"The Dream Team:" A Case Study of Teamwork in Higher Education

Tashieka S. Burris-Melville[1,*] & Shalieka T. Burris[2]

[1]Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies, University of Technology, Jamaica

[2]College of Behavioural Sciences, Humanities and Law, University of the Commonwealth Caribbean, Jamaica

*Correspondence: Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies, University of Technology, Jamaica. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5321-8877

Abstract

The integration of collaborative practices in essay writing within higher education constitutes a pivotal advantage, frequently producing outcomes surpassing those of independent composition endeavors. However, although collaboration is necessary and can yield many positive outcomes, a collaborative effort is not always successful. A paucity of empirical studies has highlighted the causes of the dysfunctions of teamwork in Jamaica. In higher education, participants often express frustration and unwillingness to engage in teamwork because of the various dysfunctions they are likely to experience. Consequently, in response to this gap, this case study explored both functional and dysfunctional attributes Academic Writing participants encountered at a university in Jamaica, as they worked collaboratively to complete their expository and argumentative essays. This mixed methods study collected data from interviews, peer reviews, and a questionnaire. The findings identified both functional and dysfunctional qualities. The results showed that the major functional attributes were clear communication, respect, commitment, and accountability. The main dysfunctional attributes were lack of trust, miscommunication, commitment, disrespect, and limited time management skills. Finally, this paper highlights best practices that educators can use to create and promote functional and effective teams in the teaching and learning environment.

Keywords: teamwork, higher education, functional, dysfunctional, collaboration, student success

1. Introduction

1.1 Contextual Background

Collaboration is critical to any organization that expects to achieve positive results. Teamwork is a highly valued skill in the workforce and is used to increase productivity. Teamwork is often used interchangeably with group work, as shown in the work of other scholars. However, while all teams are made up of groups, not all groups are teams. Although teamwork is considered integral to the success of an organization, it is not always achievable and remains elusive as organizations "unknowingly fall prey to the five natural but dangerous pitfalls," which Patrick Lencioni describes as the five dysfunctions of a team (absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results) (Lencioni, 2002, p.187).

Consequently, employees must have the requisite skills to function effectively in cohesive units. Universities in Jamaica are challenged to prepare participants to meet the competitive demands of their respective careers. It is understood that colleges and universities in Jamaica tend to incorporate teamwork in many of their courses. Although this may be commendable, based on experiences, personal observations, and numerous students' complaints, this practice is inadequate. Therefore, educators need to formally guide participants on engaging in teamwork and collaborative activities, which will provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills to create a positive collaborative environment. Additionally, by including teamwork in the learning outcomes, participants will value the process more, not just the final product.

This study emerged from the need to improve the integration and delivery of the teamwork component of academic writing courses at a higher education institution (HEI) in Jamaica. Research has highlighted that many first-year participants entering higher education seem underprepared and find academic writing challenging (Al-Tamimi, 2018; Knight et al., 2018; Twagilimana, 2017). It has also been established in the literature that writing is one of the most

demanding and daunting academic skills to master, especially for non-native speakers of English who struggle with acquiring this skill (Alleyne, 2019; Burris & Burris-Melville, 2020; Burris-Melville, 2020; Smith & Stewart-McKoy, 2019), which is the case with many of the students at the institution. Academics have registered several concerns about participants regarding the lack of critical-thinking skills, coherence in writing, their inability to synthesize and paraphrase, and their inability to use the writing process to aid in the development of their academic writing skills (Bair & Mader, 2013; Burris & Burris-Melville, 2020; Sedigheh & Hussin, 2017; Twagilimana, 2017). Additionally, researchers have highlighted grammar-related deficiencies, poor vocabulary, lack of organizational skills, and locating and documenting sources (Burris & Burris-Melville, 2020; Smith & Stewart-McKoy, 2017; Wahyuni, 2015).

Since many participants struggle with many aspects of academic writing, the researchers decided on a collaborative approach in the delivery of the writing courses (English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Academic Writing 1(AW1), and Academic Writing 11(AWII)) to enhance their academic writing development. The collaborative writing approach is one in which participants work in teams to go through the writing process (Luna & Ortiz, 2013). There has been a significant shift from personal writing to collaborative writing. The labor market requires skills from graduates, including teamwork (Jääskelä et al., 2018; Teo, 2019). Therefore, the expectation is for HEIs to prepare students to meet the demands of the workforce by engaging them in collaboration (Jääskelä et al., 2018). Storch (2019) intimated that collaborative writing in the workplace is preferred over individual writing.

Research has shown that collaborative writing positively affects learners, enhancing students' academic written production (Luna & Ortiz, 2013; Mulligan & Garofalo, 2011). A collaborative approach aids in promoting student interaction in the classroom and minimizes participants' writing apprehension levels (Mulligan & Garofalo, 2011; Poonpon, 2017). By participating in teamwork, students' awareness of the organizational and syntactical elements can be raised, which may not be observed or achieved if they work individually (Mulligan & Garofalo, 2011). Students who approach writing tasks in teams will likely benefit from each other, especially those with higher writing proficiency; thus, through the peer editing process, they will receive more meaningful feedback on grammar, vocabulary, organization, and content. Studies have also confirmed that learners who wrote their essays using the collaborative approach produced higher grades and greater grammatical accuracy than those who worked independently (Mulligan & Garofalo, 2011). The emphasis that has been placed on teamwork stems from the expectation that graduates will be able to solve real-world problems through the skills they would have learned from engaging in teamwork in higher education (Prada et al., 2022). However, one of the major issues identified when collaborative assessments are introduced is the lack of guidance learners receive (Riebe et al., 2016).

Participants enrolled in the academic writing courses were required to work in teams to complete their expository and argumentative essays. The researchers provided formal weekly guidance on team dynamics to promote and nurture effective team membership. Additionally, participants evaluated themselves and their peers using a peer review questionnaire, and their lecturer also evaluated them based on their roles and responsibilities in their teams. Therefore, this study's primary objective is to explore the fundamental tenets of effective teamwork in higher education. The insights gathered from this study will have implications for successfully integrating teams into the broader university community.

