Effectiveness of Small Group Work in Teaching Writing to First Year Students in Addis Ababa University

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Abstract: The purposes of this classroom-based research were to assess the benefit of a cooperative-group methodology that combines inside and outside language classroom situations in teaching writing, to observe and describe the product of the group work in a writing lesson under task-based teaching arrangements, and to explore the possibility that, upon analysis, these observations could be used as a measurement to determine the extent to which the group work technique enhanced individual achievement. This action research employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. It was conducted in four sections of Engineering and Social Work major students. Combinations of purposive, convenient and simple random sampling techniques were employed. 66 jointly written essays (33x2) and 70 purposively and randomly selected individually written compositions were analyzed. The quantitative analysis involved testing and evaluating the students' individually written descriptive composition. The group work-composition was done both in and outside classroom situations. One of the measuring instruments namely continuous assessment scores were completed within nearly the whole semester. The results suggested that when students worked together, they achieved better; joint work of students along with inputs from the instructor enabled the students improve their composition. Role assignment in small group work had positive association with the students' academic background, level of performance and achievement. The composition written in groups was elusively homogeneous in showing achievement and improvement while the individual focused assessment scores were found to be informatively heterogeneous in showing realistic attainment and improvement. Social-loafing or free riding, and off-task behaviors were amongst the common problems; differences in skills and knowledge characterized the students' performance. The findings thus implied that allocating higher marks for products of group work at times of assessment and evaluation was not commendable. Small group work during the regular classroom sessions was found to be more dependable than outside classroom situations.

Key words: action research, group work, active learning, achievement, assessment and testing, social loafing

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Introduction

Over the last thirty years, the use of small groups has become a common pedagogical practice in Addis Ababa University English language teaching classrooms. However, the management of small group work has become increasingly complex and problematic in English Language Skills such as the Communicative *English* or *Basic Writing Skills* classes. Such complexity and problems increase when students have varied learning experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds with different expectations and outcomes. When students are required to work in small groups occasionally, a dysfunctional group experience might not matter; but what happens when students are usually required to work in small groups as it is in the case of the *Communicative English Skills* (EnLa 1011) classes offered to all undergraduate students of the University?

The literature is quite consistent in terming small group work as cooperative/ collaborative learning. Artz and Newman (1990**)** define cooperative learning as a group-learning activity to achieve a common goal. Johnson and Johnson (1999) and Johnson, Johnson and Smith (2006) are not different in defining cooperation as 'working together to accomplish shared goals. Within cooperative situations, individuals seek outcomes that are beneficial to themselves and beneficial to all other group members. Richards and Rodgers (2001) link cooperative learning with shared information, learner autonomy and motivation. Small group work provides an opportunity for learners to focus on learning a language as well as learning how to write.

Benefits of small group work/cooperative learning

Students can learn from collaborative work in many specific ways, for example, by giving and receiving help, sharing knowledge, building on each other's' ideas, recognizing and resolving contradictions between their own and other students' perspectives, observing others' strategies, and internalizing problem-solving processes and strategies that emerge

during group work (Brown and Palincsar, 1989; Coleman, 1998; Hatano and Inagaki, 1991; Tudge and Rogoff, 1989; Webb and Palincsar, 1996).

Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1998) argue that when student collaboration (usually in small groups) works, it produces increased student learning, especially in contrast to more traditional forms of learning, such as sitting in a lecture hall taking notes. When collaborating effectively, students interact a lot with their group members. The interactions give them a chance to provide evidence for their views, test their understandings against their classmates', and consider alternative approaches to problems or situations. Cooperative learning has been found to be successful and productive teaching method to develop learners' linguistic, social and communicative skill because it provides maximum chances for students-students interaction with consequential input and output in a supportive atmosphere (Ahangari and Samadian, 2014).This is also similar to Nunan's (1991) view which explains small group work as a tool that helps emphasize learning to communicate through interaction with others.

The pedagogic benefits can be specifically drawn out from findings of empirical studies in other disciplines and in the field of English language teaching which consistently indicate that cooperative learning works. A focus on the findings from the field of ELT would be a proper area. For example, Long, Adams, and Castanos (1976) stated that small group tasks prompted students to use a greater degree of language functions than teacher-fronted tasks. Small group work also leads to effective writing instruction. Strong (1990) found that by focusing their attention on each other's writing in small groups, students wrote more elaborate answers. There was a significant increase in the amount that they wrote over as few as ten hours of instruction. There is additional research to support the use of small groups in writing. Bruton and Samuua (1980), for example, observed that learners could correct each other's errors successfully.

Several other studies have presented empirical support for the effect of group work on developing students' language skills. Tuan and Neomy (2007), for example, investigated group work pre-task planning and its effect on post planning individual oral presentation of 22 EFL second year college students at Hanoi, Vietnam. Results showed group planning to focus on content rather than language and mixed proficiency grouping to benefit the most. They concluded that group work aids students' in their oral presentation. Likewise, Wichadee (2007) reported that students benefited from group work in their reading comprehension; their reading skill improved, their interaction increased, they felt at ease, learnt more, enjoyed their time and learnt how to work with one another. More evidence of students' learning in group work was reported by Meteetham (2001); results showed students receiving a high score in the test after working in groups and all students reported having more positive attitudes towards working in groups. Also, Arumugam, Rafik-Galea, Mello and Dass (2013) investigated how group work affects university students' writing skill. Results revealed significant development in scores between the pre and posttests. Students felt group work gave them the chance to learn and improve their English language skills, understood concepts better and developed more positive attitudes as a result of working in groups.

To examine the effectiveness of group work as a technique compared with individual learning, Badache (2011) conducted an experimental study at Batna University in Algeria. The experimental group showed more cooperation, motivation and engagement than the individual work in the control group. Students reported development of their speaking skills as well as their critical skills. Hanan and Nowreyah (2014) found that the students (third year and fourth year College students in Kuwait) who worked in groups did not improve in their achievement test (Phonetics and Phonology classes-Phonetic transcription exam), but this study found that group work improved learning with certain social and academic groups only. The instructor also found through observation that when working in groups, students became more accustomed to

using scientific terminology and used names of the phonetic symbols instead of referring to their sounds only as they did previously.

Overall, much of the research in other disciplines and in ELT across varied national contexts (Europe, America, Asia, Middle East, and Africa) and varied levels of education reported positive findings such as better achievement, better learning and more effective relationships among students. The literature quite uniformly agrees students adopt more active roles when working in groups. Passivity decreases in cooperative small groups than in the whole class setting.

