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<b>JOURNAL</b>	International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science
<b>p-ISSN</b>	2544-9338
<b>e-ISSN</b>	2544-9435
<b>PUBLISHER</b>	RS Global Sp. z O.O., Poland

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<b>ARTICLE TITLE</b>	TEACHING STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE LEARNERS IN ACTIVE LEARNING IN BUSINESS STUDIES
<b>AUTHOR(S)</b>	Ngwenya Jabulisile, Zulu Sphelele
<b>ARTICLE INFO</b>	Ngwenya Jabulisile, Zulu Sphelele. (2023) Teaching Strategies to Engage Learners in Active Learning in Business Studies. <i>International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science</i> . 3(39). doi: 10.31435/rsglobal_ijitss/30092023/8062
<b>DOI</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.31435/rsglobal_ijitss/30092023/8062">https://doi.org/10.31435/rsglobal_ijitss/30092023/8062</a>
<b>RECEIVED</b>	18 August 2023
<b>ACCEPTED</b>	28 September 2023
<b>PUBLISHED</b>	30 September 2023
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# TEACHING STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE LEARNERS IN ACTIVE LEARNING IN BUSINESS STUDIES

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DOI: [https://doi.org/10.31435/rsglobal\\_ijitss/30092023/8062](https://doi.org/10.31435/rsglobal_ijitss/30092023/8062)

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## ARTICLE INFO

**Received** 18 August 2023

**Accepted** 28 September 2023

**Published** 30 September 2023

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## KEYWORDS

Business Studies Teachers,  
Teaching Strategies,  
Engagement, Class  
Discussions, Active Learning.

## ABSTRACT

Teachers in the 21st century are encouraged to creatively and actively engage learners in the learning process. This requires teachers to use student-centred approaches for learners to improve their learning experiences. This article explores teaching strategies teachers use to engage learners in active learning in Business Studies. The study employed a qualitative case study of six purposively selected Grade 10 Business Studies teachers. Data were obtained through semi-structured individual and focus group interviews. Thematic analysis method was used to analyse data. What emerged from the findings is that participants acknowledged the role of learner involvement in creating a supportive social environment that allowed opportunities for enhancing learning of new concepts. Teachers were inspired to express themselves and share in a more relaxed manner without being ridiculed during discussions and presentations. Engaging learners in a variety of collaborative activities led to positive interdependence and interaction while developing self-confidence and interpersonal skills. Diversity in members created spaces for learners to share different viewpoints.

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**Citation:** Ngwenya Jabulisile, Zulu Sphelele. (2023) Teaching Strategies to Engage Learners in Active Learning in Business Studies. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*. 3(39). doi: 10.31435/rsglobal\_ijitss/30092023/8062

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## Introduction.

Teaching in the 21st century entails engaging learners actively in the learning process (Fatimah & Santiana, 2017; Rudin, 2019; Ruminar, 2018). The teaching and learning process requires total involvement of learners to allow understanding of theoretical knowledge and intensive application of basic principles. Teaching strategies have been known to have a significant influence on students' involvement during the process of teaching and learning of new content. This also implies use of learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning that involve students and allow them to use different learning strategies. Teachers, therefore, should apply appropriate teaching methods to facilitate the process of knowledge transmission.

The Business Studies curriculum aims to produce learners who are able to solve problems, work collaboratively with others and communicate effectively (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Teachers are expected to use strategies that enable learners to acquire entrepreneurial skills and to ensure that learners apply knowledge and skills in a way that is meaningful to their own lives (America & Skelly, 2021).