1.2 Research Questions

Lencioni (2002), Pineda et al. (2009), and Tripathy (2018) underscored the importance of teamwork, especially since a considerable amount of time is spent working in teams and groups in universities and organizations. This importance, however, may not be shared by all participants. The idea of teamwork often elicits predominantly negative reactions. Research also shows several potential problems that result from working in teams (Lencioni, 2002; Sandoff & Nilsson, 2016). Considering the divergent views and attitudes toward working in teams and what contributes to team effectiveness, the following research questions were framed to guide our study:

- What are the qualities associated with a functional and dysfunctional team?
- What are the participants' perceptions of teamwork?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Teamwork

Though widely used, teamwork is complex and challenging to describe and achieve. However, a common description of the phenomenon by scholars throughout the literature presents teamwork as a cooperative effort that allows individuals who are working together to achieve common goals through the sharing of knowledge and skills (Chan & Pheng, 2018; Driskell et al., 2018; Katzenbach & Smith, 2015; Sanyal & Hisam, 2018). A team usually consists of

two or more individuals who perform interdependent tasks and activities to accomplish a shared mission.

2.2 Stages of Team Development

There are various stages involved in the development of a team. Tuckman's (1965) team development model is the most predominantly used framework to explain what a team does, how the team process works, and how team members relate to each other. The initial model proposed by Tuckman included four stages, forming, storming, norming, and performing, but was later revised to include the adjourning or mourning stage (see Figure 1) (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). The model presents a comprehensive description of the stages a team goes through from the very inception to the completion of the team activity. According to Tuckman (1965), a team must reach the performing stage to be successful or effective. However, some teams might never progress beyond the forming stage, and the movement from one stage to another may depend on the team type, composition, and leadership (Tuckman, 1965). This model is helpful in understanding and shaping successful team development.
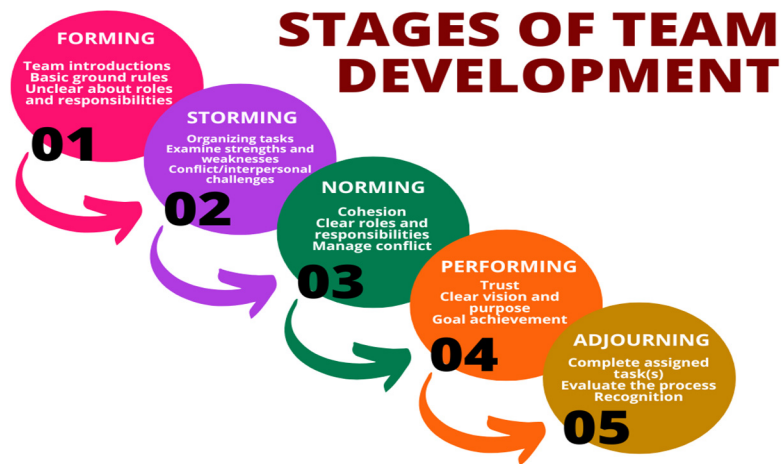

Figure 1. Tuckman's Model of Team Development

Source: Adapted from Tuckman and Jensen (1977)

2.3 Students' Attitudes toward Teamwork

The mention of teamwork usually elicits a range of attitudes, experiences, and perceptions from people, including university students. Although many students admit teamwork is essential, they still prefer working alone. The Student Engagement Insights survey results indicated that 64% of undergraduate students prefer to work on tasks individually, 23% are willing to work with a partner, and the remaining 10% stated their preference to work with groups of three or more (Chan & Pheng, 2018). Additionally, Chan and Pheng (2018) indicated that students had positive and negative attitudes toward group work. Some students have reported that participating in group work has made them more confident (Chan & Pheng, 2018).

Moreover, they also noted that students experienced more social and academic involvement and development after working in groups. Conversely, serious concerns and challenges were noted, as 90% of the participants in the study indicated that they had an issue with team members being free riders. Rees (2009) also found that many students expressed enthusiasm and preference for group work over individual work. They view teamwork as an effective and beneficial teaching and learning tool. However, in their study, only a small percentage disliked teamwork. Pineda et al. (2009), in their study of student perceptions of teamwork, identified cultural and situational factors as possible reasons for teamwork challenges. Their study, which collected data from United States (US) and Lithuanian students, found that the US group had fewer positive attitudes about teamwork than the Lithuanian group. According to Pineda et al. (2009), a possible explanation is that US students belong to a society that values individualism. The Lithuanian students also had a chance to form groups and informal groups early on in their program and used the same groups in several classes. This factor could also impact the positive attitude toward teamwork. Nonetheless, both groups reported that there are challenges associated with teamwork.

2.4 Functions and Dysfunctions of a Team

"Teamwork makes the dream work," "Together everyone achieves more," Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much" are some of the quotes used to capture the relevance and benefits of working collaboratively as a team. Lencioni (2002) identified teamwork as a powerful tool with a competitive advantage. Although the benefits of working in a team are numerous, there are also many challenges. These challenges are referred to as dysfunctions. Absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results are five dysfunctions of a team illustrated by Lencioni as a model for organizations to understand and overcome. These dysfunctions are all connected and related to each other. The dysfunctions were presented by Lencioni in the form of a pyramid (Figure 2) to convey their interrelatedness and hierarchical nature (Neatby et al., 2013).

Figure 2. Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team

Adapted from Lencioni (2002).

