belief in teachers. However, these studies did not consider the interconnection between students' participation in class, collaborative learning, and peer assessment, which is the focus of this current research.

2.2 Collaborative learning and classroom participation

Collaborative learning is an approach to education where students come together to work with their peers in solving problems, creating new ideas, and gaining critical skills through classroom activities (Azar et al., 2021). It is an instructional strategy that helps establish several motivational guidelines for implementing instructions that are more effective in enhancing students' comprehension of the lessons taught (Ghavifekr, 2020). By involving students in the learning process, collaborative learning primarily benefits them by boosting their self-confidence and fostering their interest, trust, respect, communication skills, sense of community, and motivation towards learning (Adebola & Tsotetsi, 2022; Adebola, 2024; Adipat et al., 2021).

Ghavifekr (2020) investigated secondary school students' perceptions of the adoption of collaborative learning during classes. The study also examined the connection between students' interaction skills and collaborative learning. The results indicate that collaborative learning has a substantial impact on students' social interaction abilities, with students affirming that it enhances socialisation among participants and encourages everyone to work effectively with others. Adebola and Tsotetsi (2022)

explored the impact of collaborative learning on pre-service teachers' participation in South African rural schools. Findings suggest that collaborative learning and peer feedback (a form of peer assessment) served as strategies for improving participation among these pre-service teachers. Similarly, a qualitative study by Adebola (2024) examined how collaborative learning might encourage pre-service teachers' engagement in class. According to the findings, collaborative learning was facilitated by appropriate planning, connecting the curriculum to students' own experiences, aligning classroom activities with assessment, and creating a supportive classroom environment. In contrast, the study also identified that a lack of infrastructure, inadequate classroom facilities, and language barriers could hinder the adoption of collaborative learning in a learning space. For this current study, our aim was to explore the role of collaborative learning and peer assessment in enhancing students' participation in class.

2.3 Peer assessment and classroom participation

Peer assessment enhances students' capacity for critical thought and creativity (Ritonga et al., 2020). According to Tunagür (2021), it involves students evaluating their peers' work based on predetermined criteria. This process allows students to assess and judge the learning activities and achievements of their peers (Liu & Brantmeier, 2019). The goal of earlier peer assessment studies was to help students perform better academically (Yang & Wang, 2023). Peer evaluation can improve students' group work, social skills, sense of ownership, self-assurance, and responsibility. Additionally, it can transform passive learning into active learning in a way that piques students' interests (Esfandiari & Tavassoli, 2019). Research has shown that peer assessment has significant potential for fostering students' cognitive development, evaluation and critical thinking skills, metacognitive awareness, and social and emotional growth (Reinholz, 2016). It can also assist in students' self-assessment, self-regulation, and autonomous learning endeavours.

Msiza et al. (2020) investigated the perspectives of university lecturers on peer evaluation in a teacher preparatory programme. According to the study's participants, peer assessment is important for enhancing students' content knowledge and assessment abilities as potential teachers. Wilson et al. (2015) emphasise that students should be treated as active co-constructors of knowledge rather than as passive recipients, a principle that can be supported by peer assessment. To achieve the goals of peer assessment, students must be provided with clear instructions, rubrics, and guidance on how to offer constructive criticism and insightful remarks (Zou et al., 2017). Peer evaluation can be conducted in several ways; it may involve providing textual or verbal feedback that is suggestive, confirmatory, or corrective (Cho & MacArthur, 2010). When a peer offers constructive criticism, they should first identify the areas that require improvement before making recommendations for enhancements. As a result, students develop higher-order thinking skills and become assessors themselves (Snowball & Mostert, 2013).

2.4 Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in Scaffolding Theory, first developed in 1976 by Wood, Bruner, and Ross. It is also connected to Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social learning, specifically his Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to Wilson and Devereux (2014), Vygotsky's theory views learning as a social interaction between peers and knowledgeable adults that leads to the development of an individual's learning process. In the context of education, scaffolding is the process by which instructors, or in this case, a more advanced student, offer additional direction and examples during the early phases of education (Msiza et al., 2020).

