

Efficacy of Group Work as Teaching Strategy in Developing Skills among Higher Learning Institution Students in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

The paper sought to establish the efficacy of group work teaching strategy in developing various skills/capabilities among higher learning institution students in Tanzania. The study adopted exploratory sequential design. The study employed Focus Group Discussion to collect qualitative data in phase one. It used questionnaire to gather quantitative data in phase two. The sample size was 381 of whom 24 were student participants obtained through maximum variation sampling technique and 357 were student respondents obtained through convenience sampling technique. Interview guide and questionnaire were used to collect data in phase one and phase two, respectively. Data analysis techniques used was content analysis and Yeh's Index of Satisfaction. Content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. Yeh's Index of Satisfaction was used to analyse quantitative data. The study revealed group work had more capability of developing some skills, and less capability in developing others. Group work developed numerous skills/capabilities at different magnitude. As such, the efficacy in developing skills/capabilities was at 0.70 to 0.79 (High) and at 0.80 and above (very high) in higher learning institutions. Group work as a teaching strategy has the efficacy of developing numerous capabilities/skills from high to very high in higher learning institution. Therefore, higher learning institutions should continue to embrace the teaching strategy. It is indispensable to build capacity among instructors on how to apply the teaching strategy effectively.

Keywords: *Efficacy, Group work, Higher learning institutions, Skills, Teaching strategy, Skill development, 21st century skills.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Group work in higher learning institutions is one of the most often used teaching strategy. The instructors do not use the teaching strategy arbitrarily. As we are all aware, it is a theory that guides practice. Theories of learning such as sociocultural theory emphasises learning through interaction (Dawson, 2013) social constructivism theory emphasises on the use of small group discussions (Schreiber & Valle, 2013) and Transformative Learning Theory at best encourages teachers to use small group discussions (Mezirow, 1997). As it is, group work teaching strategy results in the development of multiple skills/capabilities among students. Some of these abilities may include ability to communicate effectively, leadership abilities, cooperation, creativity, teamwork, the list goes on. Some of these are twenty first century skills, or rather soft skills assumed critical in the present-day life. The skills are developed through group work teaching strategy as a result of nurturing effects from the strategy. These effects are realised when teachers and students ensure adequate implementation of the group work. This implies that group work is crucial for student skill development.

A scholar (Taie (2014) employs the Dynamic Skill Theory by Fischer and Feldmann (1936) to contend that skills or capabilities involve ability to do and the ability is context specific. These skills are from specific nurturing environment. To achieve automation for the same (skill application), performance practice matters; and finally, power law practice is mandatory to keep effective in the skill mastered. As a matter of clarification on the theory, Taie (2014) uses the same (theory) to discuss language skills. This is because the Dynamic Skill Theory is a grand

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theory. The theory conceptualises skills as being able to do. Furthermore, what you are able to do now is context specific. For example, one is fluent in Bena language, and they can comprehend everything in a Bena community, but if you move to another community speaking a different language from Bena, one turns to be language impaired, and one cannot comprehend what the community members communicate. As such, skills tend to be context specific. Since skills are context specific i.e. they are rationalised skills and have intentional nurturing environment. When one learns certain skills needs to reach automation stage in applying the same. This stage can be achieved through practice. The repeated practice enables the doer of an action to minimise errors in using a respective skill. Finally. The doer of an action needs to keep repeating doing or using a certain skill (Something) over time in order to reduce errors. This effort culminates in seeing the intended educational outcome. This theory is relevant in analysing group works. Since group works are intentional and have the purpose of achieving defined skills among students. The importance of group work has been elucidated in the preceding paragraph of this paper. Teamwork skills are indispensable for managing successful a group work (Johnson & Johnson, 1990).

From the importance of group works indicated earlier in this paper, some studies have established skills from group work. For example, scholars (Haji & Babune, 2023) claim that 39% of respondents developed communication skills from group works in two studied higher learning institutions. Studies (McCarthy et al., 2022) have concentrated on understanding how to improve the performance in a group work. In the same way, the concentration has been on how to access group members in its operation. Furthermore, scholars (Poort, Jansen, & Hofman, 2022) mention that group works develop teamwork skills among other benefits. Teamwork skills are indispensable for managing successful a group work (Johnson & Johnson, 1990). the scholars note some of the skills as smiling, thumb up, eye contact, patting ones back, and showing interest to speakers in speaking. These are some of skills important for a successful group work. From this importance of these skills, the skills can be develop through practice, and group work is one way of practising the application of the skills (Carroll, Jansen, & Lutgens, 2019).

