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A Study of the Factors Influencing Non-Major English Students' Willingness to Do Workgroup at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade

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Abstract

When it comes to working together in the group, many students, especially non-major English ones always show their unmotivated expression on their faces and the unwillingness to join in. Nevertheless, group work has always been considered to be one of the most effective learning methods for both lecturers and students. Developing students' awareness of the importance of collaborative learning is something that lecturers should do, especially for students in higher education since it will greatly affect their chances of being employed in the future since "Employers want college graduates to have developed teamwork skills" (Burke, 2011, p. 87). Study objectives were to determine what factors influence the willingness of non-major English students to work in groups. The study revealed that students feel hesitant to join group work activities due to the fairness of grading, the characteristics of each student in the group, the intimacy in the students' relationship, a fear of being judged by their peers, and a lack of guidance from their lecturers. Furthermore, the study highlighted the need for teachers to provide more guidance and assistance to their students in order to encourage them to participate in group work activities. And after all, the writer hopes that the findings of this article will give lecturers from different majors, not only language departments, more knowledge, more confidence, and more motivation to apply this method in their classrooms to improve both teaching and learning quality in education.

Keywords: group working, collaborative learning, willingness

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1. Introduction:

In a classroom at a university, there may be up to 60 or 70 students. Even though lecturers do their very best to ensure that every student in the class understands the lesson's main objective, there will always be a few who are left behind. In a class with many students, grouping students to work together in a group is one of the most effective teaching strategies for teachers to assess their students' understanding of the lesson through their work. According to Hassanien (2006), work groups are "team processes in which members support and depend on each other to achieve a set objective" (p. 18), so when working in a team, students need to share their knowledge to support one another in achieving a goal. Students are actively and passively

raising their understanding of a subject by sharing, collecting, and comparing ideas on the subject, so everyone in the class, even the least attentive students, understands the lesson. The benefits of group working above make it more popular than other forms of classroom structure in the classroom (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1986). This learning strategy not only gives students opportunities to debate and manipulate ideas with others and reflect upon their learnings (Fraser & Deane, 1997), but also, for the large number of students in one class, especially in universities, workgroup appeals as an efficient way to diminish time and resources and for students to better understand the lessons when the workloads are so many (Burdett, 2003).

Regardless of how important group work is, it is still not favored by students, especially non-major English students, since English is just one of the subject groups in their curriculum. Students show their boredom by “cringing and groaning when told that they will need to work in a group” (Burke, 2011, p. 87). As a lecturer for both major and non-major students, the writer finds that non-major ones always show less enthusiasm and eagerness to work with others, and there is always compulsion in class in order to have students work in groups with each other. English is one of the most important subjects that has a great impact on students’ graduation since it is a must that students have to achieve an English certificate with a certain score to graduate. So in order to improve students’ English learning to meet graduate standards, lecturers have a tendency to apply the group work method during class with the purpose of increasing students’ understanding of the lesson, despite the large number of students in a class. Applying this learning method in class, lecturers not only hope to raise students’ awareness about the importance of teamwork skills but also to help students have a higher chance of getting their desired job since many employers now really value this skill in their company.

It is very important to get students’ perceptions about the reasons that affect their willingness to participate in group activities, thereby helping teachers have a better understanding of students’ difficulties when applying the method in class. In teaching, when understanding and overcoming, students will be more motivated and comfortable when working in teams.

2. Literature Review

2.1. What is a work group?

Group work can be simply understood as a certain number of students working together in a team to achieve a goal. There is no exact number for the amount of students in one group, there can be two students, three students or even more than ten ones in a group, as long as there is a mutual discussion between students within the group. According to Slavin, (1986, as cited in Dunkin ed. 1987: 238) “Group work is a division of the class into learning groups of four to six members who are of all levels of ability. These groups also

have a mix of boys and girls and students of different racial, and ethnic backgrounds in about some proportion, they represent the class as a whole.” The most important thing that and cannot be missed when assigning students to work in a team is setting a goal for them, by giving students a purpose, they will know how to share work among members to produce an expected outcome. So to put it more briefly, group work first is one of the teaching strategies that teachers like to apply in their lesson plan to make their teaching more effective (Gödek, Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, et al., 2004), in which there will be a certain number of students who share different characteristics and capabilities collaborating with each other “through several modes of communication such as face-to-face and internet” (Hassanien, 2006, p. 18) towards a common goal.

