

Enhancing Teamwork and Communication Skills Among First Year Students at the University of Botswana

Dele Olufemi Akindele

University of Botswana, Gaborone, Republic of Botswana

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Abstract

This study explores how first year students studying Communication skills in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Botswana manage team work and resolve conflict that emerges from group activities. The overall aim is to attempt to foster in the first year students communication skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, research and writing skills and conflict management through teamwork, which involved group mini-research project carried out during the second semester of the academic year. A class of 70 students was divided into 10 working groups to carry out a mini-research project on a topic in communication. The findings from the study indicated that the teamwork helped the students build self-esteem, confidence, and interpersonal and conflict management skills, as well as leadership skills.

Keywords: *teamwork, communication skills, leadership, conflict management, interpersonal skills, research and writing skills.*

Introduction

Researchers and instructors in colleges and universities have observed that teamwork has become ubiquitous, not only in the business communication classroom but in the workplace as well (Dyrud, 2001, p.105). In addition to excellent oral and written communication skills, experience working in a team/group environment consistently rank among the top ten criteria by which business evaluates potential candidates for employment (Dyrud, 2001, p.105). It is therefore desirable that students are acquainted with these skills while at the university so that they can practice effectively in the world of work. This is particularly so when the ability to work effectively and collaboratively on a group project is often one of the criteria required for successful job performance (Cox & Friedman, 2009, p.231). Such assignments have therefore become common. It has however been observed that what is not so common is adequate preparation—in the design of assignments, in classroom instruction for students, and in the management of the inevitable problems that arise with any cooperative effort (Cox & Friedman, 2009, p.232). This study took care of some of these problems by giving students a series of instructions regarding the preparation of the team project work and how they could manage any problem(s) that arose during the course of the team work exercise. In addition, I ensured that I held tutorial sessions where I showed them what to do next especially when they encounter some difficulties.

In my several years of teaching communication to first year students at the University of Botswana experience has shown that this set of students tends to shy away from group work. This is despite the fact that the University has emphasized the significance of “communication skills, organizational and teamwork skills, social responsibility and leadership skills, interpersonal skills, cross cultural fluency” (University of Botswana Teaching and Learning Policy, 2008, p.3). Some of the reasons

given were that in their secondary education, their teachers used to dictate notes to them and individuals were also given assignments which they carried out.

Therefore, the concept of group work was foreign to them. In addition, the students over the years were not sure about the significant of the roles individuals were expected to play, who is to lead the group, how they would manage individual differences and conflict that may arise, what benefits that individual will derive when the group will carry out a research; and whether the assessment will be fair to all members of the groups. It was therefore very difficult to encourage the past first year students of communication skills students that I taught to be involved in teamwork. The above reasons motivated the current study with the hope that the insights gained will help me to deal with subsequent group work in future. It is hoped that by finding out answers to the following questions will help in encouraging future students in carrying out their group work.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study was to attempt to find out how students manage communication in their teamwork, deal with leadership issues, conflicts that occurred, and how they were resolved. This is with a view to foster life-long skills such as teamwork skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills and conflict resolution skills, as well as research and writing skills which they will utilize in the society later after university education.

Research Questions

The study set out to provide answers to the following pertinent questions:

1. What type of roles did members play in groupwork?
2. What is the nature of conflict experienced in groupwork and how was it resolved?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of team/group work?
4. What is the nature of leadership style and functions in group work?
5. How do group members work together?

Rationale for the Study

The University of Botswana pays special attention to the quality of the graduates that it produces hence the institution emphasizes the attributes of its potential products in its teaching and learning policy document. It states among others, that University's academic programmes will encompass the following graduate attributes: "communication skills, organizational and teamwork skills, social responsibility and leadership skills, interpersonal skills, cross cultural fluency (University of Botswana Teaching and Learning Policy, 2008, p.3). It is in an attempt to fulfill certain crucial elements of this policy that motivates group communication activities introduced to first year students in the university. In addition in group communication, teams are presumed to make better decisions than individuals (Hollenbeck et al., 1995), and team decision making has long been lauded as a vehicle for increasing participation, perceptions of fairness, and acceptance of decision outcomes (Akindele & Tremepohl, 2008; Brodbeck et al., 2007).

