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Perception and Practice of Group Works at the Undergraduate Level in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Group work is used as a technique for learning at all levels of educational system. There are strong empirical supports for the benefits of having students learning and working in groups. The study aimed at adding to the current level of knowledge and understandings regarding the essence behind successful group work at undergraduate level. This research focused on the students' experiences in group works and learning in groups. The research was conducted in mixed-method approach. 80 students studying undergraduate level and 10 teachers took part in the study. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire survey was conducted among the students; and the interviews were conducted among the teachers. The quantitative data was analysed through SPSS version 21.00 for Windows; and interview data were analysed through content analysis technique. The results indicated that group work facilitated learning, especially in the area of academic knowledge. It also explored that students found it easier to learn working in a group compared to when they had to work individually. It showed that group work took more time to complete a task but a well-thought out group might not only took less time but it was a much more effective way of learning. Students were concerned with group structures and the role of leader. The study showed group work was negatively affected by stress and perceptions of unequal contribution of group members. Implications are drawn for teachers, learners and educators; and suggestions are made for the use of drawing as method of group support.

***Keyword**: Group work, techniques, understanding, learning in group, undergraduate*

1. Introduction

Group work is a method that includes working in groups to enhance critical, decision-making, collaborative, and communication skills to increase productivity in education. Group work is used as a technique for learning at all levels in most educational systems, from compulsory education to higher education. Group works can help students develop a host of skills that are increasingly important in the professional world (Caruso & Woolley, 2008; Mannix & Neale, 2005). Group work is frequently used in higher education as a pedagogical mode in the classroom, and it is viewed as equivalent to any other pedagogical practice (i.e., whole class lesson or individual work). Now-a-days, many teachers are applying group work technique as a teaching strategy in their classes. However, a group of teachers refuse to assign group work to their students. Both groups need to learn more about effective group work strategies. There are many studies conducted globally supported the idea that collaborative methods have a positive effect on student achievement in almost any discipline (Bennett, 2015; Katz & Rezaei, 1999; Rezaei, 2015). However, the results of research on the effectiveness of group work is not always positive and indeed some researchers have argued that group work in class may not be useful at all (Qamar, Ahmad, & Niaz, 2015; Brown & McIlroy, 2011).

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Students generally love to work in a group. They find it exciting and look forward to studying in groups. They make good friends in this process and this encourages them to be confident and be able to speak up in class because they get the support of their group mates. Positive group experiences, moreover, have been shown to contribute to student learning, retention and overall college success (Astin, 1997; Tinto, 1998; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2006). Teaching and learning in higher education especially at the undergraduate level are changing. Active and participatory learning has become an important focus in this time of pedagogical changes in the global needs. Research suggests that students learn best when they are actively involved in the group work process (Davis, 1993). According to Wasley (2006), "Students who participate in collaborative learning and educational activities inside and outside the classroom and who interact more with faculty members get better grades, are more satisfied with their education. A collaborative learning environment, as opposed to a passive learning environment, helps students learn more actively and effectively (Murphy, Mahoney, Chen, Mendoza-Diaz & Yang, 2005). Additionally, research also shows that employers want college graduates to possess the ability to work in groups and have developed suitable teamwork skills (Blowers, 2000). Group work is frequently used in higher education as a pedagogical mode in the classroom, and it is viewed as equivalent to any other pedagogical practice (i.e., whole class lesson or individual work). Without considering the pros and cons of group work, a non-reflective choice of pedagogical mode might end up resulting in less desirable consequences. A reflective choice, on the other hand, might result in positive experiences and enhanced learning (Galton et al., 2009; Gillies and Boyle, 2011; Hammar Chiriac and Granström, 2012). This practice is encouraged a great deal as it helps the team members to understand the content in a better way so that everyone can benefit from peer-to-peer instructions.