2.2. Work in a group or work as a group?

Many lecturers when putting students in a group just care about receiving the result after the working progress, they seemly show less attention to observing that students in groups actually discuss, interact with each other throughout the process or just assign jobs to each other and then each student will do their own task by themselves and when the time is over, they gather all the information to form the final conclusion, this is just like Galton and Williamson (1992) once stated that working in a group is when pupils are sitting together in a group but working individually on separate parts of a group task. So, it is quite necessary for lecturers to be aware that there is a huge difference between “working in a group” and “working as a group”. Even if group work is defined as ‘pupils working together as a group or a team’ (Blatchford, Kutnick, Baines, & Galton, 2003, p. 155), it is important to differentiate between working in a group and working as a group. If students work as a group, they surely develop both their comprehensive knowledge and their social relationships after the working process, otherwise, they just remain the same without any changes in their own knowledge and their communication ability.

Not only lecturers but also students have to be aware of the importance of behaving properly when working in groups. Students also need to understand when lecturers assign them in a group work, lecturers want them to have collaborative learning, not cooperative one. The former refers to “working as a group” where all “group members are involved in and working on a common task in order to produce a joint outcome” (Chiriac, & Granström, p.346, 2012) while the later, in other words, working in a team is where students could be working on a divisible or a unitary task (Hammar Chiriac, 2008; Steiner, 1972), the work still occurs but there is no interaction between the students.

It is obvious that both lecturers and students, besides the result of the given task, need to pay great attention to the working process. It will be meaningless if students are asked to work in groups and then they keep doing tasks individually.

2.3. What is the importance of conducting co-operative learning in class ?

The implementation of group work teaching strategies is effective not only in developing many beneficial characteristics for students in learning but also in saving time and resources for teachers and in preparing students for 21st century workplaces where teamwork skills are very essential (DETYA, 2000; Furnham, 2000; CIHE, 1996; Harvey et al., 1997).

As we know, sometimes teachers do not have enough learning materials for all individual students in class, which is a very common situation in universities due to resource limitations or budget limitations. For example, sometimes lecturers want to share with students a meaningful and inspiring story in their book; however, he or she just has one book and there are over 60 students in class. This is when group work comes in as a reasonable means of learning for students to approach the story and for teachers to save their money since they just need to make 9–10 copies of the story instead of making up to 60 ones. And when students read the story together in a group, they can come up with many more ideas about the humanistic values of the story when discussing and sharing ideas with each other, which also unintentionally elaborates the lesson outcome. Fraser & Deane (1997) believed that group work gives students opportunities to debate and manipulate ideas with others and reflect upon their learning. At the same time, the number of students in one class is also surprisingly more crowded than those in lower grades; there can be more than 50 students in just one class. For the large number of students in a class, Burdett (2003) once again praised the value of a work group since it appeals as an efficient way to diminish time and resources and for students to better understand the lessons when the workloads are so many (Burdett, 2003).

Getting a job after graduation is not as easy as before, so the pressure to get a job after graduation is not only found in the students themselves but also in universities. The goal of this project is to give students the knowledge and abilities necessary for employability and group work competencies, which are crucial traits that most employers seek out and demand (Mallinger, 1998; McEvoy, 1998; Mintzberg, 1975; Whetten & Cameron, 1995). Burdett (2003) once again emphasised the importance of equipping students with behavioural skills by affirming that those skills are one of the most important ones of a prominent worker (Burdett, 2003).