Literature confirms that in many Business Studies classes, teachers depend on following methods of planning, teaching and assessment that are more or less rigid without taking into consideration the need to actively involve students in developing essential skills (Frick et al., 2020; Lubbe, 2016; Phan, 2018). Business Studies teachers are expected to equip learners with problem-solving and investigative skills that are peculiar in making sense of business information to the subject. Therefore, Business Studies teachers need expertise in preparing and teaching discipline specific concepts prevalent in understanding, especially unfamiliar topics. Teachers are required to use particular teaching strategies to assist Business Studies learners to develop a strong conceptual base to equip them with analytical skills needed to analyse financial information. However, teaching strategies used by teachers can affect learners understanding of new concepts, development of skills that are pertinent in further learning Business Studies and ultimately learners' performance (Edokpolor, 2018). This obliges teachers to use a variety of teaching strategies to support learning of different skills that assist learners to make connections among topics (Jolliffe & Snaith, 2017; Gillies, 2016). According to these authors, teaching approaches and methods greatly influence learners' attitudes to learning, and thus determine learning outcomes. This is confirmed by Lubbe (2016), that teaching strategies used in different contexts have a huge impact on the students' learning. While teachers are struggling with the continuing changing curriculum, the situation is worse in subjects that are affected by global changes like Business Studies. According to the CAPS, Business Studies aims to produce learners who are able to solve problems, work collaboratively with others and communicate effectively (DBE, 2011). Therefore, the teaching of Business Studies requires teachers to have a deeper understanding of different teaching approaches in order to enhance teaching and learning of the subject.

The literature reviewed revealed that studies that explore the notion of teaching strategies have largely been conducted in other disciplines (Amesi et al., 2014; Lubbe, 2016, Zender & Greiner, 2020). The effect of two instructional methods on learning outcome in chemistry education). However, there is a shortage of literature in Business Studies, especially on teaching strategies that teachers use to engage learners in active learning in South Africa. This paper thus contributes to knowledge by addressing the gap in the existing literature in Business Studies, particularly on the teaching strategies teachers use to actively involve learners in learning Business Studies. The question that guides the research is: What teaching strategies do teachers use to engage learners in active learning in Business Studies in South Africa? The remainder of the article proceeds with a literature review, thereafter describing the methodology used, analysis, presentation and discussion of the findings. It concludes with recommendations and implications for future research in Accounting.

### **Literature review.**

For purposes of this article, this section is divided into three sub-sections covering the rural context of teaching, learner performance and brief literature on factors influencing learner performance, and Business Studies as a subject of teaching and learning.

### **The nature of Business Studies as a subject.**

Business Studies encompasses knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, critical for informed, productive, ethical and responsible participation in the Business and Economic sector (DBE, 2011). The role of Business Studies as a subject is to develop the learners' insight into South African schools and global businesses so that they can understand the role of different role players in various issues and challenges that influence or impact the business (America & Skelly, 2021; DBE, 2011). Business Studies emphasises teaching and learning of the theory and practice of business principles that support the enhancement of entrepreneurial and sustainable initiatives and economic growth (America & Skelly, 2021; Emeasoba & Igwe, 2016). Therefore, active learning methods are essential to increase real-world relevance of the subject and the acquisition of skills and knowledge required to keep up with the rapidly changing business environment (America & Skelly, 2021).

### **Active learning.**

Active learning is a teaching strategy that engages students in the learning process through active participation. Active Learning (AL) is a form of learning in which students are vigorously involved in the learning in learning activities beyond reading, listening, or watching to deepen their learning through discussions, scenarios, problem-solving, case studies, role plays and other methods (Gillies, 2016;

Nouri, 2016; Phan, 2018). Therefore, it places a greater degree of responsibility on the student in contrast to traditional lectures where learners passively receive information from the instructors. During the teaching and learning process, students are allowed to construct knowledge from their learning experiences by being actively engaged and building on existing knowledge.

#### **Student engagement in learning.**

Researchers define students' engagement as involvement, commitment, effort and participation in learning (Crawford & Jenkins, 2018; Dunn & Kennedy, 2019; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Mahoney, 2019). According to Sholikah and Harsono, 2012, students' engagement is demonstrated by how students participate in discussions and collaborate in learning to build knowledge. Dunn and Kennedy (2019) argue that students' level of engagement in the learning process is directly related to enhancement in understanding of new knowledge. Prior studies have provided evidence that active learning strategies are more conducive than traditional methods to fostering students' engagement and collaborative learning activities (Baloch & Brody, 2017; Zender & Greiner, 2020).