As it stands, group work teaching strategy contributes to creation of democratic societies. Democratic societies can be attained through open and honest discussion taking place in group work teaching strategy. Students discuss, disagree and agree each other after a prolonged discussion. The discussion develops elements, or values of democracy. In the same way, global and local policies find democracy in society is indispensable (African Union (AU), 2015; United Nations, 2015; United Republic of Tanzania (URT), 2023). This implies that the use of group work to create democratic societies is a pertinent in our time. As such, the use of group work teaching strategy may result in peoples and governments cherishing democracy; consequently, promoting democratic governance in the world. Despite a well-done job of showing the importance of group works, the scholars have not been able to establish major skills developed through group works in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. This means that there is inadequate information on major skills developed through group work teaching strategy in higher learning institutions. It is from this juncture this study seeks to establish major skills/capabilities developed through group work as a teaching strategy in higher learning institutions. What are leading skills/capabilities developed through group work teaching strategy in higher learning institutions?

2. METHODS

The study adopted an exploratory sequential design. Qualitative data were collected first, and after data analysis the themes from qualitative data were used to develop a questionnaire using Likert statements with three point Likert Scales. Thereafter, quantitative data were gathered. The purpose was to establish major skills developed through group work. The sample used to gather qualitative data comprised 24 student participants. Two higher learning institutions were involved. Each of the two institutions included 12 student participants making a total of 24 participants in phase I. The sample size used to collect quantitative data in phase II comprised 357 student respondents out of 500 expected respondents. The study adopted maximum variation sampling technique to obtain the 24 participants in phase I, and it used convenience sampling technique to obtain the 357 respondents in phase II of this study. This is to say the sample size for both phases comprised 381 subjects. Worth noting, data cleaning was done through Blank Cell technique. In view of this, some blank cells (Cells without Likert statements) were in the questionnaire. In a situation where the respondent ticked all the Blank Cells, it was assumed that the respondent did not read the questionnaire items before scoring. Therefore, such questionnaires were not analysed. From this technique, 143 questionnaires were excluded from analysis. The study used Focus Group Discussion in phase I. The

content for Focus Group Discussion was skills/capabilities group work teaching strategy develops. Concerning the contents for questionnaire, the content of Likert statements measured satisfaction of respondents on the capability of group in developing: confidence in public speaking, effective communication, information search skills, understanding others, inquisitive mind, creativity, reading, listening, adhering to instructions, tolerance, changing perspective/beliefs, content mastery, and sharing of information with others. The data from phase one were analysed using content analysis technique, which was aided by Atlas ti. Software, and the data in phase two were analysed using Yeh's Index of Satisfaction, which was aided by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Group Work Nurturing Effects (Skills/Capabilities) in Higher Learning Institutions

The participants were asked to say the skills that were developed from group work. The purpose of the question was to establish the views of student participants from target higher learning institutions on the skills they thought were developed from group works. It was revealed that a number of skills developed from group work teaching strategy. The skills/capabilities developed from group work teaching strategy in higher learning institutions were: confidence, effective communication, Information search skills, inquisitive mind, creativity, reading, listening, compliance to instructions, leadership, tolerance, understanding others, content mastery, cooperation and willingness to share information with others. It is important to note that these skills or effects can be realized in a situation where group works are properly managed, and where there is close follow up from a lecturer or course instructor. [Figure 1](#) provides skills/capabilities group work teaching strategy develops among higher learning institution students.