2.4. What advantages and disadvantages of conducting this method in class ?

2.4.1. Advanatges

No matter how much students show their discomfort and constraint to work in groups, it cannot be denied that working in a group helps students to develop and fulfill not only their knowledge but also their social skills. According to Gödek, Y., Üniversitesi, G., and Eğitim Fakültesi, K. [A1] et al. (2004), students

can improve themselves in many positive ways, like becoming more active and independent, improving self-esteem and motivations, and learning to respect and accept learning from each other [A2]. Students also develop a better feeling for each other; the relationship between students can be closer after the work group because they spend time working together, getting to know more about each other, and helping each other to finally reach the goal of the given task (Slavin, 1986, as cited in Dunkin, 1987: 237). According to Gödek, Y., Üniversitesi, G., and Eğitim Fakültesi, K. et al. (2004) group working method also helps shy students to be more social since they have the chance to join in conversations and discussions [A5] when they are in groups with others. There are also many different benefits that explain the significant role played by group work [A6]. There are also authors who were motivated by this topic (e.g., Clarke, 2004; Gerdy, 1998; Gillies&Ashman, 2003; Johnson&Johnson, 2000; Johnson, Johnson,& Smith, 1991; Sharan, 1980; Slavin, 1980; Vygotskii, 1978) and came to the conclusion [A7] that collaborative learning increases students' initiative to express their opinions, knowledge, and information [A8] with others, also increases motivation among participants, encourages students to think more critically, fosters socialization, improves their attitudes towards learning, and last but not least, improves their knowledge of various ethnic backgrounds.

2.4.2 Disadvantages

Along with these benefits, however, there are also some negative aspects that we must seriously take into consideration with regard to this teaching strategy. The problems in conducting this activity efficiently during class stem from both students and lecturers, not just one. According to Gödek, Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, et al (2004) Group working's success depend largely on teachers' abilities to arrange, manage, and teach groups effectively. In practice, teachers may struggle to adequately integrate all of the aspects listed above during group work time. The most difficult aspect may be the fact that "all teachers find it difficult to involve students in discussion" (Gödek, et al., 2004, as cited in Gödek & Bilgisi Öğretmenliği Ana Bilim Dalı, 2004: 31).

One of the most apparent reasons that students are reluctant to join a group task is the inevitable fight throughout the working process. According to Biott (1987, as cited in Croll & Hastings, 1996: 45) believes that children generally have a tendency to show the objection to each other's views, and (Croll & Hastings, 1996: 52) "Group discussions can soon lead to angry confrontation." Furthermore, Croll & Hastings (1996) also emphasizes that group leaders can sometimes be commanding and anxious. For some students, group work is not always a fair learning approach in terms of grades. This can be explained by the fact that in the group there will be some students do pretty much all the tasks, and there will be students that do just a few trivial tasks but at last they get the same scores. Like (Gödek, et al., 2004, as cited in Gödek & Bilgisi

Öğretmenliği Ana Bilim Dalı, 2004: 31) once said "Sometimes in a group every student does not take on the same equal responsibilities. Some pupils do their work collaboratively but on the other hand some pupils do not join the collaboration". Even though acknowledging the reason for including group work as a component of a university course, students do find it frustrating to be forced to work in groups as they think that it is easier for them to complete the given task alone than to work in group in some cases (University of South Australia, 2001c). When working in group, students have the right to negotiate their ideas, but there are still others's ideas, and after all the discussions, they have to come up with the best one despite some being unapproved by some students. Ironically, the idea that the group agree upon is sometimes not the right one but the one of one student in a group. This is why some students believe that they would have achieved a better outcome when they did the task alone.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Participants

This study employed both a qualitative and quantitative approach and was centered 180 non-major English students in 4 classes, most of them are between 18 and 20 years old. All the participants are voluntary and willing to participate honestly and faithfully in the study to find out their experience and their perceptions about the best and worst aspects of group work implementation during class, and also to explore their thoughts about the factors that hinder them from participating in group work effectively and motivationally. At the time they were gathering data for this study, they were about to attend the 1st semester final exam.

3.2. Instrument

The instrument of this survey is a questionnaire, which is designed under Google Form and consists of several questions in the form of multiple-choice questions to collect information from participants. At the end of the question list, there will be some more open-ended questions. At first, the author wanted to interview students by using apps like Skype or Google Meet, but to avoid Internet breakdowns and bad connections since some students live in dormitories and rental houses, and also because students in this time period are busy reviewing for the upcoming final exam, the author decided to add interview questions at the end of the Google Form. Questionnaires can be counted as interviews, but in writing, because Mcleod (2018) once affirmed that it is possible for questionnaires to be done by phone, by post, by computer, or face-to face.