#### **Teaching strategies used to engage learners in Business Studies.**

##### **Question and answer approach.**

According to Letshwene (2014), the question-and-answer method facilitates active interaction between the learner and the teacher while at the same time assisting learners to move from the unknown to known concepts with the help of the teacher (Phan, 2018). According to Echiverri et al. (2020), questions are highly effective triggers for class discussions. They contend that questions cause students to think deeply and make connections among the various concepts and/or skills that they are learning. Al-Husban and Shorman (2020) also note that engaging students through questioning improves learning by keeping them active as they focus on what is discussed.

##### **Enterprise education pedagogic strategy.**

Khanal (2016) believes that Business Studies requires teachers to equip their learners with necessary skills to promote practical pedagogical strategies. It is where learners learn by doing, which leads to the development of key business skills. Jones and Iredale (2010) suggest that enterprise education pedagogy should be used across all business-related subjects to prepare and expose Business Studies learners to the business world by getting practical through school-based mini enterprises. This project enhances learners' understanding of the subject in terms of how a business operates. To learn by doing and applying it into practice is seen as the best way of learning since it accommodates all types of learners. should use a pedagogical strategy described as "education through enterprise" which is teaching outside the classroom strategy. It is about training and assessing learners to be future entrepreneurs where they sell things like sweets, snacks, and things made using recyclable materials to save money. Learners are required to make a profit; therefore, they have to use affordable things. Farrell and Brunton, (2020) states that an active enterprise through education enhances the knowledge that learners need in order to operate successfully as a citizen by developing personal skills on how small businesses work.

##### **Field trips teaching strategy.**

Numerous researchers have explored how learning occurs and how learners gain knowledge in the process of field trips (Edlira & Ermiona, 2020; Nadelson & Jordan, 2012). Amesi et al. (2014) define field trips as an educational trip that intends to educate learners with information that is directed at subject matter. Behrendt and Franklin (2014) similarly state that field trips are designed in a form of instructional trip or school excursion. Behrendt and Franklin (2014) describe field trips as learners' experiences outside of the classroom at interactive locations designed for educational purposes. Field trips take learners to places that they are unfamiliar with, with the aim of educating them (Edlira & Ermiona, 2021).

##### **Group and Class discussions.**

Discussion can take two forms, namely a whole class discussion where all students in a class can exchange ideas and learn from one another, or a discussion in small groups, also known as group

work. Studies have concurred on the importance of class discussions as a student-centred method (Abdulbaki et al., 2018; Pereira & Sithole, 2020; Jebiwot et al., 2016; Pukdesree, 2017). They confirm that involving students in discussions prompts them to ask questions that help them to explore phenomena, thereby increasing their chances of gaining new knowledge. Students can explore a diversity of perspectives and build on each other's knowledge and understanding of the content. Abdulbaki et al. (2018) observed that, among others, classroom discussions increased student interest and this fosters good rapport between teachers and learners, which in turn stimulates learners' critical thinking and improve the articulation of ideas. Sybing (2015) found that, during class discussions, students helped one another as an answer raised by one learner triggered another learner's thinking to construct an improved answer, thus enhancing understanding of new knowledge. This helps students to see things from multiple perspectives, use logic to defend their positions (Brown, 2015; Sybing, 2015), and improve their critical thinking and communication skills.

Group work is an active learning strategy that allows students to work together, either in pairs or in small groups of not more than six members on a topic. Allowing learners to do their work in groups can transform classroom dynamics by giving students the autonomy to work on their own, with minimal assistance from their teacher. Kasim (2015) found that small group discussions developed the cognitive and affective abilities of participants by freely sharing information and insights among peers since groups have more information than a single individual. According to Brown (2015), different answers are essential in responding to challenging questions as different perspectives lead to a broader understanding of the concept due to the deeper analysis. Students who like group learning report that it helps them build self-confidence far from the intimidating attention and criticism of an entire class (Ganyaupfu, 2013; Kasim, 2015; Sybing, 2015).