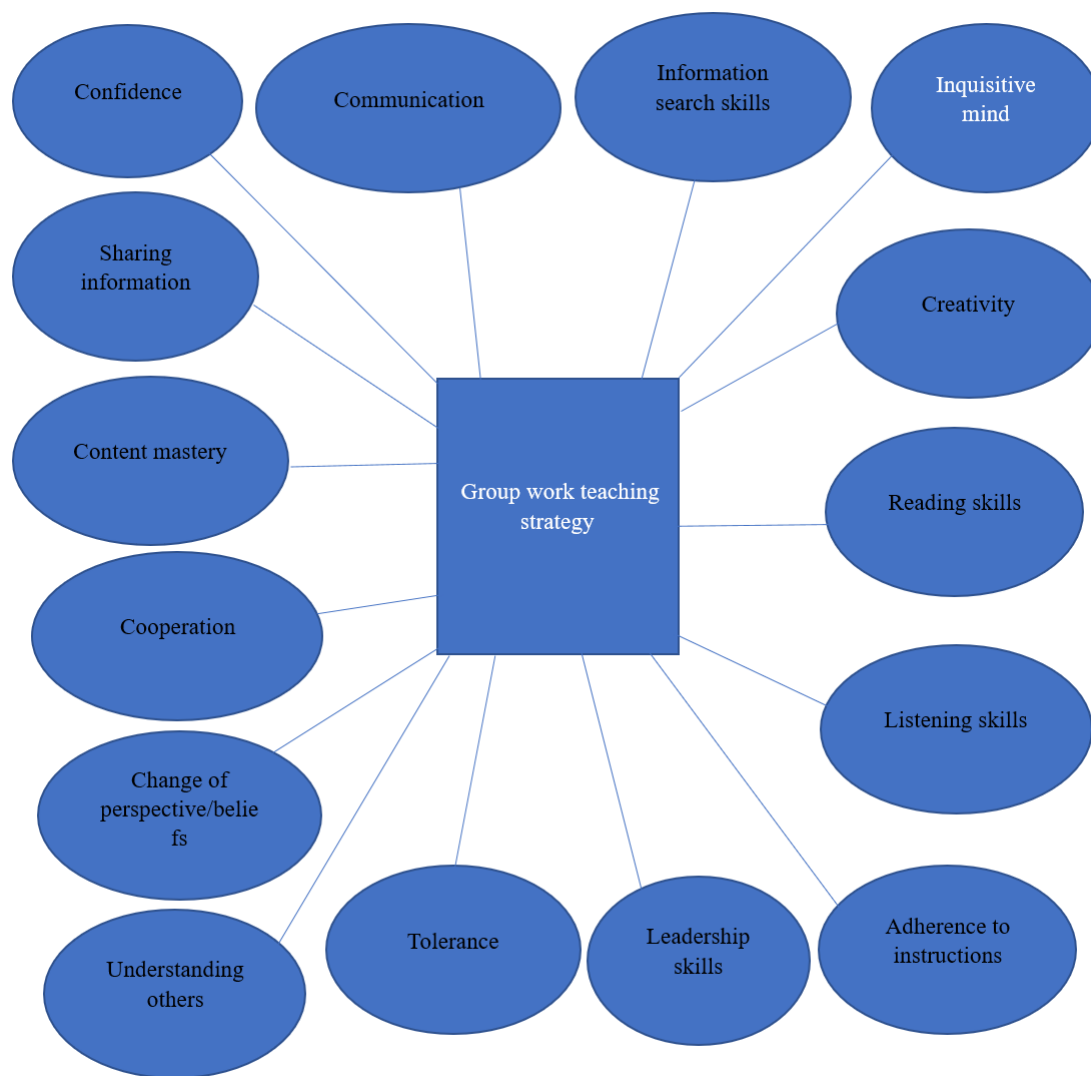


Figure. 1. Group work skill development analytical framework.

Figure 1. Shows skills/capabilities developed from group work teaching strategy. The skills/capabilities from group work teaching strategy are: confidence, communication, information search skills, inquisitive mind, creativity, reading skills, listening skills, adherence to instructions, leadership skills, tolerance, understanding others, change of perspective or belief, cooperation, content mastery and sharing of information (socialisation). These are skills or capabilities that were identified during Focus Group Discussion. To know the extent to which each of the skills/capabilities developed from group work teaching strategy, the study measured the degree to which the group work strategy develops each of the skills or capabilities indicated in Figure 1. The findings on the the extent to which skill/capabilities developed from adequate implementation of group work are presented under:

4. EFFICACY OF GROUP WORK IN DEVELOPING SKILLS/CAPABILITIES IN HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

4.1. Group Work Develops Confidence in Public Speaking

Results from Likert scales indicated 347(97.5%) of the respondents felt that Group work developed public speaking confidence. In the meantime, 3(0.8%) remained neutral whereas 6(1.7%) thought that it did not develop confidence

in public speaking. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of Group work in developing confidence in public speaking was at 0.96, which was very high.