There are three sections for students: the first is their opinion about the application of work groups in class; the second is their own experience; and the third is two open-ended questions at the end to figure out the students' opinions and the factors that affect their willingness to work with other students in the group.

3.3. Data collection procedures

The author created a group chat on the Zalo app and added all the voluntary participants. All the participants were informed 1 week prior to the survey; they were asked to give the time that they felt most comfortable doing the survey, and then the author and the students came to an agreement about the date and time to do the questionnaire on Google Form. The questionnaires were administered to the students on November 20, and they were collected after 15 minutes.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The total number of participants in the research

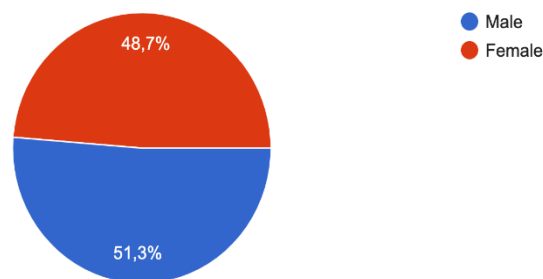


Figure 1. The total number of participants in the research

The aforementioned pie chart above shows that the majority of students in non-major English classes are male students. This reflects true classrooms' actual situation in non-major English classes in HUIT these days due to the fact that students learning in this class come from diverse majors and also because students learn in which class depending partly on their class registration at the beginning of the school semester. The findings suggested that when male students outnumber girls in non-major English subjects, they may be shy and hesitant to participate in group assignments in class. Students in Hufi's non-major English class come from various majors and aren't acquainted with each other well; they are additionally going through growth spurts, therefore dividing students into groups of boys and girls may be one of the causes that discourages students from participating in group work.

4.2 Students' experience of group work in class

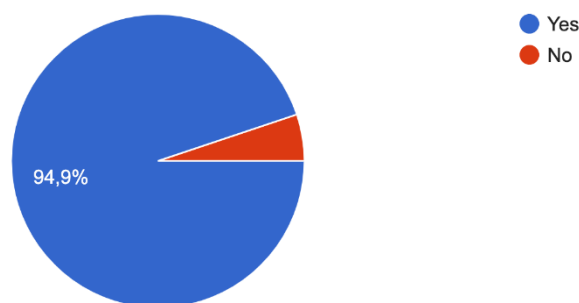


Figure 2. Students' experience of group work in class

Most of the students participating in this research already have experience working with others in a team. This confirms that lecturers in HUIT do apply the group – working learning method in their English classes and this means of learning activity has maintained its popularity among lecturers after many years. Students joining in this research clearly help the conduct of the research more effectively and more realistically drawn from their own previous working experience.

4.3 Strategy students do best when they share the work with other students in a group assignment.

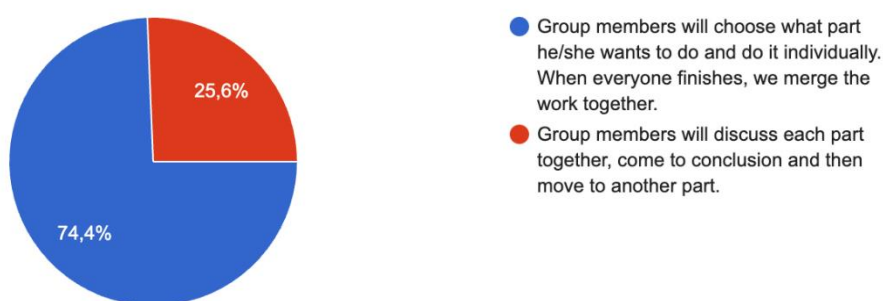


Figure 3. Strategy students do most when they share the work with other students in a group assignment.

Students were also asked to identify the most common way they share the task given by lecturer when they are in one team together. The majority of students (77,4%) chose that they tend to let group members choose what part he/she wants to to and do it individually. When everyone finishes, the leader of the group

merge all the works together. This strategy seems to be more popular and more easier to apply when students have to work with others. This result unsurprisingly support what researcher has previously discussed in the literature by showing the differences between “work in group” and “work as a group”.