#### **Theoretical framework.**

The study framed by the constructivist theory which is grounded on the view that knowledge is actively constructed by the learners based on preceding knowledge and experience (Bada & Olusegun, 2015; Kalpana, 2014; Yadav, 2016). The theory encourages interaction, where teachers and learners collaborate to create new ideas by apply previously learned knowledge and understandings to new or different conditions. Bada and Olusegun (2015) add that knowledge construction happens in the processes of teaching and learning when the learners are actively involved in learning with peers. This implies that teachers should strive to create opportunities to allow learners to apply previously learnt concepts to make meaning of the new information and to encourage learners to share their point of view with one another.

#### **Methodology.**

The qualitative interpretive approach was the most suitable for the study, as it permitted us to interact with the participants face-to-face (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Denzin and Lincoln (2018) believe that the interpretive paradigm aims to understand human experiences of the world, relying on the views of the participants within the situation being studied. A qualitative case study was adopted as a research design for the study. Yin (2018) states that the purpose of case studies is to describe how people feel about being in a particular situation that they are currently experiencing in a real-life context.

Denzin and Lincoln (2018) describe sampling as deciding on individuals or sources to use in order to generate data. This study employed purposive and convenience sampling to select five Grade 10 Business Studies teachers. The individual semi-structured interviews and focus groups interviews was used to allow a dialogue between the researcher and the participant (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The data were analysed using thematic analysis since it is an appropriate method when the researcher seeks to understand experiences, thoughts, or behaviours across data sets (Cohen et al., 2018). A process of open coding was used, and categories were established, reviewed and clustered into specific themes. The findings were arranged according to different themes that emerged from the analysis and these were used to presentation and report the findings. The ethical code of conduct was adhered to throughout the duration of the study.

### **Findings.**

The findings of this study were consolidated into the themes. Verbatim quotes are used to capture participants' responses to the questions posed.

#### **Questioning used to open whole class discussions.**

Participants explained that because Business Studies concepts are related and they build on each other, they introduced new topics by asking questions on previous knowledge. Learners were required to analyse these questions together in class before providing solutions to the entire class. They stated that this helped them to elicit learners' prior knowledge. Therefore, participants believed questions that required learners to review previous knowledge before learning new concepts were beneficial to assess and reinforced understanding of prior knowledge. This was confirmed by Bonga:

*I create classroom discussions obviously by asking questions; the moment I ask them questions in the classroom I assist them in learning to express themselves and to learn to engage in particular discussions. I ask questions without pin-pointing a particular learner, I only pin-point if only few individuals have responded. I do this to create opportunities for my learners to discuss questions together. In other cases, you find that some learners know the answers but they will not get an opportunity to respond since the teacher did not pin-point them. That is why I want them to discuss in groups and then give answers to the whole class.*

Teachers also indicated that they valued questions that they asked during the process of teaching and learning because they were continuously motivating learners to take part in the learning process and to check on acquisition of the new knowledge. Dabula added that during class discussions learners got a chance to ask questions whenever there was a need for further clarity. Peers were also expected to explain in more detail in addition to the explanation provided by him. This enhances communication and higher order thinking skills This is what Dabula said:

*Discussing questions as a class was so helpful, especially when you are presenting a new concept and ask learners to discuss it with peers. Of course, other learners feel free to ask, they ask questions one after the other, and others know that they have to explain their answers to the class. It is through class discussion that learners can grasp more concepts concerning the topic that I'm teaching.*

Anita articulated the importance of allowing discussions in the classroom through questioning. She revealed that she used thought provoking questions to encourage her learners to take part during learning and teaching process in class. Active involvement of learners through questioning encouraged them to think critically while enhancing communication skills.

#### **Debates.**

Participants acknowledged the crucial role that class debates played in enhancing understanding of new knowledge and putting what learners had been learnt into practice. During debating, learners had to demonstrate their arguments by way of relating to real-world situations regarding the given topic. It emerged that the debate allowed the participants to think through their argument points in advance and articulate them in a logical manner. Furthermore, the participants showed that debating provoked logic and critical thinking as the groups had to think about the topic and relate them to the real South African situation and its implications. Learners had an opportunity to challenge and expand their understanding of the topic by having others ask questions during the debating process. As a result, they had to do thorough research on the topic.