4.2. Group Work Develops Effective Communication

Results from Likert scales indicated 343(96.3%) of the respondents felt that group work developed effective communication skills. In the meantime, 7(2%) remained neutral whereas 6(1.7%) thought that it did not develop effective communication skills. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution group work in developing effective communication was at 0.95, which was very high.

4.3. Group Work Develops Information Search Skills

Results from Likert scales indicated 325(91.3%) of the respondents felt that Group work developed information search skills. In the meantime, 16(4.5%) remained neutral whereas 15(4.2%) thought that it did not develop information search skills. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated that the contribution of Group work in developing information search skills was at 0.87, which was very high.

4.4. Group Work Develops Inquisitive Mind

Results from Likert scales indicated 269(75.6%) of the respondents felt that Group work develops inquisitive mind. In the meantime, 69(19.4%) remained neutral whereas 18(5.1%) thought that it did not develop inquisitive mind. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated the contribution of Group work in developing inquisitive mind was at 0.70, which was high.

4.5. Group Work Develops Creativity

Results from Likert scales indicated 301(84.6%) of the respondents felt that Group work develops creativity. In the meantime, 31(8.7%) remained neutral whereas 24(6.7%) thought that it did not develop creativity. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated the contribution of Group work in developing creativity was at 0.77, which was high.

4.6. Group Work Improves Reading Skill

Results from Likert scales indicated 301(84.6%) of the respondents felt that Group work develops reading skill. In the meantime, 31(8.7%) remained neutral whereas 24(6.2%) thought that it did not develop reading skill. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated the contribution of Group work in developing reading skill was at 0.75, which was high.

4.7. Group Work Develops Listening Skill

Results from Likert scales indicated 296(83.1%) of the respondents felt that Group work developed listening skill. In the meantime, 33(8.7%) remained neutral whereas 26(7.3%) thought that group work teaching strategy did not develop reading skill. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated the contribution of Group work in developing listening skill was at 0.65, which was high.

4.8. Group Work Develops tendency to Adhere to Instructions

Results from Likert scales indicated 272(76.4%) of the respondents felt that Group work developed tendency to adhere to instructions. In the meantime, 54(15.2%) remained neutral whereas 30(8.4%) thought that it did not develop tendency to adhere to instructions. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated the contribution of Group work in developing tendency to adhere to instructions was at 0.68, which was high.

4.9. Group Work Develops Leadership Skills

Results from Likert scales indicated 295(82.9%) of the respondents felt that Group work developed leadership skills. In the meantime, 33(9.3%) remained neutral whereas 28(7.9%) thought that it did not develop leadership skills. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated the contribution of Group work in developing leadership skills was at 0.75, which was high.

4.10. Group Work Develops Ability to Tolerate Others

Results from Likert scales indicated 317(89%) of the respondents felt that Group work developed tolerance toward others. In the meantime, 26(7.3%) remained neutral whereas 13(3.7%) thought that it did not develop tolerance toward others. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated the contribution of Group work in developing tolerance toward others was at 0.85, which was very high.

4.11. Group Work Develops Ability to Understand Others

Results from Likert scales indicated 339(95.2%) of the respondents felt that Group work developed ability to understand others. In the meantime, 12(3.4%) remained neutral whereas 5(1.4%) thought that it did not develop ability to understand others. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated the contribution of Group work in developing ability to understand others was at 0.94, which was very high.

4.12. Group Work Enhances Change of Perspectives and Beliefs

Results from Likert scales indicated 297(83.4%) of the respondents felt that Group work enhances ability to changes one's perspectives and beliefs. In the meantime, 30(8.4%) remained neutral whereas 28(7.9%) thought that it did not enhance ability to change one's perspectives and beliefs. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated the contribution of Group work in enhancing change of perspectives and beliefs was at 0.76, which was high.

4.13. Group Work Enhances Cooperation Among Students

Results from Likert scales indicated 343(96.3%) of the respondents felt that Group work developed a sense of cooperation among learners. In the meantime, 11(3.1%) remained neutral whereas 2(0.6%) thought that it did not enhance sense of cooperation among learners. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated the contribution of Group work in enhancing a sense of cooperation among learners was at 0.96, which was very high.

