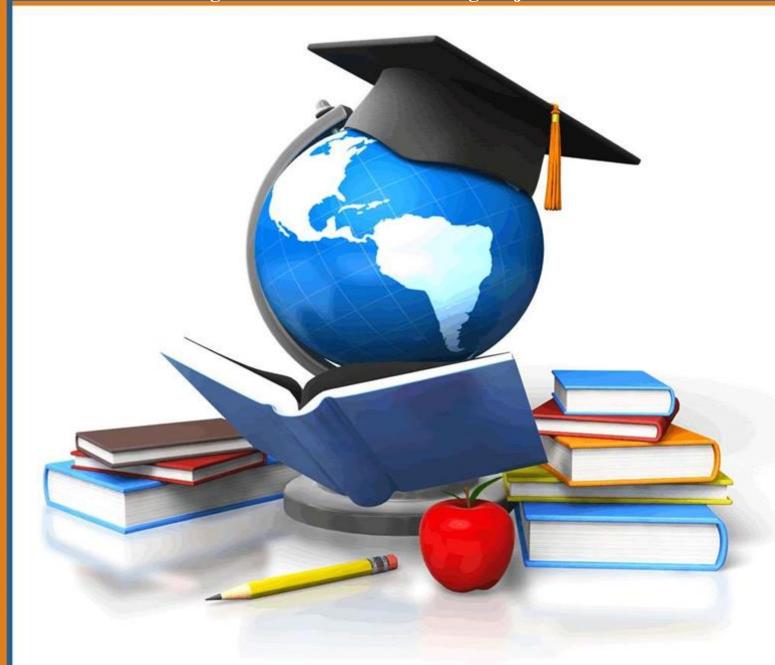
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Abstract

Purpose: The paper intended to establish major barriers impeding effective student participation in group work. It was important to understand the major barriers in order for higher learning institutions to use, or find plausible solutions for the same.

Methodology: The study used exploratory sequential design. Phase I of qualitative data collection used a sample of 24 student participants, and phase II which involved the collection of quantitative data used a sample size of 357 student respondents. Thus, the sample size was 381 subjects in total. In phase I, the study used Focus Group Discussion to collect data. In phase II, the study used questionnaire to collection data. The sampling techniques used in phase I was Maximum Variation sampling technique, and in phase II convenience sampling technique was adopted.

Findings: The major barriers for student effective group work participation include: inadequate preparation before group work discussion meetings; difficulty in handling some of personalities; poor time management; and assignment lumping.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The paper informs about major barriers impeding effective student participation in group works. The study is an eye opener to policy and by-law makers in higher learning institutions in Tanzania and elsewhere it applies. It discerns barriers needing attention in policies and by-laws. Importantly, it informs about where to focus to help students successfully learn through group work teaching strategy for the same to make it effective.

Keywords: Group Work, Participation, Barriers, Higher Learning Institutions, Student, Instructor, Teaching Strategy



1. Introduction

Group work as a teaching strategy is widely used in higher learning institutions all over the world. In this strategy, Instructors provide students with a problem to solve, or with a project to do in groups. In the process to accomplish a group work, students are expected to participate fully in the writing activity of the same. In the same way, the group work members need to participate fully in presenting the work. Interestingly, there is low student participation rate in group works in higher learning institutions (Kinyaduka, 2025). This tendency impedes the development of myriad skills through group work teaching strategy. Recent studies have attempted to list the popular nurturing effects from group work. Therefore, student effective participation in group work is indispensable to accrue skill development from the same. Since student participation rate in group work is low, this paper seeks to explore, establish barriers and major barriers resulting in low student participation in group works in higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

As it regards the participation barriers, one scholar (Straker, 2020) claims that the use of English language among international students in the UK is a barrier in group works. At times, students use their native languages. The use of native language excludes other group work members. This is to say they cannot understand what some of students say using native languages in group discussion. Further, scholars (Muluye & Tadesse, 2020) mentions barriers for group project work. These barriers include, low interest and awareness, low monitoring of group members, and not assigning piece work to group members. Other barriers are related to teacher participation, interaction in group works, and nature of group assignment (Guan, 2023). This implies that there are a number of barriers impeding effective student participation in group works. As it stands, this implies the barriers range from personal to leadership related ones.

