IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: CAN A SOLUTION BE FOUND USING THE DISCUSSION TEACHING METHOD?

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the Discussion Teaching Method can improve teaching and learning in higher education institutions. Teaching and learning are inseparable; yet, teaching becomes effective when it leads to meaningful learning. It appears that the Lecture Method of teaching dominates most of the lecture halls in the higher institutions of learning. It is receiving many negative comments from the larger society and students as well. Discussion Teaching Method has received commendation, and is also revered by a number of scholars, as possessing democratic associations. It also seems both inclusive and participatory. Effective use of Discussion Teaching Method in learning settings holds the key in stimulating and empowering learners to become critical thinkers. A Mixed Method approach was employed in conducting the study. Aspects of quantitative and qualitative characteristics were adopted at several stages throughout the study. Purposive and accidental sampling procedures were used. It was an exploratory study that adopted both structured interview schedule and interview guide in collecting data, views, ideas and suggestions from lecturers and students at the University of Ghana College of Education. It was revealed that the Discussion Teaching Method when effectively employed possesses the power to stimulate hitherto quiet and shy-looking learners to open up, think and participate in teaching and learning. It recommends that the Discussion Teaching Method should largely be adopted by lecturers in the teaching and learning in the higher education institutions. This is because it has the power to create equal playing field for both lecturers and learners to think critically, and also make meaningful contributions to address problems confronting them at the learning settings, and the society at large.

Keywords: Discussion Teaching Method, Higher Education Institutions, Democratic Classrooms, Inclusiveness, Participatory and Empowering

1. Introduction

Globally, the success of education is largely based on the quality of teaching and learning that takes place at the learning settings. In any case, good curriculum reveals that it is the human touch provided by the teacher that engenders good and lasting results produced in the educational institutions. Professionally trained teacher does appreciate that the fostering of learning is what good teaching is about. Gowin and Alvarez (2005) perceive teaching as the achievement of shared meaning. Just as teachers cause teaching, students cause learning. Learning is thus perceived as an active, non-arbitrary, voluntary re-organisation by the learner of patterns of meaning. The question to ask then is: Is it always true that teacher’s teaching leads to students learning? If even it does, is that type of learning by students meaningful? If the answer is no, then teachers in higher education institutions in particular, need to improve upon their teaching skills to benefit students in their
learning endeavours. It appears that many of the lecturers in higher education institutions, today, employ largely the lecture method of teaching in the lecture halls. The lecture method of teaching seems to be the easiest approach in delivering and imparting knowledge to students. First, a lecturer researches thoroughly on a topic captured in the course outline he/she developed. Second, he/she comes to the lecture hall with a prepared note or not, and teach the subject to the students through the lecturing approach. The lecture method is good to the extent that it causes students to develop active listening skills in order to benefit from the topic taught, and that is about all. The downside is that it creates dependency syndrome in students because it makes them become passive in their attitude towards learning. The absence of the lecturer in the lecture hall means that the students cannot undertake meaningful learning on their own.

Although knowledge in society today is vastly more important than before, it is also significant that the knowledge so conveyed by teachers has to be analysed, criticised, and re-examined by divergent views expressed by students to bring about meaningful learning. After all, good teachers have been found to use different methods for delivering best knowledge to their students. This is significant because the ‘information society’ we find ourselves in requires knowledgeable students. The student role in the technologically advanced global economy is to transform the knowledge acquired into a meaningful one. Hence, the heavy reliance on knowledge in this new age has created veritable explosion in teaching and learning in higher education institutions, in Ghana. Indeed, Ghana presently has more than 50 higher education institutions, running a number of programmes to students. Ensuring meaningful teaching in higher education institutions does not only means helping students learn new skills in identifying, accessing, and retrieving information, but also enabling them criticise and utilise that information meaningfully. The lecturer’s role as the purveyor of knowledge is being changed fast, and given new impetus. Perhaps this approach of helping produce empowered students can be realised through the discussion teaching method. The lecture method creates boredom in students, yet dominates our lecture halls. Lecturers, therefore, should rather be playing the role of discussion leadership in our learning settings.