The lecturer or the 'smarter' student gradually reduces the amount of support provided to the students as they become proficient in the skills (Stone, 1998). Students can learn new concepts from their peers' feedback during peer assessment and can work more closely with them to expand their knowledge. Following the scaffolding process, students' knowledge and skills are enhanced (Wood

et al., 1976). In essence, scaffolding equips students, regardless of gender, with the tools they need to evaluate their peers effectively, promoting collaborative learning and increased classroom participation (Kollar & Fischer, 2010; Msiza et al., 2020).

3. Methodology

The survey research type of non-experimental design was adopted for this study, as the researchers did not manipulate any variables. Survey research, defined as the gathering of data from a sample of respondents through questions posed in a structured questionnaire, was employed (Check & Schutt, 2012; Ponto, 2015). The population of this study comprised all undergraduates enrolled in the Faculty of Education at Nelson Mandela University, Republic of South Africa, for the 2024 academic year. According to faculty records at the time of the study, the total enrolment was 1,564 students. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the Faculty of Education from the sampled university, as it is believed that this faculty typically adopts a face-to-face teaching and learning mode, with students attending lectures (classes) in groups. The convenience sampling technique was then used to select students who were willing to respond to the Google Form, which hosted the research questionnaires and was administered online by a faculty administrator. The sample size calculator(https://www.calculator.net/sample-size-calculator.html) was used to determine the sample adequacy for the study. In total, 315 undergraduates who completed the form comprised the study's sample.

A research instrument, adapted from published articles in the existing literature, was used to collect data for this study. It was labelled the "Undergraduates' Classroom Participation Factors Questionnaire (UCPFQ)". The instrument has five sub-sections, A to E. Section A consists of the respondents' demographic data, such as gender and department. Section B comprises 16 items measuring students' classroom participation and is based on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 'Very True of Me' (4) to 'Not Very True of Me' (1). Items on this scale were adapted from the published article by Anderson et al. (2019) (α=0.72). Section C similarly consists of 16 items measuring students' collaborative learning, also using a 4-point Likert scale from 'Very True of Me' (4) to 'Not Very True of Me' (1). These items were adapted from the published article by Prieto-Saborit et al. (2022) (α=0.96). Section D includes 16 items on students' peer assessment, placed on the same 4-point Likert scale of 'Very True of Me' (4) to 'Not Very True of Me' (1). These items were adapted from the published article by Kruger (2025) (α=0.75). Section E contains 15 items measuring students' perceptions of strategies that can be adopted to promote classroom participation, using a dichotomous scale of Yes (1) and No (0) (α=0.78). The benchmark is based on a criteria mean of 2.5, with less than 2.5 considered low, 2.5 as moderate, and more than 2.5 as high.

The adapted instrument was further re-evaluated to align with this study's sample and context. Three experts in Educational Tests and Measurement and quantitative research instrument design critically reviewed the instruments and made further suggestions for its revision, which were incorporated to make the instrument more appropriate for the study. A pilot study was subsequently conducted on a similar sample of 36 respondents from a Faculty of Education in a public university located in a different geographical zone to ascertain its reliability. The data obtained from the pilot test were subject to the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient method, yielding values of 0.71, 0.83, 0.76, and 0.77 for the different sections, respectively. The data collection process was carried out after the researchers obtained a letter of approval from the Research and Ethics Committee of the university for the conduct of the study. Furthermore, the informed consent of the respondents was sought and obtained before they participated in the research. This was set as a default on the Google Form used for data collection. The data obtained for this study were analysed quantitatively (using frequency counts, percentages, and charts) and through inferential statistics (multiple regression analysis) at a significance level of 0.05. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and respondents were free to withdraw from participation if they wished. We strictly complied with the tenets of the

Helsinki Declaration. The Ethics Approval details for the study were REC-042508-025/NMURef:1210/22/02/2025.

4. Presentation of Results

This section is presented to respond to the above-stated research question in chronological order, as presented below.

RQ 1: What is the extent of classroom participation among the sampled undergraduates?