Having understood the barriers resulting in low student participation in group works in higher learning institutions, it is important to understand the major barriers of the same. Scholars have been able to establish barriers to student participation in group works. However, the scholars have not been able to establish major barriers to group work participation among students in higher learning institutions. The current study seeks to establish the major barriers to student participation in group works and discern plausible solutions to the barriers.

Indeed, as we are aware that the group work teaching strategy emanates from theories of learning, a number of theories of learning emphasize the teaching strategy to be used in educational processes. Some of these theories of learning include socio-cultural theory of learning (Balbay & Dogan, 2018) and social constructivism theories of learning (Akpan, Igwe, Mpamah, & Okoro, 2020). The two theories of learning emphasize on the use of group work in education systems. This implies that a human being learns effectively through interaction. Having pinpointed on the barriers and theories of learning emphasizing on the application of group work, let us navigate on solution for the barriers associated with the use of group work in education systems.



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In relation to solutions for the major barriers, scholars (Muluye & Tadesse, 2020) contend that barriers for student participation in group works can be dealt with through creating awareness, distributing project guidelines, assigning group members' roles, monitoring group members, and establishing assessment criteria. Though these are proposed ways to address barriers to participation in group works, it is unknown which solutions to prioritise to make effective student participation in group works. The existing information does not help the instructors and the policy makers exercise frugality in resource allocations as far as group work is concerned. Thus, pinpointing the major barriers and solutions helps the frugality of resources. It is important to focus on major barriers to enhance efficient functioning of group members; consequently, mitigating the negative effects from the same (major barriers) of group works. From this understanding, this study seeks to answer the following questions: How student group work participation in higher learning institution is affected? What are major barriers affecting student participation in group works in higher learning institutions?

Studying barriers for group work is important because the teaching strategy contributes significantly in creating the envisaged Africa 2063. Furthermore, the United Nations seeks to create democratic society and leaders. Equally important, the African Union in her aspiration No. 6, and the Tanzania 2023 Edition for Education and Training Policy seek to cultivate democracy. As it stands, all the three documents by the United Nations, African Union and the Tanzania Education policy perceive democracy as critical for the prosperity of people (United Nations, 2015; African Union, 2015; URT, 2023). Since democracy is important, we cannot ignore the effective use of group work teaching strategy in higher learning institutions in Tanzania and elsewhere in the world. Indeed, it is not only important to use in higher learning institutions, but the same has to apply at all levels of education. In this strategy, students discuss, argue and reach consensus after seeing different points of views. The students or learners get endowed with the culture of fighting opposing perspective and not opposing people. The learners learn how to developing the strongest argument to gain acceptance among group members. This is how a democratic society can be created and nourished through group work teaching strategy in education systems in Africa and beyond. As it is, there is inadequate information about the major barriers for student participation in group works in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. This study intends to bridge this information gap.

2. Methods

The study adopted an exploratory sequential design. In this design, first qualitative data were collected. The contents drawn from qualitative data were on how students failed to participate in group works effectively. Twenty Four student participants were involved in two Focus Group Discussions, each with 12 participants. Maximum variation sampling technique was used to obtain the participants. Two out of three higher learning institutions were involved in Focus Group Discussion. The duration for the Focus Group Discussion was one to two hours. The data collected through Focus Group Discussion were analysed using content analysis technique, with the aid of



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Atlas.ti.Software. Second, the themes from qualitative data were used to develop a questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to determine major barriers to student participation in group works. The third activity was to collect data using the questionnaire. The questionnaires were adapted from lifelong learning development survey questionnaire. The questionnaire contents were: reluctance to contribute; inadequate funds to print group work; lack of group work member preparation, multiple interpretation of questions; little experience in handling group work; lenience to lazy students; some students volunteering to write a group work on behalf of group members, unreliable power; inability to handle personality diversity; group member poor time management; lumped assignments; inadequate discussion rooms; limited instructions from a course instructor; assertive student influence over other group work members; frustrations among gifted students; and too short time allocated for a group work. In this regard, the questionnaire was administered in all the three selected higher learning institutions. The sample size for the respondents was 357 out of 500. Convenience sampling technique was adopted to obtain the respondents. The researcher used blank Cell technique for data cleaning. In this technique, the researcher used a questionnaire with some cells without Likert statements. In a situation where the respondent ticked all blank cells (cells without Likert statements), it was assumed that the respondent did not read the questionnaire before scoring it. From this respondent malpractice, 143 questionnaires were excluded from analysis. The data from questionnaire were analysed through Yeh's Index of Satisfaction, with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Worth noting, the participants and respondents included in this study were 381, and it was solely those who were willing to participant in the study.