Brookfield (2004, p. 209) admits that “of all the methods favoured by adult educators, it is the discussion which has perhaps become enshrined as the adult educational method “par excellence”. Discussion, as a teaching method, seems both inclusionary and participatory. In today’s lecture halls, teaching through discussion method, may be a useful approach of helping students engage in critical and constructive thinking about issues, problems and challenges in their lecture halls. In any case, the real fruit of education is the thought processes that result from the study of a discipline, not the information accumulated. Kimble, et. al. (1954) observes that the extra-mural class students have themselves made it a deliberate policy to act as regular leaders for vernacular discussion groups. The discussion method as an approach to teaching and learning of students in higher education institutions ensures that both teachers and learners involved in the learning activities gained from the cross-fertilisation of ideas, views, suggestions, and experiences that emerge from learning. The learning theory suggests that the student is more likely to learn when he/she actively participates in the learning process. Students sometimes form study groups because they know that by participating in the ‘give and take’ of a discussion, they will be more likely to remember what is discussed. Breaking students into groups to discuss topical issues dear to them, and inviting participation, is a time-proven strategy to help students learn in the lecture halls. This study which seeks to find out how discussion teaching method can largely be adopted by lecturers to make students exhibit democracy, independence and become critical in thinking, used the College of Education, University of Ghana, Legon, as a case study.
2. Statement of the Problem
It has been observed that the discussion teaching method provides one of the most promising opportunities to transform students disabling deference into thoughtful independence. Professionally trained lecturers believe that empowering students to critically think through issues under discussion teaching method should be one of the main goals of any class. That in itself informs lecturers’ that adopt discussion teaching method to perceive it as a better approach of training and educating today’s students. This is because it fosters democracy, independence, openness and critical thinking. Unfortunately however, in today’s higher institutions of learning, the lecture method seems the first approach that many lecturers’ buys into at the lecture halls in teaching students. The lecture method however, has received a lot of criticisms, and largely frowns upon by both students and society at large. It creates boredom and passive attitudes in students since enough opportunities are not created for students to ask thought-provoking questions, critique, comment, as well as challenge some uncritical assertions often made by some lecturers in lecture halls. This happens because lecturers often assume that students don’t know the subject matter being taught them.

Some lecturers, sadly, forget that today’s students are social-media-savvy learners, who are practically-oriented learners. They buy into hands-on experience and continue to explore new ways of learning. Continually providing students copious notes and information is not the way to go in today’s information age and knowledge society we find ourselves in. Merely thinking that students need to be taught new facts cannot help today’s students become critical, assertive and independent thinkers. What students need today is an empowering teaching and learning method that will constantly keep them engaging, thinking, reflecting and innovating sufficiently to follow through their dreams and visions in life. Davis (1993) has underscored the fact that initiating and sustaining a lively, productive discussion is among the most challenging activities for an instructor. It appears; however that while the advantages of discussion method as a means of teaching may seem obvious, most teachers are not skilled in the use of dialogue and discussion as teaching tools. Sometimes, too, due to little experience and preparation students have had in participating in discussion group due to the domination of lecture methods in the lecture halls, they are often unprepared to participate in discussion teaching and learning. On the basis of the above suppositions, the question to be answered then is: How can discussion teaching method be made an effective approach of aiding students learn meaningfully?

3. Research objectives
The main objectives of the study were to:
(1) Identify guidelines that foster effective discussion teaching and learning.
(2) Find out questions types that provoke students to open up to discussion teaching and learning.
(3) Identify facilitation roles that enhance students’ participation in meaningful learning.