Table 1 presents the results of the extent of classroom participation among the sampled undergraduates. The results reveal that 91.7% and above of the undergraduates claimed that they participate actively in class, contribute to class discussions, pay attention to what is being taught in class, attend classes all the time, submit assignments on time, are punctual, and take notes during class (Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, and 12). Also, 81.0% of the respondents indicated that they enjoyed participating in group discussions (Item 14). Furthermore, between 74.9% and 78.8% of the respondents revealed that they ask questions in class when confused, interact with their peers after class on lessons taught, and enjoy participating in role-play (Items 5, 11, and 16). Similarly, between 63.2% and 68.5% of them claimed that they answer questions in class and love participating in debates (Items 6 and 15). However, 58.7% of them disagree that they lead most of the discussions in their class (Item 7). Moreover, the results revealed that the weighted mean score (3.6) is higher than the criterion mean score (2.5). Summarily, one can conclude that the sampled undergraduates have high classroom participation.

Table 1: *Extent of classroom participation*

S/N	Statements	True of Me	Not True of Me	Mean	SD
1	I always participate actively in class	289 (91.7%)	26 (8.3%)	3.57	0.87
2	I ensure that I often contribute to class discussions	291 (92.3%)	24 (7.7%)	3.58	0.86
3	I do pay attention to what is being taught while in class	309 (98.1%)	6 (1.9%)	4.35	0.80
4	I attend classes all the time	290 (92.0%)	25 (8.0%)	3.96	0.98
5	I ask questions in class when I get confused	236 (74.9%)	79 (25.1%)	3.21	0.97
6	I answer questions in class most times	199 (63.2%)	116 (36.8%)	2.85	0.88
7	I lead most of the discussions of my class	130 (41.3%)	185 (58.7%)	2.34	0.89
8	I actively take part in group projects in class	312 (99.0%)	3 (1.0%)	4.29	0.66
9	I ensure assignments are submitted in time	309 (98.1%)	6 (1.9%)	4.58	0.73
10	I am punctual in class	303 (96.2%)	12 (3.8%)	4.09	0.81
11	I interact with my peers after classes for further discussions of lessons taught	248 (78.8%)	67 (21.2%)	3.56	1.18
12	I take notes during classes	300 (95.2%)	15 (4.8%)	4.15	0.94
13	I speak up in class whenever I feel like	179 (56.8%)	136 (43.2%)	2.83	1.09
14	I enjoy participating in group discussions	255 (81.0%)	60 (19.0%)	3.57	1.23
15	I love participating in debates	216 (68.5%)	99 (31.5%)	3.11	1.19
16	I enjoy participating in role-play	239 (75.8%)	76 (25.2%)	3.12	1.02

Criterion mean = 2.5; weighted mean = 3.6

RQ 2: What is the extent of collaborative learning among the sampled undergraduates?

Table 2 presents the results of the extent of collaborative learning among the sampled undergraduates. The results show that over 91.4% of the undergraduates claimed that they love discursive class lectures with their course mates, listening to others explain their understanding of lecture contents, sharing resources with classmates, calling their classmates to explain unclear concepts, learning together with classmates to solve problems, and exchanging experiences (Items 1, 2, 6, 8, 15, and 16). Additionally, between 83.8% and 89.2% of the respondents indicated that debating academic issues in class interests them, contributing to lessons, learning with classmates provides a more relaxed learning atmosphere, and stimulates critical thinking (Items 3, 5, 13, and 14). Furthermore, 73.6% of the respondents agreed that group work should be encouraged in class (Item 12). However, 61.9% of them disagreed that reading alone bores them (Item 11). Further, the results revealed that the weighted mean score (3.5) is higher than the criterion mean score (2.5). In summary, it can be concluded that the majority of undergraduates have high collaborative learning.