1.1 Statement of the Problems

The phrase "two heads are better than one" certainly has enough merit. Researchers found that if students are able to work together, for example on a problem-solving task, they are more likely to experiment with different techniques in order to try and solve it. They can also learn faster from positive and negative feedback. The application and practice of group work in the classroom are one of the most widely researched and implemented teaching approaches in the world. Yet, the practice of group works at the undergraduate level in Bangladesh is inadequate or partial. Numerous researches have shown the benefits of collaborative learning on academic performance, communication skills, and confidence. However, the understanding of how group work facilitates learning and why group work is only effective in certain situations is still limited. Researchers have even argued whether the time-consuming nature of group work made the strategy ineffective. As a result, more research is emerging about when not to use group work in the classroom and suggest that for simpler tasks, students complete them individually.

1.2 Aim of the Study

The overarching knowledge interest of this study is to enhance the body of knowledge regarding group work in higher education. The aim of this article is to add knowledge and understanding of what the essence behind successful group work in higher education is by focusing on the students' experiences and conceptions of group work and learning in groups, an almost non-existing aspect of research on group work until the beginning of the 21st century. A primary aim is to give university students a voice in the matter by elucidating the students' positive and negative points of view and how the students assess learning when working in groups. Furthermore, the students' explanations of why some group work results in positive experiences and learning, while in other cases, the result is the opposite, are of interest.

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1.3 Research Questions

This research intends to explore the current practice how students collaborate and how they process information in the form of germane cognitive load. The study also aims to explore how the teachers pedagogical behaviours in the class to facilitate collaborative learning. In particular, this research asks the following questions:

1) How are they students benefited working in the group?
2) What problems the students feel with group work?
3) How do the teachers facilitate the group works?

2. Literature Review

The most important purpose of group work in educational practice is to serve as an incentive for learning. For example, it is believed that the students involved in the group activity should learn something. The review of previous research shows that in the 20th century, there has been an increase in research about students' cooperation in the classroom (Lou et al., 1996; Gillies and Boyle, 2010, 2011). This increasing interest can be traced back to the fact that both researchers and teachers have become aware of the positive effects that collaboration might have on students' ability to learn. The main concern in the research area has been on how interaction and cooperation among students influence learning and problem solving in groups (Hammar Chiriac, 2011a,b).

Teaching and learning in higher education are changing. Active learning has become an important focus in this time of pedagogical change. While the term encompasses a broad array of practices, collaborative learning, or small group work, remains an important element of active learning theory and practice. Research suggests that students learn best when they are actively involved in the process (Davis, 1993). According to Wasley (2006), "Students who participate in collaborative learning and educational activities outside the classroom and who interact more with faculty members get better grades, are more satisfied with their education, and are more likely to remain in college" (p. A39). A collaborative learning environment, as opposed to a passive learning environment, helps students learn more actively and effectively (Murphy, Mahoney, Chen, Mendoza-Diaz & Yang, 2005). Additionally, research also shows that employers want college graduates to possess the ability to work in groups and have developed suitable teamwork skills (Blowers, 2000).

The dynamics of group size is an important component of group work. A small group is often considered to consist of three or more people (Beebe & Masterson, 2003). Groups of two are called dyads and are not encouraged for group work because there are not a sufficient number of individuals to generate creativity and a diversity of ideas (Csernica et al., 2002). In general, it is suggested that groups of four or five members tend to work best (Davis, 1993). However, Csernica et al. (2002) suggests that three or four members are more appropriate. Larger groups decrease each members opportunity to participate and often results in some members not actively contributing to the group. In situations where there is a shorter amount of time available to complete a group task, such as an inclass collaborative learning exercise, it is suggested that smaller groups are more appropriate. The shorter amount of time available, the smaller the group should be (Cooper, 1990; Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1991). Group work can be especially beneficial for large classes. Wright and Lawson (2005) found that group work helped students feel that the class was smaller and encouraged them to come to class more often.