In the study by Chan and Pheng (2018), students mentioned that a lack of commitment was an issue among teams. This dysfunction is described as members being "free riders." This issue is a recurring theme in other studies. Frith (2017) highlighted that in a survey of about 2000 employees, less than half (49%) did not enjoy working in teams primarily because of its associated challenges. Among the challenges noted were freeloaders who failed to pull their weight, individuals engaged for their own benefit, conflict, they had to manage the egos of their teammates, and others were holding them back. Tucker and Abbasi (2016) also mentioned that one of the dysfunctional attributes noted by students is that there were social loafers in their team, and this caused strain on the group. Unequal distribution of workload contribution, poor engagement and communication, and poor work quality were also cited as factors that negatively affected team dynamics and success (Clack, 2018; Tucker & Abbasi, 2016). Moreover, Pfaff and Huddleston (2003) also revealed that social loafing significantly predicted students' attitudes toward teamwork.

Figure 3. Lencioni's Five Behaviors of a Winning Team

Adapted from Lencioni (2002).

Functional teams require members to "practice a small set of principles over a long period of time" (Lencioni, 2002, p. 220). Teamwork can be successful if leaders acknowledge and understand Lencioni's five dysfunctions. Therefore, Lencioni's (2005) work sought to provide practical guidance on measures that team members can implement to

overcome the five dysfunctions. Trust among team members, engagement in debates and healthy conflicts, committing to decisions and plans of action, holding members accountable, and a focus on the achievement of collective results are the five behaviors that form the framework of Lencioni's model (Figure 3) of authentic and successful team development (Lencioni, 2002; Sanyal & Hisam, 2018).

Frith's (2017) findings were also aligned with Lencioni's model. Employees identified mutual respect, having a common goal, and having clearly defined roles and responsibilities as keys to a winning team.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed methods case study design. A case study design is appropriate when researchers aim to provide a more in-depth description and understanding of a phenomenon within a particular context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mills & Gay, 2019; Rashid et al., 2019; Schoch, 2020). The researchers used a convergent mixed methods approach to merge the qualitative and quantitative data collected simultaneously (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The convergent method allowed the researchers to comprehensively analyze the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This case was chosen because teamwork and collaborative learning have become central pedagogical tools in higher education, although many participants detest working in teams. A pictorial summary of the research design is illustrated in Figure 4.
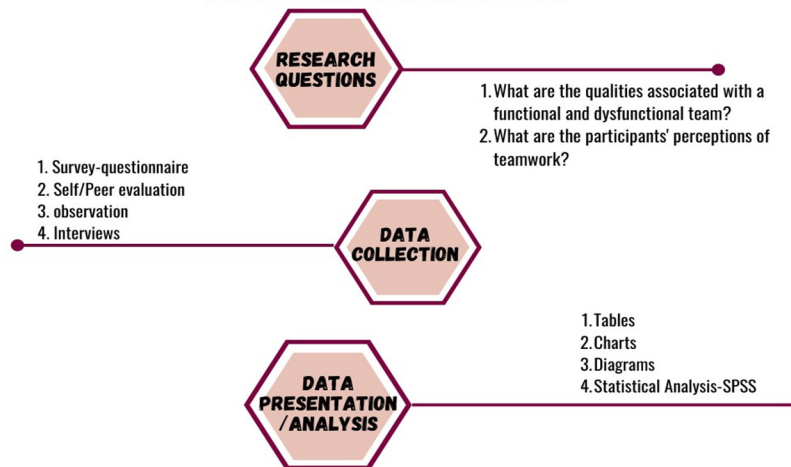

Figure 4. Research Design

3.2 Participants

The research was conducted at a private urban university in Jamaica. This case study included first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year undergraduate participants enrolled in EAP, AWI, and AWII courses in the fall, spring, and summer semesters of the 2020/2021 academic year. Participants pursuing these courses were required to produce an expository or argumentative essay at the end of the course, which comprised 35% of their final grade. The participants were assigned to teams to complete the collaborative writing assessment. We chose to use an instructor-assigned approach for two significant reasons. First, most participants preferred to join a group with a classmate they did not know. Results from a study on collaborative learning practices reported that learners saw friendship in teamwork as a barrier to effective collaboration (Le et al., 2018). The students explained that if their friend did not produce the desired work, it was difficult to criticize them as they did not want to ruin the friendship (Le et al., 2018). Second, the researchers intended to present a real-world experience, given that employees are not always consulted about who they want to work with. In addition, we wanted groups to comprise different genders, majors, and year levels. Maximizing the heterogeneity of instructor assignment of teams is deemed effective (Burke, 2011).

There were 324 teams combined in all three courses. Each team consisted of four participants. At the undergraduate

level, teamwork skills are not fully developed by learners. Consequently, facilitating teams of between three and five participants is ideal, as smaller teams promote equal participation (Wilson et al., 2018). Of the 324 teams, 100 teams consented to participate in the study. However, based on observations and interactions with the teams, we identified and selected 36 highly successful and 36 dysfunctional teams from each course (EAP, AWI, AWII) over the three semesters, making it a total of 72 teams. All participants signed a consent form and knew they could opt out of the study at any time without any negative implications on their success rate in the courses. In groups of four, participants had to develop a pre-writing and sentence outline, including references, before eventually producing the completed essay. See Table 1 for writing tasks and timeline.

Table 1. Team/Writing Tasks

Stages	Description of Activities	Output and Feedback
Team assignments	Assigned participants to groups Participants have an initial meeting which includes: 1. Establishing a communication channel 2. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of each team member	Assign roles based on team members' strengths and preferences.
1. Assignment of team roles and responsibilities	Team leader, editor, and APA roles are assigned.	Written and video feedback are provided on the topic and thesis.
2. Planning and group work	The group decides on the essay topic/prepares the prewriting outline.	
Group writing: Drafting	Topic sentences/supporting evidence APA title page (outline) Introduction/conclusion	Detailed feedback is given to the group via Google doc/Moodle Group consultation/sessions are held
Editing/Proofreading Stage	Areas to examine: Grammar Organization Content APA	In groups, feedback is provided to the teams' drafts/paragraphs.

Participants were encouraged to assign team roles- team leader, editor, and APA leader. The researchers dedicated 10-15 minutes each week to guide the participants on team dynamics, principles, and skills needed to experience a successful team. During this segment, participants were allowed to share their team progress and indicate if they were experiencing challenges that may require the researchers' intervention. These challenges were addressed during the researchers' virtual office hours.

