

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF GROUP DYNAMICS IN PROMOTING STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This paper examines how group dynamics can be harnessed to promote students' engagement and foster educational development Ekiti State Secondary Schools, Nigeria. Amid persistent challenges such as passive learning, students' disengagement, low classroom participation and academic underachievement, this study offers a theoretical analysis of how structured group interaction can foster motivation, collaboration, active participation, and deeper learning. Drawing on social constructivist theory, principles of cooperative learning and relevant literature, the paper emphasizes the relevance of cultivating positive group dynamics within educational settings which can serve as a catalyst for transforming passive learning environments into participatory and inclusive classrooms. It identifies the benefits of group dynamics such as improved academic performance, leadership development, and critical thinking, and discusses the practical and policy implications for the local education system. While acknowledging existing challenges like large class sizes and limited teacher training, the paper offers actionable recommendations for educators, policymakers, and school administrators to harness group processes for optimal students' engagement. The study concludes that fostering productive group dynamics in classrooms can significantly enhance students' cognitive, social, and emotional development, thereby contributing to overall educational progress in Ekiti State.

Keywords: Group dynamics, students' disengagement, educational development, social constructivist theory

Introduction

Education in many Nigerian secondary schools still faces serious issues such as high student disengagement, low classroom participation, passive learning, and academic underachievement despite the revision on teaching methods and curriculum. Cultural attitudes may favor individual achievement, rote learning, or hierarchical classroom structures in many rural or semi-urban institutions. People may perceive group work as strange or disruptive. The teacher-centered and uninspired nature of many classrooms

persists despite efforts to change curricula and teaching methods, which hinders students' overall development and raises academic standards. Investigating cutting-edge pedagogical strategies that support the use of group dynamics to improve student engagement and advance education in Ekiti State secondary schools is becoming increasingly necessary in response.

Group dynamics refer to the behavioral and psychological processes that occur within a social group or between groups. According to Genc̄er (2019) group dynamics refers to changes that may occur

in any part of the group which bring out actions and reactions in the group structure that affects group members. It involves how students interact and function collaboratively to achieve learning objectives. In group-based settings, the behavioral patterns, interpersonal relations, and psychological mechanisms of students influence their interactions with peers within a group (Ozenc, 2022). In educational settings, these dynamics involve how students work together, communicate, influence one another, resolve conflicts, and achieve shared academic goals. These dynamics can significantly influence students' behaviour, learning outcomes, motivation, and classroom atmosphere. Group dynamics, rooted in social psychology and educational theory, when appropriately harnessed in the classroom, offer powerful tools for encouraging active participation, decision making, collaboration, communication, deep learning and critical thinking among students. Group communication facilitates activities that improve social skills such as cooperation, teamwork, and efficient participation (Bada, Ibimiluyi & Ayodele, 2025).

Educational development refers to the improvements in the structure, quality and outcomes of educational systems. It involves better learning outcomes, expansion of access and equity, and promotion of innovation in teaching and learning in secondary schools. It reflects progress in the quality and effectiveness of the education system. This paper presents a theoretical and conceptual analysis of group dynamics within the context of secondary education in Ekiti State. Drawing from social constructivist theory, cooperative learning principles, and relevant scholarly discourse, it identifies practical strategies and policy recommendations for leveraging group processes to foster a more engaging and productive learning outcomes.

Current Educational Challenges

Passive Learning

When new knowledge is taught in passive learning, it is stored with fewer connections to preexisting schemas, making it more difficult for students to retrieve (Kooloos et al, 2019). Some students are mostly knowledge consumers with little active engagement, which impedes strong peer collaboration and effective motivating. Their level of comprehension is limited because they frequently only have surface-level understanding. The effectiveness of group-based learning and the development of positive learning behaviors are undermined when students encounter challenges in expressing their ideas, participating in collaborative discussions, and contributing meaningfully to group tasks. As a result, they experience discouragement, boredom, information overload, limited critical thinking opportunities, and lack of interest (CPD, 2023).

Low Classroom Participation

When group dynamic strategies are not used, students often feel disengaged, isolated, and uninterested in contributing or asking questions. Classroom participation is a multifaceted concept that includes many aspects that suggest evidence of students' engagement (Márquez et al., 2023). Low classroom participation negatively impacts individual learning outcomes and overall classroom performance. Peer collaboration, mutual support, and active social interaction accelerate students' confidence, motivation, and sense of belonging. Other factors that have been found to have positive effects on students' participation include self-esteem, life skills, democratic skills, social skills, and school ethos (Mager & Nowak, 2012).