Not surprisingly, educators often have students work in teams—a strategy that positively influences students' overall grade point average, especially when students perceive these teams as valuable and fair (Freeman, 1996). Groups often work on a

superordinate goal, a task so complex that cannot be accomplished by an individual or individuals working alone. To accomplish a super-ordinate goal, group members must work together to create synergy. Synergy is present when the performance or outcomes of a group go beyond the capacities of the group members (Schweiger & Sandberg, 1989).

Methodology

Participants

At the beginning of the second semester in an undergraduate communication and study skills class at the University of Botswana in the academic year 2009/2010, ten (10) groups were formed from a class of sixty-five (65) students. Nine of the groups were made up of six (6) students, while one group was made up of 5 students. The students were not allowed to make their choice of groups to belong. The reason is that some of them may prefer to choose their friends or students from their ethnic groups or those from their previous schools. This choice may not promote intercultural communication which this study partly aimed to promote. The selection of students into the groups was done randomly and according to how they were registered for the course. I did not appoint any student as the leader of the group. The issue of leadership was left in the hands of individual group, as it is one of the skills that I intended to test in the teamwork exercise. Following group formation, I assigned students a mini research project. The project is a semester long and designed to develop collaborative research skills, team writing, group communication, intercultural communication, team building, leadership and conflict resolution skills.

I provided the students with guided research topics in which to choose from; but they have the choice of working on topics suggested by members of their groups. The course instructor approved such topics before the commencement of the research project. Each group met the course instructor from time to time for guidance as it carries out the research. I instructed the students on the preparation, practice, and performance review stages of the collaborative process. In addition, I asked each group to build a portfolio in which they account for membership roles, communication patterns, tasks assignment, leadership roles, conflict in their group and how it was resolved.

Each group submitted a research project report, which contains a portfolio detailing their timetable for meetings, group members' assignments, conflicts that occurred during the process, and how they were resolved. Students received a team grade for the research report, the portfolio and the oral presentation of the report, although that grade was increased or reduced due to favorable or unfavorable individual student's participation in the project. The aim of the project was to teach students about teamwork with a view to provide them with the tools they need to perform well in collaborative assignments in the work place.

The group project assignment seemed to be a perfect choice for collaborative work. Because of its extra length and complexity, the report enabled several students to contribute meaningful research, writing, and document design decisions to one product or a related set of products. If the project goes well, each student will learn important lessons both about report writing and about teamwork (Dyrud, 2001, p.110). This observation is in line with the fact that teams have become the fundamental unit of organizational structure because of their flexibility (Beersma et al., 2003). In addition, teams make better decisions more than individual group members (Hollenbeck et al.,

1995), and team decision-making is a vehicle for increasing participation, perceptions of fairness, and acceptance of decision outcomes.

Data Collection Procedure

The study used quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry. I collected data from the students' portfolio which shows minutes of their meetings and individual's participation, as well as how conflicts were resolved. I administered the questionnaires to members of all the ten teamwork groups in class after the completion, submission, of their group projects. Each member of the team completed the questionnaires. I collected them immediately for analysis. I followed this with an interview of selected representatives of each of the ten groups, comprising the chairperson, secretary, and leader.

Literature Review

In order to deal with the above problems, it is necessary to discuss very briefly some characteristics of team/group work as recorded in group communication literature. The following section takes a cursory look at some important features of the group. These include group formation, its communication dynamics, leadership types, decision-making process, and conflict management.

On Group Formation

Three central processes regarding team dynamics and team effectiveness prevail in the management and communication literature. These processes are leadership, decision-making, and conflict management. Keyton (2006) defines groups and teams by group size, group goal, group member interdependence, group structure, and group identity. Often larger groups have logistical problems. For instance, larger groups tend to foster social loafers (Vik, 2001).

Interdependence is the degree to which group members' influence, and are influenced by other group members (Brewer, 1995). Any member has the potential to influence any other group member. Group members also engage in a variety of interdependent activities, such as working with shared task inputs, processes, goals, and reward distributions (Wageman, 1995). An important factor in group structure is the roles individuals take upon themselves. Often these roles are assigned, as the students in this study have done with their project tasks; but interaction determines which roles are recognized. For example, an individual may be assigned the role of leader of the group (Snyder, 2008). But if another member starts facilitating meetings, making decisions, and dominating group conversation, this person will informally be considered the leader. It will be interesting to see how group members in this study handle such situations when they occurred during their project meetings.