Additionally, the participants got the opportunity each week to meet in breakout rooms via the Zoom web conferencing tool in their assigned teams to work on activities relating to their final assignments. The participants were also expected to meet at least once outside the class session to work on their collaborative assessment.

3.3 Data Triangulation

The researchers utilized multiple data sources to collect data to ensure data triangulation. One of the major ways validity is added to a study is by including several data sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These included an observation form, interview protocol, self and peer evaluation sheet, and a questionnaire. The researchers observed how the participants interacted with each other during their team meetings in their respective breakout rooms. Additionally, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews. Additional questions were asked based on some of the responses provided by the participants. Each team was interviewed once in a virtual format. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interview sessions were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The participants were required to assess their contribution and the contribution of the other members of their teams at the end of the

course using a self and peer evaluation tool provided by the researchers.

The researchers also sought to gather information on participants' perceptions of teamwork using an online questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section 1, comprising six questions, collects general demographic information about the participants. Section 2 examined participants' perceptions of teamwork employing Likert-type questions. In section 3, the participants were required to respond to closed-ended questions addressing their effectiveness in team settings.

4. Findings

The demographic data revealed that of 285 participants, most were females (87%). A great number of the participants (40%) were noted to be in the age group of 31-40 years, with the least number of participants (2.5%) aged 51-60 years. Fifty-nine percent are in their first year of university, 28% are in their second year, 11% are in their third year, and 2% are in their fourth year and up. It was found that a majority of the participants are employed (86%), and the majority (79%) are also studying on a part-time basis. Ten percent of the participants have completed the course EAP, 38% are from AWI, and 52% are from AWII.

4.1 Perception of Teamwork

Figures 5 and 6 show the extent to which the participants favored teamwork and their reaction when they learned they would be working collaboratively. In Figure 5, many participants (42%) are neutral about favoring teamwork. Similarly, Figure 6 shows that most participants (149) are also neutral about reacting to teamwork. On the contrary, 20% of the participants dislike working in a group for the class. Figures 5 and 6 show the breakdown of the participants' views.
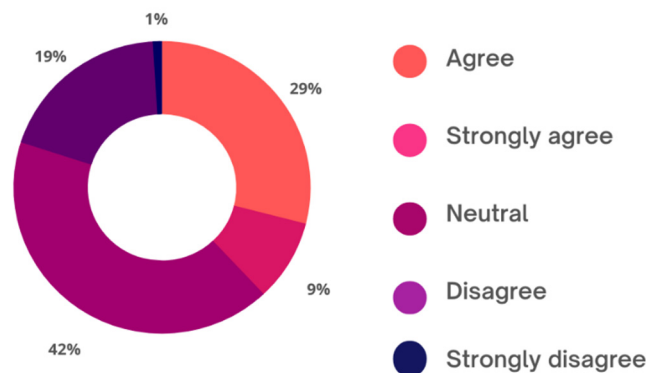

Figure 5. Participants' Preferences for Working in Teams

Figure 6. The Reactions of Participants When Learning They Are Working in Teams

Figure 7 highlights the number of courses the participants have engaged in that utilized teamwork. The results revealed that one to six courses engage participants in collaborative group assignments. Many of the participants (52%) have engaged in one to three courses with a teamwork component.
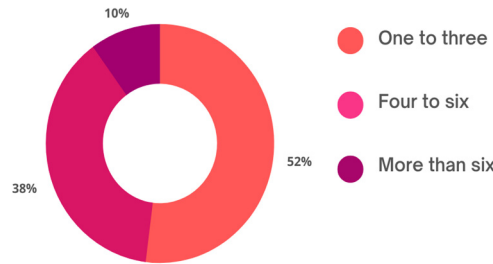
Figure 7. Number of Courses Utilizing Teamwork

The participants also shared their perceptions of teamwork following their involvement in the academic writing courses. The data revealed that many of the participants (135) agreed that participating in the writing courses changed their perception of teamwork. In Figure 8, a breakdown of the results is shown.
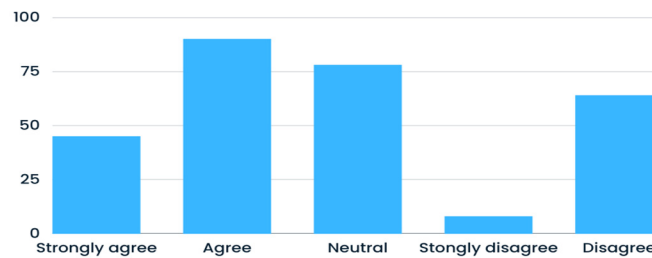

Figure 8. Participants' Perception of Teamwork Based on Engagement in Academic Writing Courses

Figure 9 addresses the participants' perceptions of whether lecturers and facilitators should teach teamwork skills and dynamics. An overwhelming majority (67%) of the participants acknowledged that teamwork skills/dynamics should be taught by lecturers/facilitators.
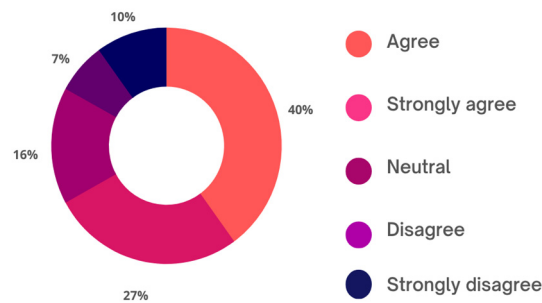

