

Effectiveness of Participatory Learning Strategies in Fostering Generic Skills: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

Developing generic skills has become an essential priority in contemporary teacher education, as these transferable competencies are strongly associated with employability, lifelong learning, and professional readiness. This study investigates the effectiveness of **Participatory Learning Strategies** in fostering generic skills among student teachers. Grounded in learner-centered, experience-based pedagogical principles, participatory learning emphasizes active engagement, collaboration, problem-solving, and authentic learning contexts. A sample of 337 student teachers participated in the study, where generic skills were assessed using the **Generic Skills Inventory**. Four subject-based compelling situations and four school-based challenging problems formed the learning framework for the participatory strategy. Results were analyzed using critical ratios to compare the impact of **Traditional Learning Strategies** versus **Participatory Learning Strategies** across eight categories of generic skills. Findings indicate statistically significant improvements ($p < .01$) in all measured skills including communication, problem solving, information processing, and team management among participants exposed to the participatory approach. The results demonstrate that participatory learning creates a more dynamic, meaningful, and contextually relevant environment for developing key competencies in teacher trainees. The study highlights the need for integrating participatory pedagogies within teacher education programs to strengthen both academic and employability outcomes.

Keywords: Participatory Learning, Generic Skills, Student Teachers, Employability, Comparative Study

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the cultivation of **generic skills** has become a central priority in higher education and teacher training. Employers, professional bodies, and educational institutions increasingly recognize that academic qualifications alone are insufficient for preparing individuals to succeed in rapidly changing work environments. Beyond subject-specific expertise, graduates are expected to demonstrate transferable competencies such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, self-management, information processing, and adaptability. These skills not only strengthen employability but also contribute to personal development and the ability to engage effectively in social and community settings. Generic skills often referred to as core skills, key competencies, transferable skills, or employability skills are developed continuously throughout one's academic and professional life. Their relevance spans multiple contexts, including the workplace, educational settings, personal interactions, and civic engagement. As the demand for versatile professionals increases, educational institutions bear a significant responsibility to integrate learning approaches that foster these essential competencies. Traditional learning environments, characterized by teacher-centered instruction, often limit opportunities for students to actively construct knowledge, collaborate, or engage in critical and reflective thinking. In contrast, **Participatory Learning Strategies** provide an alternative pedagogical approach that positions learners at the center of the learning process. Rooted in experiential and problem-based learning traditions, participatory learning introduces authentic, meaningful activities through which students interact, analyze, discuss, and apply concepts in real-world contexts. These strategies support democratic, issue-based, and collaborative classroom environments that encourage deeper engagement and skill development. Within teacher education programs, participatory learning holds particular importance, as future teachers must not only acquire generic skills themselves but also learn how to cultivate such competencies in their own classrooms. Thus, the effectiveness of participatory approaches in fostering generic skills among student teachers is a matter of both academic and practical significance.

The present study seeks to examine the **effectiveness of Participatory Learning Strategies in developing generic skills among student teachers**, compared with traditional instructional methods. Using the Generic Skills Inventory and a structured set of compelling subject-based and school-based learning activities, the study evaluates eight core generic skill areas. By analyzing differences in outcomes between participatory and traditional learning groups, this research provides insight into how active, learner-centered pedagogies contribute to the holistic development of teacher trainees.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Generic skills occupy a prominent position in contemporary educational discourse due to their applicability across diverse professional and social contexts, and they are widely recognized as transferable, high-level competencies that enable individuals to manage tasks, interact effectively with others, solve problems, and adapt to changing environments. Although their importance is universally acknowledged, the conceptualization of generic skills remains complex because different countries and educational systems employ varying terminologies and classification frameworks. Often referred to as core skills, key competencies, employability skills, transferable skills, or life skills, generic skills represent abilities that extend beyond discipline-specific knowledge and include communication, critical thinking, teamwork, numeracy, information processing, self-management, and problem solving, all of which contribute significantly to professional identity, lifelong learning potential, and overall employability in modern workplaces. International frameworks have played an important role in defining and categorizing these skills; for example, the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (1993) identifies eight essential generic skills, including communication, information processing, self-management, numeracy, problem solving, and teamwork, while the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in the United Kingdom outlines six core generic skills involving information technology, numerical application, collaboration, improvement of learning, and problem solving. These globally recognized frameworks highlight the continued emphasis on transferable competencies despite variations in terminology or grouping. Scholars have also proposed theoretical models that illustrate the multidimensional nature of generic skills. Bennett, Dunne, and Carre (1999) present a framework built around managing self, managing information, managing tasks, and managing others, illustrating the interrelationship between cognitive, interpersonal, and organizational abilities. Likewise, Harvard, Hughes, and Clark (1998) argue that generic skills help students become effective learners and practitioners across academic, professional, and personal domains, reinforcing the idea that these competencies are central to academic and professional readiness. However, developing generic skills poses challenges because traditional lecture-based instruction, which relies heavily on passive learning, often limits opportunities for students to engage in meaningful skill acquisition. Gibbs et al. (1994) emphasize that the development of generic skills requires an experiential learning cycle that includes active engagement, reflection on performance, formalization of knowledge, and planning for future application. Similarly, Seagraves, Kemp, and Osborne (1996) highlight the value of workplace-based experiences and authentic learning contexts in strengthening the development of transferable competencies. These findings collectively support the use of learner-centered approaches such as problem-based learning and participatory learning as effective mechanisms for fostering generic skills. Anchored in these theoretical and empirical foundations, the present study employed an eight-skill framework designed specifically for student teachers, encompassing thinking skills, computation skills, communication skills, problem-solving skills, independent learning skills, information processing skills, team management skills, and self-management skills, thereby providing a comprehensive basis for examining the influence of Participatory Learning Strategies on the development of key generic competencies.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a comparative quasi-experimental design to examine the effectiveness of Participatory Learning Strategies in fostering generic skills among student teachers by comparing two naturally occurring instructional groups one receiving Traditional Learning Strategies and the other Participatory Learning Strategies. The sample consisted of 337 student teachers from a teacher training institution, with 139 participants exposed to traditional methods and 198 participants instructed using participatory approaches, and both groups shared similar academic backgrounds, ensuring that differences in results were attributable primarily to instructional strategy rather than demographic variation. The Participatory Learning Strategy was developed based on experiential and problem-based learning principles and consisted of four subject-based compelling situations designed to promote critical thinking, discussion, and reflection, along with four school-based challenging problems that provided authentic, real-world contexts for application and skill transfer; in contrast, the Traditional Learning Strategy centered on teacher-led lectures, explanations, and note-taking with limited student engagement. Generic skills were measured using the Generic Skills Inventory, a standardized tool assessing eight skill domains: Thinking Skills, Computation Skills, Communication Skills, Problem-Solving Skills, Independent Learning Skills, Information Processing Skills, Team Management Skills, and Self-Management Skills, each containing items evaluating cognitive, interpersonal, and behavioral competencies. After receiving their respective instructional methods, participants completed the inventory, and scores were compiled to obtain mean values and standard deviations for each skill domain. To determine the comparative effectiveness of the two instructional strategies,