Individuals assert authority in groups/teams when they make claims about how a project should be completed; advocate that particular decisions should be made, actively support or oppose suggestions of others, and/or engage in consensus building and compromise (Fredrick, 2008, p.249). Often, this generates conflicts arising from differing interests. Effective group work relies on students' ability to negotiate authority in small peer groups and manage conflicts that arise. This study will find answer to this question, among others.

Another important aspect of teamwork is group Identity. Group members have a group identity when they behave as a group, believe they belong to the group, and like being in the group (Henry et al. 1999). When group members identify with the group, they want to abide by the norms and rules the group follows. But some could be deviant, refusing to follow rules, to obey the leader, etc. Many individuals use group membership to satisfy their need to feel included, to demonstrate psychological closeness, or to control others (Snyder, 2008).

Conflict Management

Conflict is described as a process involving two or more individuals or groups in opposition (Pruitt & Rubin, 1996). Its place in conflict studies is well established with a focus on social conflict (Schellenberg, 1996; Pruitt & Kim, 2004). It is an integral part of group formation. Conflict is the process that begins when an individual or group feels negatively affected by another person or group (Burton, 1990; Anstey, 2006). Conflict is associated with positive and negative consequences (Coser, 1956).

In team/group work, conflicts usually occur and there are strategies put in place to manage them otherwise the success of the group project may not be attained. Personal attacks, coalitions, isolation, and chaos can ultimately lead a group to underperform. The management of power and disagreement can determine if a group benefits from conflict. If members believe group processes are unfair, they tend to perceive more group conflict and to be less satisfied (Wall & Nolan, 1987). Kilmann and Thomas (1975) distinguish between a concern for the group member (self) and everyone else (other). From this distinction, the researchers developed five different approaches to managing conflict: collaborating, competing, avoiding, compromising, and accommodating as exemplified as follows according to Pearson, et al (2010).

- **Competitive:** high in assertiveness, low in cooperativeness. Competitive people want to win the conflict.
- **Accommodative:** low in assertiveness and high in cooperativeness. These group members are easy going and willing to follow the group.
- **Avoiding:** low in assertiveness, low in cooperativeness. Avoiding people are detached and indifferent to conflict.
- **Collaborative:** high assertiveness, high in cooperativeness. These group members are active and productive problem solvers.
- **Compromising:** moderate in assertiveness, moderate in cooperativeness. Compromisers are willing to "give and take" to resolve conflict (p.240).

It will be interesting to see how the students working in groups in this study employ some of these strategies in managing conflicts that occurred during the process of interaction.

Sources of Group Conflict

Many researchers have noted that often instructors/professors are unaware of group problems until the conflict reaches a flashpoint: disgruntled students besiege the instructor with complaints, typically occurring when a major deadline looms (Schultz, 1998). These conflicts may make students develop a phobia about group work, which is not the attitude instructors want the students to take into the workplace (Dyrud, 2001, p.107).

It has been observed that effective teamwork relies on students' ability to negotiate authority in small peer groups and manage the conflicts that arise. For most

students, however—even those with previous teamwork experience— negotiating peer authority and managing conflict are more difficult than teachers may realize (Fredrick, 2008, p.442).

Fredrick (2008) further observes that for students engaged in teamwork, however, negotiating authority with peers and managing conflict are not simple; nor are the issues the same as those issues that workplace teams face. First, the classroom hierarchy, which places teachers in power over students, leaves students on a horizontal plane where their relative authority in relation to one another is undefined. In addition, institutions of higher education define students primarily as cohabiters and social peers; and in teamwork settings, many students feel pressure to maintain that socially based, nonhierarchical relationship. The second important observation is that unlike most workplaces where teamwork is essential to the company's success, Western systems of education continue to define the student as an individual trying to succeed alongside of, or in competition with, other students, but rarely in collaboration with them (p. 452). These two institutional structures create distinct challenges for students working in team settings (Gueldenzoph & May, 2002, p. 14).

