

**The Status of Group Discussion Instructional Strategy Implementation in
Bahir Dar University**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the status of the implementation of group discussion method in Bahir Dar University and thereby identify the opportunities and challenges encountered by instructors while they implement this method. To this end, mixed research design was employed. To obtain relevant data, the Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies department was purposively selected as the department is where the researcher is working. In this department, samples were drawn from instructors using available sampling technique and students using random sampling technique. Close and open ended questionnaire, observation checklist and interview guides were prepared by referring to the literature. Data was presented in tables and analyzed using t-test, frequencies and percentages. The results of the study indicated that there exist both opportunities and challenges of implementing group discussion method in Bahir Dar University. The opportunities include sharing of experiences, collaborative work culture, and positive competition between and among groups, well developed socialization and tolerance of differences in ideas. The major challenges instructors and students faced during group discussion implementation include work load, shortage of instructional time and little interest towards group discussion instructional strategy implementation. On the basis of the findings, appropriate way outs were recommended.

Key Words: Implementation; Group Discussion; Bahir Dar University; Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies; Strategies

Introduction

Background of the Study

Teaching is directed towards educating all children from every walk of life to the benefit of the individual learner in particular and to the community in general. With this understanding of the function of teaching, Ethiopian Education and Training Policy has been implemented with the basic aim of developing the physical and mental

competence of individuals so that to enhance problem solving abilities and critical thinking (Ministry of Education, 1994). To attain the above broad goal of the Education and Training Policy, the nature of teaching-learning strategies utilized play considerable significance. Regarding this, Borich (1988) noted that teaching-learning approaches are means for successful attainment of planned objectives. Among the teaching learning

strategies, group discussion is a much more suitable method to the achievement of educational objectives related to higher order thinking.

A discussion method as to Donald and Cruickshank (1995) is suitable when the purpose is to solve a problem. In these kinds of instructional situations, students could be provided with political, economic and social problems to discuss and resolve cooperatively. Therefore, as to these educators, students should use group discussion when any of the instructional purposes focuses on higher order thinking goals. Consequently, instructors are advised to engage students into group discussion when the instructional goal is to review information, to examine ideas and opinions, to solve problems, to improve oral communication skills, to enhance students' long term memory, high order thinking, attitudinal change or moral reasoning.

According to Staton (1960), more than perhaps any other methods, discussion stimulated every person in the group to do constructive and creative thinking on the subject of discussion. Using this method, students learn not only to accumulate ideas, but also evaluate them and find wider and more practical application of those ideas. Davies (1987) further asserted that group discussion method is important for solving problems, exploring and making decisions. Through group discussion methods, teachers and students join to transform learning in to a process towards building common understanding of a problem situation. Generally, the study focuses on investigating the status of group discussion teaching learning method implementation in Bahir

Dar University particularly in the department of Teacher Education and Curriculum Study.

Statement of the Problem

According to Arends (1994), group discussion is the most preferred method employed by instructors in teaching in focus of higher order thinking goals of instruction. The implementation of this method is hoped to reduce instructors own talk and thereby involve students more actively in thinking. However, some scholars (e.g., Vanments, 1990; Battisken, Solomon & Beluchi, 1993) witnessed the existence of negative side effects of using discussion method, such as aimless rumbling, unnecessary waste of instructional time and become unpleasant as it is poorly conceptualized by instructors and students.

It is difficult for both instructors and students to design and implement group work effectively. Students may get frustrated the group processes especially when they do not have the skills to work with others. Instructors may also fail to understand how students work together, structure time or ways that instructors can help the students. Instructors should make certain that each student understands the assignment, know the purpose of the project, the learning objective and skills that need to be developed through group work. Group discussions become successful if the students know how the assignment is related to the content and what the final project is supposed to be (Davis, 1999).