Figure 9. Perception of Whether or Not Teamwork Skills Should Be Taught

When asked about team members' clarity regarding their roles and responsibilities, the data revealed that 187 participants believed they had clarity about their roles and responsibilities. However, some participants did not agree that team members had a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. See Figure 10 for the results.
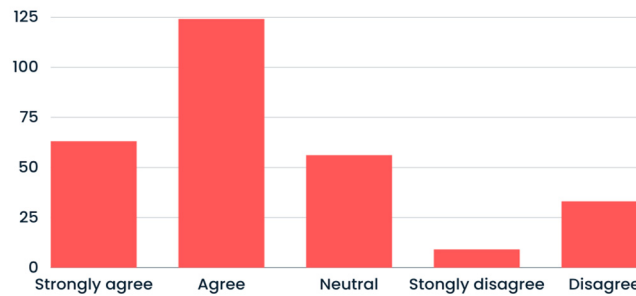
Figure 10. Participants' Perceptions of the Clarity of the Roles and Responsibilities of Team Members

The participants also shared their perceptions of whether team members trusted each other. Figure 11 shows that most of the participants (42%) are undecided; 40% agreed that team members trusted each other, and 18 % disagreed that there was trust among members.
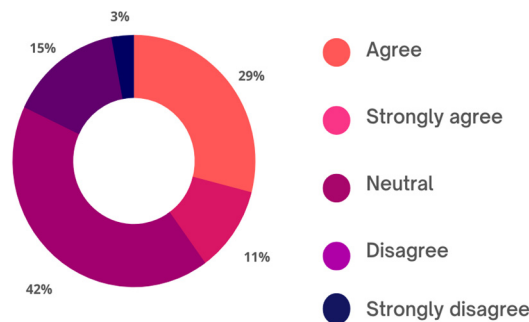

Figure 11. Team Members Revealed Whether or Not There Was Trust in Their Teams

The participants were asked whether effective mechanisms were established to address conflict within their teams. The data revealed that most participants (132) agreed that mechanisms were in place for conflict resolution. Figure 12 illustrates the complete findings.
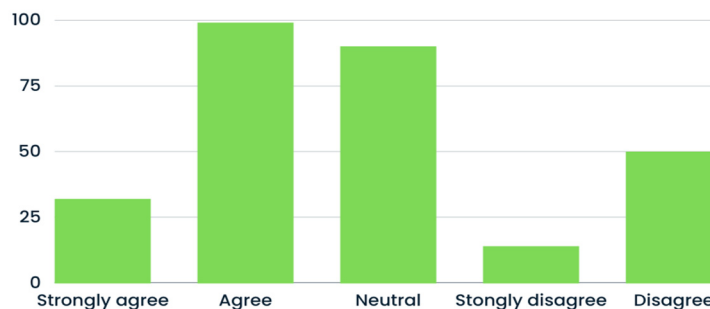

Figure 12. Participants' Perceptions of Effective Mechanisms Established for Conflict Resolution in Their Teams

Figure 13 illustrates the participants' perceptions of whether they believe team members are held accountable for their decisions. Surprisingly, most participants (66%) revealed that team members are held accountable for their decisions.
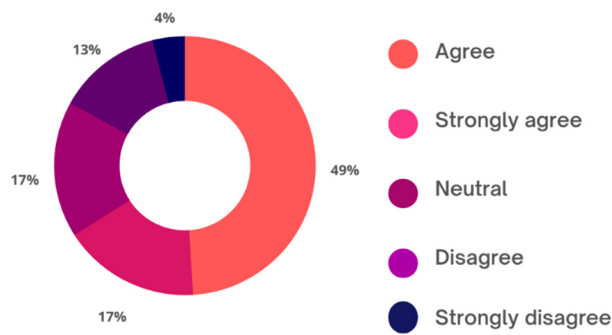
Figure 13. Team Members Are Held Accountable for Decisions Made in a Team

The participants believed that, for the most part (187), the workload was distributed equally and fairly in their teams. Figure 14 displays the distribution based on the participants' perceptions.
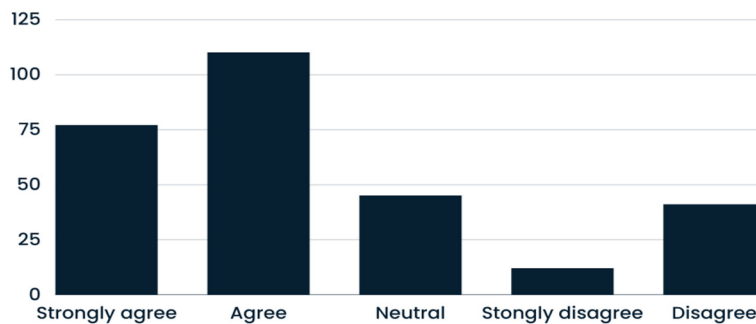
Figure 14. Distribution of Workload

In Figure 15, the participants revealed whether communication was done promptly and effectively. The results showed that some participants believed that teams had good communication, while others did not believe that their teams communicated effectively and timely.

Figure 15. Timely and Effective Communication

Most participants responded positively to the idea that each team member ensured the assignment was completed. Figure 16 presents this finding.

Figure 16. Completion of Assignment

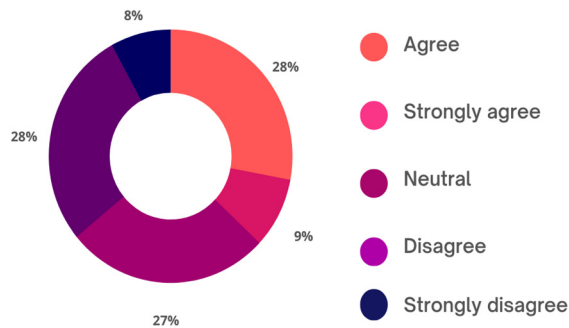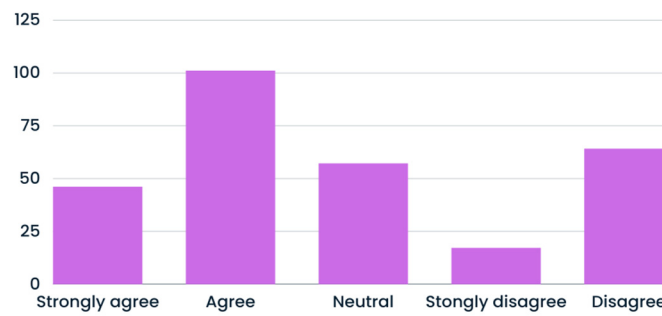In Figure 17, the participants highlighted that team members supported each other's roles and responsibilities when completing an assignment. However, some team members were not supportive.
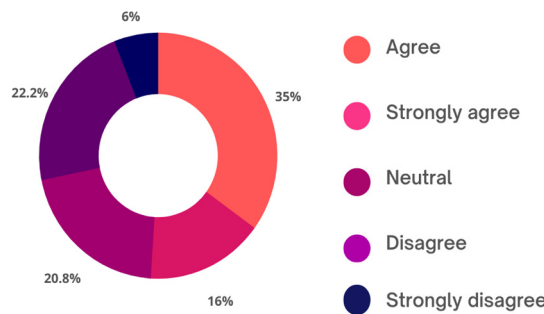