It is common knowledge that students complain that group meetings are unproductive, that some members do not participate, and that they end up rushing to complete the project by the deadline (Synder, 2009, p.76). One person may refuse to contribute equally or slack off altogether (Dyrud, 2001, p.108). Conflict emerges in group work due to the following factors according to Cowan (1995): ill-defined goals, role conflicts (leader-follower), poor communications, personality clashes, cultural differences, and poor management. Ill-defined goals stems from disagreements over the goals of the group - over what it seeks to accomplish, and how different individuals understand those.

Cowan (1995) further asserts that poor communications occur when ideas are not communicated effectively throughout the group, turn-taking is poorly handled, and one speaker may dominate the group talk, leading to unnecessary conflict behavior. Another possible source of conflict is personality clashes, which can form the basis for conflict within the group. There is poor management, which can result from allocating turn and tasks on a basis that are unfair. These can contribute greatly to conflict within a group.

Dynamics of Group Communication

Work groups function to complete a particular task. In a work group, the task dimension is emphasized. The group members pool their expertise to accomplish the task. There are several types of work groups according to Pearson, et al. (2010, pp.224-6). These include Additive Work Group where all group members perform the same activity and pool their results at the end. An example of this would be gathering signatures for a petition drive. Another type is Conjunctive Work Group: Here group members perform different, but related, tasks that allow for the completion of a goal. Every group member must complete its task in order for the group task to be completed. An example of this would be an assembly line, in which each worker performs tasks that together build a completed car. Students in this study working groups fall into this category in the sense that every member was assigned a component of the research project such as literature review, data collection, problem statement, which they carried out and then came together as a team to synergize all the components into a composite whole - a research report.

Another option for decision-making is brainstorming. When brainstorming, group members in this study were encouraged to generate as many ideas about a particular topic as they can. Group members were encouraged to say anything that comes to mind when brainstorming. Every idea was written down and judgments about ideas were saved until later, when the group returned to all of the ideas and selected those that were most useful.

Within the working group, there is the issue of leadership, a facilitator or coordinator. Leadership is concerned with control and power in a group. According to Cowan (1995), leadership can be aimed at either maintaining the interpersonal relationships in the group or prodding the group to achieve its task. Groups sometimes have two leaders: one for the social dimension and one for the task dimension.

Leadership with task-oriented roles according to Cowan, (1995) relate to the completion of the group's task: initiator-contributor. The roles include asking for information about the task; asking for the input from the group about its values; offering facts or generalization to the group; stating his or her beliefs about a group issue; and explaining ideas within the group, offering examples to clarify ideas. Others involve showing the relationships between ideas; shifting the direction of the group's discussion; measuring group's actions against some objective standard; stimulating the group to a higher level of activity; performing logistical functions for the group; and recording, as well as keeping a record of group actions.

Results and Discussion

In analyzing the data, I then categorize responses to the open-ended questions thematically group by group. I labeled the groups A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, for ease of reference. The following findings were derived from a summary of the 10 groups.

I took into consideration the research questions stated earlier. I focused on the four central questions that seek to address the main problem that motivated this research. For ease of reference, the questions are re-stated as follows: What type of roles did members play? What is the nature of leadership style and functions in your groups? What is the nature of conflict experienced in your groups and how was it resolved? What do you consider as the advantages and disadvantages of team/group work? The responses to these questions are derived from the sub-questions posed in the questionnaire and interview.

Individual Roles

All the ten (10) groups summarized the type of roles individual played throughout the period of the project. Typical remarks were derived from the questionnaires and interviews.

"We set up a committee made up of the following officers: Secretary, Chairperson, and Leader".

"All members were involved in the choice of topic of research. Each member was requested to search for a topic and provide justification for any chosen topic. The topics were discussed and vote was cast for all the topics. The topic with the highest vote was selected for research".

"Every team member was requested to do literature search on the chosen topic. Members suggested items to be reviewed for the study".

"Members agreed to review the items and to be compiled by all the group members".

“Members of the group were also assigned questionnaire drafting, data collection and writing up of the research. The same was done for the typing, proof reading and oral presentation of the project”.

