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**Group Work Student Participation Rate in Tanzania Higher
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Group Work Student Participation Rate in Tanzania Higher Learning Institutions



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Abstract

Purpose: The study sought to establish student participation rate in group works among higher learning institution in Tanzania.

Methodology: The study used an exploratory sequential design. It used maximum variation sampling, and convenience sampling techniques for including participants and respondents, respectively. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was used to collect data from participants. Questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents. The sample size was 381 subjects of whom 24 were participants and 357 were respondents. The data from FGD were analysed using content analysis technique. The data from questionnaire were analysed using Yeh's Index of Satisfaction (YIS).

Findings: The findings from FGD revealed there was less than fifty percent, over fifty percent and a hundred percent participation rate. Results from YIS indicated there was low participation rate of group work members.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The study has contributed on the status of student participation in group work in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. The participation rate in group works is low. Instructors need to create awareness on the benefits accrued from student participation in group works during training cycle and after graduation. Higher learning institutions need (a) model(s) to enhance student participation in group works. Finally fines for students who do not participate or contribute during group work development may be introduced with contextual conditions.

Keywords: *Group Work Assignment, Participation Rate, Higher Learning Institutions, Skills, Group Work Teaching Strategy*

1. Introduction

As it stands, achievements of goals of an individual or an organization are by-and-large influenced by cooperation with others. Usually, many individuals contribute to the outcome or a product. For example, one who wants to start a school requires civil engineers, architects, interior designers, parents, teachers, students, nurses, doctors, the list goes on. All these people can make a school operate in unison. This is a team of people enabling a school to operate optimally. To narrow down from the list, teachers for example, need to work as a team to teach subjects to achieve the aims and objectives of education in a school, district or a country. Different people working in synergy in the education system, it does not solely enhance the realization of aims and objectives of education, but also it contributes to the achievement of a nation vision.

From the aforementioned understanding, scholars (Shermin, Silva & Wesumperuma, 2019) opine employers require teamwork skill in the world across job markets. This implies group work teaching strategy which develops teamwork skills (cooperation) is indispensable in education systems. Indeed, most of higher learning institutions use group work teaching strategy because of its myriad benefits in developing multiple skills among students. Worth noting, the group work teaching strategy can be effective if students participate fully in all group works offered during training cycle. In a situation where students do not adequately participate in group works, the expected nurturing effects from the strategy are without doubt compromised.

In addition, scholars (McKay & Sridharan, 2023) contend that group work is useful, but it is not immune from challenges. The scholars (McKay & Sridharan, 2023) opine that group work teaching strategy develops teamwork skills, management skills, research skills, interpersonal skills, communication skills and self-reflective skills. While group work teaching strategy develops myriad skills such as teamwork skills among others; however, students claim that the skills are usually not assessed (Cano, Lluch, Grane, & Remesal, 2023). From this student awareness, students are likely to bank little efforts in group works because the skills from the same are not assessed. In this paper, we consider this is out of unpopular effects of assessment and examination. This further suggest that teachers need create awareness among students on the benefits from adequate participation in group works. The benefits in terms of skill development during and after training cycles. Adequate student participation in group works enhances the development of teamwork skills among students. To add, group work assessment through video resulted in the development of communication and teamwork skills (Asernis, Flore & Petropoulou, 2021). According to Khalid (2023), group work develops communication, teamwork and leadership skills. Students avoid evaluating their peers in group work participation because it may affect the grades of the peer counterparts (Khalid, 2022). This implies that there are some challenges in assessment through peers when a teacher uses peer-assessment in student participation in a group work.

Though students are reluctant to evaluate their peers in group work, participation, and acceptance are paramount for effective group work (Melguizo-Grain, Pelaez-Fernandes, Ruiz-Rodriguez & Salas-Rodrigues, 2022). In a situation where students cannot make open evaluation of group work members in terms of participation, it is difficult to motivate student active participation; consequently, compromising the development of behaviours which are useful for a nation, and which are out of group work teaching strategy. As such, the researcher is interested to know a) what is the participation rate of group work members in higher learning institutions in Tanzania? The understanding of the participation rate helps us know the extent to which the problem prevails since students cannot openly evaluate their group work members for reasons established. The understanding helps higher learning institutions take appropriate action to improve student participation in group works.

2. Methods

The study adopted exploratory sequential design. In this design, the first step was to collect qualitative data, and the second step was to collect quantitative data using tools developed from themes generated from qualitative data obtained in the first phase. The used a sample of 381 subjects of whom 24 were student participants and 357 were student respondents. The 24 participants were involved in two Focus Group Discussions each having 12 participants. The Focus Group Discussion took one hour to two hours. The content for the Focus Group Discussion was to show the extent to which the group work members participated in group assignments. The study used maximum variation sampling techniques to select student participants. In this respect, students who were group work leaders and those who never held leadership role in the groups were included in the sample. Further, convenience sampling was used to obtain a sample size for student respondents. The first step was to identify the respondents who were willing to participate in the study. The second step was to distribute and administer the questionnaire to student respondents. The third step was to collect administered questionnaire from the respondents. The content for the question was less than fifty percent participation, over fifty percent participation and always hundred percent participation. The contents were in form of Likert statements and Likert scales with three points.