Drawbacks of Small Group Work/Cooperative Learning

Even though many writers and researchers have pointed out favorable qualities of cooperative learning, not all reviews of studies have concluded working in small groups is favorable for learning. There are some disadvantages as reported by research worldwide (Payne and Monk-Turner, 2006; Hassanien, 2007). Michaels (1977) concluded that individual competition consistently produced greater achievement than group conditions. Webb (1982) reviewed that there are discrepancies among comparative research findings on cooperative and individual settings pertaining to achievement across different cooperative learning methods. Inconsistencies have been explained on the basis of characteristics of the cooperative learning techniques, settings, measures, experimental designs (Slavin, 1980a), and student characteristics (ethnic group, socioeconomic status), and subject matter (Sharan, 1980).

There are also several factors that may impinge negatively on group work. These include cognitive and psychological factors (Cantwell and Andrews, 2002), lack of appropriate student skills (Prichard, Stratford and Bizo, 2006), quality of collaborative learning methods (Slavin, 1999), group management skills of tutors and group assessment. Group assessment procedures are particularly problematic because of the need to assess individuals within a group (Boud, Cohen and Sampson,

1999). The simplest method of group assessment involves each student receiving the same mark (Nicolay, 2002). However, this practice assumes equal contribution by group members, an assumption that has been indicated to be wrong (Bourner, Hughes and Bourner, 2001; Mills, 2003).

The reviews indicate passive roles of students can characterize small group activities/tasks. The literature defines passive behavior as lack of any discernible involvement in the group task; it does not include working individually on the task. Many students merely observe other students' working on a task and listening to others' explanations and hence they did not have sufficient contribution to the product expected. Thus, such students in co - operative small groups may be described as "social loafing" (Latan and, Williams, and Harkins, 1979). This is supported by findings of some studies which have reported that students making negative comments about group work. A major reason for their negative comments was the issue of 'passengers' (i.e. poor contributors) (Bourner, Hughes and Bourner, 2001) or 'free riders' (Boud, 2001). In this regard, Aggarwal and O'Brien (2008) suggest that "the benefits of group projects cannot be realized if groups are dysfunctional", which can happen for a number of reasons. For example, individualistic personalities and 'lone wolves' can have a negative impact on teamwork: such individuals prefer to work alone and dislike group processes and collective decision-making (Barr, Koppel, Reeves,Hammick , and Freeth , 2005).These students exert less effort in groups because they do not perceive themselves as personally accountable for the group product, and they consider that their individual contribution is not easily identifiable by the teacher. Some students may regard their efforts on group tasks as dispensable and, therefore, may withdraw effort from these tasks. This "free-riding" behavior is likely to be more common among low achievers and students with a very poor command of English. Withdrawal of effort may be further encouraged by more competent students who communicate either implicitly or explicitly to low achievers that their efforts are indeed dispensable. Students not actively involved in group work could be engaged in off-task activities or passively

observing others at work. Freeman and Greenacre (2011) reported this problem as inadequate contribution to the group. Studies reporting results of off-task behavior showed a negative, but non-significant relationship between off-task behavior and achievement (Hanelin, 1978; Webb, 1980a). Students spend less amount of effective/relevant group time on talking or listening to another student concerning topics that were not relevant to the task.

Group conflicts and student dissatisfaction may also arise due to various levels of motivational and moral maturity (Taylor, Hunter, Melton and Goodwin, 2011), and incompatibility in personalities and communication styles (Amato and Amato, 2005). Workload management and diverse goals in relation to process, output quality and marks can also contribute to group conflicts (Conway, Kember, Silvan and Wu, 1993; Walker, 2002). Disagreement on the content in the collaboration process and role problems can also impede the group processes (Johnson and Johnson, 2006; McMaster and Fuchs, 2002; Slavin, 1996).

Another reported disadvantage is when one group member dominates the group, group performance reflects the groups' member level instead of the whole group together (Nihalani, Wilson, Thomas and Robinson, 2010). Also, the teacher faces the difficulty of grading every group member. Beebe and Masterson (2003) pointed out readily conforming to the majority opinion to avoid conflict, individual domination and the resultant possible feelings of alienation, too much dependence on others, and that group work takes more time, as draw backs. Mc Graw and Tidwell (2001) also indicated that the time is an obstacle as many teachers complain group work is time consuming. Noise is one of the outstanding disadvantages that discourage many teachers from using group work. Also, in an EFL context, students might prefer using their native language, since it is easier for communication. And finally, in group work students may not get feedback on their errors.

Local Studies on Active/Cooperative Learning in Tertiary Level of Education

Active Learning/ Cooperative Learning appear to have attracted many researchers on Primary, Secondary School and Tertiary level of Education in Ethiopia. I shall ponder over the studies on Higher Education Institutions of the country.

There are numerous studies conducted on Co-operative Learning (CL), Peer-Assisted Learning/Peer Learning, Group Work, Learner–Centered method/approach and Active Learning from generations of Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions located   in the various corners of the country. The studies on active learning focused on assessing/ exploring practices /implementation (Birhanu, 2010; Tefera, 2014; Muhammed, 2014; Samuel, 2016; Abiy, 2017; Kitaw, 2017; Mulugeta, Solomon and Mathivanan, 2018; Birhanu, 2019; Mohammed, Seid, and Abdurahman, 2020). The other category of studies focused on assessing/ examining perception, attitudes, beliefs and practices (Melaku, Harrison and Temechegn, 2013; Aschalew, 2013; Betegiorgis, Abiy and Mesafint, 2015; Efrem and Oukula, 2015; Tolessa, Sorale and Sultan, 2016; Samuel, 2019). They dealt with wide ranges of disciplines or subjects including teaching and learning the English language.

In these studies, the most commonly reported findings on benefits of active learning voiced the following: better understanding of subject matter/ enhanced learning, and improved quality of student engagement; developed self-confidence, enhanced socialization and interpersonal interactions; and making learning interesting. While the recurrent flaws and challenges in practicing active learning identified in these studies were *instructor*, *student* and *learning* and *administration and resource related*. *Instructor* related: no utilization of alternative techniques/ activities not diverse in nature, ineffective classroom management and follow up, and infrequent and improper practices. *Student* and *learning* related: poor background and experience: knowledge and ability of learners (knowledge of content, command of

English), lack of student interest and motivation, misconceptions on objectives of group work, students being interested in grades than learning, low level of student participation, passiveness-passive style of learning, irresponsible and careless studentship, clever students overburdened, and difficulty in getting together in outside classroom situations. These lists of findings roughly correspond to what was identified as cognitive and psychological factors by Cantwell and Andrews (2002), and lack of appropriate student skills by Prichard, Stratford & Bizo (2006) that may impinge negatively on group work. *Administration and resource* related: lack/shortage of time, large class size, * lack/shortage of instructional materials and facilities and *[1]lack of administrative /institutional support.