“The secretary was charged with the responsibility of taking minutes of the meetings while the leader was mandated to summarize the decisions made during meetings. The chairperson took charge of chairing and overseeing the smooth running of the team meetings”.

In this case, virtually all members of the groups were deeply involved in the group project.

“Members reviewed the drafts stage by stage and the final version. We jointly rehearsed and criticized oral presentation of the project before it was presented to the class”.

Group A and F indicated that during *“the sharing phase, members voluntarily share their feelings, ideas, and insights concerning the topic. Each person is given an uninterrupted turn while everyone else listens. Only after all members have shared does the leader open up the team circle to the give and take of general discussion”*. The two groups pointed out that *“this is particularly helpful when the group has been working on a research topic and problem statement. In such cases, a member took written notes; and a quick summary of those notes helped assure everyone’s commitment to the group’s outcomes”*.

The results indicate that right from the beginning of the group work, all members of the ten groups formed demonstrated the spirit of democracy. Despite their cultural, religious and political diversity, members of the groups unanimously appointed the key officers to coordinate, manage the activities of the group. Members of all the groups participated fully in the assignment of tasks such as choice of topic, literature review, data collection and analysis, writing up the report and finalizing the report. The implication of the roles played by individual members of the groups is that such skills can be transferred to real class situation where students are allocated into groups and assigned activities. It facilitates independent learning and cross cultural communication.

On Leadership

On leadership, virtually all (95%) of the students were of the view that having a leader is very important for the success of the group hence they chose a leader who was unanimously elected by members to ensure the smooth execution of the task assigned to them. Only a few (5%) of them felt that leadership in their groups should be rotational. They argued that it is more democratic than having one person ‘holding on to power’ at all times. Typical comments were:

“We elected the person we felt was mature and democratic in orientation from our group. We have worked with our leader in some other assignments; therefore, we knew him/her to exude good quality leadership skills”.

All the groups also observed that the leadership style employed was participatory whereby every member of the team was given the opportunity to contribute his/her own quota to the implementation of the task assigned. The groups added that the leadership is group-centred and democratic. They reported that there are many advantages to having a group leader. *“These include allocation of tasks, speaking turns during discussions, summarizing decisions taken at meetings; and resolving conflicts that emerged”*. Group F members remarked that *“it is the leader’s responsibility to introduce the topic, and to ensure that the group adheres to the group work procedure and follows the rules”*.

Furthermore, all the group members seem to conclude that leaders in their teamwork made sure the ground rules were understood by all members; introduced the topic or stated the objectives of their tasks; elaborated if the topic needed clarification; allowed time for members to share their thoughts; and discussed and summarized conclusions and insights.

As indicated above, in one of the ten groups, leadership was rotational. Group K remarked that, *“one member at a time acted as the leader or facilitator, but the person taking that role voluntarily changes from one to the next. The group did not pressure any one to lead in the beginning. However, shared leadership became one of the natural developments of our group process”*.

The results suggest that the students valued the significance of leadership in teamwork. They elected the person they knew very well; who can guide them in the allocation of tasks and turn-taking and managing group meetings. Leadership skills acquired through teamwork will not only be helpful in students' future group activities but also in their work place.

On Conflict Within the Groups

On conflict within the groups, virtually all members (90%) of the ten groups agreed that there was conflict in their teamwork and it was triggered by such factors as conflict of Interest, behavior regulations, need for consensus, and communication barriers. From the responses of the interviews conducted with members of the group, the following was quoted as typical sources of conflict among the groups.

“Some members were fond of late coming”.

“Time for group meeting is another source of conflict”.

“Members often disagreed on times of meeting”.

“There is the problem of loafers/uncooperative members”.

“There was also the problem of allocation of tasks; that is, who gets what and why”.

One of the things that contributed to the successful implementation of the group task was a well-developed willingness and ability among group members to collaborate in resolving conflict. The groups explained that individuals were able to define clearly the problems that underlie the conflicts that emerged, and selected or developed strategies for bringing about their resolution. For example, they battled for several hours before they could agree on such issues as times for group meetings, lateness, research topic and methodology at the onset of the project.