Barkley et al. (2005) recommend designing the coursework in such a way that the success of the individual relies on the success of the group. The instructor should assist the group in creating ways in which to handle unproductive members and foster communication skills. Two approaches concerning learning in group are of interest, namely cooperative learning and collaborative learning. Cooperative group work is usually considered as a

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comprehensive umbrella concept for several modes of student active working modes (Johnson and Johnson, 1975; Webb and Palincsar, 1996), whereas collaboration is a more of an exclusive concept and may be included in the much wider concept cooperation (Hammar Chiriac, 2011a,b). Cooperative learning may describe group work without any interaction between the students (i.e., the student may just be sitting next to each other; Bennet and Dunne, 1992; Galton and Williamson, 1992), while collaborative learning always includes interaction, collaboration, and utilization of the group's competences (Bennet and Dunne, 1992; Galton and Williamson, 1992; Webb and Palincsar, 1996). At the present time, there is strong scientific support for the benefits of students learning and working in groups. In addition, the research shows that collaborative work promotes both academic achievement and collaborative abilities (Johnson and Johnson, 2004; Baines et al., 2007; Gillies and Boyle, 2010, 2011).

According to Gillies and Boyle (2011), the benefits are consistent irrespective of age (pre-school to college) and/or curriculum. When working interactively with others, students learn to inquire, share ideas, clarify differences, solve problems, and construct new understandings. Gillies (2003a,b) also stresses that students working together are more motivated to achieve than they would be when working individually. Thus, group work might serve as an incentive for learning, in terms of both academic knowledge and interpersonal skills. Nevertheless, studies about what occur in groups during group work and which factors actually influence the students' ability to learn is still lacking in the literature, especially when it comes to addressing the students' points of view, with some exceptions (Cantwell and Andrews, 2002; Underwood, 2003; Peterson and Miller, 2004; Hansen, 2006; Hammar Chiriac and Granström, 2012). Similarly, the question of why some group work turns out successfully and other work results in the opposite is still unsolved. In this study, some new pieces of information concerning others result in the opposite are emerged.

3. Research Methodology

In this research, quantitative and qualitative data collection methods are combined in order to maximize the amount of pertinent data. The details of participants, instruments and method of data analysis are presented in the following sections:

3.1 Participants

The study applied mixed-method approach to conduct the study. The participants were the undergraduate students in the Political Science Department of three colleges. The participants consisted of a total of 90 students, comprising 55 males and 35 females. The student participants were the fourth year students in their undergraduate course studying Political Science. The subjects had plenty of class works, exams and exercises, which could be done in a group or individually. As a result, all of the respondents had the required experience to complete the questionnaire with adequate understanding. In addition, a number of 10 teachers teaching political science in different colleges took part in the study as interviewees. The teachers were directly involved in teaching courses and evaluating students performances on regular basis in the respective colleges.

3.2. Instruments

The study was conducted in Mixed-method research approach, a blending of qualitative and quantitative instruments. The quantitative data was collected through a 17-item questionnaire which applied a five-point Likert Scale (1932) ranging from "strongly agreed"- "strongly disagreed" following the Model of Hoque (2016). The qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with teachers. For the interview, an interview protocol was developed based on the 17 issues and themes projected in the student questionnaire. The required data were collected virtually during three months from January- March 2021. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the questionnaire was sent to the respondents' email address for obtaining their responses. The

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interviews were conducted one to one in the ZOOM platform and Facebook Messenger. Interviews typically ranged from 20 minutes to 30 minutes with each were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

3.3 Data Analysis

The quantitative data were compiled and documented in a structured manner before being examined with Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21 for Windows. The reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire were checked through Cronbach's Alpha measure, and found the reliability α 0.81 which was a very good level. Descriptive analysis was conducted for the questionnaire data focusing frequency counts, percentage, mean, median, standard deviation, etc. The interview data were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis method based on three different research questions posed in the research. Analysis of interview data typically began with a set of transcripts of the interviews conducted. It usually followed some steps: getting familiar with the data (reading and re-reading); coding (labeling) the whole text; searching for themes with broader patterns of meaning; reviewing themes to make sure they fitted the data; defining and naming themes; creating a coherent narrative that includes quotes from the interviewees. It analyzed the documented information in the form of texts, direct quotes, or even physical items.

4. Findings of the Study

The current study focuses on undergraduate students' experiences and conceptions of group work and learning in groups. The analysis resulted in the emergence of three different abstractions: learning, study-social function, and organizations. Each abstraction also included a positive and a negative variant. The findings of the study are presented in different sections, with each section corresponding to one abstraction. The students from the Political Science Department display a higher amount of positive experiences in connection with a study-social function and organizing in comparison with the other programmes.