Table 2: *Extent of collaborative learning*

S/N	Statements	True of Me	Not True of Me	Mean	SD
1	I love discussing class lectures with my course mates	296 (93.9%)	19 (6.1%)	3.83	0.91
2	I love listening to others explain their understanding of lecture contents to me	307 (97.4%)	8 (2.6%)	4.29	0.85
3	Debating academic issues in class interests me	281 (89.2%)	34 ((10.8%)	3.86	1.05
4	I prefer to study in groups with fellow students	164 (52.1%)	151 (47.9%)	2.72	1.34
5	I always contribute in class	275 (87.3%)	40 (12.7%)	3.37	0.82
6	I share resources with classmates for us to learn better	288 (91.4%)	27 (8.6%)	3.77	0.97
7	I prefer group task	160 (50.7%)	155 (49.3%)	2.58	1.36
8	I call my classmates to explain unclear concepts to me	295 (93.7%)	20 (6.3%)	3.84	1.01
9	It is fun working together with my classmates in class	165 (52.3%)	150 (47.7%)	3.70	1.05
10	I enjoy group projects a lot	183 (58.1%)	132 (41.9%)	2.79	1.38
11	Reading alone bores me	120 (38.1%)	195 (61.9%)	2.24	1.24
12	Group work should be encouraged in our classes	232 (73.6%)	83 (26.4%)	3.30	1.33
13	Learning with my classmates provided a more relaxed learning atmosphere	264 (83.8%)	51 (16.2%)	3.65	1.18
14	Learning together with my classmates stimulates my critical thinking	272 (86.3%)	43 (13.7%)	3.77	1.16
15	Learning with my classmates made problem-solving easier	300 (95.2%)	15 (4.8%)	3.99	0.92
16	Learning together with classmates fosters the exchange of experiences	302 (95.8%)	13 (4.2%)	4.13	0.86

Criterion mean = 2.5; weighted mean = 3.5

RQ 3: What is the extent of peer assessment among the sampled undergraduates?

Table 3 presents the results regarding the extent of peer assessment among the sampled undergraduates. The findings reveal that over 90.2% of the undergraduates indicated that their classmates participate actively in class, pay great attention, respect others' opinions, engage in group discussions, work collaboratively, ask and answer questions, creatively solve problems, accept feedback, communicate ideas with others, are accessible for academic discussions, show enthusiasm for learning, and encourage one another to solve problems (Items 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15). Additionally, 87.3% of them claimed that their classmates attend class regularly (Item 1), while 73.9% stated that their classmates are the reason for their continued interest in learning (Item 16). Furthermore, the results revealed that the weighted mean score (3.8) is higher than the criterion mean score (2.5). Hence, it can be concluded that a large proportion of the undergraduates are favourably disposed to the assessment of their classroom peers.

Table 3: *Extent of peer assessment*

S/N	Statements	True of Me	Not True of Me	Mean	SD
1	My classmates regularly come to class	275 (87.3%)	40 (12.7%)	3.62	1.02
2	My classmates actively participate in class	284 (90.2%)	31 (9.8%)	3.89	1.04
3	My classmates are punctual to class	282 (89.5%)	33 (10.5%)	3.57	0.94
4	My classmates pay great attention in class	289 (91.7%)	28 (8.3%)	3.70	0.94
5	My classmates respect the opinions of others	295 (93.6%)	20 (6.4%)	3.95	0.92
6	My classmates actively participate during group discussions	300 (95.2%)	15 (4.8%)	3.95	0.93
7	My classmates like to work together as a group	285 (90.5%)	30 (9.5%)	3.52	0.99
8	My classmates do ask questions in class	294 (93.3%)	21 (6.7%)	3.98	0.96
9	My classmates do answer questions in class	301 (95.5%)	14 (4.5%)	3.95	0.89
10	My classmates creatively solve problems in class	303 (96.2%)	12 (3.8%)	3.84	0.86
11	My classmates accept feedback from others	304 (96.5%)	11 (3.5%)	3.86	0.85
12	My classmates like communicating ideas with one another	298 (94.6%)	17 (5.4%)	3.80	0.93
13	My classmates are accessible for academic discussions	297 (94.3%)	18 (5.7%)	3.85	0.87
14	My classmates show great enthusiasm for learning	299 (94.9%)	16 (5.1%)	3.92	0.83
15	My classmates have encouraged me to solve my academic problems	287 (91.1%)	28 (8.9%)	3.70	0.92
16	My classmates are the reason for my continued interest in learning	233 (73.9%)	82 (26.1%)	3.20	1.30

Criterion mean = 2.5; weighted mean = 3.8

RQ 4: What is the relative contribution of collaborative learning, peer assessment and classroom participation strategies to undergraduates' classroom participation?

Table 4 presents the relative contributions of the predictor variables (collaborative learning, peer assessment, and classroom participation strategies) to the criterion variable (classroom participation) among undergraduates. The predictor variables: collaborative learning (β=0.55, t=8.18, p=0.000), peer assessment (β=-0.15, t=-2.18, p=0.030), and classroom participation strategies (β=0.19, t=2.27, p=0.024) significantly contribute to undergraduates' classroom participation. Although the result of the peer assessment revealed a negative and significant beta value on classroom participation, these results imply that all the variables were potent predictors of undergraduates' classroom participation.