Also, in most of the studies reviewed, active learning is widely expressed, but found poorly put into effect. Positive attitude, perceptions and belief on/ towards active learning and existing awareness of instructors and students on active learning and its contribution was apparently good; however, this disposition of the respondents was not accompanied by a corresponding behavior of utilizing active learning; it is reported as low, except in few papers. The adherence to traditional teaching/ lecture method was found as high even though employment of Active Learning is emphasized in the Ethiopian Education and Training policy (Ministry of Education, 1994; and 2002).

A survey of several studies undertaken by postgraduate candidates of Addis Ababa University on implementation/ practices of AL/CL or even small group work at elementary /secondary school level indicates that there is little research conducted despite the common use of group work in the University classrooms. There was only one study by Mulugeta, Solomon and Mathivanan (2018) on the implementation of active learning in Physical Education Classes in Kotebe College of Teacher Education and Addis Ababa University in the field of Sport Science. Nearly all of these studies cited in preceding paragraphs were not action

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*[1] Very common problem/challenge

research oriented in Ethiopia in general and Addis Ababa University in particular; one exception is the study conducted by Samuel (2019) from Ambo University on Active Learning Methods in the teaching of Linguistics courses. However, the dependability and validity of what he stated as intervention and post-intervention phase of the research is dubious and simplistic. He did not have empirically valid and significant post-intervention work.

In sum, the problem of this study was effectiveness of small group work as a way to improve individual students' writing skills. It is believed that group work is not implemented effectively towards ensuring good quality of education. The study intends to assess whether small group work in the context of Addis Ababa University is effective as it is discussed in the literature review from other contexts. Does it work for it worked in other contexts? Do we have unique problems/challenges not addressed in the literature review? To address the problem, two levels of theoretical principles guided this study - the substance of the principles ponders on benefits and limitations of small group work in terms of the behavior of individual students within the groups vis-à-vis the modality's contribution to the product desired at the end of a lesson. Assessment and evaluation schemes employed in the process must be reliable and valid indicators of learners' actual active and meaningful involvement in the group work than indiscriminate award of marks which actually mislead or hide the quality of participation, shared knowledge and skills. The backwash effect of indiscriminate allocation of marks must also be seriously considered.

Based on observations and reviews on the benefits and drawbacks of small group or active learning, the study poses the following research questions and draws the following hypotheses:

- Do students improve their composition (achievement) through joint writing work in small groups?
- Does the learning outcome as measured by the achievement test exhibit improvement through joint work?

- Do individual students produce a fairly similar quality composition (achievement) right after joint writing task? In other words, do they individually demonstrate meeting the learning outcome?
- Does role assignment in small group work have relationship with the students' academic background, level of performance and achievement?
- Who does the writing - is it the work of individual students or a joint work of group members?
- How do the students describe their experiences in group work?

Hypotheses

H_1: There is no significant relationship between role assignment and students' level of performance/ achievement in writing.

H_2: There is no significant difference in the small group work based (joint writing) work of students and individual students' written work (paragraph).

H_3: Students will have positive description of their group work experiences in writing skills lessons.

Objectives

- Find out the benefit of a cooperative-group methodology that combines in-class and outside the language classroom situations in teaching writing
- Describe the product of the cooperative group work in a writing lesson as the students are engaged in the writing activities under task-based teaching arrangements, and
- Explore the possibility that, upon analysis, these observations could be used as a measurement to determine the extent to which the group work technique enhanced individual achievement.

Research Method

Action research is adopted as the framework for the present study, which addresses the issues, entertained previously pertaining to effectively teaching English writing skills in small groups (CL) at a University level. Action research is a work in progress. It is chosen in order to have more effective strategies and methods in the pursuit of practical solutions to problems of conducting small group work in ELT classes. It is evaluative, investigative and combines action and reflection, theory and practice. It is driven by the philosophy of knowing through doing to bring about change as part of the research act. Theorizing in education is of little use without the doing. The research was normally conducted by the instructor, who also simultaneously plays the role of researcher. Bearing the research problem in mind, the study is viewed from perspectives of the instructor, the students and the researcher. It employed both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The quantitative method is descriptive to establish a relationship between closely knit variables, to determine patterns/ trends and relationships between variables, such as role played (independent variable) and achievement in tests of skills and sub-skills of English (dependent variable). The method is also used to compare student essays/ paragraphs in two major types of roles students had (group secretary/ leader vs ordinary member) in small group work and to determine a relationship between general English proficiency (achievement in tests of skills and sub-skills of English) and role taken. Quantitative research has a clearly defined research question to which objective answers are sought.

The qualitative method, on the other hand, aims at understanding a phenomenon- group work dynamics in a natural and holistic picture of the phenomena being studied e.g. interaction within small groups in the classroom and outside classroom and shared orientation of students as a whole. Students' description of their group work experiences is explored. It enables to investigate   how/or what students think about

working in small groups. Through such research we can discover the underlying factors which make students like or dislike a particular mode of delivery in comparison to their skills and knowledge (ability) and the roles they adopted in particular group works.

In tandem, the quantitative and qualitative methods employed are viewed as complementary means of investigating the complex phenomenon of small group works in English language teaching classes. The methods employed and the approach followed are found appropriate as they enabled the researcher to meet the purpose of assessing effectiveness of group work in class room or outside classroom modalities in practice.

Participants and Instruments of Data Collection

The study relied on semi-structured interviews, observation, assessment and test. It was conducted in four sections of Engineering and Social Work major students. The qualitative data was collected through the tools by the researcher who had also simultaneously been teaching these groups of students. 30 students from four sections (three from the Faculty of Engineering and one group from the Social sciences: Social work) were interviewed. The other qualitative data was collected through semi-structured observation technique compounded with the instructor's observation during his stay with the students in outside classroom contexts (office consultations, and consultations in the various places of the University campus). A controlled test was administered to evaluate the students' individually written descriptive composition.

The Procedure and Observation

Below is given a brief description of the classroom procedure and observation followed and conducted:

The class was divided into groups of five or six depending on the actual class size and the day's attendance; in most cases, students were randomly assigned to groups. Composition of the groups was roughly characterized by availability of diverse ability and socio-cultural background students. The task as part and parcel of the overall aim of the *Communicative English Skills* course (EnLa 1011)[2] is designed to develop students' basic communication skills and to help them learn how to interact with others. With such a goal in mind, the instructor introduced guidelines for group behavior, such as speaking in turns, equal participation by everyone, (that 'silence is not golden') being moderated by a chairperson, the responsibility of the chair person, assigning group secretary and responsibility of the secretary, how to take short notes while listening to members of the group speaking about the cultural wedding, they are familiar with.