4.1 Findings of the Questionnaire

The findings of the study are presented as per themes. The quantitative analysis in this study involved descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency counts, means, standard deviations, etc.) and inferential statistics. The SPSS 21.0 for Windows was used for the statistical analysis. The responses of the participants for each statement were tabulated and converted into percentages (Hoque, 2011). The statements assessing the expected response of the participants were adopted through a five-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932). Since the responses were actually on a binary scale, the two categories of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were collapsed into single category agreement, while 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' were collapsed into single category disagreement to allow easier discussion of the results (Hoque, 2011) . The findings are presented in the tables (Tables, 1,2, 3,4,) and textual description. On the scale, statements were coded as Strongly Agree=5, Agree=4, Neutral =3, Disagree=2, and Strongly Disagree=1. Here, Q1 refers to Statement Number-1.

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Table 1: Frequency counts of student questionnaire data (Q1-Q4)

		Strongly Agree= 5, Agree=4, No opinion=3, Strongly Disagree= 1, Disagree=2				
		Significant Frequency		Negligible Frequency		
No	Statement	Agreement		Disagreement		
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		5	4	3	2	1
Q1	Group work facilitates my learning.	54 (60%)	27 (30%)	0 0%	9 (10%)	0 0%
Q2	Group work has been very useful method compared to carrying out tasks individually.	78 (86.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	12 (13.3%)	0 (0%)
Q3	Small group is more suitable than big group.	66 (73.3%)	24 (26.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Q4	Gender differences do not act widely in the group ingwork	12 (13.3%)	36 (40%)	0 (0%)	39 (43.3%)	3 (3.3)

The findings of the study (Q1) showed that the majority of the students (90%) responded that working in group facilitated their learning (M=3.67, STDV=.1.061), academic knowledge, collaborative abilities or both, accordingly confirming previous research. According to the 87% students (Q2) they learnt more or different things when working in groups compared with working individually (M=4, STDV=. 346). Interestingly, the study (Q3) revealed that 100% students preferred working in small groups (M=4.73, STDV=.450) to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats. In contexts, with a large population of students, the smaller group gives the participants an opportunity to feel affiliated with the group and to each other. Previous research studies reveal that students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats (Cockrell et al., 2000; Johnson & Johnson, 2000). Group learning also promotes the development of student social skills such as communication, presentation, problem solving, leadership, delegation and organisation (Cheng & Warren, 2000). For small groups to function effectively in a course context, students must attend to both the climate within their group and the process by which they accomplish their tasks (Hoque, 2016). Critical to a healthy climate and an effective process are strong communication skills.

The study (Q4) explored that 53% students (M=3.63, STDV=.765) confirmed that gender difference did not impact much in the group learning; rather it promoted the development of student social skills such as communication, presentation, problem solving, leadership, delegation and organization. The study discovered that group work has been proposed as"female-friendly" pedagogy because it emphasizes cooperation and equality over competition and hierarchy. However, sometimes teamwork serves to reinforce a gendered hierarchy.

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Table 2: Frequency counts of student questionnaire data (Q5-Q8)

		Strongly Agree= 5, Agree=4, No opinion=3, Strongly Disagree= 1, Disagree=2				
		Significant Frequency		Negligible Frequency		
No	Statement	Agreement		Disagreement		
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		5	4	3	2	1
Q5	It is very interesting way to share ideas and knowledge with others.	21 (23.3%)	42 (46.7%)	3 (3.3%)	21 (23.3%)	3 (3.3%)
Q6	Academic knowledge is not the only type of knowledge learned through group work.	18 (20%)	42 (46.7%)	3 (3.3%)	15 (16.7%)	12 (13.3%)
Q7	Group work hampered learning as being ineffective due to the presence of conflicts.	24 (26.7%)	30 (33.3%)	0 0%	36 (40%)	0 0%
Q8	Group work takes longer time to complete the task.	45 (50%)	21 (23.3%)	0 0%	24 (26.7%)	0 0%