3. Results

3.1. Student Group Work Participation Barriers in Higher Learning Institutions

From the Focus Group Discussion findings, a number of themes were generated. The themes were on barriers for effective student participation in group works in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. From the themes, the barriers were reluctance to contribute (passive participants), some students lacked funds for printing group works, some of group members had inadequate preparation, conflicts from differences in question interpretation; this resulted in some students stopping attending group work meetings, less experience in handling group works, lenience towards lazy students, (some lecturers were not strict enough when lazy students were reported), and some students wrote group works on behalf of others (group members). To add, other barriers were: unreliable power, hard to handle some of group member personalities, poor time management skills, lumping assignments at the same time, inadequate rooms for discussion, inadequate instructions for a task, some students had greater influence over others; thus, wrong ideas were possibly accorded in the group work, frustration among gifted students, and inadequate time allocated for a group work (some instructors provided too short time for group work).



3.2. Student major barriers to participation in group works

From the aforementioned results from Focus Group Discussion, the researcher developed a questionnaire in order to establish major group work participation barriers and their solutions. In view of this, results from questionnaire discerns the major barriers for effective group work participation in higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

3.2.1 Reluctance to contribute in group work discussions

Results from Likert statements show that 236(66.3%) of respondents felt that reluctance to contribute ideas during group work discussions was a barrier in implementing group academic tasks. Meanwhile, 53(14.9%) of respondents felt that they had no position. Moreover, 67(18.8%) felt that reluctance to contribute ideas during group discussion was not a barrier in group academic tasks. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of reluctance acting as a barrier to effective student participation in group work was at 0.47, which was a moderate.

3.2.2 Inadequate funds for printing group works

Results from Likert statements show that 256(71.9%) of respondents felt that inadequate funds were a barrier in student participation in group academic tasks. Meanwhile, 31(8.7%) of respondents felt were not sure on whether or not inadequate funds was a barrier to student effective participation in group work in higher learning institutions. Moreover, 69(19.4%) felt inadequate funds were not a barrier in effective student participation in group academic tasks. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of inadequate funds acting as a barrier to student effective participation in group works was at 0.52, which was moderate, or rather medium.

3.2.3. Inadequate preparation before group work discussion meetings

Results from Likert statements show that 310(87.1%) of respondents felt that inadequate preparation among group members before discussion meetings was a barrier to effective student participation in group academic tasks. Meanwhile, 20(5.6%) of respondents were not sure on whether or not inadequate preparation before group work meetings was a barrier to effective student participation in group works in higher learning institutions. Moreover, 26(7.3%) felt that inadequate preparation before discussion meetings was not a barrier to effective student participation in group academic tasks. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of inadequate preparation before group work discussion meetings was at 0.80, which was very high.

3.2.4. Differences in question interpretation among group work members

Results from Likert statements show that 254(71.3%) of respondents felt that multiple interpretations of a question among group work members was a barrier in effective student



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participation in group academic tasks. Meanwhile, 41(11.5%) of respondents were not sure on whether or not multiple interpretation of a question was a barrier to effective student participation in group works in higher learning institutions. Moreover, 61(17.1%) felt that multiple interpretation of a question was not a barrier to effective student participation in group work academic tasks. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of multiple interpretation of a question among group work members was at 0.54, which was moderate, or medium.

3.2.5. Low experience in handling group works

Results from Likert statements show that 259(72.8%) of respondents felt that low experience in handling group works among students was a barrier to effective student participation in group work academic tasks. Meanwhile, 51(14.3%) of respondents were not sure on whether or not low experience in handling group works was a barrier towards effective participation in group works in higher learning institutions. Moreover, 46(12.9%) felt that low experience in handling group works was not a barrier towards effective student participation in group work academic tasks. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of low experience in acting as a barrier to effective handling group work was at 0.60, which was high.