Table 4: *Relative contributions of collaborative learning, peer assessment and classroom participation strategies to undergraduates' classroom participation*

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	31.560	4.280		7.374	0.000
Collaborative Learning	0.403	0.049	0.552	8.181	0.000
Peer Assessment	-0.116	0.053	-0.145	-2.178	0.030
Classroom Participation Strategies	0.144	0.063	0.119	2.270	0.024

**Significant at p<0.05 level*

RQ 5: What are the perceived dominant classroom participation strategies among students?

Figure 1 presents the perceived dominant classroom participation strategies among students. It indicates that the key strategies identified by the sampled undergraduates are creating a safe learning environment, introducing varied methods of student participation, connecting lessons to students' interests, providing opportunities for student feedback, encouraging simulations, building an inclusive classroom, enabling students to reflect on the lessons taught, offering opportunities for students to practice communication skills, and assigning responsibilities that require communication.

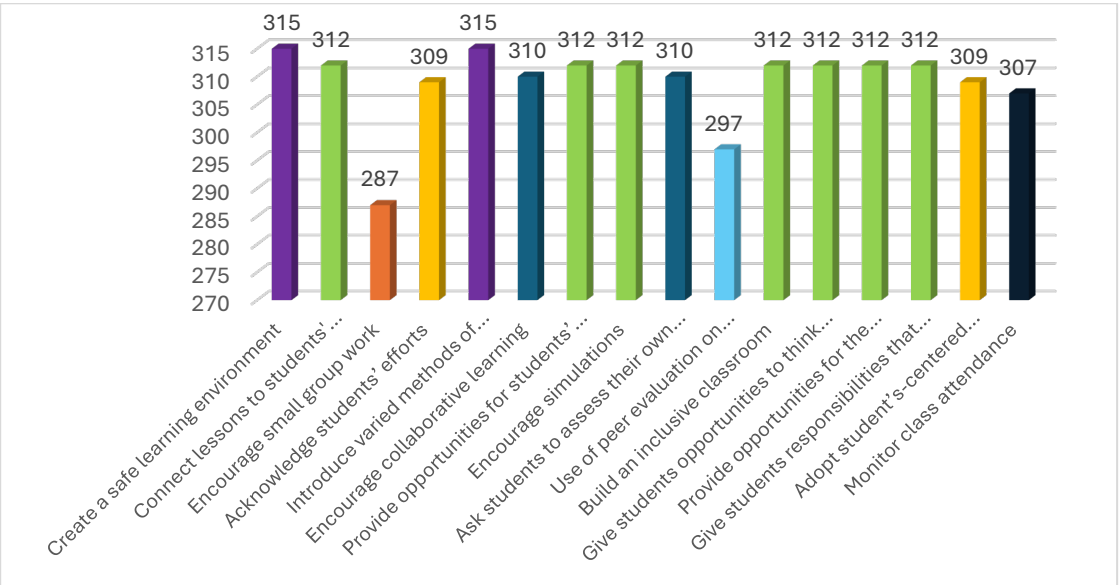

Figure 1: *Dominant classroom participation strategy*

5. Discussion of Findings

This study examined the relationship between collaborative learning, peer assessment, and classroom participation among undergraduate students, as well as their perceptions of strategies to promote classroom participation. The findings of this study indicate high levels of classroom participation among the students. Classroom participation is influenced by students' understanding of subject content, as well as lecturers cultivating a culture of engagement and dialogue in their classrooms (Du et al., 2025; Le, 2024). By employing positive teaching approaches such as humanising pedagogies and critical pedagogy and consciousness (a dominant teaching approach in this study's context), lecturers can encourage students to view dialogue and engagement as learning opportunities rather than competition. This fosters a willingness among students to participate in classroom activities. These positive teaching approaches help students see themselves and their peers as partners in learning rather than competitors, by creating safe spaces for learning. Classroom participation encourages students to engage in discussions that challenge their knowledge openly and fosters a desire to continue participating in class. This finding aligns with those of Aziz et al. (2018), Susak (2016), and Yao et al. (2024), which affirm high levels of classroom participation and engagement among their study samples. We argue that, in our context, the institutional support available to our students may have contributed to their participation in class.