Conflict Resolution Within the Groups

On how the conflicts were resolved, the ten groups indicated that they typically used the following strategies, among others:

“In terms of tasks, we asked members to voluntarily make their choice, which they complied. Failure to complete the tasks attracted a fine, which members agreed to pay. The fine compelled members to cooperate throughout the project period. With regard to disagreement on choice of research topic, group members debated on many topics and at the end voted on the suggested ones; and we accepted the topic that got the highest vote”.

Four (4) (G, H, I, J) of the ten groups remarked that presentation of the research report to the class was a problem. They noted that:

“Some members argued that they were given large components of the project to present while others were given smaller components. After a lengthy debate, the team leader

was mandated to present the report while two other members were asked to volunteer to support the leader”.

Group E members said they adopted majority vote particularly when most members would not agree with others' views. *Truly, “we based most of our decisions on the opinion of the majority of group members after voting”.* Yet Group H members said they entrusted their decisions to the group who made the final decision on controversial issues.

Group B for instance *“said there were many ways that our group made a final decision and came to agreement on many issues such as the research topic, allocation of tasks. Some of the ways we took decisions include consensus; that is my group members all agree on the final decision through discussion and debate”.* On the other hand, Group C members, while responding to the questionnaire said *“we used compromise at times especially when we were at a deadlock. In other words, through discussion and readjustment of the final plan, group members came to agreement by giving up some of their demands and accepted some members' proposals”.*

All the members of the ten groups seemed to suggest that resolution of their team conflicts promotes significant individual personal growth in that members see themselves as capable of dealing effectively with conflict and interacting positively with others in the process. Groups E & G commented that consequently, *“self-esteem is enhanced; the need to belong is satisfied, and group members experience a kind of bonding that produces unity and cohesiveness”.* The teamwork is seen as creative and the group is seen as something people want to be a part of.

The groups admitted there were conflicts even though most of the time group members either voluntarily took up tasks or agreed to take up tasks allocated to them. Failure to complete tasks assigned or lateness always constituted sources of conflict. They dealt with them by imposing fines, among other strategies, which members complied with.

Benefits of Group-Work

On the advantages of the teamwork, a large number of the students (85%) were of the view that group work was highly beneficial to their academic and professional development. In an interview, Group B & C members said: *“ It was an exercise preparing us for the real world of work because at one point we are going to be working in large organizations with people of diverse backgrounds”.* Others made the following comments: *“We get to understand better and discover our strengths and weaknesses and know how we can tackle them. This made us to open up to other students and learn to communicate with them”.*

The students also claimed that teamwork opened avenues of communication; building trust; developing awareness of self and others. In addition, they said that teamwork developed positive interaction skills; and encouraged quality listening and the use of other communication skills such as intercultural communication skills. The following summarizes the views of all the ten student teams. All the Group members said *“they were involved in defining the research problem, to brainstorm alternative solutions, or to reach a decision through consensus; discussing and resolving a conflict in the group, or to move through successive stages of strategic planning typical of workplace group tasks.”*

Group K members stressed that when *“we engaged in self-observation and contemplation, and then share our thoughts and feelings, we develop self-awareness. We come to understand ourselves by looking inward and recognizing how we feel,*

think, and behave in response to other members and the issue at stake. When we listen to others do the same we expand our understanding of other group members". Yet Group J members were of the view that "the process of the teamwork provides us with frequent opportunities to observe ourselves and others in action, and to begin seeing how we contribute to the success of our group task". In fact someone with whom we thought we had nothing in common surprised the group by exposing an underlying human nature that leads to mutual respect", Team C added.

Another significant benefit of the teamwork that the students identified is that it promotes group interaction. For example Group E members explained that group work brings out and affirms the positive qualities inherent in everyone of us, and allows participants to practice effective modes of communication. They further indicated that it gently forces each member of the group to interact; and as they interacted, they learnt about each other and realized what it takes to relate effectively to other members of the group. In the process, *"we developed positive interaction skills through observing how others feel, think, and behave and comparing these observations to our own feelings, thoughts, and behaviours".* Members of Group B team explained that *"we begin to recognize what is effective - what works and do not work. We identify what others want and need from us in order for the entire group to achieve its goals".*