4. Literature review
Welty (1989) revealed “that [lecturers] who are interested in discussion method teaching are probably convinced that improving interactive skills in the classroom will improve [our] teaching” (p. 197). Welty admits that both learning theory and common sense suggest that finding ways to involve students actively in what they are supposed to be learning is a worthwhile undertaking. It is perhaps on that basis that lecturers with vast experience are almost always desirous to promote discussion teaching method in the lecture hall. Yet lecturers can still do better with discussion
teaching method if they allow the students to frame some of the topics earmarked for discussions in the lecture hall. To make discussions teaching method open and democratic to learners, lecturers must put in place small discussion groups of 15 to 20 students to deliberate on a topic. The object, sometimes, is to use the discussions as a means of bringing out both sides of the question. The creation of democratic lecture halls is a necessary pre-requisite for embarking upon during discussion teaching. To become and adopt democratic teaching is a joyful celebration in the sense that the needs and views of every student are tolerated. Brookfield (1995) explains democratic teaching in this way:

- Teaching democratically does not mean that we cease to speak authoritatively or that we pretend to be exactly the same as our students. Teaching democratically is not to be confused with creating laissez-faire atmosphere of intellectual relativism, where anything goes. What it does mean is that we make an effort to create conditions which all voices can speak and be heard, including our own, and in which education processes are seen to be open to genuine negotiation (p. 44).

Most university lecturers value content and theory and feel that the most effective way to teach is to communicate the content-laden, theoretically-based lectures (Brookfield, 1995). Many lecturers, today, have become what we call ‘the sage on the stage.’ We talk and talk and rarely give students the opportunity to ask pertinent questions for clarifications of the points raised during lecturing. At any rate, we must all process information before we can make it our own. Such processing, however, requires interaction on the part of lecturers and students in the lecture hall. Wassermann (2010) observation that to have a productive classroom discussions, those that enable students to invent, create, imagine, take risks, and dig for deeper meanings, there should be in place a climate in which students feel safe to offer their ideas. This observation is significant here. Indeed, lecturers can create safe learning climate by being mindful of the essential conditions of interactive teaching. Wassermann offered five of such conditions, including lecturers should listen, attend, and apprehend what students say and clarify what students mean during discussions. In doing this, however, he/she should give students time to think and say what is on their minds. Lecturers should show appreciations to students’ ideas expressed during discussion, for we have come to ascertain for many years that a major barrier to productive classroom discussion is teachers’ natural tendency to judge, evaluate, and approve or disapprove of students’ contributions (Rogers, 1961).

Lecturers should accept lack of closure; after all, the need for certainty seems to be part of human make up. Lecturers should not talk too much to curtail students’ brain power, and come to terms that the key elements of effective classroom discussion are not present every moment of every teaching day, and, thus need to balance their classroom instructions. In any case, the art of teaching requires being clear about the goals we set, and using teaching strategies that are in concert with those goals, thus, consistently connecting our means with our ends. The goal here is to bring teaching strategies into sync with the teaching objectives for that lesson. Thus, productive classroom discussions are an excellent means when the objective is to promote students' intelligent habits of mind. Davis (1993) also asserts that lecturers can ensure effective discussion in lecture halls when they guide students to keep the discussion focused, repeat the key point of all comments or questions for the rest of the class, take notes and also be alert for signs that the discussion is deteriorating. Davis adds that if students are having trouble communicating, lecturers should avoid making remarks. They should also prevent the discussion from deteriorating into a heated argument. When the discussion travels its full length, the lecturer should bring closure to the
deliberation, and also remember that not all students are comfortable with extended direct eye contact.

Beginning a presentation in a lecture hall with questions and discussions has been hailed by Meyer (1986) as one best approach of stimulating students to open up to learning. This approach creates an atmosphere of anticipation and inquiry. Professional teachers sometimes bounce questions back to students to enable students know that the teacher has confidence in their abilities. It reinforces the practice of raising questions, and provides opportunities for students to develop their own critical thinking faculties. After all, questions are entry point to the discovery of knowledge and key to intellectual growth. The question to be asked is: What sort of question types should lecturers be encouraging the students to pose to themselves, and to their lecturers? Although the effects of question depend on tone, voice level, and speed of delivery, facial expression, bodily movement, eye contact as well as content, but recall questions do little to stimulate discussion and inquiry. Questions that generate real discussion pose problems and encourage students in the formulation of judgements.