The (Q5) majority of the students (70%) responded that it was interesting way to share ideas and knowledge with others working in group which somehow facilitated learning, sharing ideas and knowledge with others. that group work has allowed them to share and exchange knowledge as it can develop critical thinking skills, exchange knowledge, share expertise. This method is very effective because ideas from one person will trigger additional ideas from another (Hoque, 2016). By discussing and questioning (Q6) each other's points of view and listening to their fellow students' contributions, 67% students (M=3.87, STDV=.819) thought that "Academic knowledge is not the only type of knowledge learned through group work. In addition to academic knowledge, students also gain advanced knowledge about how groups work, how the students function as individual members of groups and how other members behave and work in groups.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of student questionnaire data

Descriptive Statistics of Student Questionnaire Data									
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	08	Q9
Mean	3.67	4.87	4.73	3.63	3.60	3.87	4.50	4.23	4.60
S.E of Mean	.194	.063	.082	.140	.183	.150	.125	.157	.113
Median	3.79	4.87	4.73	3.60	3.57	3.82	4.56	4.32	4.64
Std. Deviation	1.061	.346	.450	.765	1.003	.819	.682	.858	.621
Variance	1.126	.120	.202	.585	1.007	.671	.466	.737	.386
Skewness	-.749	-2.273	-1.112	.259	-.184	.259	-1.047	-.487	-1.330
S.E of Skewness	.427	.427	.427	.427	.427	.427	.427	.427	.427
Kurtosis	.058	3.386	-.824	-.440	.057	-1.457	-.034	-1.484	-.831
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.833	.833	.833	.833	.833	.833	.833	.833	.833

Assigning group work is a good teaching strategy (Q7) 60% students responded (M=4.50, STDV=.682) group work hampered learning as being ineffective due to loss of focus and the presence of conflicts. The absence or presence of conflicts in the group affects students'

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experiences, and conflicts not handled may influence learning in a negative way. The students perceived that it was difficult to come to an agreement and experience those conflicts and the need to compromise hampered individual learning. More Than 73% students (M=4.23, STDV=.858) believed (Q8) that group work took longer time to complete the task.

Table 4: Frequency counts of student questionnaire data (Q9-Q12)

		Strongly Agree= 5, Agree=4, No opinion=3, Strongly Disagree= 1, Disagree=2				
No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		5	4	3	2	1
Q9	Group work provides me with more confidence as help may found from other group members at the time of need.	40 (66.7%)	24 (26.7%)	0 0%	6 (6.7%)	3 (3.3)
Q10	We are concerned with group structure and the roles of leader.	24 (26.7%)	18 (20%)	3 (3.3%)	39 (43.3%)	9 (10%)
Q11	A well-thought-out group composition, including both group size and mix of members is essential.	54 (60%)	12 (13.3%)	0 (0%)	24 (26.7%)	0 0%
Q12	Weak students are more benefitted through group work activities.	15 (16.7%)	39 (43.3%)	0 (0%)	24 (26.7%)	12 (13.3%)

Managing group dynamics for successful implementation of group work is time intensive for instructors. Exploring students' perceptions of group work might provide insights into which time-consuming support strategies (e.g., role assignment, group contracts, peer evaluations at the midpoint and endpoint of the semester, and summative peer ratings) students were using effectively. Nearly, 93% students (M=4.60, STDV=.621) opined that (Q9) group work provided them with more confidence as support might be found from other group members at the time of need. The study (Q10) revealed that only 47% students were concerned with group structure and the roles of leader (M=3.63, STDV=.999) while more than 53% students (Q11) showed their disagreement meaning that they were concerned about it. The aspects of group structure to be considered are (1) work roles, (2) work group size, (3) work group norms, (4) status relationships, and (5) work group cohesiveness. Each of these factors has been shown to influence group processes.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of student questionnaire data