At the beginning of each class period, the instructor introduced the whole class to the material to be covered that day and gave a few examples to the class (description vocabulary and grammar). The students then broke into their assigned small groups to practice describing a cultural wedding they are familiar with appropriate vocabulary and grammar they had learned. In these groups, students worked on the individual assignment, usually tasks assigned in the textbook.

The instructor set up the task by explaining that each student should tell his or her group peers about a cultural event or practice (Wedding Ceremony) he/she is familiar with. Each member of the group had to talk about the wedding ceremony and other members listen to the talk and ask some questions/ seek clarifications. The group leader chaired the discussion and the members spoke in turns. In course of the group activity, students requested the assistance/help of the instructor who then gave them some input or explanations on

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[2] *The curriculum unit being studied was Unit 3 "Culture and Values" taken from the College English (Volume I)- textbook for first year University students (1996). The skills and practices in the Unit are on the theme culture and values.*

recurrent questions from students. The reading material provided them guidelines.

The instructor allowed the activity to continue for about 90 minutes. Each group then discussed the topic and chose one cultural wedding ceremony most/all of the group members were interested in. The entire class discussed the topic in question. The group secretary (selected by group members) took detailed notes while the student whose description of the cultural wedding was preferred and hence selected was speaking on. Expected cooperative behaviors included group members agreeing on steps and on the roles of individual members in the group, such as group leader and/or group secretary assignment, contributing ideas, facilitate task completion, providing assistance to group members who needed some help, listening to one another and providing support for each other, requesting information and/or clarification from other group members when required, and doing one's fair share of work to achieve group goals.

The whole class thus discussed cultural wedding ceremonies from the diverse parts of the country. The learning task was suitable for the students for it was based on familiar and interesting topics for discussion which require bilateral or multilateral communication, negotiation, and interaction among participants. The task created some kind of mutual dependence among the group members, since it could not be completed adequately enough without each individual's contribution. They were asked to choose one wedding ceremony they found the most interesting to hear from the description and narration of one of the group members' oral presentation.

At the end of each class period, groups were allowed to continue working together in outside classroom situations to complete their work. The outside classroom mode was not in the plan of the instructor from the outset, but he was obliged to do so because the students insisted on continuing working and completing the composition. They said, "*We need more time to work*". Normally,

therefore, given the poor academic background   and poor command of the English language of many of the students, it would sound reasonable to think that – they would get more time for consulting various resources to improve content, language and /or organization of the composition following their own pace as well as discussing on and improving their work 'fairly' jointly. Periodically, the instructor discussed the groups' experiences in the whole-class setting.

The students submitted the descriptive essay which was hoped by the instructor to have been done jointly. It demanded them to engage in writing and editing works together in the outside classroom situation. The instructor went through the essay gave written feedback which included comments on the organization and content of the essay, grammar and word choice, spelling and even layout of the essay. Oral feedback—an explanation –was also given on the common or recurrent flaws identified by the instructor from the groups' essay. It included some specific explanations, such as organization of the descriptive essay, content (completeness), features of paragraphs (unity, cohesion, coherence) some aspects of grammar, spelling, mechanics etc.

Then the groups went through their work again. They were told that they had to improve their work and resubmit the essay. At this stage, the students were informed of the fact that the composition they produce carries 10 marks. The instructor assumed that the group reward condition facilitates the collaborative and cooperative activity as the students would be more motivated to work together to get the best 'reward' for their efforts. The activity took 50-60 minutes.

The observation was guided basically by seven open questions: Do they all talk to share what they know to their group members? Who does much of the talking? Do they all discuss to choose relatively more interesting or unique cultural wedding ceremony from   the individual group members presentation? How do they go about writing the composition? Who does much of the writing? Who are

assigned as secretaries or group leaders? What is the common problem observed during the group work and in their written work?

The quantitative data was collected through a planned group task. It involved evaluating the students' individually written descriptive composition. In the evaluation scheme, all group members received the same score as the product i.e. the descriptive essay was 'assumed' as an account of a joint work. There was also a test on descriptive writing (Paragraphs) on the same topic the students were working on in their groups. In the individual reward condition, students received their own scores on the test as they worked individually.

Sampling

Combinations of purposive, convenient and simple random sampling techniques were employed. 66 jointly written essays (33 x 2) and 70 purposively and randomly selected individually written compositions were analyzed. All of the students who served as a group secretary, 36 in number, were purposively selected while the remaining sample of students, 34 in number, were randomly selected from the groups. Out of the 36 students who served as secretaries, 25 were interviewed. There were 33 groups of students organized for the writing task as it was also true for any other tasks/activities of the course:

Table 1: Class size and group arrangement across sections

	Communicative English Skills Sections	Faculty /Major	No of groups in a Section	Class size
1	Section 15	Engineering	9	51
2	Section 16	Engineering	9	47
3	Section 28	Engineering	8	46
4	Section I/II	Social Work	7	39
		Total	33	183

In some cases, due to absenteeism or reassignments (Since the teacher advised them not to assign the same students as a secretary/ leader other student came to the role too, hence 36 secretaries). Besides, convenient sampling technique was employed to interview students. Next, random sample of students were selected from each section. 28 students from the 3 sections of Engineering majors and 6 students from the social work section were selected. Hence, the total sample turned out to be 70 (36 secretary + 34 ordinary members) out of the total of 183 students. The sample constitutes 38.25% of the total number of students. The students who had a responsibility of writing were coded as secretary (In many cases, secretaries serve as leaders of the group) while the other members of the same group in the respective sections were coded as ordinary members.

Inter-rater agreement

The degree of similarity between the two raters (including the researcher) had to be determined in order to ensure reliability of the marking. The composition consisted of two body paragraphs on the same topic they were working on in their respective groups. The evaluation followed the analytical scheme: organization (coherence, cohesion, unity) 2, content (adequate development/ completeness) 4 and language (word choice, grammar, spelling and punctuation) 4 marks-a banding criteria both of the instructors are familiar with. The inter-rater agreement check test indicated that there is agreement between the two raters at < 0.05 level. Their overall marking of the composition (organization + content+ language) indicates no significant difference [Paired t (69) = 0.708, p=0.481].[3]

Therefore, both the researcher and the other instructor marked the students' composition (out of 10%) which was coded to avoid any element of bias-The marking was guided/controlled by a banding

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[3] *The tabular summary of the results of the statistical test employed to find out the degree of linear agreement between the two raters is left out due to space constraints.*

criterion with which both of the markers were familiar following the analytic approach to evaluating written work. Descriptive statistics was utilized to analyze the average score of the raters.