“Work in group” is no different than work alone; students in group simply do what they want, do it themselves, and then connect each part together; there is little interaction, conversation, and discussion during the process, which leads to other students' willingness to join in group work because they see this activity as a redundant activity which wastes their time; sometimes they believe they can do the task better on their own. This clearly demonstrates that even while working in a team, students have their own ways of avoiding working with others. This also demonstrates that students still prefer working in their own workspace than chatting and collaborating with other team members. Students sitting in a group but working on separate sections of a group job appear unwilling to collaborate and communicate efficiently and actively with other students.

4.4 Students' awareness of the effectiveness of Group Working Method

Table 1: Students' awareness of the effectiveness of Group Working Method

No.	Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Group work is a necessary learning strategy in class.	51,2%	33,3%	12,8%	0%	2,6%
2	Group work can help me gain more new knowledge which I did not know before.	33,3%	46,2%	10,3%	2,6%	5,1%
3	Group work helps me to make more friends.	33,3%	33,3%	28,2%	0%	2,6%
4	Group work helps me improve my communication and leadership skills.	46,2%	35,9%	12,8%	2,6%	2,6%
5	Group work gives me the sense of belonging in the class since working together makes other people aware my present.	25,6%	46,2%	18%	7,7%	2,6%
6	Group work helps me boost my confidence through sharing my ideas and my opinions about the subject matter.	38,5%	38,5%	12,8%	7,7%	2,6%
7	Group work helps me to gain higher score.	25,6%	43,6%	15,4%	12,8%	2,6%
8	Group work develops my creativity.	38,5%	41%	5,1%	10,2%	2,6%

9	Group work teaches me organization skill and time management skill since there is always time limit to any task given by lecturers	46,1%	35,9%	7,7%	7,7%	2,6%
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It can be seen from the above table that most of the respondents show their approval attitude toward the benefits of group-work learning activity. Most of the students agree that group work is necessary learning strategy for students in class (84,5%). This proves that students do aware the importance and benefits of this learning method during their learning process in class. Approximately 79% students agree that working in group with other students give them a chance to approach to new knowledge from thier peers which they have never known before. Each student will have a particular interest in which he or she will be more interested and will learn or find related knowledge; from this, they will share what they know with others if they work in groups and on a topic connected to their interest. And by sharing what they know, other students will naturally obtain additional understanding about something they never spent time learning before. The researcher also found that most of the students agree upon the idea that after finishing a group work, their social skills improve and their social relationships expand (66% students agree that they have more interesting friendships after finishing a group-work task, 82% students agree that they improve their own communicating skills and leadership skills through interacting with others when working in a team). Furthermore, 71% students agree that group – work bring other students' attention and also teacher's attention to thier present since there can be up to 60 students in a university class and it is sometimes hard for all the students and also for teacher to get to know each other well. Surprisingly, in term of students' abilities, 77% students agree that working in a team with other classmates improve their confidence by the fact that they dare to share and express their opinions towards the subject matter with others without the fear of being judged, 79% students agree that group-work enhance their ability to be creative, 82% students agree that group-work helps them be more aware of organizing their to-do-list, improve their ability to realize what thing they should prioritize and what things they can do at the end. There is always time limit in every task assigned by lecture, if students do not have organization and management skills, they are very likely to get behind schedule which can have a negative impact on their group's overall working results.

The percentage of respondents that oppose this form of learning is modest, ranging from 2.6% to 15% in each area. This finding leads the writer to conclude that students know the benefits of cooperating with other students; yet, the writer wonders why students still fear to work in groups when asked by lecturers, despite the fact that the benefits of this learning approach are immense.