Figure 17. Participants' Perceptions of Team Members' Support of Roles and Responsibilities

4.2 Identifying Qualities of Functional and Dysfunctional Teams

Table 2. Codes and Themes Identified from Data Analysis

Codes	Themes	Total n of References
Cooperation	Functional	25
Respectful	Functional	20
Communicated well	Functional	19
Meet deadlines	Functional	17
Social loafer	Dysfunctional	21
Accountability	Functional	13
Unresolved conflict	Dysfunctional	23
Positive feedback	Functional	16
Effective	Functional	33
Little cohesion	Dysfunctional	29
Inflexible	Dysfunctional	25
Fair workload distribution	Functional	36
Valuable	Functional	23
Undefined roles	Dysfunctional	32
Hardworking	Functional	29
Collaborative	Functional	31
Failure to listen	Dysfunctional	16
Lack of communication	Dysfunctional	22
Disrespect	Dysfunctional	35
Absence of Trust	Dysfunctional	31
Failure to meet deadlines	Dysfunctional	33
No accountability	Dysfunctional	27

The researchers used the NVivo software to provide a thematic analysis of the interview data to answer research question two. Responses to each question were grouped and coded to provide emerging themes. The participants' responses to peer reviews and the researchers' observations of the collaborative groups also accounted for emerging themes. The themes identified are, therefore, a result of the most expressed views of the participants, along with the peer reviews and observation notes. Table 2 captures the themes that emerged from the data.

4.3 Attributes of Functional Teams

Clear and effective communication, respect, fair distribution of workload, accountability, and good leadership were found to contribute to the success of functional teams. It was evident that communication and respect played a role in the teams' success. Most participants from the 36 successful teams concurred that their team worked effectively because they communicated regularly and promptly. They also displayed mutual respect and valued the opinions of each team member.

One participant highlighted *my group was cooperative, respectful of each other's opinions, and communicated well.* Another shared that *members were very respectful and communicated well. They completed assignments on time and offered meaningful feedback. Overall, we were effective.* Additionally, another participant mentioned that the team was a *highly effective group* as *they completed the tasks on time and communicated well. They were respectful to each other* and *contributed adequate development to the paragraph.*

The participants also underscored the importance of effective leadership in a team setting. *Our group leader was a very good one and was very valuable to our group. He was very respectful and valued the input of all team members.* One participant noted that their team leader was instrumental in assigning tasks, so the workload was distributed evenly. *Our team leader assigned us tasks and ensured that our work was completed correctly and efficiently to have it submitted on time.*

One team highlighted that even though they had a social loafer, by holding the team member accountable, they were able to be successful. *We had a very effective group. We had a team member who was a social loafer, but we did everything as a team to work with her and hold her accountable.* The participants also noted that they achieved success because they were able to collaborate effectively because each member completed their assigned task. *Our group worked assiduously and in unison to complete this assignment on time. Each member contributed fairly and participated equally in the decision-making processes. Our group was very effective! All members completed their assigned tasks. We communicated at least once per week and used online collaborative tools, so we all had access to the project simultaneously and were determined to complete our assigned tasks. All members were forthcoming with information and met the required deadlines.*

4.4 Attributes of Dysfunctional Teams

Other groups of participants noted severe challenges that affected their teams and, in some cases, the overall output of the assignment. The primary dysfunctions noted were miscommunication, disrespect, lack of commitment, unresolved conflicts, absence of trust, and lack of effective leadership. Regarding communication, 22 references were made to a lack of communication in the team context. Some participants highlighted that they *didn't have much communication at first,* and *after the outline submission, we did, except for one group member.* However, even after the outline submission, *there was still not much communication. The submission wasn't on time. I had to keep begging for the group members to communicate.* Another member noted that *there was little to no communication in the group.*

Others shared that *communication was not effective* in their teams, and in one instance, a team member said *I had issues with one of my group members. We were not able to communicate with her, and while we were discussing and assigning tasks, she was never around to share her ideas or thoughts. As a result of her not communicating with the group, I wasn't sure if the task given to her would be completed, so I had to do other areas that weren't assigned to me in case she never showed up. I contacted her three days prior to the submission date, and she sent her portion of the essay.*

The researchers identified other teams with multiple dysfunctional traits based on observations. These findings were also supported in the interviews conducted. The participants noted that poor, ineffective, and lack of leadership influenced the overall teamwork experience. *The team leader speaks to other group members about an issue rather than addressing it with the specific team member involved. This is disrespectful.* Additionally, *group members identify the leader as very demanding.* Moreover, members noted that *no team leader was identified, and as such, there were problems with defining roles and responsibilities in the groups.* Other group members *abhorred resentment against the team leader. A few group members do not feel valued because they are constantly asked to*

make corrections.