3.2.6. Lenience to lazy group members

Results from Likert statements show that 300(84.3%) of respondents felt that lenience in dealing with lazy group work members was a barrier to effective participation in group work academic tasks. Meanwhile, 29(8.1%) of respondents were not sure on whether or not lenience towards lazy group work members was a barrier to effective student participation in group works in higher learning institutions. Moreover, 27(7.6%) felt that lenience towards lazy group work members was not a barrier to effective student participation in group work academic tasks. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of lenience to lazy group work members acting as a barrier to effective participation in the same was at 0.60, which was high.

3.2.7. Group work member volunteering writing entire work

Results from Likert statements show that 265(74.4%) of respondents felt that a group work member volunteering to write the entire work on behalf of group members was a barrier to effective student participation in group work academic tasks. Meanwhile, 34(9.6%) of respondents were not sure on whether or not a group work member writing the entire work on behalf of other members was a barrier to effective participation in group work in higher learning institutions. Moreover, 57(16%) felt that one group member writing the whole work on behalf of others was not a barrier to effective participation in group work academic tasks. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of a group work member volunteering to write the entire work for the members was at 0.59, which was moderate, or medium.



3.2.8. Unreliable power

Results from Likert statements show that 279(78.4%) of respondents felt that unreliable power was a barrier to effective preparation and participation of or in group works in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. Meanwhile, 42(11.8%) of respondents were not sure on whether or not unreliable power was barrier to effective preparation and participation of group works in higher learning institutions. Moreover, 35(9.8%) felt that unreliable power was not a barrier to preparation or participation in group work academic tasks. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of unreliable power in acting as a barrier to preparation or participation in group work was at 0.69, which was high.

3.2.9. Difficulty handling personalities of some group work members

Results from Likert statements show that 290(81.5%) of respondents felt that it was hard handling personalities in group works. Meanwhile, 39(11%) of respondents were not sure on whether or not difficulty in handling personalities among group work members was a barrier to effective participation in the same in higher learning institutions. Moreover, 27(7.6%) felt that it was not difficulty handling personalities among group work members. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of difficulty in handling personalities acting as a barrier to effective student participation in group work was at 0.74, which was very high.

3.2.10. Poor time management among group work members

Results from Likert statements show that 312(81.5%) of respondents felt that poor time management among group members was a barrier to student participation in group work academic tasks. Meanwhile, 28(7.9%) of respondents were not sure on whether or not poor time management was a barrier to effective student participation in group works in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. Moreover, 16(4.5%) felt that poor time management among group work members was not a barrier to affective student participation in group work academic tasks. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of poor time management in acting as a barrier to effective student participation in group works was at 0.83, which was very high.

3.2.11. Assignment lumping

Results from Likert statements show that 293(82.3%) of respondents felt that assignment lumping was a barrier to effective student participation in group work academic tasks. Meanwhile, 34(9.2%) of respondents were not sure on whether or not assignment lumping was a barrier to effective participation in group works in higher learning institutions. Moreover, 29(8.1%) felt that assignment lumping was not a barrier to effective student participation in group work academic tasks. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of assignment lumping in acting as a barrier to effective group work participation was at 0.74, which was very high.



3.2.12. Inadequate rooms for group work discussion

Results from Likert statements show that 266(74.7%) of respondents felt that inadequate rooms for group work discussion was a barrier to effective participation in group work academic tasks. Meanwhile, 35(9.8%) of respondents were not sure on whether or not inadequate rooms for group discussion was a barrier to effective participation in group works in higher learning institutions. Moreover, 55(15.4%) felt that inadequate rooms for group work discussion was not a barrier to effective student participation in group work academic tasks. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of inadequate rooms for group work discussion in acting as a barrier to effective student participation in group works in higher learning institutions in Tanzania was at 0.59, which was moderate, or medium.

3.2.13. Unclear instructions for group work

Results from Likert statements show that 270(75.8%) of respondents felt that unclear instructions for a group work were a barrier to effective participation in group work academic tasks. Meanwhile, 39(11%) of respondents were not sure on whether or not unclear instructions of a group work were a barrier to effective participation in group works in higher learning institutions. Moreover, 47(13.2%) felt that unclear instructions were not a barrier to effective participation in group work academic tasks. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of unclear instructions in acting as a barrier to effective group work participation was at 0.62, which was high.