On the other hand, the other measuring instruments namely Continuous assessment scores (CAS), Joint composition 1(JC1) and Joint composition 2(JC2) were completed within nearly the whole semester, 4 months of the first semester of the 2016 academic year as part of the regular teaching- learning process. Hence, the evaluation was processed by the instructor alone who was guided by the same banding criteria to evaluate the composition work of the various groups in four sections of the Communicative *English Skills* classes. In case of the continuous assessment scheme, students were tested for their knowledge and skills as measured by tests of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills and a test of grammar. It used to be required by the Department that 50 percent of the total marking scheme of the course, consisting of the various skills and sub-skills of English had to be administered by individual instructors assigned to teach the course within a length of a semester.

Results and Discussion

Classroom observation analysis involved 33 groups all of which were part of the selected sample comprising all students from the field of Engineering and Social work organized in four sections.

In the classroom observation, common problems observed during the group work and in the written   works of the students were:

- Many of the students were at the mercy of others for language inputs, ideas or information. Their command of English, basic background knowledge plus the motivation to learn was low. This finding is consistent with Kitaw's (2017, p.148 and p.157) doctoral study report: …very poor English language skills and lack adequate academic background, (their) tendency to depend too

much on other group members i.e good achievers. It also agrees with Birhanu (2019, pp.13- 14) Tolessa, Sorale and Sultan (2016, p.865), Muhammed (2014, p. 3049), Samuel (2019, p.345) and Mulugeta, Solmon and Mathivanan's (2018, p.82) research report.

- Many students were hardly able to construct one complete and meaningful sentence leave alone a paragraph and hence they did not seem to be ready to actively participate and cooperate in the groups at the various levels of the writing task as their English proficiency is very poor or low.
- Frequent use of the local language- Amharic and in some cases Afan Oromo.
- Too brief /brief talk mainly on the part of academically weak or low-achieving students.
- Editing was mainly left, in many cases, to the clever students who were also observed writing the composition. This observation concurs with Tolessa, Sorale and Sultan's (2016, p. 862) and Kitaw's (2017, p.157) finding. They reported that ..high achiever students …complained about … burden   of work with no contribution from other members.
- The students were asking the instructor for clarification and he focused on shared weaknesses to help them improve their essay. His written and oral feedback focused on grammar, word choice, organization and lay-out. The questions they asked the instructor right after they received his written feedback: *What was wrong with tense /grammar*?   *What was wrong with the spelling*? The instructor   took the students attention on mistakes /errors and demanded them to correct themselves and others in a group (peer correction). They then discussed the right answer within their groups.

In the context of outside classroom situations, some secretaries came to the instructor complaining about lack of cooperation of their other group members - that *they wasted their time waiting for them*; - that even *if they appeared, they were passive, they didn't contribute anything*, and that *they were mere observers*.

During the administration of the controlled test due care was taken to discourage cheatings and ensure that each student was working on his/her own piece without seeking or getting help from others. One notable observation: many or a large number of students burst into a buzz of gentle noise and laughter in the hall when they were told to write on the same topic they were working on in their respective groups and that they could not write on another topic. This observation was significant because it revealed that a large number of students were not actively participating during the group work; they might have observed others doing not engaged in the group work at all except including their names at times of submission. Besides, it appears that they found the practice unusual since in many other cases instructors collect the written works of groups, evaluate the works and assign uniform scores to members of the group the same way the instructor did in the two phases of the intervention: *Joint Composition 1* and *Joint Composition 2*.

Interview

The students were asked seven interrelated questions. In response to the first question on the problems/challenges they faced during group work, all of them complained of non-cooperating group members ; more specifically, eleven (out of the 14 students who served as secretaries) students reported that some of their group members did not appear on time or did not appear at all for the group discussion in the outside classroom situation; Eight students reported their group members did not work with them, rather they want them do it themselves; five students stated that even if group members were with the secretaries or with some of them, they didn't say or do anything; they observed them doing it. Four students pointed out that some of their group members leave the task on them stating that they (the secretaries) should write it and they (the ordinary members) would go through it later. While five other students who served as secretaries indicated that some of their group members went even to the extent of telling them they ought to write and complete it (the task) appreciating them for being quite good at English or a high-achieving student.

On the other hand, eleven students who were neither group leaders nor secretary of their groups were also interviewed. Out of these numbers of students, six students replied that expressing themselves in English or using good English was very difficult to them; while five other students replied they felt the other students in their groups looked down upon them because of their pronunciation and demonstration of knowledge. Moreover, five ordinary members of the groups also reported they were not used to speaking in English and in similar terms with the group secretaries' reports, they said that some group members did not appear on time or did not appear at all for group discussion in outside classroom situations; even two of the respondents had similar response with that of the secretaries - some students left the task on the group secretaries saying, '*You should write it and we would go through it later*'. From the eleven ordinary members of the groups, four students also indicated that there were non-cooperating group members, in general, during the group work; three students also replied that they did not know how to go about and lacked some specific information.

When asked about their preferences of where and how to work in groups, thirteen students who served as a secretary reported they preferred to work in groups during the regular classroom sessions. Their reasons were: *instructor monitors and encourages students to participate*, *possibilities of asking the instructor for help or any question, more cooperation in groups as the instructor is observing everyone*, *being motivated to work actively for others are involved in lively discussion, better and frequent use of English*. Other reasons given were: *late arrival of group members*, *no active involvement*, *leaving the work up to the secretaries/group leaders*, *work load in other subjects (assignments)*, *getting the work done by others,* and *habits of using mother tongue or Amharic* in outside classroom situations.

On the other hand, out of the eleven students who were ordinary members of the group, six students preferred working in group in the regular classroom session. Reasons given were: *better cooperation in*

the regular classroom under the close observation of the instructor, *possibilities of asking the instructor   for some help or questions*, *being encouraged to work actively whenever they see other students busy working together* and *better use of English*. Other reasons given were associated with outside classroom situations: *getting work done by others*, *dominant habits of using mother tongue or Amharic,* and *burden of work / assignments in other subjects*. Besides, the remaining five students   preferred working in groups in outside classroom situations. The reasons put forward were: *getting   more time to work and improve their piece of writing*, *inadequacy of class time for writing exercises*, *having ample or more time to refer books*, *dictionary or even to talk to others*, and *feeling much relaxed or free when working in groups*. Neither the secretaries nor the ordinary group members preferred the combined mode of delivery i.e group work in the regular classroom session combined with group work in outside classroom situations. It is also interesting to observe that only one student who served as a secretary preferred working in groups in outside classroom situations stating that class time was not adequate enough for writing exercises.