Content analysis technique was used to analyse data from Focus Group Discussion with the aid of Atlas.ti. Software whereas Yeh's Index of Satisfaction (YIS) was used to analyse data from the questionnaire, with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences programme version 20. The interpretation rule was based on: less than 0.20 as very low; 0.20-0.39 as low; 0.40-0.59 as medium; 0.60-0.79 as high, and 0.80 and above as very high satisfaction. Moreover, the study used blank cells technique to clean data. In this technique, the researcher left blank cells in a questionnaire. The Cells without Likert statements. In a situation where a respondent consistently ticked all the blank cells in a questionnaire, it was assumed the respondent did not read it before responding,

and thus, it was excluded from analysis. In view of this, 143 questionnaires were excluded from analysis.

3. Results

3.1. Participation rate and action in student group works in higher learning institutions in Tanzania

During Focus Group Discussion, three themes came out. First it was agreed that the participation rate ranged from less than fifty, over fifty and a hundred percent. With regards group work participation rate, it was further revealed that the participation rate was between 2 to 4 participants out of ten were active members of a group work. In some cases, one person wrote the work which was submitted as a group work. In view of student participation rate, it was reported to be less than 50% on average. At times, group members did appear for a group work meeting, but they did not or had little or no contribution during discussion. In addition, some of group participants did not attend discussion meetings. From this, to enhance active participation among group members, some of groups introduced fines for those who did not appear for group discussion meetings, and for those who did not actively contribute ideas. The amounts for the fine ranged from Tsh. 2000 or 0.7 USD for those who did not appear for the discussion, and Tsh. 500-1000 or 0.19-0.37 USD for those who remained dormant during discussion.

3.1.1. Participation less than fifty percent

Results from questionnaire, show 188(52.7%) were of the view that participation rate was less than fifty percent. In the meantime, 81(22.7%) remained neutral. Finally, 88(24.6%) thought that the participation rate in group works was not less than fifty percent. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the participation rate was at 0.28, which was low.

3.1.2. Group Work Members attendance over fifty percent

Results indicated 201(56.3%) were of the view that participation rate was over fifty percent. In the meantime, 69(19.3%) remained neutral. Finally, 87(24.4%) thought that the participation rate in group works was not over fifty percent. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the participation rate was at 0.32, which was low.

3.1.3. Group Work Members attendance always hundred percent

Results indicated 126(35.3%) were of the view that participation rate was a hundred percent. In the meantime, 59(16.5%) remained neutral. Finally, 172(48.2%) thought that the participation rate in group works was not a hundred percent. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the participation rate was at -0.12, which was very low.

4. Discussion

There is generally low student participation rate in group works in Tanzania higher learning institutions. This implies that students in higher learning institutions do not participate adequately

in group work assignments. Thus, it follows that the myriad skills that are developed from group work teaching strategy are not developed. This is corroborated by the initiatives of students themselves who report that they introduce fines for those who do not participate in group work, or for those with little or no contribution in the discussion meetings. This level of participation rate is alarming. Higher learning institutions need to take deliberate initiatives to increase the participation rate among students in group works. The purpose is to develop the skills that are important in the 21st Century for one to succeed in different territories of life.

Further, the introduction of fines to improve participation rate may not be effective for students from well to do families. The risk is that some of students who are economically stable may not appear or contribute in group discussions because they can afford to pay fines. In such situation, the students may not benefit from the myriad skills group work teaching strategy develops. As a consequence, universities may be blamed for producing graduates who have inadequate skills/capabilities in public speaking, communication, information search, cooperation/teamwork and understanding others, the list may continue for some time.

5. Conclusion

There is low level of student participation rate in group works in Tanzania higher learning institutions. From this situation, the students introduce informal fines to enhance student participation in group work. There are reasons for low student participation in group works. The reasons are not within the scope of this paper.

6. Policy implications

Higher learning institutions in Tanzania need to devise mechanisms (effective model for group works) to enhance the level of student participation in group works.

Instructors in higher learning institutions need to create awareness among students the benefits that they can harness from active participation in group works.

Higher learning institutions may need to formalise the fines introduced in group works by including them in higher learning institutions assessment by-laws among other contextual considerations as it may deem to be appropriate. It is important to impose conditions which will bind students who consistently do not change from imposed fines. The conditions target students from well to do families who may always pay fines only to graduate half-baked.

7. Area for further research

Studies can be conducted to develop model(s) that are effective in enhancing student participation in group works in higher learning institutions.

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