3.2.14. Overriding influence from some of group members

Results from Likert statements show that 254(71.3%) of respondents felt that overriding influence from some of group work members was a barrier to effective participation in group work academic tasks. Meanwhile, 39(11%) of respondents were not sure on whether or not overriding influence among group work members was a barrier to effective participation in group works in higher learning institutions. Moreover, 63(17.7%) felt that overriding influence from some of group work members was not a barrier to effective student participation in group work academic tasks. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of overriding influence among group work members in acting as a barrier to effective group work participation was at 0.54, which was moderate, or medium.

3.2.15. Frustration among gifted group work members

Results from Likert statements show that 254(71.3%) of respondents felt that gifted students got frustrated and thus affecting effective participation in group work academic tasks. Meanwhile, 39(11%) of respondents were not sure on whether or not gifted students got frustrated in participation in group work. Moreover, 63(17.7%) felt that gifted student frustrations were not really; thus, it did not act as a barrier to effective participation in group work academic tasks. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the view that gifted students



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got frustrated; thus, the contribution of frustration among gifted group work members in acting as a barrier to effective student participation in the same was at 0.48, which was moderate, or medium.

3.2.16. Allocating limited time for group work

Results from Likert statements show that 275(77.2%) of respondents felt that allocating limited time for a group work was a barrier to effective student participation in group work academic tasks. Meanwhile, 38(10.7%) of respondents were not sure on whether or not allocating limited time for group work was a barrier to effective student participation in group works in higher learning institutions. Moreover, 43(12.1%) felt that allocating limited time for group work was not a barrier to effective student participation in group work academic tasks. Furthermore, results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of allocating limited time in acting as a barrier to effective student participation in group work was at 0.65, which was high.

4. Discussion

There are various barriers which impede effective student participation in group works in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. These findings are similar to those by scholars (Muluye & Tadesse, 2020) who mention a number of barriers which act as drawbacks to effective student participation in a group works. This implies that the problem of low student participation in group works in higher learning institutions is rampant in most parts of the world. In view of this, it is worthwhile to understand the major barriers (with very high) and other drawbacks with significant (high) contribution to impeding effective student participation in a group work are discussed under:

To begin with inadequate preparation before group work meetings, it is one of major barriers in enhancing effective student participation in group works in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. This implies that most of students in higher learning institutions do not prepare themselves well for group work discussion. This further means that most of students in higher learning institutions benefit very little from skills group work teaching strategy develops. This is because inadequate preparation for group work lends a problem of student understanding contents. Indeed, low preparation for group works is probably because of using group work members as a camouflage (shield) for student responsibility for learning. This behaviour is likely to be at commonplace in group works, but it has no room in individual assignments. In individual assignments, one is directly responsible for the work by a hundred percent. Indeed, despite the multiple skills developed from group works when effectively implemented, the teaching strategy is not immune from disadvantages. Low preparation for a group work is one of the disadvantages the teaching strategy faces.

Furthermore, difficulty in handling some of personalities is one of major barriers resulting in ineffective student participation in a group work. From my experience, classes always comprise a diversity of student personality. From the diversity of personality, at times, it is difficult to handle some of group work members with personality disorders. It takes highly skilled individuals to understand and handle individuals with personality disorders in educational institutions. This



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implies that students need some knowledge and skills on personality and personality disorders to know how best to handle personality diversity, personality disorders are not exclusive. This further infers that general knowledge on personality is paramount for effective handling of group work members. For instance, introverts tend to be quiet most of the time. For group members who are not familiar with such a personality, it might be difficult understanding and handling the same. This is because they may choose to keep quiet throughout the discussion. The group members need some knowledge and skills on personalities and how to manage each of the personalities. Indeed, at times, even what they claim as little contribution of some group members during discussion of academic tasks might partly be attributable to personality of the students.

In addition, poor time management was one of the major barriers to effective student participation in group work. This implies that most of the group work members have tendency of not observing time during group work meetings. This is typically an African culture. Africans have no concept of time. The concept of time is imported one. From my experience, most of meetings or gatherings scheduled in many parts in Tanzania, and her institutions do not honour programme schedules. Tanzanians do not keep time. Time is an imposed concept in Africa from our colonial masters. Indeed, this is different from my own experience from peoples of Europe; time and programmes scheduled are more often honoured than not. In Europe people arrive at the meeting point in or on time. The people leave the meeting room within the scheduled time. It is unlike school meetings, university meetings and many more forms of meetings in Tanzania, which do not always observe time on when to commence or when to end. Failure to observe time is a second nature of Africans. Therefore, it is difficult to change. This further means that a lot is desired on the aspect of time management in the education system in Tanzania and other peoples in Africa.