4.5 Reasons for students' unwillingness to join work-group activity

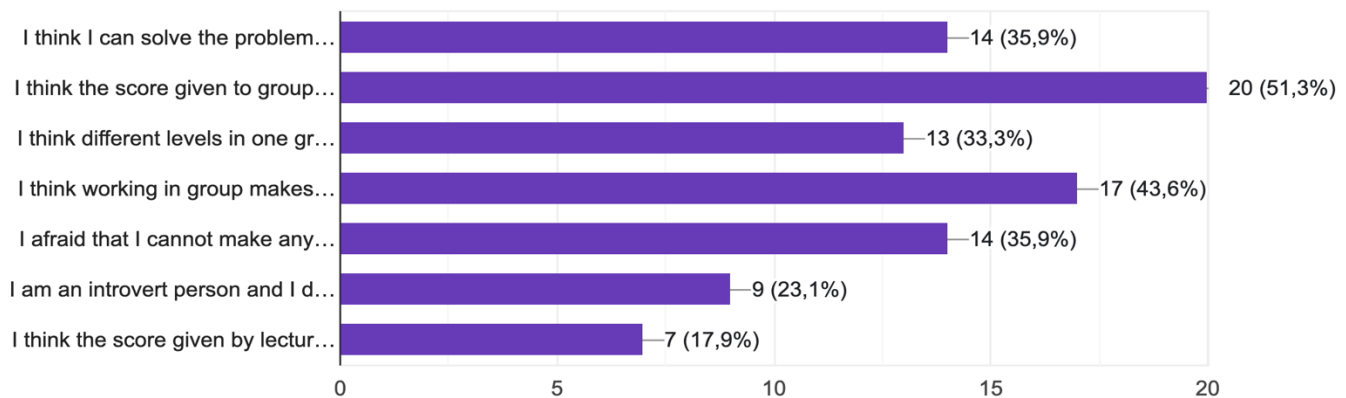


Figure 4. Reasons for students' unwillingness to join work-group activity

The majority of learners (51,3%) chose to express their preference for working individuals because they believe the grade assigned to their group does not seem fair to all members, and 43,6% of students choose working together causing students to become lazier and more reliant on others to complete their tasks. Lazy and dependent people are referred to as "free riders," they accomplish nothing but obtain the same score as everyone else. Furthermore, the diverse levels of students in a group can have an effect on their score because a group with more good students will nearly always outperform a group with mixed levels of students. This also applies to student grades, which are sometimes perceived as unfair by students.

Next, 35,9% students selected "I think I can solve the problem better by my own." and 33,3% students chose "I think different levels in one group can cause time wasting, resentment and conflicts within the group." The findings suggest that students prefer working alone because they are afraid of getting into an unnecessary argument with a peer. Students have varying levels of knowledge and comprehension about a subject, and when working in a group, there will always be a need for only one response, and individuals of a group may consider their own ideas as being far more correct than an answer agreed upon by the group. This gave rise to the belief that if students could solve the problem on their own, they would be more satisfied with the outcome.

Next,.. Unexpectedly, 35,9% select "I afraid that I cannot make any valuable ideas or contributions to my group due to my limited knowledge." for their reluctance to participate in group work activities, respectively. Then, as many as 23,1% of students believe they are an introvert and that working in groups is not something that fits their personality as they tend to try to avoid much communication. The results

show the lack of confidence from students themselves also the factor that make them unwillingly participate in a group work activity in class.

Teachers also asked open-ended questions on the Google Form so that students could easily submit their own ideas on the research topic. The examination of their comments provides useful insights into their true reasons for being hesitant to participate in collaborative activity along with what they genuinely believe lecturers would do to improve the situation.

Research question 1: What is the main barrier that hinder you from actively and willingly to join a group assignment with other students?

Once again, for this question, the researcher wants to explore more from students' respective about their reluctance to collaborate with their classmates, in addition to what the researcher has previously stated above. And, amid all of the responses, the researcher sees that there are some elements that, while not generally considered influential, can have a significant impact on students' willingness to participate in a group working task. For instance, students wrote that:

- "I do not like the timidity from some students in the group, which make others feel demotivated when working together"
- "I do not really enjoy working in group due to the fear of not being listened by others in the group."
- "I am quite a cautious person so when I want to express and give any ideas I tend to think very carefully, this somehow makes me concerned that I will not be able to contribute as many ideas as my group desires to complete the given task in time."

Based on the response above, the researcher realizes that understanding each student's characteristics is also critical when grouping them together. students with introverted personalities may be overwhelmed if placed in a group with pupils with high energy levels, and vice versa. Aside from personality, students' willingness to join group working tasks is greatly influenced by their confidence in themselves, as they fear that their ideas will not be useful enough to be heard, or that they will lack knowledge about the given topic, limiting their contribution in the group.