Christensen (1991) provided a typology of questions that as a professional teacher find helpful in teaching students in lecture halls. They include open-ended, diagnostic, information-seeking, challenge or testing, action, priority and sequence, prediction, hypothetical, extension and generalization questions. For instance, action question such as “What needs to be done to implement the government’s anticorruption agenda?” can be posed to students during a discussion of a topical issue on the ‘Effects of corruption on Ghana’s economy’. A professionally trained lecturer will always endeavour to vary the kinds of questions posed to students to provoke active participation in class discussions. On a fundamental level, questions permit a lecturer using discussion teaching and learning method to stimulate students to think about and analyze the day’s exercises. In any case, language is one of the most powerful tools available to lecturers. Lecturers can use language to stretch students’ curiosity, reasoning ability, creativity, and independence. One effective way to do this is by asking open-ended questions—those with no single right or wrong answer. Instead of predictable answers, open-ended questions elicit fresh and sometimes even startling insights and ideas, opening minds and enabling lecturers and students to build knowledge together. Discussions provide means for testing and exploring the validity of students’ comments. Lecturers tailoring of questions to individual students’ needs and interests, and to the needs of the entire class, enable them to manage the levels of students’ involvement in the teaching and learning endeavours.

Lecturers’ undertake a number of facilitating roles that seek to invite students’ participation in meaningful learning in the lecture halls. Effective leadership exhibited by lecturers is often the difference between effective and ineffective discussion. In any case, one of the major goals of discussion is to teach students how to talk to each other. If their questions and comments are mostly addressed to the lecturer, it means that the students are not learning to talk to each other. As a lecturer plans for lecture halls discussions, he/she should take some time to think about his/her facilitating role. He/she should also consider training a corps of student moderators so that students can develop the leadership skills associated with moderating discussions. Discussion lecturers should use the following broad guidelines, understanding that factors such as participant experience, nature of the topic and setting of the discussion may differ from one discussion to the next. Lecturers in lecture halls should endeavour to begin the discussion effectively and fairly. What it mean is that the discussion lecturer is responsible for introducing the topic of the discussion and reviewing the expectations for the discussion, including the ground rules and goals for the
discussion. Second, every good discussion lecturer endeavours to encourage every student to take part in the discussion. If there are participants who dominate the discussion to the exclusion of others, the lecturer is responsible for trying to move the talk to other students often by introducing new topics or points of view. Third, discussion lecturers should periodically summarise the path of the discussion to help participants get a sense of where they have been and what remains to be discussed. Fourth, the lecturer should ensure that the moderator is responsible for timing the discussion, including informing participants about remaining time left. This, in a way, will help the class use its time effectively, including saving time for closing thoughts, if those are planned parts of the discussion. Fifth, at the end of the discussion, the lecturer should ensure the students reflect on its progress if the moderator summarises the course of the discussion, including major points, action items and resolutions. The moderator should pay particular attention to the lines of discussion that were wrapped up and the ones that remained open at the end of the discussion, as those latter lines will be fruitful topics for subsequent discussion. The researcher next turns his attention to the method designed for the study.

5. Methodology
Students formed the sampling units and unit of analysis in the design. A mixed method design was adopted. Aspects of quantitative and qualitative characteristics were adopted at several stages throughout the study. Convenience procedure was adopted in selecting the sample. The names of the accessible students, who were 60 in number, were compiled and serially labelled on pieces of papers. They were put into a container and reshuffled and 30 of them were randomly selected for the study. This sample size of 30 respondents out of the accessible population of 60 was representative in terms of the institution under study. The researcher’s intention was to understand, analyse and describe how discussion method can improve teaching and learning in higher institutions of learning. The researcher adopted these sampling procedures to identify the meaningfulness of discussion teaching and learning to students. The researcher’s intention was, therefore, to get a deeper insight into how the respondents assessed the guidelines, questions types posed to them, and the facilitating roles adopted by lecturers during lecture halls discussions.