The power of effective listening has often been stressed as a very significant tool in group communication and conflict management (Cowan, 1995). In the students' teamwork analyzed in this study, students remarked that *"the teamwork provides us with many opportunities to talk while others actively listen".* They pointed out that listening is perhaps the most powerful interaction skill they developed; and through the consistent process of sharing, they developed the ability to clarify their thoughts. A member of Group E clearly summarized this view when he said *"we were encouraged to go deeper, become more creative, find new directions, and face and solve difficult problems that may at other times be hidden obstacles to progress".*

Disadvantages

On the disadvantages of group work, only a small percentage (15%) of the students did not approve of the approach. For example, members of Group C, D, and I in response to the questionnaire said those who did not approve of the approach gave the following reasons:

"We are really interested in things that are done individually and later the teacher assesses them. We only concentrate better when we work on our own. Group work sometimes is stressful; some members do not participate and are rewarded equally with the hardworking ones".

Those that responded negatively in Groups F, H, and J argued that: *"It is a waste of time or that it could be subjective. We prefer working on our own, then any mistake that we make is our own and not everyone else's".*

"Individual work gives each person the opportunity to study at their pace".

"It seems to favour some students at the expense of others".

In order to minimize the negative attitude and prejudice expressed by this group of students, I stressed the significance of teamwork in their future careers, and in the future workplace. I pointed out that I made efforts to be objective and fair in the assessment of the project by paying attention to the groups' records of meetings and portfolio, and reward individuals according to their contributions. The students cooperated with members of their groups after my explanation and persuasion.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to attempt to foster in the first year students of the University of Botswana, communication skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, research and writing skills and conflict management through teamwork, which involved a mini-research project. From the findings, the students highlighted the skills they derived from teamwork. Typical comments made include:

“We get to understand better and discover our weaknesses and strengths and improve. We knew little about other cultures, and how to communicate with our mates; but now we are interested interacting with students from other cultures because they want one to understand ours too”.

The students that believed that the teamwork exercise enabled their group participation added comments such as:

“Some of us never participated in class but due to teamwork we were forced to talk and interact with our mates, and our confidence was boosted”.

“It helps improve our communication skills and we can learn a lot of what is happening out there in real life situation”.

“We learnt a lot on how to resolve conflicts thereby facilitating the group’s task and peaceful co-existence”.

It is obvious that most of the students embraced the idea of using group work approach. They said that teamwork was an enlightening exercise that kept one aware of what is expected in the workplace. The students added that if team work is done often in class it would help prepare them for how to interact with the people in the world of work

The study has indicated clearly a pedagogical approach to the teaching and learning of lifelong skills required of the work place. It fosters conflict resolution skills, leadership skills, interpersonal/intercultural communication, research, writing, and presentation skills, among others. Team work has proved a useful instrument for making learning student-centred and highly enjoyable. Nevertheless, the study is limited to a course at the University of Botswana. Hence future research should focus on the practice and effectiveness in other disciplines.

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About the Author

Dele Olufemi Akindele obtained a PhD with specialization in Discourse Analysis and Sociolinguistics from the University of Nottingham, U.K and M.A. (ESL). His areas of interest include Textlinguistics, Communication Studies, ESL/EFL and Systemic Functional Linguistics. He was formerly a Professor of English Linguistics at National University of Lesotho, having taught for many years at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. He currently teaches communication studies at the University of Botswana. His recent publications include Lumela/Lumela: A socio-pragmatic analysis of Sesotho greetings *Nordic Journal of African Studies* (16), 1, 2007, Thou Shall Use PowerPoint: Students' Use and Abuse of PowerPoint in an ESL Oral Presentation Course *ESP Online Journal*, 2007; and Breaking the Culture of Silence: A pragmatic approach to teaching speaking and writing skills in an ESL Context *Language Culture and Curriculum*, 22 (2) 2008. He is Editor of *LASU: Journal of the Linguistics Association of SADC Universities*. He is author of *Family Conversation, Berlin: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing (2010)*; and co-author of *The Sociology and Politics of English in Nigeria*, Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 1999 and co-editor, *Talking Freedom: Language and Democracy in Southern Africa*, Windhoek: Macmillan Press, 2002.

He can be contacted through his e-mail: olufemiphiladele@yahoo.ca, phone: -267 3555143 and mobile: -267 73294957.