Similarly, Celiwe promoted peer and collaborative learning in her class through using debates. During debating in class, some learners shared the same point of view and some would oppose that view. This enhanced learning of new knowledge because learners got different views about the topic. Celiwe was certain that debating in her class was used as a form of teaching strategy that enhanced learning since learners were learning from each other. She facilitated the debate and she used this strategy as a method of introducing new topics. She explained that after the debate, she would spend more time

clarifying issues of disagreement if learners raised different opinions or viewpoints in order to reach consensus. She had this to say:

*When teaching a topic like CSI, I can ask learners to list the community projects that they have and they would do so normally with such enthusiasm as well as with key interests to a point where they begin to debate about it which is the best part, because it just allows me to focus on facilitating teaching and learning. After all the approach to learning has to be learner-centred so that is normally how I introduce a new topic to my learners. Before any teacher can facilitate a debate in the classroom, you need to make sure that your classroom management is excellent because learners love to fight during debate. Firstly, I always teach my learners basic debate skills and that if you do not like another learner's point of view it does not mean you must fight him or her. I also clarify that debating is a polite way of disagreeing with the opposition and when you respond you must be disciplined.*

Teachers believed that debates allowed learners to challenge each other by having others ask questions and this developed their thinking skills while enhancing their understanding of new knowledge. Presenting during debates and justifying their argument builds confidence and enhanced communication and critical thinking skills.

Group presentations.

Participants believed that in Business Studies there were terms that were not easy to unpack all alone. They mentioned that they encourage learners to meet in groups to share the learning of such concepts with peers. Teachers felt it was necessary for learners to meet to prepare for class presentations and to clarify those terms in groups. They believed that learning new concepts in groups created space for increased learning because other learners provided various interpretations and clear explanations during presentations. David also used presentations to see if learners understood a certain topic. He used group presentations as a strategy to assess learners' understanding while also consolidating the learning of new content. He explained that he divided learners into groups and gave them topics to present on. While groups were presenting, other groups asked questions. David explained:

*I believe that as a teacher you need to check after a lesson if you have achieved the learning outcomes of a topic. Presentations assist me to assess if my learners understood a topic. For example, with my Grade 10s, I would take Business environments topic and divide my class into three groups; one group would discuss about micro-environment; the second group would debate market environment and the third group would elaborate about macro environment. All I do is facilitate the presentations and also note down points that I feel need clarity; if need be, I also ask questions.*

Most participants agreed that the learning technique of engaging the learners during the presentation allowed interaction and further clarification of new knowledge. This motivated learners to take charge of the learning and integrate previous knowledge on new concepts. Active listening during group presentations required the learners to engage the presenter through questions. During the class presentations learners were also required to participate by asking for clarity on certain issues being presented as well as taking notes to reinforce understanding. This was particularly critical for new topics since understanding new concepts always began with the learners having to listen to presentations. Zinhle indicated that she normally tasked learners to conduct research on specific topic before the presentations to ensure that presentations were founded on relevant arguments. Since her lessons are interactive, she wanted learners to come to class with some knowledge on the new topic. This allowed learners to have time to find more information before coming to class.

*I always encourage them to do research about a topic a day before I teach it. They have an option of googling or even going to the library. They come with different ideas on the new topic and they all talk in class.*

Busi pointed out that she used group presentations to introduce a topic because she wanted her learners to have a deeper understanding of the concepts, and learners needed to learn to create solutions for any problems that might occur. She believed that group work stimulated effective communication

among learners as their peers learn and collaboratively by engaging in tasks. When she gave learners a task, the learners had to appoint one person who would represent them.

Role play as a teaching strategy.