The findings of this study also indicate high levels of collaborative learning among students. When students collaborate, they share knowledge in ways that differ from those of the lecturer. We believe that because these students are taught using positive teaching approaches, they feel free and willing to express themselves and collaborate in class. Through this collaboration, they practically bring different perspectives to the learning landscape, promoting their cognitive and behavioural growth and development. Collaborative learning enables students' voices to moderate and mediate classroom interactions and culture, as well as multiple perspectives on the lessons taught. In the study context, students frequently engage in several project-based learning and collaborative/group-based assignments/tasks. Consequently, these learning engagement activities create opportunities for enhanced collaborative learning among students. This aligns with previous studies that indicate the positive effects of collaborative learning in boosting students' self-confidence, interest, trust, respect, communication skills, sense of community, and motivation in learning (Adebola & Tsotetsi, 2022; Adebola, 2024; Adipat et al., 2021; Ghavifekr, 2020).

A finding of this study reveals a highly favourable peer assessment among the students. They appreciate having their voices heard and respected. Students easily relate to their interactions while discussing with one another and connecting their ideas to practical implementation. While lecturers can enlighten and provoke their thoughts during teaching, it is crucial to afford students the opportunity to occupy the learning space and evaluate themselves, as this significantly affects their eventual learning outcomes. This approach provides them with a competitive edge to engage in a festival of ideas, thereby boosting collaborative learning, dialogue, and engagement. This finding supports previous research which affirms that peer assessment enhances students' capacity for critical thinking and creativity, fosters active learning, and improves academic performance (Esfandiari & Tavassoli, 2019; Msiza et al., 2020; Reinholz, 2016; Ritonga et al., 2020; Yang & Wang, 2023).

Another finding of this study indicates that collaborative learning, peer assessment, and classroom participation strategies significantly contribute to students' classroom engagement. Collaborative learning enables students to share their understanding as a group or team (McKay & Sridharan, 2023). Thought-provoking questions are provided to ensure discussions align with the module outcomes, thereby helping students imbibe the culture, value, and power of teamwork. This ultimately results in increased active participation. Students' peer assessment contributes to their thought processes related to the subject taught (Fleckney et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2022). This

demonstrates that students can assess themselves in class without necessarily participating actively in discussions. It strengthens their self-belief and boosts their confidence in engaging during lessons. The strategies used in the classroom can incorporate discussions, dialogues, and debates around the subject matter or the module itself. In this study, classroom participation is enhanced through strategies such as culturally responsive teaching, growth mindset, and inquiry-based instruction. Culturally responsive teaching requires educators to be conscious of the backgrounds of the students they are teaching.

This study's findings also indicate strategies for fostering classroom participation, which include creating a safe learning environment, introducing varied methods for student participation, connecting lessons to students' interests, providing opportunities for student feedback, encouraging simulations, building an inclusive classroom, giving students opportunities to reflect on the lesson taught, providing chances for students to practice communication skills, and assigning responsibilities that require communication. This finding reiterates those of Adebola (2024) and Jones and Nillas (2022), which show that students' class participation is facilitated by appropriate planning, relating the curriculum to students' own experiences, linking classroom activities to assessments, and creating a supportive classroom environment. This current study confirms the Scaffolding Theory by reemphasising that students' academic outcomes, motivation, and engagement are significantly influenced by their active classroom participation, collaborative learning tendencies, and assessment of one another's work. In line with the Scaffolding and Social Learning Theories, the findings of this study further illustrate that students' participation in class is associated with collaboration (subsumed in social interaction) and appraisal (peer assessment) of their learning outcomes.

5.1 Implications of the study

This study's findings have several implications. Academic, social, psychological, and motivational domains are all subsets of students' collaborative learning and classroom participation. Through this approach, students are encouraged to actively participate in conversations and express their thoughts. Better academic performance and knowledge retention are outcomes of this method, which also promotes a deeper understanding of the lessons taught and enhances students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Hong, 2025). Compared to independent study, collaborative learning fosters social connections, increases motivation, engagement, commitment, peer networks, trust, and reliance on one another for both academic and emotional support, making learning more enjoyable (Nazeef et al., 2024). Additionally, collaborative learning expands teachers' competencies and promotes the use of various teaching techniques to better assist student learning (Nazeef et al., 2024).