In addition to the above theoretical background, the researcher was also initiated to focus on this area due to the following

practical challenges encountered during the implementation of group discussion method in the University:

- Students have no motivation working together in group discussion
- Lack of commitment among teachers and students
- Students low participation in group discussion
- Shortage of time
- Work overload of both instructors and students
- Students may discuss their own non-academic issues which have nothing to do with the given points of discussion
- During discussion the group members depend on the respective group leaders.

It is on this background that the researcher is initiated to study the status of group discussion instructional strategy implementation in the department of Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies. To this end, therefore, the following basic questions were set out:

- What is the current status of group discussion instructional strategy implementation in Bahir Dar University?
- What are the possible opportunities of implementing group discussion instructional strategy in Bahir Dar University?
- What are the challenges of implementing group discussion instructional strategy in Bahir Dar University?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to assess the current status of the implementation of group discussion instructional strategy and identify possible opportunities and challenges that may occur during the implementation of group discussion as an instructional strategy.

The specific objectives of the study were:

- To describe both instructors and students effort during the implementation of group discussion instructional strategy
- Examine challenges and opportunities encountered by instructors and students in Bahir Dar University during the implementation of group discussion instructional strategy
- Assess instructors and students attitude towards the implementation of group discussion instructional strategy in Bahir Dar University.

Significant of the Study

The outcomes of this study are hoped to:

- Provide clue for instructors, students, department heads, course chairs, the vice dean and dean of the college and other concerned bodies about the implementation of group discussion instructional strategy.
- Suggest possible solutions on how to eliminate the negative attitudes of instructors and students towards group discussion instructional strategy.
- Be used as an input for large scale future research in the area of group discussion instructional strategy.

Delimitation of the Study

The scope of this study is delimited to the investigation of the implementation of group discussion method, and identification of opportunities and challenges of implementation of group discussion instructional strategy in Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies department of Bahir Dar University.

Limitation of the Study

This paper is strongly limited with lack of relevant articles and books in the area. That is why the researcher mainly based the review on old reference materials.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to assess the status of the implementation of group discussion instructional strategy, and examining opportunities and challenges of students and instructors during the implementation of group discussion instructional strategy. To this end, the researcher employed case study research design. The design was selected as it enables the researcher to assess and described the problem in-depth. As a result, the researcher can learn better from particular cases of group discussion instructional method implementation the case of Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies department of Bahir Dar University more than other designs.

Population, Sample Size and Sampling Technique

In Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies department of Bahir Dar University there were 21 instructors and 111 (66 female and 45 male) students in 2015/2016

academic year. From these, 30 instructors who had taught different subjects of the department were selected using available sampling techniques. Similarly, 56 (36 female and 20 male) students from years one to three were selected from Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies department undergraduate program using simple random sampling technique. The department was selected using purposive sampling technique as students in this department had better understanding of the implementation of group discussion instructional strategy and as a result, they could provide sufficient information about the implementation of group discussion instructional strategy of the University.

Data Gathering Instruments

In this study, the researcher used questionnaire, semi structured interview and participant observation. The questionnaire contains both cloth ended and open ended items, the questionnaire for instructors contains twelve questions of which ten were cloth ended and two were open ended. The questionnaire for students also contains fourteen questions of which thirteen of them were cloth ended and two were open ended. Five semi-structured interview items and ten observation checklist items were also designed. The items focus on the status of implementation, challenges and opportunities of group discussion instructional strategy implementation.

An attempt was also being made to increase the validity and reliability of the instruments. To increase the validity of the instruments, two senior Measurement and Evaluation course instructors of the

University were given both the basic research questions and the instruments. The researcher received comments and revised the tools as per the comments suggested by the experts whereas reliability was checked by distributing the questionnaire items for 30 students of sister departments (Educational Planning and Management). Using Cronbach alpha coefficient 0.85 reliability indexes was found.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected was analyzed using both qualitative analysis techniques and quantitative methods. The qualitative

analysis technique used was an in-depth description vis-à-vis themes adapted from the basic research questions. The quantitative analysis method used was descriptive statics such as one sample t-test and percentage.