In response to the third question on preferences of working in groups in outside classroom situation, only seven students reported that the academically clever or high- achieving students usually preferred working in groups in outside classroom situations. Reasons given were: *getting more time*, and *insufficiency of class time to do best*. However, most of the students, eighteen in number, reported that usually, the academically poor or low achieving students preferred working in outside classroom situations. The reasons were: *seeking help from other students*, *discreet dependence on   clever group members for task accomplishment*, *benefitting a lot despite poor or no participation in group activity*, *securing higher scores thanks to the academically clever students who did the job* and *the indiscriminately shared marks among group members*.

In response to the question on preferences of working in the regular classroom situation, most of the students (17) replied that the

academically clever or high - achieving students usually prefer completing group tasks in general in the regular classroom. The reasons given were: *being overburdened in outside classroom situations*, *lack of time to study their other courses*, *wastage of time waiting for one another*, *academically weak students lacking meaningful contribution to the group task* and *becoming mere observers*. Other reasons were: *already known eventual task accomplishment by the high-achieving students, confidence in high-achieving or performing group member' knowledge* and *skill in English and the resultant busyness, other students being involved in working on other courses*, and group *work in class being perceived as less overburdening*. In contrast, only eight students reported that academically weak students usually prefer completing the group task during the regular classroom session. Their reasons were: *easily meeting all members of the group in class and working better, talking to the instructor for any necessary support, convenience to meet and work with others.* Outside classroom situations were perceived as inconvenient for arranging meeting time and committing oneself to the task; outside classroom tasks such as writing competed with their time for the other courses they study.

When asked about their observation of the work load of students who adopted roles in the group work, the overwhelming majority of the students (21) reported the group secretary did much of the work in their groups. The reasons given were: *being quite good at English, willingness and feeling responsible*, and *submissiveness* (not saying no). Three students indicated the academically clever or high-achieving students did much of the work in their groups. The reason given was *securing higher marks.*

In response to the question of whether all members of the groups organized by the instructor meet in outside classroom situation to work together, fifteen students reported *No* involvement of group members as desired; eight out of fifteen students stated many students didn't show up for the group work on time; therefore, the ones who had come on time sat together and finished off the task instead of wasting their time. While

the remaining seven respondents gave an extreme view- they said many students neither showed up on time nor answered their phones; they did not cooperate. However, ten students reported *Yes*. Four of them reported they worked together their best even though some time was wasted waiting for one another. Two other students from the ten, said that they enjoyed the company and listening to one another's views and cultures as they'd come from the various parts of Ethiopia. Four of them gave a response characterized by some kind of reservation, though. They stated that 'Yes' they met for the group work, but few members of the group did the task; the remaining complied with whatever was done by the few; two of them also replied 'Yes', they met, but their contribution was insignificant; they were very quiet or just observing what was done (*These students were secretaries of their groups and were talking about their ordinary members*).

Finally, all of the twenty-five students were asked to put forward their suggestion regarding the group works organized by the instructor in two modalities: *group work during the regular classroom* or *group work in the classroom combined with working in outside classroom situations*. Seventeen students suggested that the instructor should organize a group work only during the regular classroom sessions. They justified their suggestions as follows:

- *in outside classroom situations, only the secretaries or group leaders used to write and complete the task*
- *in outside classroom situations, it is only, in many cases, the academically clever students who were working.*

Some of these students also suggested that their instructor should require the students to produce compositions individually rather than in groups because groups did not usually work collaboratively together; only a few or a member did it, others didn't participate in the group work actively. Out of the twenty-five students, only eight students suggested that their instructor should give them ample time to work on the writing activity in outside classroom situations. A couple of them also suggested

group members did not have similar level of skill and knowledge so much that they ended up arguing; their interest was also varied. There were many students who did not feel comfortable with a group work; they preferred individual work. Therefore, they said, the instructor ought to consider this.

Comparison of the Students' Compositions

Table 2: A Summary of Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA

Score	N	Mean	SD	Df	F	Sig.
Joint Composition 1	70	6.07	1.898			
Joint Composition 2	70	7.67	1.391	2	13.530	.000
Individual Composition	70	6.47	2.286			
Total	210	6.74	2.004			

Table 2 summarizes the One-way ANOVA results. It indicates, in general, that there is a significant difference among the three scores from the   composition works of the students done in groups (JC1 and JC2) and Individually (IC)[$F(2)= 13.530, p.<0.01$].It appears   that the students'   achievement   in Joint composition 2 is the best of   the measuring scores. Higher mean from Joint composition 2 is normally expected as the groups were retaining inputs from the feedback and explanations given by their instructor and improve the product accordingly. In JC1 the mean is thus smaller than the mean of JC2 since it was the first work the students produced without focused or more meaningful intervention of the instructor. The students largely depended on their own contributions in terms of   knowledge and skill. Similarly, in IC, the scores are not shared or indiscriminately distributed among members of the group rather the individual students' scores were entered. It appears that there is a value added and hence learning taking place from JC1 as the increase in the mean justifies the same and their scores are distributed or heterogeneous as communicated to us by the higher standard deviation in contrast to the JC1 and JC2. In JC1 and JC2 the groups are   relatively homogeneous given the fact that scores were awarded indiscriminately among members of the group; but in

relative terms, the uniform distribution of scores in conjunction with the instructor inputs makes JC2 relatively more homogeneous than JC1.

However, the ANOVA shows only the overall difference. It does not show to what extent one writing work of the students, such as JC1 differs from the other, for instance IC. It was thus necessary to find out the least significant difference (LSD) between the written works. The post hoc test is utilized to confirm where the difference occurred between groups (scores).

Table 3: Multiple Comparisons

(I)Writing Performance	(J) Writing Performance	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std.Error	Sig.	95% confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Joint Composition 1	Joint Composition 2	- 1.600*	.320	.000	-2.23	-.97
	Individual Composition	-.400	.320	.213	-1.03	.23
Joint Composition 2	Joint Composition1	1.600*	.320	.000	.97	2.23
	Individual Composition	1.200*	.320	.000	.57	1.83
Individual Composition	Joint Composition 1	.400	.320	.213	-.23	1.03
	Joint Composition 2	-1.200*	.320	.000	-1.83	-.57

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 3 summarizes the multiple comparisons performed between the various dependent variables, namely JC1andJC2, JC1and IC, and JC2 and IC. Post hoc comparison using the LSD test indicated that the mean score for the JC1(M=6.07, SD= 1.898) was significantly different than the JC2(M=7.67, SD=1.391). The comparison also indicated the mean score for the JC2(M= 7.67, SD=1.391) was significantly different than IC (M=6.47, SD=22.86). However, the scores of JC1 (M=6.07, SD = 1.898) did not significantly differ from the IC scores. The Post Hoc test clearly indicates that the scores of JC1 are always less than (<) the scores of JC2 while the scores of JC2 are always greater than the scores of IC. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in

the small group work-based work of students and individual students' written work is not supported.

