

Original Paper

Impact of In-class Breaks on Students' Revitalization: An Observational Study in China and Bangladesh

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Abstract

Students are the receiver and the teachers are the providers of information at a classroom. The exchange of information is conducted mainly through delivering lectures although there are several other ways to do that. Generally in a longer class duration (more than 1 hour), breaks are quite essential for the students as well as for the lecturer to get revitalized. This study aims at examining the impact of in-class breaks on revitalizing or energizing the students in order to focus on the lectures effectively. The investigation was conducted on 527 Bachelor and Master students of three universities in China and three universities in Bangladesh on a random sampling basis. Those students participated at two different classes: one with frequent short breaks and other one with two long breaks where they were being observed. The results indicate that frequent short breaks can revitalize the students more than fewer long breaks. Further, it was revealed that the Chinese students were more punctual and efficient in time management than the Bangladeshi students. The author hopes that this study will be inductive to the university lecturers as well as educational policymakers for putting more motivational focus for students in order to make the lectures enjoyable and effective.

Keywords

in-class breaks, lecture, revitalization, university, undergrad & master student

1. Introduction

Among all the jobs we do in our everyday lives, the most preferred word is having a “break” particularly if the job is longer in duration and requires utmost attention. As a matter of fact, whether or not we like coffee or tea, we always look forward to coffee/tea breaks. Any action, irrespective whether it is physically or psychologically fatiguing, turns out to be boring after a while; and a small break serves to revitalize an individual and regenerate attention. In this regard, a classroom or a lecture hall is not a different place, where people often deliver or listen lectures lasting from slightly less than an hour

(e.g., 45 minutes) to 3 hours in duration. Therefore, a student has to spend most of his/her time at educational campus (schools, colleges, universities). Considering that a university student has 3 to 6 credits to attend a class in a day, he/she may have to sit in a lecture room/class from 6 to 9 hours in average.

It is imperative to admit that the main purpose of a good lecture is to deliver a proper and timely transmission of information from sender (the lecturer) to receiver (the students). In this regard, proper attention from the receivers is of paramount significance. To receive the appropriate attention from the students, a lecturer needs not only to make the lecture interesting and deliver it in a unique, interesting manner, but also the in-class “break management” needs to be formulated and implanted prior to and during class. In fact, breaks are effective methods to allow the level of attention to recover (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Creating diversity and relief during the lecture is significantly vital to preserve audience attention (Mambert, 1976) and enhance learning capabilities (Milford, 1984). Eble (1976) recommended that providing recurrent breathing spaces increase students’ freshness and revitalization to ask questions. He further suggested that physical movement, use of the boards/power point slides, audience participation and any other possible method for breaking up single presentation modes are efficient strategies to attract students’ attention. Mambert (1976) warned that the standard audience is allured to sleep by a kind of monotonous repetitiveness whereas Miller (1981) agreed that only a few professors/lecturers are capable of presenting inspiring, motivating and attention-drawing lectures (Anderson & Harrison, 1985).

However, although there is no disagreement among the educational scholars or leaders that in-class breaks are imperative, there is very few research evidences about the duration and number of breaks in a university standard class lecture (2 hours or more). Considering such research gaps in recent academic platform, this empirical paper has been carried out to investigate the role of in-class breaks (both long and short) on student revitalization (revival of interest/attention). Therefore, the following research questions can be put forward for this empirical study:

RQ 1: What is the role of in-class breaks to revitalize students?

RQ2: What should be the optimum frequency and duration of in-class breaks?

2. Literature Review

In university level education system in a number of countries, the most conventional and still widely used method is class lecture. Particularly, in case of humanities and social science schools, in-class lecture method is the only option with a few exceptions (case study, project tour, industrial visit, etc.). A lecture is a two way communication of information involving two counterparts: sender or deliverer (lecturer) and the receivers (students). Two way communications in this regard indicate the communication or exchange of information must not only come from one side but it should be a normal flow from both sides (lecturer and students). Such lectures vary in duration from minimum 45 minutes to 180 minutes depending on the course credits. For due reason, in order to get adequate attention from

the students and to make the information exchange effective, a lecturer must make his/her lecture contents in an attractive, presentable and enjoyable manner for average students especially in longer duration classes.