Peer assessment among students has significant effects on their academic performance and personal growth. Because students often correct their own errors after noticing them in others' work, this process helps them comprehend the material more thoroughly, develops their critical thinking abilities, and encourages self-reflection. Students are more likely to be motivated, take greater responsibility for their education, and meet higher standards when they know their peers will be evaluating their work (Ritonga et al., 2022). They are exposed to a range of perspectives and helpful suggestions, which enhances their learning and enables timely modifications or improvements. Peer assessment also improves students' social skills, including negotiating different points of view, providing and receiving constructive criticism, and collaborating more effectively.

Participation in class also influences students' overall academic achievement. By actively engaging in class, students can retain information longer and gain a better understanding of the course material through discussions that clarify unclear concepts (Starmer et al., 2015). Active engagement is a strong predictor of success; students who participate actively tend to perform better both objectively and subjectively. Those who engage in class discussions and activities are more connected to the topic and the learning process, which fosters motivation and leads to a more satisfying learning experience (Márquez et al., 2023).

5.2 Limitations and suggestions for future studies

This study has a few limitations in addition to the pertinent data and findings. Firstly, the results are not as broadly applicable as they could be due to the intentional sampling of a university and faculty from several institutions within the study's context. Future research should expand its geographic reach to include universities in various provinces and regions, facilitating more comprehensive comparisons and more widely applicable findings. Secondly, biases may have been introduced due to the use of student self-reported data. This could have occurred because of factors such as mood swings, contextual circumstances, and varying degrees of comprehension of the survey questions, which may have impacted data accuracy and resulted in measurement errors. To ascertain, validate, and supplement future data, as well as to enable a more comprehensive and trustworthy analysis, future research should therefore employ direct observational or mixed methods approaches.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has examined the extent of and relationship between collaborative learning, peer assessment, and undergraduate classroom participation, as well as the strategies perceived to promote classroom participation. Our data affirms high levels of classroom participation, collaborative learning, and peer assessment among the sample. It also revealed that collaborative learning, peer assessment, and classroom participation strategies significantly contribute to students' classroom engagement. Accordingly, it highlights strategies for fostering classroom participation, which include creating a safe learning environment, introducing varied methods of student participation, connecting lessons to students' interests, providing opportunities for student feedback, encouraging simulations, building an inclusive classroom, allowing students to reflect on the lessons taught, providing opportunities for students to practise communication skills, and assigning responsibilities that require communication. Based on these findings, and to continually maximise students' learning outcomes, it is recommended that:

- To enhance learning and self-evaluation, peer assessment techniques should be implemented with explicit instructions for students on how to provide and receive constructive criticism.
- Creating an interactive peer evaluation that facilitates the exchange of feedback, which aids in the development of practical performance, teamwork, and individual skills.
- Including cooperative exercises from the beginning of the module to establish guidelines and expectations for participation, and purposefully creating smaller groups for group projects.
- Establishing clear guidelines for participation, contributions, and peer review to guard against bias and ensure equity.
- Consistently providing students with the opportunity to reflect on the feedback they have received from teacher and peer evaluations, thereby promoting constructive criticism and independent study.
- Offering professional development programmes for lecturers on strategies to promote collaborative learning, peer assessment, and classroom participation among students.

5. Declarations

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation (M.P.O. & M.M.); Literature review (M.P.O. & M.M.); methodology (M.P.O.); software (M.P.O. & M.M.); validation (C.P.M.& H.S.); formal analysis (M.P.O.); investigation (M.P.O., M.M., C.P.M. & H.S.); data curation (M.P.O.) drafting and preparation (M.P.O.); review and editing (M.P.O., C.P.M., & H.S.); supervision (C.P.M.); project administration (M.P.O. & M.M.); funding acquisition (C.P.M). All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

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Conflicts of Interest: "The author(s) declare no conflict of interest."

Data Availability: The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Access will be granted to researchers who meet the criteria for data sharing established by the institutional review board or ethics committee.

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