The scores of JC1 are normally expected to be less than the scores of JC2 since the composition of the groups was an improved version based on the instructor's written and oral feedback and some explanation; in other words, JC1 does not include inputs from the instructor feedback rather it is the first version of the 'groups' work.

All together, these results suggest that when students work together, they achieve better; joint work of the students along with inputs from the teacher enable the students improve their composition in terms of layout and organization, language use (grammar, spelling, words) and content. This in turn contributed to the improvement of the individual students' composition (achievement). However, group work without inputs from the teacher does not yield in a significant increase in individual achievement.

The continuous assessment scores consisted of achievement scores on tests of speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills and of grammar. It gives a good picture of the student's overall command of English or general proficiency as measured in harmony with the course syllabus. The mean score of all of the students was *37.39* and the standard deviation was *8.05*. It indicates that the sampled students are heterogeneous in their knowledge and skill of English/ abilities.

Table 4: A Summary of Group Statistics and Independent Samples Test

Score	Responsibility	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	Df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Continuous	Secretary	36	40.50	7.689				0.001
Assessment Score	Ordinary	34	34.09	7.149	0.086	.771	68	
Joint Composition 1	Secretary	36	5.72	2.051				0.114
	Ordinary	34	6.44	1.673	1.198	.278	68	
Joint Composition 2	Secretary	36	7.53	1.424				0.378
	Ordinary	34	7.82	1.359	0.464	.498	68	
Individual	Secretary	36	7.2639	1.75860				0.002
Composition	Ordinary	34	5.6324	2.49639	3.178	.079	68	
		70						
Total								

A t-test was employed in order to find out whether role assignment in small group work had some relationship with the students' academic background and level of performance or achievement and to find the implication this could have in teaching. The statistical analysis conducted shows the difference or similarity between students who adopted various roles in small group works as a secretary or ordinary member of a group in attaining scores in the various instruments identified. The CAS carries 50 marks; JC1, JC2 and IC each carry 10 marks, respectively. Table D summarizes the descriptive statistics and tests of variation in the achievement of the students playing the roles of either a group secretary or an ordinary member of the groups in which they were assigned to work with the other members. The CAS enabled to find ways of looking into the individual student's background-capacity or ability. The same applied to the IC-the individual students' change of performance after the two interventions- without considering the joint works. The mean scores of students who served as a secretary in the small group work tasks, is bigger in the CAS, and IC measurements. This clearly indicates that the students who adopted the role of a secretary in the small groups formed are clever or academically well-to-do students. It also indicates that in the controlled writing test, the group secretaries performed better than the ordinary members of the group. It may justify that despite being clever or well-to-do, they have benefited from the role assignment-plenty

of practice opportunity so much that it resulted in higher scores. The t-test indicated that in the CAS, the difference between the scores of the secretaries and the scores of the ordinary members of the group is significant (t= 3.608, p.value< 0.01). The group secretaries performed consistently better.

Even though the mean scores of ordinary members of the groups(JC1=6.44, and the JC2 =7.82) are bigger than the mean scores of the secretaries of the group(JC1=5.72, and the JC2= 7.53, mean), the t-test indicated no significant difference between the secretaries and ordinary members in the JC 1(t=-1.602, p. value=0.114) and in the JC 2 (t=-0.888, p.value= 0.378).The insignificant difference may relate to the fact that these measures are uncontrolled as students took their own time in outside classroom situations along with the regular classroom work towards producing improved composition according to their interest and the demands of the writing task. Besides, the difference isn't likely to be significant since scores of the composition work are indiscriminately shared among all members of the group. But, the statistical test of significant difference for the achievement of the two groups in the IC indicated a significant difference between the secretaries and the ordinary members of the groups (t=3.175, p.value= 0.002). Therefore, the hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between role assignment and students' level of performance /achievement in writing is not supported. There is significant relationship between role assignment and students' level of achievement in writing.

The CAS and IC are discriminatory as each and every individual is awarded a deserving score according to his/her own performance. It thus reflects one of the qualities of a good test: "its strength to discriminate ability groups- A good test/item discriminates between those who do well on the test and those who do poorly (Matlock-Hetzel, 1997).

As already been mentioned, the qualitative data collected from the interview and observation tools also indicated the relationship between shouldering responsibility, performance and achievement. During the

regular classroom sessions, the assigned secretaries or group leaders were almost all of the high-achieving students who had a good and very good command of English. The high-achieving students had very active level of participation. Relatively speaking, the secretaries took much time talking than the ordinary members of the groups; the high-achieving students i.e those who had a good command of English appeared much enthusiastic about the task and took relatively much time; in most of the groups, the secretaries were busy writing, these students observably demonstrated their skills and knowledge in the previous tasks and activities of the course. The students who perceived themselves not as competent as the others were not willing to shoulder responsibility and serve as secretaries. The group secretaries or leaders covered the lion share of the groups' work. The interview conducted also confirmed the same. The group secretaries did much of the work in their groups as they have had good command of English, feelings of responsibility and the willingness.

How are the students describing their experiences in group work?

In outside classroom situations, the researcher was used to coming across group leaders/secretaries complaining of lack of cooperation of their group members-be it in terms of utilization of time and engagement in the groups' task. What can be deduced from the students' judgmental complaints is, even if they appeared for the group task, many students were found to be passive or mere observers. The non-cooperating students were usually the weak students. A free-riding behavior was also deducible from the students' complaints and reports: " *You write it and we will go through it later*"(but they did not actually go through it later or they usually say it is ok submit it), " *Write it yourself you're quite good at English*", " *Complete it yourself; you are a high-achieving student* or *complete it you're the top-scoring student*"; many students appeared to have perceived the group work as a means to help the low- achieving students. During the regular classroom sessions, many weak/low achieving students asked for the completion of the task in outside classroom situations. These study findings are consistent with

the other local research reports that testify lack of equally sharing responsibilities for common goals, poor coordination of group members' contributions, and lack of accountability (Tefera 2014, p.133; Muhammed 2014, p.3049). Tolessa, Sorale and Sultan's report (2016, pp.862-865), Birhanu's (2019, p.14;) and Kitaw's (2017,p. 150 and p.157) reports are also quite consistent with findings of the present study. They reported that lack of participation by some members, group assignment done by one student, getting good scores despite lack of involvement, and carelessness prevailed. A statement from one of Birhanu's (2019, p.12) student respondents reveal the lack of positive interdependence and cooperation and existence of too much dependence: "When the group includes an excellent student and weak students, and the excellent student is absent, this affects the group's work." It also agrees with research findings from another context reviewed in the present article: "social loafing" (Latan, Williams and Harkins, 1979), the issue of 'passengers' (Bourner, Hughes and Bourner, 2001) or 'free riders' (Boud, 2001).