Academic Underachievement

Academic underachievement happens when students consistently fail to perform as well as they should based on their abilities, age, or grade level. This problem is becoming more serious in Ekiti state and shows that there are deep issues with how the education system is structured and how teaching is done. Students who are underachieving typically get low scores on tests, cannot meet the basic requirements of their curriculum, and show poor performance in class over long periods. When students continue to underachieve, it doesn't just hurt them individually—it also damages the bigger picture of education, including the country's development and making sure all students have fair opportunities. To fix this problem, schools need to move away from old teaching methods and use approaches that focus on students, like group learning that gets students involved, working together, and actively participating. When teachers use group activities effectively, they can build learning communities where students support each other, help struggling classmates gain confidence, clear up confusion through working with peers, and slowly improve their performance.

Students' Disengagement

Students' disengagement means that students become emotionally, behaviorally, and mentally disconnected from their learning. They show no interest in schoolwork and lack the inner drive to succeed. Febriana and Suparman (2020) found that student disengagement is a major problem that leads to poor grades, disruptive behavior, and students dropping out of school. How engaged students are plays a huge role in whether they succeed academically and continue learning throughout their lives. Students often lose motivation because teaching methods are boring and repetitive. When students don't understand what they're learning, they

naturally become disengaged and lose interest, which damages the whole learning process.

Theoretical Framework

Social Constructivist Theory

The Social Constructivist Theory, developed by Lev Vygotsky, highlights that learning happens through social interactions and cultural settings. Vygotsky believed that students build knowledge by talking together, interacting, and sharing experiences. This theory focuses on the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD), which means students can learn more when they get help from classmates or teachers than when they work alone. Group learning creates the perfect environment for this kind of guided learning.

Cooperative Learning Principles

Cooperative learning is an organized type of group work where students work toward shared academic goals while still being responsible for their individual learning. Johnson & Johnson (2019) identified five main principles of cooperative learning: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, interpersonal skills, and group processing.

Cooperative learning is a teaching method where students work in small groups to help each other learn as much as possible. These methods provide practical ways to organize group activities and show how they can improve student achievement and motivation (Johnson, Johnson & Tjosvold, 2014). This approach aligns with the goals of group dynamics in getting students more involved in the classroom. Collaborative learning methods encourage ongoing learning (Ajani, 2023).

Classification of Group Dynamics in Educational Settings

Group dynamics in classrooms can be organized in different ways based on

how they're structured, what tasks they focus on, their purpose, function, and how students interact. Understanding these different types helps teachers organize groups strategically to encourage positive learning behaviors, social interaction, and academic success.

1. Based on Group Structure

- a. **Formal Group:** Teachers or school authorities deliberately create these groups for specific academic purposes or tasks, like project teams, lab groups, or study teams. These are structured groups built to achieve a common goal. To succeed, they need clear goals, timelines, assigned roles (like leader, timekeeper, presenter), and close teacher supervision. Examples include organized clubs (science club, debate team) with structured leadership and regular meetings. Students work in groups with clearly defined roles and objectives (Robbins & Judge, 2017; Ozenc, 2022).
- b. **Informal Group:** These groups form naturally through friendships, shared interests, or sitting close together. They have no structure or official purpose, like friendship groups or lunch buddies (Can et al., 2017; in Ozenc, 2022). Because they're unstructured, they might encourage exclusion or peer pressure. Learning in these groups can be either helpful or harmful. These include cliques or friendship circles often based on social status, hobbies, or shared backgrounds, which can be either positive or exclusive. Students may form voluntary study groups to review material or complete assignments together, which can improve academic achievement.

2. Based on Task Orientation

- a. **Task-Oriented Group:** These temporary groups focus on completing specific academic projects or assignments, such as science experiment groups, group essays, or presentation teams. Though usually short-term, they're outcome-focused and members' performance is clearly evaluated. They concentrate on achieving specific academic or extracurricular goals and address particular issues like school improvement, discipline, or academic challenges.
- b. **Maintenance-Oriented (Social) Groups:** These groups promote emotional support and peer bonding through activities like peer mentorship and support groups. Counseling or support groups help students deal with personal or academic issues with help from a facilitator or counselor. Students focus on social interaction and others' well-being, promoting empathy, inclusion, and school belonging. Members focus on building relationships, expressing emotions, and providing mutual support. Peer mentoring or tutoring groups encourage knowledgeable students to help their peers academically or socially.

3. Based on Duration

- a. **Temporary Group:** These groups form for short-term activities or class periods, such as pair-share discussions or one-time debates. They have minimal structure and are quickly formed and easily dissolved.
- b. **Permanent (or Long-Term) Group:** These groups are used over extended periods, such as a term or session, like research groups or classroom "families." They establish stronger relationships and provide greater

opportunities for role rotation and collaboration.

4. **Based on Size**

- a. Small Group: These groups have about 3 to 6 students, promoting in-depth discussion, cooperative tasks, higher engagement, and equal participation.
- b. Large Group: These groups have 7 or more members and encourage brainstorming or role-playing among students. Without proper control, these groups risk social loafing (relying on active students to do the work, reducing individual accountability) or dominance by one or two students who take over discussions or tasks while others remain passive or excluded.