Results

This chapter deals with the presentation and analysis of data obtained from instructors and students through both open and close ended items questionnaire, observation checklist and interview. The responses were analyzed and tabulated as follow:

Table 1 – Background of instructor respondents

<i>Category</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>
Sex	Male	24	80%
	Female	6	20%
	Total	30	100%
Year of experience in teaching	1-5 years	4	13.3%
	5-10 years	2	6.7%
	10-15 years	14	46.7%
	15-20 years	4	13.3%
	20-25 years	4	13.3%
	Above 25 years	2	6.7%
	Total	30	100%
Academic qualification	Masters	26	86.7%
	PhD	4	13.3%
	Total	30	100%

As it is disclosed in table 1, 24(80%) of the respondents were male, and 6(20%) were female. As to years of experience in teaching of the respondents, 4(13.3 %) had 1-5 years, 4(13.3%) had 15-20 years, 4(13.3 %) had above 25 years of experience, 2(6.7%) had 5-10 years, 2(6.7%) had above

25 years of experiences, and 14(46-7%) had 10-15 years of experience. On the same table, 26(86.7%) of the respondents had Masters Degree and 4(13.3%) had PhD Degree. The students who participated in this study were 12 (21.4%) male and 44(78.6) of them female.

Table 2 – Opportunities of group discussion method implementation in Bahir Dar University as reported by instructors

Opportunities	N	Expected Mean	Cal. Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	Sig. (2 - tailed)
Small class size is an opportunity of implementing group discussion method	30	2.5	3.53	0.730	29	7.75	.000
All students are actively participating in group discussion	30	2.5	2.20	0.664	29	-2.47	.019
All students are interested in group discussion method implementation	30	2.5	1.93	0.450	29	-6.90	.000
All teachers in the classroom are good facilitators of group discussion method implementation	30	2.5	3.13	0.629	29	5.52	.000

As it is disclosed in table 2, the calculated mean on class size (3.53) is above the test value (2.5). This value is significant at α value of 0.05. That is, small class size is an opportunity of implementing group discussion method in Bahir Dar University. In the same table the respondents indicated students active participant in group discussion was below the expected. That is, the calculated mean (2.20) is below the test value (2.5). This value is significant at α value of 0.05. That is, student active involvement in group discussion method implementation in Bahir Dar University is no more an opportunity. In the same table again, the respondents indicated that they were not interested in group discussion. That

is, the calculated mean (1.93) is below the test value (2.5). This value is significant at α value of 0.05. That is, student interest towards group discussion method implementation in Bahir Dar University is no more an opportunity. In spite of these findings, the respondents disclosed that instructors were competent in facilitating group discussion method implementation. That is, the calculated mean (3.13) is above the test value (2.5). This value is significant at α value of 0.05. The result implies that teacher competence in facilitating group discussion is a good opportunity in group discussion method implementation in Bahir Dar University.

Table 3 – Challenges of group discussion instructional strategy implementation in Bahir Dar University as reported by instructors

Challenges	N	Expected Mean	Cal. Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Scarcity of teaching materials is a challenge in group discussion instructional strategy implementation	30	2.5	2.53	.819	29	.22	.825
Most teachers are not interested in group discussion instructional strategy implementation	30	2.5	2.73	.583	29	2.19	.037
The implementation of group discussion instructional strategy implementation is time consuming	30	2.5	2.53	.900	29	.20	.841
Large class size is a challenge for group discussion instructional strategy implementation	30	2.5	2.47	.973	29	-.19	.852

As it is disclosed in table 3, the calculated mean on instructors' interest towards group discussion instructional strategy implementation (2.73) is above the test value (2.5). This value is significant at α value of 0.05. That is, instructors' interest is a challenge in implementing group discussion instructional strategy in Bahir Dar University. However, scarcity of teaching materials, instructional time consumption, and class size are no more a challenge in implementing group discussion instructional strategy in Bahir Dar University as the calculated means of the three variables have no significant

difference with the test value at α value of 0.05.