This was an exploratory study which gathered data through semi-structured interview schedule and the results were presented qualitatively in terms of themes and quantitatively in terms of statistics. The data collected from closed-ended questions was analysed using percentages. The responses from the open-ended questions were summarised, organised and interpreted in the form of tables. A descriptive-narrative approach was also adopted to analyse some of the responses. The study sought the views of students on the guidelines that foster effective discussion and the type of questions that provoke students to open up to teaching and learning. Lecturers’ facilitation roles that enhance students’ participation in meaningful learning were also examined.

6. Analysis and discussion
In all, twenty-eight (28) students in the College of Education, the majority (64 percent) of the respondents being males, and remaining (36 percent) represented the female respondents participated in the study. In terms of age, the majority (61 percent) of the respondents fell within 18-30 years brackets, indicating that they are young adults. More than half (58 percent) of the respondents were undergraduate students.
6.1. Institution of Guidelines to Foster Discussion Teaching and Learning
On whether lecturers institute guidelines to foster discussion teaching and learning in lecture halls, the respondents mostly ranked occasionally and frequently for the four guidelines put in place which students were asked to rank from lower level of (1) to higher level of (4). Table 1 presents the results as ranked by the respondents.

Table 1. Ranking Guidelines that Foster Discussion Teaching and Learning (T/L)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guidelines</th>
<th>Never (1)</th>
<th>Seldom (2)</th>
<th>Occasionally (3)</th>
<th>Frequently (4)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers use discussion method in class</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers make you feel safe during T/L</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers encourage students to ask questions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lectures show appreciation to students input</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Multiple responses were made. N = 28. Source: Field Data, 2016

From Table 1, respondents indicated that lecturers frequently (57 percent) encouraged students to ask questions during discussion teaching sessions in the lecture halls. Less than half (32 percent) of the respondents admitted that lecturers occasionally encouraged them to ask questions during discussion teaching sessions. As to whether lecturers use discussion method in lecture halls, more than half (55 percent) of the respondents said lecturers occasionally adopt discussion teaching approach in the lecture halls. Though efforts were made by lecturers in using discussion method in teaching in lecture halls, more of that is required to make students deeply reflect and think critically on topical issues before expressing themselves. That notwithstanding, nearly half (44 percent) of the respondents admitted that lecturers frequently make them feel safe during discussion teaching sessions in class, and that in itself is good, because it has the power to empower quiet and shy-looking students to open up and speak, perhaps with sense, in the lecture halls. The good news, too, was that more than half (52 percent) of the respondents admitted that lecturers showed appreciation to the input in terms of contributions they made in lecture halls during discussion of topical issues. The findings confirm Brookfield (2004) assertion that of all the methods favoured by adult educators, it is the discussion which has perhaps become enshrined as the adult educational method “par excellence.” This perhaps should be expected because majorities (61 percent) of the respondents were young adults, and they prefer to actively engage in teaching and learning endeavours that is interactive, dialogical and conversational. More so, discussion as a teaching method seems both inclusionary and participatory. The quiet, shy-looking and unassuming students are encouraged to share their views on topical issues under discussion teaching and learning sessions. It also means that the discussion method is a useful approach of helping students engage in constructive thinking about issues, problems and challenges not only in the lecture halls, but the society at large. In any case, Christensen (1991) has made us understand that questioning, listening and response shine best in the classroom. Thus, as questions are posed during discussion teaching, and students actively listen, it impact positively on responses offered by students in the lecture halls. It has to be added, however, that student’s appreciation and mastery of questioning, listening and response are not only important in the lecture halls, but also to the decision making in the larger society as well.
6.2. Question Types Posed by Lecturers to Students during Discussion Session