critical ratios (C.R.) equivalent to t-statistics for large samples were calculated for all eight generic skill domains, using a significance threshold of $p < .01$; any C.R. exceeding this level indicated a statistically significant difference in skill development between the Traditional and Participatory Learning groups.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study clearly demonstrate that Participatory Learning Strategies were significantly more effective than Traditional Learning Strategies in fostering generic skills among student teachers, as evidenced by the consistently higher mean scores across all eight domains measured by the Generic Skills Inventory and the critical ratios reported in the analysis. The statistical findings in Table 2 reveal that each generic skill—Thinking Skills (C.R = 3.89, $p < .01$), Computation Skills (C.R = 3.02, $p < .01$), Communication Skills (C.R = 3.93, $p < .01$), Problem-Solving Skills (C.R = 3.72, $p < .01$), Independent Learning Skills (C.R = 3.31, $p < .01$), Information Processing Skills (C.R = 3.02, $p < .01$), Team Management Skills (C.R = 3.24, $p < .01$), and Self-Management Skills (C.R = 3.61, $p < .01$)—showed a highly significant improvement among participants who engaged in participatory learning compared to those taught through traditional methods, confirming that the experiential, collaborative, and problem-based nature of participatory approaches directly supports the acquisition of transferable competencies. These findings substantiate the hypothesis that participatory strategies are superior to conventional instruction in enhancing generic skills, emphasizing that active involvement, real-world problem engagement, meaningful classroom interaction, and opportunities for reflection collectively produce deeper learning outcomes. The consistently higher performance of the participatory learning group suggests that such strategies facilitate the development of critical thinking, deeper comprehension, and applied problem-solving, while also strengthening interpersonal skills, teamwork, and self-directed learning—core attributes required in teacher education. The present results align with the observations of Gibbs et al. (1994) and Seagraves, Kemp, and Osborne (1996), who argue that authentic, experience-based tasks and reflective learning environments are more effective than passive instructional approaches in fostering competencies that transfer to workplace and professional contexts. Furthermore, the outcomes reinforce the theoretical frameworks of Bennett, Dunne, and Carre (1999), as well as Harvard, Hughes, and Clark (1998), whose work highlights the multidimensional nature of generic skills and the importance of integrating learner-centered pedagogies to develop such capabilities. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that participatory learning not only enhances academic skill development but also promotes personal growth, professional readiness, teamwork, and self-management, making it an essential component of contemporary teacher education programs.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study clearly indicate that Participatory Learning Strategies provide a highly effective and engaging approach for fostering generic skills among student teachers, offering a dynamic alternative to traditional instructional methods. By actively involving learners in meaningful, problem-based, and collaborative experiences, participatory learning environments promote not only the acquisition of core competencies such as communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and self-management, but also encourage independent learning, teamwork, and deeper cognitive engagement. Although the study was limited to a specific sample and utilized a single instrument for measurement, the significant differences observed between the participatory and traditional learning groups underscore the importance of integrating active, learner-centered strategies within teacher education programs. The results confirm that participatory learning supports both individual and collaborative growth, enabling future teachers to develop the transferable skills necessary for professional success and lifelong learning. Expanding the scope of participatory strategies to include additional generic skills and broader instructional contexts may further strengthen the overall effectiveness of teacher training, making such approaches a valuable component of modern educational practice.

6. REFERENCES

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