Data from the interview also indicated the way how the interviewees described their small group work experiences. All of the students who served as secretaries (14) reported the prevailing of non-cooperation in the group. Six out of eleven students who served as ordinary members of the group exhibited lower self-esteem because of poor command of English, poor demonstration of general knowledge and poor experience in using English. The interview data also revealed the manifestation of free-riding behavior in the groups, such as '*You write it we will go through it/see it later*'. The interviewees also reported the existence of non-cooperating group members.

Thirteen out of fourteen students who served as a secretary described small group work as good if done during the regular classroom sessions. The justifications were: *enhancement of cooperation given the presence of the instructor*, *being encouraged to participate meaningfully when seeing many students in groups work actively together*, *better use of English* and *good utilization of time*. This is quite consistent with

Birhanu's (2019, p.12) report on one of his students' interview response; it gleams light on the perceived advantage of working in-groups during the regular classroom session: *When we feel that the instructor watches, we will work hard and participate to demonstrate our abilities*.

Six out of eleven students who served as ordinary members of the group described small group work as good if done during the regular classroom sessions. Their justifications were: *minimizing burden of work*, *better cooperation because of instructor presence around*, *seeking help from the instructor*, *feeling encouraged doing when seeing other students work actively in their groups*, and *avoiding over dependence on others*. *Better use of English or minimized use of L1 or Amharic* was also stated. It is worth noting that only five students, out of twenty-five students interviewed, who served as ordinary members, described small group in outside classroom situations as good. Their reasons were: *availability of more time to work and improve*, and *inadequacy of class time for writing exercises*. Only one student who served as a secretary described small group work in outside class room situations as good.

The more notable observation is, the students' interview represented the combined mode delivery as undesirable or not good regardless of variations in roles played in small group works. Eighteen students out of twenty-five reported that it was the weak students who usually preferred working in outside classroom situations. Their reasons were: *seeking help*, *expecting the well- to -do group members to do the task, benefiting a lot regardless of passive involvement in the group work* and *scoring good marks*. This observation is very important in that the small group learning experience report of the majority of the students enable us to realize working in small groups in outside classroom situations was represented as the preferred mode of delivery of the academically weak students. It appears to be perceived negatively by the majority, as a manifestation of dependency syndrome on the part of weak students. Based on his observation and experience, it is the researcher's conviction that the low achieving or weak students exhibit social loafing

and/or free riding behavior in small group work since the well-to-do or high achieving students had to sustain good work for good grades through their own dominantly individual work. The academically poor or low achieving students seemed to have accepted that they could not do well and take advantage of the well-to-do students' motive. This is corroborated through the contrasting responses to the 4th interview question. Majority of the students interviewed (17 out of 25) reported that the well-to-do students usually preferred completing the group tasks in general in the regular classroom. The reasons were: *avoiding /minimizing burden of work*, *good utilization of time*, and *better participation of group members*. Therefore, it is possible to generalize that small group work during the regular   classroom sessions is viewed as the most preferred mode of deliveries by the well-to-do students. They described it as good. The overwhelming majority of the interviewees (21 out of 25) represented the small group works in general as overburdening the group secretaries/ leaders.

In general, the outside classroom model of delivery for a small group work is described negatively by most of the interviewees. Fifteen students reported 'No' involvement of group members at a desirable level of participation in outside classroom situations. The reasons were recurrently the same: *poor utilization of time*, and *off-task behavior and loafing*. Ten students described their outside classroom small group works favorably, however. Reasons given were: *working together their level best despite the poor utilization of time*, and *enjoying the company of others*. Nevertheless, the 'Yes' response is characterized by reservation and hence tilts towards negativity: prevailing free-riding behaviors, and passive involvement of group members. Seventeen students suggested the instructor should organize a group work only during the regular classroom sessions. This suggestion of majority of the students vividly reveals the dominantly negative portrayal of small group work experiences in outside classroom situations. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that students will have positive description of their group work experiences in writing skills lessons is partially supported. The qualitative analysis vividly indicates that, in contrast to the

classroom work, the outside classroom small group work is found to be characterized by prevailing off- task, loafing and passive behavior. A free- riding and non-cooperating behavior was found out from the students' complaints and reports; the non-cooperating and /or free – riding students were usually the low- achieving students.

Conclusion

An individual's role in group work is an important influence on learning, and that level or quality of participation can best be predicted from multiple characteristics of the individual students drawn out from observation and evaluation of the students' work as a group and in individual terms. Altogether, the results suggest that when students work together, they achieve better; joint work of the students along with inputs from the instructor enabled the students improve their composition in terms of layout and organization, language use (grammar, spelling, words) and content.

Role assignment in small group work has positive association with the students' academic background, level of performance and achievement. The analysis also vividly indicated controlled and individual focused assessments or evaluations are more dependable and realistic than group work-focused evaluations. The group work is mischievously/and elusively homogeneous in showing achievement and improvement while the individual focused assessment scores were found to be informatively heterogeneous in showing realistic attainment and improvement. Social-loafing or free riding, and off-task behavior plus differences in skills and knowledge characterize the students' performance. The non-cooperating and/ or free–riding students were usually the low- achieving students. The findings thus implied that allocating higher marks for products of group works at times of assessment and evaluation is not commendable. The findings also do not support the necessity of organizing and completing small group work in outside classroom situations. The study rather justifies the need to avoid the same as much as possible and maintain accountability through individualized

assessment and evaluation schemes if the measuring tools are to be reliable and valid. Small group work during the regular classroom session is found to be more dependable than outside classroom situations.

Small group work requires careful planning and management in terms of group formation, role assignment and supervision; small group work/cooperative learning is not as such a main goal in itself. The major goal should never be forgotten or neglected ; each and every individual student must be able to express himself/herself writing- 'enabling' learners should not be expected from indiscriminate allotment of marks to all group members who do not actually exert the same effort ,knowledge and skill .The set of conditions well identified by social interdependence theory were not fulfilled at a desirable level; positive interdependence is loose, individual accountability is weaker; face to face interaction plus exchange and balance of roles is better promoted in classroom situations.

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