Open-ended questions such as: “What social issues are facing today’s graduates from our universities?” and “What is the greatest facing the youth today?” were posed to students. Diagnostic questions such as: “What is your analysis of youth unemployment problem in Ghana?” and “What conclusion can you draw from youth unemployment data in Ghana?” were also asked. Information-seeking questions sometimes posed include: “What is the percentage of the youth population in Ghana?” and “what does it tell you as a student?” In terms of challenge (testing) questions posed, the following were considered: “What conclusion can you draw from the unemployment situation confronting the youth of Ghana?” and “what strategies must be put in place to address the challenge?” “How will you implement the strategies you come up with?” and “what will be the likely result?” were some of the action questions posed. Hypothetical and questions of extension sometimes posed to the students include: “What would have happened to unemployed youth without these strategies?” and “what would have been the likely effects?” and “what are the implications of such strategies on youth unemployment in Ghana?” and “what will be the overall effect of such strategies on youth unemployment in Ghana?”

On whether varieties of question types were employed during discussion teaching and learning sessions in lecture halls, all (100%) the respondents were in the affirmative. When respondents were asked to rank in order of importance least asked (1) and most asked (2) question types posed by lecturers to students during discussion teaching sessions in lecture halls, the responses that emerged are presented in Table 2 explicitly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Types</th>
<th>Least Asked Questions (1)</th>
<th>Most Asked Questions (2)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended questions</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic questions</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information-seeking questions</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge (testing) question</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action question</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothetical question</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions of extension</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Multiple responses were made. N = 28. Source: Field Data, 2016

The use of question types during discussion teaching cannot be underestimated, and that exactly the study demonstrates. From Table 2, the majority (83 percent) of the respondents indicated that information seeking (recall) questions were mostly posed to them during discussion sessions in lecture halls. This is not good enough, especially when it is contrasted to action (63 percent), hypothetical (52 percent) and extension (58) questions which possesses the power to make students develop critical thinking skills were least asked in the lecture halls. The findings amply demonstrate that lecturers largely fail to pose questions that have extraordinary ability to stimulate students learning. More than half (62 percent) of the respondents indicated that lecturers used open-ended questions during discussion teaching sessions. Indeed, Small (2009) asserts that a question is considered open-ended when it is framed in such a way that a variety of responses or approaches are possible. Although open-ended questions are designed to uncover students understanding and misunderstandings, but if equal weights are assigned to other question types in lecture halls as lecturers did to information-seeking question type, many of our students would become powerful independent thinkers with positive effects felt by the larger society. As lecturers,
the responses we get from discussions are used to inform instruction because we learn from how our students think, rather than to make evaluative decisions. It also reveals what students know how they apply their knowledge. Interestingly, while diagnostic questions had a little more than half (52 percent) of the respondents admitted that they were least asked by lecturers, more than half (56 percent) of the respondents revealed that challenge questions were most asked by lecturers during discussion teaching at lecture halls. It demonstrates a sign that students are gradually, but surely developing the skill of responding to thought-provoking questions posed to them in lecture halls.

On whether the questions posed by lecturers to students make them develop critical thinking skills, nearly all (96 percent) the respondents were in the affirmative. However, if you juxtaposed this finding to the types of questions posed by lecturers to students you can arrive at a conclusion that students are not sufficiently encouraged to reflect, think and innovate with new ideas, views and suggestions during discussion teaching in lecture halls. As to whether the students think through questions posed to them, all (100 percent) the respondents were in the affirmative. The finding amply demonstrates that the discussion teaching possesses the power to make students develop critical thinking skills, and eventually, become innovators. Lecturers, however, need to vary the question types posed to students to make them extend their imaginative thinking skills. Nearly all (96 percent) the respondents were in agreement that views expressed by colleagues during discussion teaching make them refine inputs and contributions they make in lecture halls. That is good because no one head is a repository or a fount of all knowledge and wisdom. We learn better when we share ideas among ourselves, after all knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers.