In spite of the above findings, interview and open ended questionnaire results indicated that the major challenges in implementing group discussion instructional strategy were scarcity of teaching materials, lack of teacher motivation, shortage of time and work overload of instructors. The researcher felt that the difference between the quantitative and qualitative findings showed that the above variables are still challenges in implementing group discussion strategy though the impact is not significantly below or above the test value in the quantitative explanation.

Table 4 - Students' interest towards group discussion instructional strategy implementation as reported by students themselves

Student Interest	N	Expected Mean	Cal. Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Students like group discussion	56	2.5	3.68	.543	55	16.24	.000

As it is disclosed in table 4, the calculated mean on students' interest towards group discussion instructional strategy implementation (3.68) is above the test value (2.5). This value is significant at α

value of 0.05. That is, most students are in favor of the implementation of group discussion instructional strategy in Bahir Dar University.

Table 5 - Teachers' role in group discussion instructional strategy implementation as reported by students

Teachers' role	N	Expected Mean	Cal. Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Instructors give students good guidance during group discussion instructional strategy implementation	56	2.5	3.36	.554	55	11.59	.000
Instructors initiate students to work in group by creating conducive environment	56	2.5	3.18	.604	55	8.38	.000
Instructors encouraging group discussion in the classroom	56	2.5	3.29	.889	55	6.62	.000

As it is disclosed in table 5, the calculated mean regarding instructors' role of guiding students during group discussion instructional strategy implementation (3.36) is above the test value (2.5). This value is significant at α value of 0.05. That is, the result confirmed that Bahir Dar University instructors provide good guidance service, for example, they move around the class during the implementation of group discussion instructional strategy. It is also confirmed that Bahir Dar University instructors initiate students to work in

groups by creating conducive environment in the class room as the calculated mean (3.18) is greater than the test value (2.5). This value is significant at α value of 0.05. The same tables pointed out instructors encourage students to discuss instructional themes in group as the calculated mean (3.29) is above the test value (2.5). This value is significant at α value of 0.05. This result confirmed that instructors in Bahir Dar University support group discussion in the class room.

Table 6 - Opportunities of group discussion instructional strategy implementation as reported by students

<i>Teachers' role</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Expected Mean</i>	<i>Cal. Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Small class size is an opportunity to implement group discussion instructional strategy	56	2.5	3.29	.803	55	7.33	.000
The way students sit in the classroom doesn't reduce their interest in implementing group discussion	56	2.5	2.50	.786	55	.00	1.000
Instructors usually arrange the classroom in such a way that it is easy for students to interact as a group	56	2.5	3.18	.606	55	8.38	.000

As it is disclosed in table 6, the calculated mean on class size (3.29) and instructors' competence in arranging students' seats conducive to group discussion (3.18) are above the test value (2.5). These values are significant at α value of 0.05. That is, small class size and instructors' competence in arranging students' seats conducive to group

discussion are opportunities in implementing group discussion instructional strategy in Bahir Dar University. Though not significant it is confirmed that the way students sit in the classroom reduces their interest in implementing group discussion instructional strategy in Bahir Dar University.

Table 7 – Points/ themes of discussion as reported by students

<i>Themes of discussion</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Expected Mean</i>	<i>Cal. Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Instructors usually design tasks for a group discussion that are interesting and that stimulate higher order thinking	56	2.5	3.14	.796	55	6.9	.000

As it is disclosed in table 7, the calculated mean regarding the selection of themes for group discussion (3.14) is above the test value (2.5). This value is significant at α value of 0.05. That is, instructors' selection

of themes for group discussion is conducive for generating different perspectives and initiates higher order thinking among members in a group discussion instructional strategy in Bahir Dar University.