5. **Based on Interaction Patterns**

- a. Positive Group: These groups consist of students with strong intentions to achieve positive results through deliberate cooperation. They promote collaborative learning, supportive peer interaction, constructive feedback, mutual respect, shared responsibility, consensus building, and academic growth. Students actively work together on tasks or projects, share ideas, learn from each other, promote critical thinking, and give and receive helpful feedback. Group members encourage and help one another academically and emotionally, with leadership roles rotating and all members contributing equally.
- b. Negative Group: In these groups, students exhibit behaviors that hinder learning, create tension, or promote unhealthy competition, with little or no teacher control. Peer pressure may make students conform to group norms, leading to negative behaviors like skipping school or cheating.

Competition for rewards or recognition can motivate high performance but may also cause stress or rivalry. The desire for harmony may lead groups to suppress different opinions, limiting creativity and critical thinking.

Procedures to Implementation of Group Dynamics

Using different types of group dynamics in Ekiti State classrooms requires intentional strategies that match students' cultural, social, and academic realities. Teachers and school administrators can implement positive group dynamics and manage negative ones to improve learning through these procedures:

1. **Using Collaborative Learning:** For assignments and projects, students should be divided into small, mixed-ability groups. To promote involvement, strategies like role-playing, Jigsaw, and Think-Pair-Share should be used. To guarantee equal participation, assign alternating roles (leader, recorder, and timekeeper). Students might be gathered to examine a passage and present interpretations jointly in subject like English in Ekiti State.
2. **Encouraging Peer Support:** In order to help children that struggle academically, teachers can set up peer mentoring or tutoring programs. This promotes an environment in the classroom where empathy, kindness, and active listening are valued. In Ekiti State, students can assist one another in areas like physics or mathematics during weekly "Study Buddy" sessions.
3. **Strengthening Formal Groups:** In-class and extracurricular groups (such debate teams and science clubs) can be organized by teachers and school officials with defined objectives and leadership positions. Class prefects or

group leaders can manage team assignments and give constructive comments. Students might be encouraged to take part in school clubs that prioritize teamwork or local interschool academic competitions.

4. **Managing Informal Groups:** Students' social interactions should be closely observed in order to identify any exclusionary or harmful cliques. Groupings and seating arrangements can encourage inclusivity across friendship boundaries. To make sure students develop broader peer bonds, teachers can switch up group pairings at school assemblies or athletic events.
5. **Using Task-Oriented Activities:** Teachers should give their students group projects or real-world challenges to address. Use performance-based evaluations for both the group process and the final product. Students can collaborate to make posters that raise awareness of health issues such as teen pregnancy and malaria prevention.
6. **Promoting Social-Emotional Support:** To address emotional or behavioral issues, educators should organize peer support groups that would be led by the school counselor. Cooperative games and group talks can be used to foster empathy and trust among participants. For students to discuss academic or personal issues in a secure, accepting environment, teachers can create a Boys' Forum or Girls' Circle.
7. **Addressing Negative Dynamics:** Students in secondary schools in Ekiti State should receive moral education and guidance counseling from school authorities in a planned manner. Peer review, leadership rotation, and participation guidelines would promote critical thinking, respect for differing viewpoints, and the elimination of social loafing.

Educational Relevance of Group Dynamics

Group dynamics can transform passive classrooms into inclusive, participatory, and student-centered environments with these key benefits:

1. **Improved Academic Performance:** Collaborative learning encourages peer explanation and shared responsibility, deepening understanding, content retention, and improving achievement across subjects.
2. **Social and Leadership Skill Development:** Different group roles help students develop capabilities and accountability, promoting teamwork, conflict resolution, delegation, and leadership skills vital for personal development and civic engagement.
3. **Critical and Reflective Thinking:** Group discussions foster analytical reasoning, argumentation, problem-solving skills, and metacognition, enhancing cognitive development and enabling students to learn, analyze, critique, and synthesize information.
4. **Inclusivity and Participation:** Group structures give every learner, including quiet or marginalized students, opportunities to contribute, promoting inclusive education and active participation regardless of personality.

Challenges in Implementing Group Dynamics

Despite their potential, group dynamics face systemic and contextual challenges in Nigerian secondary schools, including Ekiti State:

1. ***Large Class Sizes:*** The dynamic of a group in the classroom can be altered by its size. Classrooms frequently have more students

than the optimum number, such as 1:40 (Ajayi, 2017). This makes it challenging for teachers to effectively manage group interactions or offer individualized guidance. The teacher may find it difficult to assess each student's individual contributions within the group (Ozenc, 2022).