6.3 Facilitation Roles that Enhance Discussion Teaching and Learning

On whether lecturers start discussion teaching by first setting the ground rules, more than half (64 percent) of the respondents were in the affirmative. That in itself demonstrates that the lecturers ensure that the students get settled properly before they start the teaching and learning sessions. It further makes the students become attentive and focused to the overall discussion endeavours in the lecture halls. Lecturers’ starting the teaching and learning session with a problem related to the topic understudy is one surest approach of arresting the attention of students for the lesson. The students can be asked to brainstorm among themselves, and the key ideas they come up with are captured on the board. It goes a long way to resonate in students that their views are respected. On the question of whether students follow through the instructions offered during discussion teaching, nearly two-thirds (71 percent) of the respondents, indicated yes. The findings confirm Meyers (1986) assertion that if a lecturer begins a discussion teaching with a problem or a question related to the topic for the day, it helps students settle down and focus their attention. The result provides ample indication that when students are made to settle down properly for a lecture, they psychologically and mentally give all their attention to the teaching and learning endeavours at the lecture halls. This is a matter of great importance, if, indeed, we want to produce students who can imagine, reflect and think critically and independently as well. On whether quiet and shy-looking students are encouraged to participate in the learning activities, nearly two-thirds (68 percent) of the respondents responded in the affirmative. This is one strong side of discussion if only lecturers fairly distribute questions and do everything possible to control the dominant students from hijacking the entire discussion teaching and learning activities. Thus, greater participation, involvement and inclusiveness are ensured if students are sufficiently encouraged to open up and talk during discussion sessions at lecture halls. It means, therefore, that the discussion method of teaching possesses the power to engender the ‘can-do’ spirit in both students and lecturers not only
in the lecture halls, but in the larger society as well. On how the discussion method can empower students to actively participate in teaching and learning activities, students offered multiple responses as Table 3 explicitly summarizes it.

**Table 3. Discussion Method Empowering Students Participation in Teaching and Learning (T/L)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boost students interest, contributions and communication skills in T/L</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages students research, reflection and confidence in becoming involved in T/L</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases students retrieval rate of information during teaching and learning sessions</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes understanding by offering opportunity for seeking clarification of issues</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students become practical in approach to learning</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Multiple responses were made. \( N = 28 \). **Source:** Field Data, 2016