Other participants alluded that their teams failed because team members were disrespectful and did not trust each other. *Our group is very dysfunctional because the members are very disrespectful. There is no I in team, and we were supposed to be working like a team, but that did not happen.* Others stated that their teams were ineffective due to *issues of disrespect.* In addition, participants indicated that there was a lack of commitment and accountability among members of the team. *My team member's behaviour was definitely detrimental to the team. This was displayed early when the group was presented with the first assignment provided by the lecturer. Not only did she not complete the assignment, but she also did not immediately take accountability for her actions when we met with our lecturer regarding the issue. For the final assignment, there was not much improvement in her attitude towards the task, and based on her character, she appeared as though she was not interested in completing the work.*

Similarly, other participants shared that *little or no contribution was made by the members of the team.* A lack of commitment was also evident in a team where a member noted that *completing tasks is an issue, as well as getting them done on time.* Due to the social loafing evident in the team, other members noted that *other members were pressured and stressed with more work.* Several other participants noted that *members are not willing to contribute but want to be assigned a grade. It's challenging to get people to participate when they have little or no interest in teamwork.* Furthermore, participants highlighted that the *lack of clarity and focus contributed to the poor performance of the team. It was obvious there was very little cohesion. During the team meetings, members were not on the same page; they had individual documents, and they were blaming each other for their mediocre performance.*

Unresolved conflict is another primary dysfunction experienced by the participants. One member revealed that *unresolved conflicts affected the team and created resentment among each other.* Another member recalled her experience of working with the team as *everyone being kneaded out of the same dough but not baked in the same oven. This is a quote I have always heard, but it was never meaningful to me until now. This quote is a perfect way to explain my experience with the group that I was assigned to. It was not always easy to remain rational because of the different personalities, and no one is willing to be the bigger person.* Team members were also unwilling to listen to each other, which resulted in conflict. *We have started our outline; however, based on the narrowed topic that was chosen, we will not find sufficient information to write the complete essay, not even enough for the sentence outline. "Overpopulation in Haiti" I have been trying to explain to them that I don't believe it makes sense to select that topic, and I will not be able to write about it. I sent several messages to the group asking for us to change it. However, the leader insisted on having a Zoom meeting today. Maybe I am overthinking, but if it is just the outline and we are having these issues, I would prefer to change before the stress starts.*

Other participants made several requests to join another group because they could not address the challenges being encountered. *Miss, I beg you. Please switch me. Could you please allow me to join another group? Miss, if it is not too much, I would appreciate it if I could be assigned to another group because things are not working out in my current group.*

5. Discussion

Teamwork assessment is widely utilized in HEIs. Despite the increase in teamwork integration in the curricula, employers continue to emphasize that graduates are unprepared to function effectively in team settings (Paguio & Jackling, 2016; Riebe et al., 2016; Strang, 2022). Consequently, this study sought to determine the qualities of a "dream" team and the dysfunctional attributes that lead to failure in teamwork. Additionally, a survey was used to explore students' perceptions of teamwork in higher education. Introducing a teamwork component into a writing course has unearthed interesting and surprising perceptions from the academic writing participants. Overall, the study's results align with previous studies on using teamwork assessments in higher education.

Most of the responses from the participants revealed that they are neutral about working in teams, which means they neither agree nor disagree about favoring teamwork or reacting positively to it. However, although they presented a neutral reaction to working in teams, most participants agreed that working collaboratively would be more effective with proper guidance from their lecturers during the teamwork process. Some participants recognized and acknowledged that the academic writing courses the researchers taught assisted with increasing their teamwork skills and fostering a positive attitude towards teamwork.

5.1 Successful Teams

Teamwork is a complex phenomenon; however, having a clearly defined structure sets the stage for effective teamwork. Successful teams have a clear purpose, established roles, and a formal communication system. Successful

teams are comprised of members who recognize the value they contribute to their teams and are eventually satisfied with the outcome of their work. Based on the results presented, the successful teams valued and practiced attributes that align with existing literature. From the interviews, team members shared that they established the importance of communication, respect, and valuing others' ideas and perspectives in their initial meetings. The team members were happy to attend team meetings as there was positive energy and a high level of respect.

The results show that the highly successful teams not only developed an attitude to produce results, but they also recognized that they all have different personalities, which would require them to consider the feelings of others. Interestingly, the participants were not formally introduced to group emotional intelligence; however, it was evident in these successful teams. It was highlighted that for teams to work effectively, members must be aware of the emotions of the group and use their own interpersonal skills to benefit the group (Druskat & Wolff, 2015; Gantasala, 2015; Gersdorf-Van den Berg et al., 2022; Greaves & Watkins, 2021).

It is evident that the successful teams understood the value of team spirit and tried to build camaraderie. The value of team spirit in an effective team is also shared by Gersdorf-Van den Berg et al. (2022), who concurred with the present study that when members take into consideration the feelings of others and are sensitive to each other, team members have a shared sense of community. This study also has similar results to Lencioni's (2002) and Gersdorf-Van den Berg et al. (2022) studies, highlighting characteristics needed to build communication. These attributes include:

- Respect
- Personal and shared drive
- Shared ability to overcome challenges
- Shared sense of accomplishment
- Team spirit
- Trust
- Commitment
- Accountability
- Healthy conflict
- Effective leadership

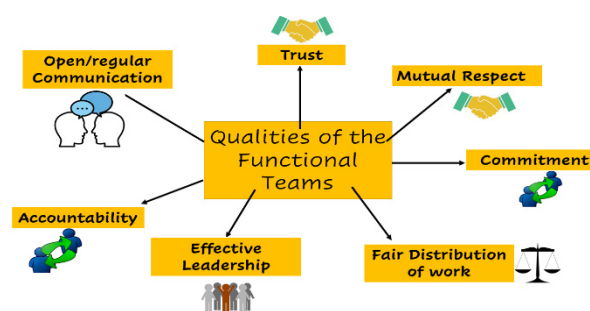Figure 18 presents the qualities of a highly successful team identified in the present study.