The most significant requirement of a proper in-class exchange of information is the due attention of the receivers, the students. However, in this regard, there are in general, three broad sets of factors can influence such required attention. The broad sets or categories indicate three aspects: The deliverer, the students and finally, the atmosphere or classroom environment. Table 1 indicates the factors that influence students' attention corresponding to three categories mentioned.

Table 1. Factors That Influence in Getting Proper Attention at a Class

Factor category	Job role	Factors required
The lecture deliverer	The lecturer	Charismatic personality, presentation style, voice, eye contact, student involvement & number of breaks
The receivers	The students	Adaptation, patience, personality, number of breaks & subject interest
Atmosphere or classroom environment	Institutional authority	Technical facilities such as noise-free environment, size of lecture hall, multimedia & other facilities related to IT

Source: Author's elaboration.

However, the scope of this paper is limited to the role of breaks during a class in order to revitalize the students and get appropriate attention of the pupils. An important question might be asked in this case such as how long an average student can typically pay his/her attention to a lecture? There are several answers to this. According to Johnstone & Percival (1976), as expressed in their famous article "Attention Breaks in Lectures", published in the journal "Education in Chemistry" students with average memory typically can pay attention to a 10 to 20 minute span of lectures while Eastwood et al. (2012) argued that if such paid attention is insufficient, encoding and recalling of information are adversely affected and learning becomes stalled. Furthermore, the lecturers or university teachers having already loaded with multiple classes need some shorter refreshments in order to energize and revitalize themselves (Hosain, 2016).

Therefore, in-class breaks are quite essential in order to revitalize the students from boredom, monotony and variation. The question arises what should be the frequency and duration of in-class breaks in a normal class duration, such as 1 hour. Previous findings suggested that shorter, more frequent in-class breaks are more helpful than those of fewer and longer breaks (Anderson & Harrison, 1985; Bunce et al., 2010; Balbis, 2017). The obvious reasons for preferring shorter breaks pointed in

their studies were that the shorter breaks are conducive for a quick remembering the lecture contents as well as reducing the boredom.

Considering that most of the Bachelor and Master classes have the normal duration of more than 60 minutes with 3 classes a day, it is quite necessary to retain the attention of students so that they do not leave the classes or go to sleep. In such a case, they might miss out the most important parts of the lectures. As a result, it can be useless to attend the classes if they cannot get the real content and grab it into their brain. Although an in-class break is quite an important factor for a proper class management, research evidence focusing on this issue is quite uncommon and rare. This observational study has intended to discover the effects of number and frequency of breaks on Bachelor and Master students in two countries, China and Bangladesh.

3. Research Methods

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the author selected two countries (China and Bangladesh) to conduct this study. For due purpose, six universities have been pre-selected as the research premise. Total six classes of six universities have been taken as the sample classes having three hours duration. Out of those six classes, four classes were for Bachelor students and two classes were for Master students. The participants (students) have been kept uninformed regarding the real purpose of the study. Altogether 527 Bachelor and Master level students participated in this study.

The same lecturers took each class two times. During the first time, the lecturers gave two longer breaks for each class having a duration of 15 minutes each. At the second stage, the same lecturers delivered lectures to the same students. During that time, they (the lecturers) gave 6 breaks each having 7 minutes. After all the classes, the students' attention and revitalization were observed. Such attention and revitalization were considered based on three factors: questions asked by the students, eye contact and listening patience. The whole class period of all the six classes were observed by the author including the break time. At the end of the classes, the author conducted an informal interview with the students as a whole.