According to Table 3, majority (82 percent) of the respondents admitted that discussion method of teaching and learning possesses the power of boosting students’ interest in a course they offer. It also enhances their contribution and communications skills in lecture halls. This is significant to the extent that students become attentive and focused when they develop interest in a particular course. Their psychological and mental capacities become invigorated and heightened such that they remain focused on whatever subject matter taught them, after all, interest and desire are the foundation of motivation. Lecturers can get much from students when they build their motivation and commitment up, and discussion method possesses the power to do just that. Indeed, as students continue to interact among themselves and that of their lecturers, their contributions as well as their communication skills improve for the better. In any event, communicating is the ability to listen, to hear, and to persuade. Effective communication displayed by students in lecture halls enables them to be understood properly by their lecturers. Indeed, students learn better when they are deeply involved in learning endeavours, and that exactly is what discussion method of teaching seeks to do. A Native American saying sums it up best: “Tell me and I’ll listen; show me, and I’ll understand; involve me, and I’ll learn.” (Evers, Rush & Berdrow, 1998). More than two-thirds (79 percent) of the respondents indicated that the discussion method possesses the power of encouraging students research, reflection and confidence of getting involved in teaching and learning in lecture halls. This is an important observation because students want to make a mark or difference in lecture halls, and can only excel in their academic endeavours only if they research on the subject matter, and topics earmarked to be treated in lecture halls. Less than half (36 percent) of the respondents respectively asserted that discussion method increases students retrieval rate of information and also promotes understanding and offers opportunity for seeking clarification of issues during teaching and learning in lecture halls. These two observations made were very significant, however, did not receive much premium from the respondents, but that does not in any way make them less important when it comes to what discussion method seeks to offer to both students and lecturers in our learning settings. In a similar vein, less than a quarter (18 percent) of the respondents indicated that discussion method makes students become practical in their approach to learning. This observation is equally important; however, it received less response. That notwithstanding, students, in particular should come to realisation that the discussion method possesses the power to engender meaningful learning in them in tertiary institutions of learning, only if lecturers largely adopt it.
7. Conclusions and recommendations
The paper explored how discussion teaching method can largely help improve teaching and learning in higher education of learning, taking into consideration guidelines that foster effective discussion teaching and learning, question types that provoke students to open up to discussion teaching and learning and lecturers facilitating roles that enhance students’ participation in meaningful learning. The researcher’s personal observation as a lecturer in higher education institution sufficiently informs him that the lecture method heavily dominates our lecture halls. However, it has received massive criticisms based on how it is practiced. Perhaps some of the lecturers who adopt lecture method of teaching in our lecture halls are not very critical when lecturing, hence lecturing method is perceived as a worst kind of banking education. As a professionally trained teacher, the researcher is better positioned to explore to ascertain how discussion method can aid students to undertake meaningful learning. The findings of the study indicate that lecturers occasionally and frequently institute guidelines during discussion sessions in lecture halls. Thus, lecturers make students feel safe during discussion sessions, call on students to ask questions and equally show appreciation to diverse views expressed by students in lecture halls during discussion sessions. Although discussion method is occasionally practiced in lecture halls, appropriate question types that will stimulate students to foster critical and independent thinking skills were least asked, except challenging and information seeking questions which were mostly asked. That is not good enough if we truly want to empower sufficiently students to undertake meaningful learning in the lecture halls. Yet discussion teaching method possesses the power to boost not only students’ interest and communication skills, but also to encourage them to develop skills in researching, reflecting and building their confidence and motivation up to learn. The findings make it imperative that lecturers in higher education institutions largely adopt the discussion method of teaching and learning to sufficiently empower today’s students to become creative and innovative in their learning endeavours.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

In order to address the institution of appropriate guidelines to foster effective discussion teaching and learning in the lecture halls, it is recommended that lecturers:

- Should, together with students, dialogue and extensively interact and brainstorm to arrive at convincing learning guidelines that would benefit all the parties involved in the discussion teaching and learning sessions in the lecture halls;
- Considering the benefits to be derived from discussion method of teaching and learning to the students in particular, effort has to be made by lecturers to largely adopt the discussion method in teaching and learning in the lecture halls of our higher education institutions.

In order to improve on question types that provoke students to open up to discussion teaching and learning in the lecture halls, it is recommended that lecturers:

- Take into consideration the interest and concerns of students to inform the kind of question types posed to them during discussion teaching and learning sessions in the lecture halls.
- Lecturers should consciously involve students in framing the question types that possesses the power to stimulate sufficient students’ participation in discussion teaching and learning sessions in the lecture halls.
In order to improve upon the lecturers facilitating roles that enhances students’ participation in meaningful learning, it is recommended that lecturers:

- Should pace at the rate of the students such that they will all flow together. In so doing, the comprehension and competencies in research skills, communication skills and meaningful learning would be promoted in students.

- Should encourage students to seek for clarifications on issues raised and, thus, become intellectually skeptical at learning settings. In so doing, they would build their motivation and confidence levels up to become independent learners and thinkers not only in the lecture halls, but the society at large.

- Finally, lecturers must learn fast to move from the ‘sage on the stage’ to the ‘guide on the side’. By so doing, they can help students to see the need to stop thinking like students and start thinking like learners in the learning settings.

8. Suggestions for future research
The following areas could be explored for further research.
- An assessment of integrating active interaction into lecture method in promoting effective learning in tertiary institutions in Ghana.
- Engendering Quality Tutoring in Distance Education: Challenges and Strategies.

9. References