Table 8 - Students' participation in group discussion as reported by them

<i>Participation in group discussion</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Expected Mean</i>	<i>Cal. Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Students usually show good participation in group discussion	56	2.5	3.39	.731	55	9.145	.000

As it is disclosed in table 8, the calculated mean regarding students' participation in group discussion (3.14) is above the test value (2.5). This value is significant at α

value of 0.05. That is, students' actively participate in group discussion instructional strategy in Bahir Dar University.

Table 9 – Challenges of group discussion method implementation as reported by students

<i>Challenges of group discussion</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Expected Mean</i>	<i>Cal. Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
An instructor lectures most of his/her instructional time	56	2.5	3.00	1.009	55	3.708	.000
Large class size is a challenge in implementing group discussion	56	2.5	3.25	.958	55	6.857	.000
Students hate turning their faces back to other students behind or toward their side to discuss	56	2.5	2.54	.873	55	.306	.761
In most group discussions, students are not clear with all the given tasks	56	2.5	2.18	.897	55	-2.683	.010

As it is disclosed in table 9, the calculated mean regarding lecturing takes the loins share of the instructional time (3.00) and large class size is a challenge in implementing group discussion (3.25) is above the test value (2.5). This value is significant at α value of 0.05. That is, lecturing and large class sizes are significant challenges in implementing group discussion instructional strategy in Bahir Dar University. It is also true that students'

hatred towards turning their faces back to other students behind or toward their side to discuss (2.54) is greater than the test value (2.5). However, this value is not significant at α value of 0.05. The same table also disclosed that the calculated mean for students misunderstanding of all the given tasks in a group discussion (2.18) is below the test value (2.5). This value is significant at α value of 0.05. That is, the result ensures

that students showed disagreement about the doubtful nature of group discussion tasks.

Moreover, the results of interview and open ended questionnaire data indicated that the major constraining challenge of implementing group discussion instructional strategies were lack of both instructors and students motivation in group discussion, scarcity of instructional materials, negative attitudes of instructors and students towards group discussion instructional strategy, shortage of time and work over load were found the major challenges of implementing group discussion instructional strategy in Bahir Dar University. The result obtained using open ended questionnaire pointed out that shortage of instructional time and work over load were the major challenges in implementing group discussion instructional strategy.

Conclusions

The findings of this study assured the existence of both opportunities and challenges in implementing group discussion instructional strategy. The major opportunities were the culture of sharing experiences in the University, increased socialization and tolerance among different groups of students in the University, students' confidence to freely share their experiences to others, strong communication and listening skills were some to mention. In spite of these, the findings depicted that lack of student interest, low commitment of instructors and students, work over load of instructors and shortage of time were the major challenges that obstruct the implementation of group discussion

instructional strategy in Bahir Dar University.

Recommendations

On the basis of the major findings of this study and the conclusions made thereon, the following recommendations were forwarded.

- To enhance effective implementation of group discussion instructional strategy, department heads, course chairs, and other concerned practitioners should device regular follow up strategies of Bahir Dar University instructors' performance in implementing group discussion instructional strategy.
- Bahir Dar University instructors should convince their respective students to increase their cooperatively working culture during the implementation of group discussion instructional strategy and they should also motivate their respective students using different tactics to work collaboratively
- Bahir Dar University instructors should upgrading and updating their knowledge, skill and attitude towards implementing group discussion instructional strategy through long and short term trainings such as seminar, workshops, summer course, CPD sessions and the like.
- Both Bahir Dar University instructors and students should make use of the available instructional materials more effectively than used to do. That is, they should use enough teaching materials by sharing or exchanging among them.
- Bahir Dar University instructors should encourage their respective students to

- take more responsibility of their own learning.
- Bahir Dar University instructors should be able to initiate their respective students to be active participants in group discussion instructional strategy implementation.
- Bahir Dar University instructors should practice before hand planning, organizing and perform attractive discussion on major instructional themes of their respective courses for their students during group discussion.

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