Research question 2: What factors from your lectures that hinder you from actively and willingly to join a group assignment with them?

For this question, the researcher wishes to learn more from students' perspectives on lecturers' failure to assign tasks for students to work on in groups. The issues may also stem from lecturers rather than students, so it is critical to learn what students think about the factors from their own lecturers that make them uncomfortable working with others. And below are what students think lecturers should avoid when implementing group assignment in their classes:

- "Lecturers not let me choose the team members myself"

- “Lecturers set high expectation which put a lot of pressure on us despite of considering our level and ability”
- “Lecturers not give us sufficient guidance and clear instruction of the task”

It can be difficult for instructors to select participants for group projects based on what students want. Students in non-major English classes come from a variety of majors; therefore, students prefer to work with others who have similar majors to them, thereby making them feel more at ease and reduces any nervousness when working together. Another factor from instructors is insufficient direction and sometimes not being fully aware of all of the students' abilities when setting a work goal. Non-major English students have limited English language knowledge, which may impact their ability to fully comprehend instruction at the beginning of a task and respond to lecturers' expectation. As a result, it is simple to understand when students' responses are related to these two criteria.

Research question 3: What do you think lectures need to do when apply work group teaching strategy in class?

For this question, the researcher hopes to learn more about students' desire for lecturers' assistance when conducting collaborative tasks in class. This is imperative because if lecturers comprehend what students need from them in order to perform better in groups, their mindsets and willingness to engage in this activity might shift. And the requirements from students as listed below:

- “I need lecturers to observe the working process more carefully and encourage shy students to discuss more actively.”
- “I need lecturers to first connect each individual in class to get to know each other better before assigning them into group working.”
- “I need lecturers to clearly instruct students how to properly share works with other members in group and help them to remind students that do not put much effort in completing task with others.”
- “I need lecturers to let us ask questions more freely during the time we are working in group to avoid ambiguity which may lead to group conflict.”
- “I need lecturers to let them choose their members by themselves.”

As previously stated in, since there will possibly be more male students than female pupils in Non-major English classes, it is necessary for students to get to know each other first, and after a while, assigning group-work tasks will be more effective.

The answers from participants also show that students' demand for lectures to more closely observe the working process and to instruct students on how to properly share work with other members of the group is a justified and fair demand. These assistances from lecturers are crucial for students to truly make a successful accomplishment without any conflicts among students themselves. And by closely observing

how the group functions and teaching students the necessary skills for effective collaboration, lecturers equip students with the necessary foundations for a successful and fulfilling experience in group-based activities.

6. Conclusion

In summary, teamwork is indispensable in this nonstop changing society. It is because :”there is no time for more stereotypical ideas, only bold ideas that can be successfully implemented with the help of many people. Science and technology are developing more and more, society is progressing, the need to exchange and expand relationships is becoming more and more necessary, and work is becoming more and more difficult. It requires a unified and ingenious combination of many people and contains in it the most reasonable structural organization.” (Thi T, Tram T, 2022, p.29). More and more companies are requiring collaborative skills from their applicants in their job descriptions these days. Knowledge is no longer the only criterion for hiring an employee; instead, many employers prefer candidates with adequate soft skills, with teamwork skills being the most important. Many businesses are currently looking for something that will set them apart from the competition, as the business environment is extremely competitive. And, in order to stand out, they need their employees to work together to generate a slew of new ideas; many minds working on a single problem can be more effective than just one; and different ideas and approaches will result in greater success. Students, particularly those in universities, are among those who need to master the teamwork skill the most because it is one of the determining factors in receiving an offer from the job they want to do in the future. And, because teamwork is in high demand, it is critical to equip those students with this skill during their time in school. This study sought to investigate students' difficulties with group work in order to assist more lecturers in better understanding and adjusting their approach to this type of learning method in order to conduct it more effectively in class. Once all the problems students facing with this type of learning strategy are solve, students will surely show no more hesitation to join in and from that gradually develop their teamwork skills. Due to many limitations in terms of ability, experience, time, and research materials, as well as an understanding of this issue, the group's topic only mentions a small part of the actual situation of non-major English students in HUIT university.

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