4.14. Group Work Enhances Content Mastery Among Students

Results from Likert scales indicated 292(82%) of the respondents felt that Group work enhanced content mastery among learners. In the meantime, 42(12.1%) remained neutral whereas 21(5.9%) thought that it did not enhance content mastery among learners. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated the contribution of Group work in enhancing content mastery among learners was at 0.76, which was high.

4.15. Group Work Enhances Willingness to Share Information with Others

Results from Likert scales indicated 338(94.9) of the respondents felt that Group work enhanced readiness to share information with others. In the meantime, 13(3.7%) remained neutral whereas 3(1.4%) thought that it did not enhance readiness to share information with others learners. Results from Yeh's Index of Satisfaction indicated the contribution of Group work in enhancing the readiness to share information with others was at 0.94, which was very high.

5. DISCUSSION

Group work as a teaching strategy develops various skills/capabilities when consistently and adequately implemented in higher learning institutions. These skills/capabilities are: confidence, communication, information search skills, inquisitive mind, creativity, reading skills, listening skills, adherence to instructions, leadership skills, tolerance, understanding others, change of perspective or belief, cooperation, content mastery and sharing of information. To develop these skills/capabilities higher learning institutions use group works nearly in every course to harness the wealth of the skills from group work teaching strategy nurturing environment. Taie (2014) using Dynamic Skill Theory emphasises on the repetition of an action in order to reduce errors. This implies that for students in higher learning institutions to develop the multiple skills/capabilities from group work and apply the same in life undertakings it is important to use the strategy as often as possible during training cycle. Indeed, scholars (Haji & Babune, 2023; Poort et al., 2022) contend that group work develops various skills.

Group work teaching strategy has a very high contribution to the development of confidence in public speaking, communication, information search, cooperation/teamwork and understanding others skills/capabilities. This

signifies that group work teaching strategy if well-coordinated and implemented provides good results in the development of these skills/capabilities. Indeed, these are skills that group work teaching strategy develops the most. Group work remains one of the best teaching strategies today since most of these skills fall under the twenty first century ones. What is important is for course instructors and students to ensure that there is effective implementation of the teaching strategy.

In addition, group work teaching strategy has high contribution to the development of skills/capabilities such as inquisitive mind, creativity, reading, listening, adherence to instructions, tolerance (perseverance), student perspective/belief change, content mastery and information sharing. This implies group work can develop multiple skills/capabilities among learners from its nurturing effects. Since group work develops multiple capabilities or skills, it is important to find ways that make the method effectively implemented to produce graduates with all these skills from an education system. To emphasis, group work teaching strategy can at best create democratic societies in the world. The genuine discussion among learners with different perspectives is a strong way of forging a sense of tolerance when there is difference in beliefs or perspectives in society. Students learn how to live with others who have a different world view to that of their own. In this way, group work can contribute to creating people who can maintain peace in the world. Group work can contribute significantly to reducing autocrat governments in the world if it is effectively implemented.

6. CONCLUSION

Group work teaching strategy has potentials for developing a number of skills/capabilities of a student. It develops fifteen different capabilities in higher learning institutions ranging from high to very high efficacy in developing the same. Group work teaching strategy develops most of the twenty first century skills. Group work teaching strategy develops multiple capabilities among higher learning institution students. As such, group work is one of the best teaching strategies in higher learning institutions which instructors and students should continue to embrace to harness the myriad benefits from it.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Instructors in higher learning institutions should continue to embrace group work teaching strategy because of its potential benefits of developing multiples skills/capabilities among students and in society as a whole.

Quality assurance units in higher learning institution should initiate capacity building among instructors to apply group work teaching strategy effectively to realise its multiple benefits to students and a nation at large.

The ministry responsible for education matters should underscore on the use of group work at all levels of education. This enhances on the creation democratic societies through building a culture of leaders and society members attacking arguments rather than assaulting persons with a different world view from that of theirs.

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD STATEMENT

The Ethical Committee of the Mzumbe University, Tanzania has granted approval for this study on 27 May 2024 (Ref. No. AL.3/267/01/317).

TRANSPARENCY

The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author did not receive any funding for this research; therefore, the author has no conflict of interest.

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