High noise levels, off-task behavior, and unequal involvement are all problems in unsupervised groups that make it difficult to create harmonious and controllable groups. When teachers are unable to provide each group with sufficient attention, quality group learning becomes impracticable. This could encourage bad habits like social loafing and result in flimsy cooperation. Members of the group would get educational values from the usage of smaller, rotating group activities and the support of peer leaders.

2. Limited Teacher Training:

Many educators lack the pedagogical knowledge and expertise required to successfully apply cooperative learning techniques. Cooperative learning tactics, group management approaches, and group conflict resolution are areas in which many teachers are undertrained. Teachers may encourage bad group facilitation that results in dominance, exclusion, or conflict because they lack the skills to assign positions or organize tasks properly. Group work is poorly executed without professional development, which lowers its credibility and leads to student discontent and poor learning outcomes. Teachers would be equipped with the necessary abilities for group-based application if collaborative teaching techniques were incorporated into teacher education curricula and workshops or in-service training on classroom group dynamics were organized. Effective professional development initiatives enhance teaching methods, pedagogical expertise, and

student learning results (Badiani-Magnusson, 2017).

3. Time Constraints and Curriculum Pressures

There is limited time for interactive or student-centered teaching strategies because the secondary curriculum in Nigeria is frequently overburdened and exam-driven. Group activities that call for more in-depth investigation and facilitation are discouraged by the pressure to cover a large syllabus in a short amount of time. In order to quickly achieve the requirements of the curriculum, teachers may steer clear of group work. When group activities are offered, the application is typically hurried and superficial. Collaboration and critical thinking are discouraged when test scores are the main focus. Group planning shortcuts undermine the educational goal of group dynamics and result in inefficient teamwork. Curriculum policies should include group-based assessment.

4. Cultural and Attitudinal Barriers

Some students are reluctant to participate in groups because they are shy, afraid of being judged, or think they are not intelligent enough. Because they prefer traditional rote-learning methods, are too accustomed to them, or are afraid of losing control of the classroom, some teachers may be resistant to collaborative methods. Teachers may believe that group projects hinder equitable participation in diverse groups and undercut authority. If group activities are not explained or introduced gradually, they may become culturally incompatible or badly received.

Policy Recommendations

To effectively integrate group dynamics, these practices are recommended:

1. Curriculum Reform: Promote the use of cooperative and problem-solving exercises in instructional materials

and evaluation instruments. Make group-based learning a central part of your class design process.

2. Infrastructure and Classroom Design: To build adaptable learning settings that encourage mobility, debate, deeper connections, and group interaction, divide big classrooms into manageable learning units. Individuals in smaller groups—ten or fewer—may accomplish more and have more chances to contribute than those in larger groups. Additionally, it is important to create classroom activities that are demanding, interesting, in line with learning goals, and doable in a predetermined amount of time. It was possible to create diverse groups with designated roles (such as presenter, recorder, or leader) to guarantee equitable participation.

3. Teacher Education Programs: Examine teacher preparation programs that incorporate cooperative learning and group dynamics modules. Workshops for professional development that concentrate on classroom management and cooperative learning techniques ought to be offered to in-service teachers. To determine the workshop's efficacy and expand teachers' expertise, it should be conducted regularly. Raise awareness of the advantages of cooperative learning among educators and learners. To improve the guidance and counseling departments and make it easier to keep an eye on social behaviors, Ekiti State secondary schools should be encouraged to hire school counselors. Inform parents about how peer pressure affects learning.

4. Use of Peer Assessment: Encourage accountability and responsibility by letting students assess the contributions of their group members.

5. Integration into assessment Framework: To confirm the value of group work, include it in official evaluation procedures.

6. Monitoring and Support Systems: Put in place mechanisms to assess group projects' efficacy and give schools continuous assistance.

Implications of Group Dynamics on Educational Development

Strategic integration of group dynamics can have far-reaching effects:

1. Enhanced academic achievement across subjects
2. Improved school climate and teacher-student relationships
3. Development of 21st-century skills like teamwork, communication, and problem-solving
4. Greater equity and inclusivity in learning opportunities

These outcomes contribute to broader educational goals such as quality education, human capital development, and sustainable socio-economic progress in Ekiti State secondary schools.

Conclusion

For group dynamics to succeed in Nigerian educational settings, structural and cultural challenges must be addressed. Group learning should be treated as a core teaching strategy, not an extra, especially when adapted to realities of large class sizes, teacher preparedness, and cultural values. When effectively implemented, group dynamics can transform learning from passive reception to active participation. By using cooperative learning principles and social constructivism, educators can create environments where students are motivated, collaborative, and engaged. While implementation faces systemic constraints, with appropriate training, infrastructure, policy support, and curricular alignment, group-based learning

can significantly enhance students' cognitive, social, and emotional development. Ultimately, effective group dynamics can help educators and policymakers create a transformative shift toward a more participatory, equitable, and effective educational system.

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