David supported the notion of engaging learners in knowledge construction. He stated that he normally used role play to present different topics to encouraged deep understanding of Business Studies topics. Role playing was done in groups to allow learners to learn from each other and work as a group. It became enjoyable since learners had to write the script about the content. Each character or learner had to make a point and this required thorough practices, more often so that learners could learn and simulate their roles. He believed that using role play as a teaching strategy allowed learners to think creatively as they simulate their roles. This enhanced learning and understanding of new topics. David's expression of combining group work and role playing was as follows:

*In my classroom, I use role playing as a significant strategy to enhance their level of understanding Business Studies. I noted that my learners enjoyed their Drama class and they used to get bored in my Business Class; therefore, I decided to use a strategy that they would enjoy. I just inform my learners to create groups of five, then I give them a topic to role play about and they need to be innovative by including props if need be. They write a script down on their own and each character has to say a point.*

Similar to David, Anita found role play to be the convenient strategy to consolidate learning if learners showed difficulty in understanding the topic. She used role play for particular topics. She could not use the same strategy for all topics because the level of difficulty is different. Anita stated that she used role playing as a teaching strategy to introduce the topic. She explained that after performance she usually asked questions to start a discussion about what was portrayed. By doing so, learners learned from each other and the teacher facilitated the classroom discussion.

### **Discussions.**

In this study, teachers believed that it was crucial to involve learners by using a variety of teaching strategies when teaching Business Studies encourage active engagement in learning. The participants acknowledged active involvement of learners in class discussions and group work as a valuable learning strategy that reinforced understanding of new knowledge. Teachers believed that it aroused the learners' involvement and active engagement by allowing them an opportunity to state their opinions. This finding is corroborated by Frick et al. (2020) who asserted that the group chat becomes a platform where ideas are shared by all community members in real-life context They indicated that they always encouraged learners to discuss their work as a class before providing solutions. Findings of the study revealed that teachers used questioning to open up discussions that created opportunities for learners to master the skill of expressing themselves. Perrott (2014) states that the importance of using questions to engage learners into discussions give all learners an opportunity to be heard. Doing work in small groups through debates and presentations created a shared entity in which learners were motivated to learn collaboratively. The use of collaboration during debates and presentations further supports the creation of conditions in which students come together to do research and formulate strategies for presentations (Gillies, 2016; Jolliffe & Snaith, 2017).

Findings also revealed that teachers appreciated the interpersonal relationships that learners developed with their peers. This finding is confirmed by the majority of scholars who indicated that increased social integration that fosters a sense of belonging may result from social interaction and ongoing conversation with peers (Gillies, 2016; Frick et al., 2020; Frykedal & Chiriac, 2018; Jolliffe & Snaith, 2017). Participants acknowledge the effect of group interactions on their learning since it promoted interactions among students in a space that allowed all to engage with respect in a supportive social environment (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). Pre-service teachers received numerous and diverse solutions and opinions that they wouldn't have thought of if they were doing work alone. This finding is supported by numerous scholars, who agree that discussing activities in groups can lead to varied answers to a particular situation as inputs come from different students who will be applying their minds to the subject (Asmara, 2020; Erasmus & Fourie, 2018).



### **Conclusion.**

In a context characterised by the need for students to be actively engaged in learning, this article presented the strategies that teachers used in engaging learners actively in learning Business Studies. Participants in this study acknowledged the role of group and class discussions in assisting learners' learning by creating a supportive social environment that allows opportunities for active learning. Learners benefited from consistent support provided by peers in the groups; as such, learning of new concepts was enhanced. The interconnectedness that existed between the learners inspired them to take accountability for each other's learning. Learners' shared learning prompted values such as sharing, caring, teamwork, harmony, unity and helping one another as they engage in collaborative activities. This study revealed that, besides improving understanding of new knowledge, active engagement in learning also engendered communication, social skills and interactive skills, which are extremely desired in business.

This article offers beneficial insights to teachers and subject advisors on how small group and class discussions, debates, presentations and role play can be used in the pedagogical process to improve learners' engagement and learning while developing the collaborative and interpersonal skills among learners. The paper focused on Grade 10 Business Studies teachers, interested researchers could embark on the study by extending the scope to include all Business Studies teachers. Three levels of Accounting cohorts. Moreover, an avenue for further research would be to conduct an empirical study using a quantitative approach in exploring strategies teachers use in engaging learners in active learning in Business Studies.

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