4. Research Findings

According to the author's observation based on those three factors mentioned in previous section, it was revealed that frequent short breaks can revitalize and hold the students' attention than fewer long breaks. Such results are mostly supportive the previous findings regarding in-class breaks. The students also supported their views in favor of shorter and more breaks when they talked to the author after class periods. They argued that frequent short breaks are conducive for quicker revitalization and remembering the lecture contents as they can take a cup of coffee, tea or cigarette. Further, the lecturer can talk to the students informally and record the quick feedback grading of the students who performed well during the class period. As a whole, both of the two very important parties (lecturer and students) were in favor of frequent short breaks than fewer long breaks.

If we consider the countrywide difference between the results in China and Bangladesh, the study observed that the Chinese students are more interested in frequent short breaks than those of Bangladeshi students. Further, the Chinese students came back to the classes timely after break whereas the Bangladeshi students came back a little bit late. Therefore, the Chinese students are more punctual and efficient in time management than the Bangladeshi students participated in this study.

5. Action Recommendations

Based on the findings of this observational study, the author would like to provide a few action recommendations in order to make a longer class more effective regarding break management. The lecturers and educational policymakers can benefit from such suggestions.

- A one hour class can be divided into two breaks having 7 to 8 minutes each whereas a three hour class can be divided into 6 breaks having the same duration of each break (7 to 8 minutes).
- After every break, the lecturer can ask the students regarding the lecture contents in order to check if they can remember the previous topics.
- No personal breaks for going to toilet or having coffee should be allowed unless there is an emergency.
- Immediately after each in-class break, quick quiz or group cases can be conducted to check the overall class performance.

6. Rationale and Significance

The study topic is based on the impact of in-class lecture breaks on revitalizing the students. Such a purpose is quite uncommon so far in academia and educational management. The study can aid in reducing the gap in literature to a large extent as far as the author is concerned. Further, the educational policymakers can also take the help from the results and recommendations provided in order to formulate and implement a proper break management policy for their educational institutions. The author expects that further research can be conducted based on this observational study as a guideline and pioneering effort.

7. Limitations and Further Study

Although pointing to a significant issue, the study is limited to a confined area based on only two countries. Further, the study is based on a kind of qualitative nature rather than an extensive questionnaire survey. Such limitations are small but obvious from the points of study nature.

The author is hopeful that further efforts can be initiated taking into consideration of such limitations by the researchers devoted to educational management.

8. Concluding Remarks

The advice to teachers based upon the observational proof of this study is that students do not or cannot pay their undivided concentration constantly during a longer lecture period. Therefore, the lecturers/teachers should be conscious of students' attention cycles within a lecture period and endeavor to pick up student concentration using student-oriented pedagogies at diverse times all the way through a lecture, not merely to reduce students' attention gapes but also to amplify their concentration for the duration of the lectures that go after the utilization of such pedagogies. This research shows that the constructive outcome of student-oriented pedagogies acts not only to reduce student inattentiveness during class periods but also has the additional advantage of an adjourned consequence to a consequent lecture segment. Such results supports the idea of altering conventional break management within a class period cannot simply be considered as a method to present new concepts in an alternate arrangement but might also assist in connecting students in succeeding teaching formats.

As an obvious true fact, it cannot be denied that the in-class breaks are not only quite essential but also an integrated part of proper class management particularly if the total class duration is more than 60 minutes. Lecture breaks can serve up to invigorate, arouse attention and pick up attentiveness during classroom presentations. Participants/students admit that in-class breaks help to resolve the problems of boredom, noise, and extreme material exposure. Almost all the parties involved in classroom management believe that in-class breaks can aid in improved learning, rather than wasting valuable class time.

Many actions are promising, in addition to providing desired diversity and liberation. This study suggests that it is an important task to plan a successful in-class lecture break during a generally scheduled class lecture since it is equally important as to prepare the lecture itself.

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