Moreover, assignment lumping is a major barrier to effective student participation in group works. This implies that at times students find themselves having quite a number of assignments from different subjects. These assignments range from group works to individual ones. As such, sometimes, it is difficult for a student to attend all group work meetings if the schedule is at the same time. Therefore, this situation affects student preparation, and participation in group work meetings. This requires researchers' attention to know how to address this situation in order to improve the preparation and participation rate among group work members. Having seen the major barriers (barriers with very high contribution), it is worthwhile to navigate into barriers with high contribution based on Yeh's Index of Satisfaction. The discussion of the same is indicated under:

Importantly, other barriers the contribution of which impedes effective student participation in group work, and cannot be ignored include: low experience in handling group work; lenience to lazy group members; unreliable power; unclear instructions; and allocating limited time. As for low experience in handling group works, this infers that direct entrants in higher learning institutions have limited skills to handle group works; thus, ineffective student participation in group works. Further, in relation to lenience to lazy students, this infers that at times there are no measures taken against lazy students reported to course instructors for not participating in a group



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work. There are no substantive measures usually taken against such students. This further implies that course instructors contribute to ineffective group work participation in higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

To add, unreliable power is a barrier to effective group work participation. This implies that at the time of data collection in June 2024 Tanzania had unreliable power. This affected the student full participation in group work in higher learning institutions in the country. Nevertheless, there are other barriers such as unclear instruction from course instructors. This implies that some of course instructors their English language is poor such that they cannot write clear instructions for students to follow. Equally important, this may imply that the students are poor at English language such that they cannot follow the instructions from the course instructors. Indeed, to understand the exact problem research is needed to corroborated one of these assumptions. Finally, allocating limited time, this claim probably it is not authentic because one of the purposes of education is to produce graduates who are hard working. Providing students limited time to write a group assignment at times it is a good practice. This is because it is one way to make students hard working people, and one way of producing graduates who can work under pressure. This is something good for low-income nations like Tanzania. As a nation, we need hard working people who do not always render excuses for not doing their job properly. The discussion of the findings does not cover all the results, but major ones and the variables with Yeh's Index of Satisfaction at 0.70 and above. However, those with Yeh's Index of Satisfaction at 0.80 and above are perceived as major barriers, and the discussion of which is detailed for that matter.

5. Conclusion

Inadequate preparation before group work discussion meetings; difficulty in handling some of personalities; poor time management; and assignment lumping are major barriers impeding effective student participation in group work in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. These major barriers are at 0.80 or above Yeh's Index of Satisfaction. There are some other barriers with high contribution to ineffective student participation in group works. These barriers their Yeh's Index of Satisfaction ranges from 0.70 to 0.79. These barriers are: low experience in handling group work; lenience to lazy group work members; unreliable power; unclear instructions and allocating limited time for a group work. Group works in higher learning institutions in Tanzania are affected tremendously by a number of barriers which need instructors and institutional attention.

To make group work student participation effective, it is important for instructors taking appropriate legal measures to handle deviant students in group works. In the same way, student reporting to course instructors on group work deviants, and the instructors handling the reports from group members with high degree of integrity and confidentiality. Further, Universities have to provide orientation on how to conduct group works, and how to manage well time when one joins a higher learning institution. To add, it is important to develop guidelines for doing a group



work. Introduction of formal fines to the deviants among other academic oriented measures that may include re-writing the assignment in person. Moreover, each group work member has to make independent presentation, and get awarded some marks based on established quality of their presentations. Equally, instructors have to abolish the model that involves one group member presenting the entire group work for the members in the group. Finally, students should be given freedom to choose with whom to work instead of working with anyone; and instructors need to devise ways to establish individual effective student participation in writing a group work.

6. Areas for further research

A study is needed to understand how higher learning institutions can avoid assignment lumping in a training cycle in Tanzania.

A doctrinal study is needed to analyse the extent of ambiguity in questions and instructions for group work in higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

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