

WORKING IN GROUPS FOR COURSEWORK ASSIGNMENTS: THE TERTIARY STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

Rosnah Bt. Hj. Mustafa¹

Pung Wun Chiew²

Shirley Michael Slee³

¹ ²Centre for Language Studies, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

³Sarawak State Education Department

¹mrosnah@cls.unimas.my

²wcpung@cls.unimas.my

³abadiey_paradise@yahoo.com

Abstract

The study examined undergraduates' perception of group work in doing coursework assignments. It specifically investigated students' perceptions of the usefulness of group work in doing assignments; identified reasons which influence students' preference or non-preference for group work in doing assignments; determined students' expectations of instructor's roles in group work; and compared students' perceptions of group work across ethnic groups. A 39-item questionnaire was distributed to 200 students in a Malaysian public university. The findings showed that a majority of students viewed group work positively due to lesser time required to accomplish given tasks and increased interpersonal gains. Some students however disapproved of group work for several reasons including the difficulty to find mutually agreed time for discussions, domination of some group members, and the existence of slackers in the group. One major aspect highlighted in the study was students' need for continuous instructor support and assistance when group work was assigned.

Keywords: group work, collaborative learning, assignments

Introduction

The challenges of teaching and learning are diverse and teachers and educators are constantly diversifying their teaching techniques to ensure active and meaningful learning takes place, both inside and outside the boundaries of a classroom or lecture theatre. A common Malaysian classroom, whether at school or tertiary level, consists of students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Such diversity often requires teachers and educators to use a variety of teaching techniques to