Descriptive Statistics of Student Questionnaire Data								
	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17
Mean	3.63	4.33	3.63	3.30	4.03	4.20	3.90	4.30
S.E of Mean	.182	.161	.169	.174	.131	.162	.168	.160
Median	3.58	5.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.50
Std. Deviation	.999	.884	.928	.952	.718	.887	.923	.877
Variance	.999	.782	.861	.907	.516	.786	.852	.769
Skewness	.161	-.737	-.280	.621	-.050	-.738	-.355	-1.308
S.E of Skewness	.427	.427	.427	.427	.427	-.427	.427	.427
Kurtosis	1.149	-1.331	-.623	-.391	-.954	-.481	-.736	1.352
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.833	.833	.833	.833	.833	.833	.833	.833

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It was found that (Q11) more than 73% students (M=4.33, STDV=.884) believed a well-thought-out group composition, including both group size and mix of members was essential for full learning outcome. It showed (Q12) that 57% learners confirmed weak students were more benefitted through group work activities. Often, very good students strongly oppose group work; they worry that an ineffective group with weak members may hamper their learning and achievement. However, many openly express the belief that weak students can do the activity better on their own and would prefer doing it that way.

Table 6: Frequency counts of student questionnaire data (Q13-Q17)

		Strongly Agree= 5, Agree=4, No opinion=3, Strongly Disagree= 1, Disagree=2				
		Significant Frequency		Negligible Frequency		
No	Statement	Agreement		Disagreement		
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		5	4	3	2	1
Q13	My teacher gets involved when groups face problems.	15 (16.7%)	48 (53.3%)	0 (0%)	12 (13.3%)	15 (16.7%)
Q14	Group work is affected by unequal contribution of group members.	24 (26.7%)	45 (50%)	0 (0%)	21 (23.3%)	3 (3.3)
Q15	I prefer to pick my group members without any interference of my teacher.	42 (46.7%)	27 (30%)	0 0%	18 (20%)	3 (3.3%)
Q16	Although it's a group work, I believe that everyone should be assessed individually	27 (30%)	33 (36.7%)	0 (0%)	24 (26.7%)	6 (6.7%)
Q17	We require more teachers' assistance and training on how to work effectively to work in a group.	45 (50%)	33 (36.7%)	0 0%	6% (6.7%)	6 (6.7%)

The study exposed that (Q13) 70% students (M=4.30, STDV=.952) teachers got involved groups faced problems. Teachers can assist their students in many ways to produce maximum results from the group work activities. As students do their work, teacher should circulate among the groups and answer any questions raised. 77% students (Q14) blamed that group work was affected by unequal contribution of group members (M=4.03, STDV=.718). Some group members may be weaker than others, but if members are not contributing at all this is a problem. The study (Q15) showed 77% students (M=4.20, STDV=.887) preferred to choose their group members without any interference of their teachers. The study (Q16) disclosed that 67% students (M=3.90, STDV=.923) they should be assessed individually, even though they worked in group. Finally, 87% students (M=4.30, STDV=.877) remarked (Q17) that they required more teachers' assistance and training while working in groups. To avoid interfering with group functioning — teachers need to allow time for students to solve their own problems before getting involved. Also, they should listen for trends that are emerging from the discussions, so that teacher can refer to them during the subsequent plenary discussion. Teachers might consider leaving the room for a short period of time to create students' autonomy. Their absence can increase students' willingness to share uncertainties and disagreements (Hoque, 2011).

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4.2 Findings from the in-depth interviews

The study conducted in-depth interviews to explore the range of students' perceptions, practice, and attitudes in group work in order to gain better insight into the comments made by the teachers. The in-depth interview protocol was designed to collect data from the teachers. The 10 teachers who took part in the interviews were named as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, and T10. Among the participants, 6 teachers were male and 4 were female. The interviewed teachers were from urban and sub-urban areas; and the teachers were interviewed on a number of 17 issues of perception, practice, and effectiveness of group work and assessment of the students. The study usually follows some steps: reading and re-reading the data; coding or labeling the whole text; searching for themes with meaning; reviewing themes to make sure they fit the data; defining and naming themes; creating a coherent narrative that includes quotes from the interviewees. The findings from the in-depth interview were analysed in the content analysis method and presented in the following section:

The interview was conducted one-to- one, and faces to face; and they were asked complementary and supplementary questions to obtain authentic related data. The interviews were tap recorded with the permission of the interviewing teachers; then, their comments and statements were coded and categorized in different issues and areas. The result shows that all teachers (100%) advocated that working in group facilitated students' learning, academic knowledge, collaborative abilities or both, which confirmed previous research (Hoque, 2011, Freeman & Greenacre, 2011). The 60% of the interviewed teachers claimed they frequently arranged group work in their courses as the group works were beneficial for students' learning. In this context, T4 remarked that:

> *I always appreciate my students in working in groups because working on their own can sometimes feel easier. It can be efficient, you can work on the project in your own time, and you can control the whole processes. I also motivate other teachers to apply group work method in their class.*

The most of the teachers (80%) commented that group work has been very useful method compared to carrying out tasks individually. The teacher participants commented that students made lots of fun while working in groups meaning that they enjoyed the collaborative activities other than working individually. While interviewing, most of the teachers (80%) remarked students learn many things other than academic knowledge. They remarked that there is strong scientific support for the benefits of having students learning and working in groups. They highlighted that collaborative work promotes both academic achievement and other abilities that might help them working in the other environment and fields. Previous research studies reveal that students working in small groups tend to learn more and what is taught retains it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats (Cockrell et al., 2000; Johnson & Johnson, 2000). Group learning also promotes the development of student social skills such as communication, presentation, problem solving, leadership, delegation and organisation (Cheng & Warren, 2000). It is clear from this research that there are a wide variety of values that students can gain from their group work experience. These vary from behavioural skills to the accumulation of intellectual and personal skills. It has become clear that the full range of the advantages of group work is diverse in nature. The results of of the study support the findings of the research (Galton et al., 2009; Gillies and Boyle, 2011; Hammar Chiriac and Granström, 2012). While answering a question, T8 commented that:

> *Group work serves not only academic purposes but also different purposes. She continues that the overall purpose of the group work in education is that the students who participate in group work learn something new and something different. Learning can be in terms of academic knowledge or group knowledge.*

All the teachers (100%) of the study responded that small group is more suitable than big

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group; however, 70% teachers added that organizing and administering too many groups at a time was difficult because time for a class-time was limited. From the interview it was revealed that working in small groups gave students a chance to practice the higher-order thinking skills that teachers loved to teach. The teachers remarked that a 4-5 member group is an ideal group for cooperative learning, as the larger the group size the more difficult it is to organize tasks, manage different skills, and reach a consensus. This finding agrees with Biott (1999) claims that there should be no fixed rules about group size and hence group size of 3-5 learners are satisfactory since any decision made will need to be dependent on the classroom context. Students who do small group work generally learn more of the material and retain their knowledge longer than students who don't (Davis, 1993). In this connection T5 said:

> *Actually, the students prefer small group as assigning tasks to small groups during class can have many benefits, such as involving students in their own learning, making course topics come to life, deepening students' knowledge, and developing particular skills.*

70% Teachers remarked that gender differences acted widely working in the group, which was a different opinion from the students as they (53%) commented that gender differences was not a problem; however, 47% students echoed the majority of the teachers' opinion. From the interviews, it was clear that students enjoyed working in groups. The teachers focused that both the male and female students felt shy if they worked in the same group. It was found that females were more positively predisposed to group work than males, and the gender differences were statistically significant; differences were especially notable with regard to recognizing the benefits of studying in groups and groups' contributions to understanding class material. *In mixed-sex* groups, female can play stronger roles than male. Such findings reinforced the expectations that group work was a pedagogy with which females were particularly comfortable. In this regard, T3 said:

> *In many cases, we find that the female students are welcome by the male students. The males may take on dominant roles, while females assume more passive and supportive roles. I believe and maintain that mixed-sex groups groups should be formed because it creates diverse experience; however, the some female student always prefer separate groups for them even though there are a wide variety of values that students can gain from their mixed-group work experience.*

Though the group work provides a very valuable experience that further develops students' learning and achievement, 90% teachers expressed that the gender differences, differences in the intelligence level of students, group formation difficulties, and time killing/consumption factors are the barrier of group work activities in the class. The interviewee teachers (70%) expressed that weak students got more benefit from the group work activities; but, the students were selective, they wanted to form their own groups on their choice without interference of the teachers. In this connection T7 informed that:

> *We cannot apply group work technique in our classes all the time because it is more time consuming. Furthermore, students want to form their own group, but they mostly fail to rightly form it as they do not consider it from teaching-learning point of view, rather they prefer mutual relationship or friendship. As a result, though the students like to form their own group, they cannot do it without the help of teachers.*

A good number of teachers (60%) pointed out that some of the shortcomings of group work such as unequal performance among team members and communication across timelines helped them develop effective skills for working with low performers. 70% teachers claimed that they helped their students while working in groups, and solved problems and helped them face challenges. From the study, it becomes clear that the full range of the advantages of group work is diverse in nature. These vary from behavioural skills to the accumulation of intellectual and personal skills. In this point, T9 mentioned:

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All students of a group cannot perform equally; some students are more intelligent and hard working than others. But, as a collaborative technique, any group should be diverse and mixed with the stronger and weaker students; we cannot push out the weak students from the group. I always remain active to help my students working in any groups.

Almost every teacher (90%) separately expressed that success of a group depended on how much it was a well-thought-out group. The teachers mentioned that a well-thought-out group should consider group size, roles, prior knowledge, previous experiences and skills, motivation, diversity of perspectives, students' familiarity with each other, personality, and mix of members. While commenting on a well-thought-out group, T10 focused that:

In my experience, the success of a team is mostly dependent on a well-thought-out group and the leadership qualities of the team's leader. A Group leader with a positive attitude and good communication skills has a greater impact on performance and group attitude than the abilities of the individual members. A team without leadership is much more likely to perform below their capability.

In this regard, T2 slightly disagreed with T10 by saying:

As per my experience, it depends on attitude and performance of the whole team which is driven by a great leader. It supposes to be blend of all. If only leadership without the performance of the team, you can't succeed as a team and at the same without a good leader you cannot utilize your team services efficiently to succeed. Therefore I feel it is a combination of all.

A good number of Teachers (70%) reported that placing students in groups and expecting them to cooperate would not necessarily promote collaborative learning; students needed explicit training in the interpersonal and small group skills that might facilitate co operation in a way that promotes their learning and achievement. This training should be an ongoing process and should not be restricted to a one-time session. 90% teachers suggested that students should receive training on group learning, such as how to set goals, share roles, divide tasks, use of peer and self-assessment, adopt strategies for conflict resolutions and communicate face-to-face and via technological means. The results of the study indicated that the teachers and students experienced that group work facilitated learning, especially concerning academic knowledge. Besides the academic knowledge, group works helped students attaining other abilities and skills that might add potential and understating of learners. By listening to the undergraduate students' voices and elucidating their experiences and conceptions, teachers can add new knowledge and understanding of what the essence is behind successful group work in higher education. Furthermore, the students' explanations of why some group work results in positive experiences and learning, while in other cases, the result is the opposite, can be of use for further development of group work as a pedagogical practice.

5. Conclusion

The results indicate that group work facilitated learning, especially concerning academic knowledge. Three important prerequisites (learning, study-social function, and organization) for group work that serves as an effective pedagogy and as an incentive for learning were identified and discussed. The study explored that students were always benefited in many ways from group work; it also showed that maximum teachers facilitated the group work activities; however, the study explored that when the group was not well-though out and group members could not contribute adequately, the students faced problems. The students' explanations of why some group work results in positive experiences and learning, while in other cases, the result is the opposite, can be of use for further development of group work as a pedagogical practice. Every study has its limitations, and the present study is no exception . One of the weaknesses inherent in this research

is that it becomes difficult to generalize to the greater population of undergraduate students of Bangladesh. Future research, therefore, is needeed to adopt larger-scale, empirical approaches, within different universities or geographic regions, to confirm some of the findings observed here. In addition, as this study focused upon fourth year students studying political science, it seems clear that more robust mechanisms are required for measuring and assessing group learning skills throughout the other undergraduate experiences. Future studies would also consider examining the effectiveness of other types of learning versus collaborative learning in enhancing critical-thinking skills. Notwithstanding these potential limitations, this study was still able to address very relevant issues in the area of group-based learning.

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