Figure 18. Qualities of a Functional Team

Even though the highly successful teams exhibited the qualities of a functional team above, one team member started as a social loafer in at least one case. However, the team members showed a willingness to hold the member accountable, which Druskat and Wolff (2015) and Lencioni (2002) intimated establishes respect and alleviates a problem quickly. This team also showed that they had the flexibility to address a concern and work on issues that could lead to conflicts. Furthermore, the team did not report experiencing any other challenge with that team member, so accountability and steps were taken to perform well.

5.2 Unsuccessful Teams

Dysfunction in a team environment is unsurprising, as humans are inherently flawed (Lencioni, 2002). Dysfunctional

teams often have problems working together, affecting their project's output and morale. Findings from this study revealed that the unsuccessful teams lacked a shared vision and were not focused or committed, which resulted in mediocre performance on team tasks. An interesting observation is that the dysfunctional teams did not make an effort to establish clear roles and responsibilities. No one wanted to accept the team leader role, and no one was appointed. Consequently, each team member expected the other to initiate communication and tasks.

Burke (2011) also agreed that dysfunctional teams often have limited motivation and strong leadership skills. One of the major issues found in ineffective teams was social loafing. Members complained bitterly about the lack of effort shown. This finding is in keeping with other studies addressing teamwork, which have noted that social loafing contributes to unproductivity among teams (Aggarwal, 2023; Mihelič & Culiberg, 2019; Ying et al., 2014). See Figure 19 for an outline of the major dysfunctions found in the current study. Some of the dysfunctional attributes found in this study concur with Lencioni's (2002) seminal work on the five dysfunctions of a team.
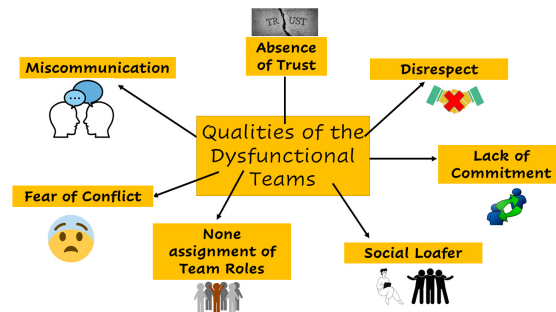

Figure 19. Qualities of a Dysfunctional Team

5.3 Students' Perceptions

The study's findings confirm participants' mixed perceptions of their teamwork experiences. Although they recognize the value of teamwork, the challenges associated with working collaboratively have led them to perceive teamwork negatively. Therefore, even though the participants are aware of the benefits associated with teamwork, they still prefer to work alone due to the frustration of working with others with different personalities and styles, schedules, and levels of commitment. This finding aligns with other studies also highlighting that students know the importance of teamwork, but there is still a preference to work independently (Chan & Pheng, 2018; Rudawska, 2017; Sachdeva et al., 2015). Notwithstanding, some participants have positive experiences of the teamwork process, shaping positive perceptions for them. Some view the teamwork process as an ability to share ideas, exchange knowledge, and enhance skills through learning from each other. Additionally, the students' perceptions regarding the lack of guidance from faculty concur with the view of employers that graduates are not prepared to function effectively in team-oriented situations (Lazíková et al., 2022; Paguio & Jackling, 2016; Prada et al., 2022; Riebe et al., 2016).

6. Limitations

It must be noted, however, that perception studies have certain limitations that might affect responses. Participants may provide answers that are desirable to the researchers, or they may not accurately recall their experiences. Furthermore, participants may have preconceived notions or expectations about the research topic. Additionally, the study's population is limited to three academic writing groups in a private higher education institution, so the findings may not be transferable to other universities in Jamaica.

7. Conclusion

The ability to work effectively in teams has become an increasingly important demand within the workforce. As a result, HEIs have implemented a teamwork component in one or more courses to foster the development of collaborative skills. However, the current study has found that participants do not believe educators formally guide them in understanding the skills needed to function effectively when working with others. Notwithstanding, most participants noted that the courses offered by the researchers helped them develop teamwork skills to function in their teamwork assignments. The current study highlighted functional and dysfunctional attributes among undergraduate participants in a higher education institution. Highly functional teams experienced trust, transparent

and regular communication, respect, accountability, and effective team leadership. In contrast, an absence of trust, disrespect, lack of commitment, social loafing, and fear of conflict, among others, were identified among dysfunctional teams. Consequently, it is crucial for HEIs not merely to integrate teamwork assignments but to spend quality time fostering the development of teamwork skills to prepare graduates for the professional world.

8. Recommendations

The literature has established that teamwork components must be introduced to learners before collaborative assessments can be effectively incorporated into courses. Having engaged in this study, the researchers gathered significant insights that they intend to utilize in integrating teamwork into the curriculum. They could also prove helpful to other faculty when developing instructional and pedagogical strategies for teaching teamwork. We, therefore, recommend a model for incorporating team-based assessments in higher education to foster healthy and practical teamwork experiences that can ultimately be transferred to the professional world. Figure 20 represents the uCollab Teamwork Model developed by the researchers. The model has a three-pronged approach, focusing on team planning, team development, and team assessment, and is categorized into six stages.

Figure 20. uCollab Teamwork Model

8.1 Designing Team Assignments

One of the reasons teams fail is due to poorly designed assignments (Clack (2018). Assignments must be designed to facilitate effective teamwork. In designing effective team-based assignments, it is fundamental that they require a high level of interaction among team members. Therefore, in planning to integrate teamwork activities and projects, facilitators must ensure that:

- the teamwork activity/project is aligned with the course learning outcomes.

- the assignment results in the team developing a tangible product.

- the activity or project addresses real-life situations they will likely encounter in the workforce.

- methods for assessing teamwork are determined.

- a rubric is developed that assesses the team product and process.

8.2 Teach Teamwork Dynamics

The knowledge of critical thinking, research, communication, and writing skills are all taught in HEIs as learners are expected to develop the ability of each skill to utilize in various situations. Similarly, the knowledge of teamwork skills should also be imparted to students to prepare them to function in the world. Scholars have emphasized that learners must be trained to develop teamwork skills to meet the requirements in the workplace (Ali et al., 2017; Pöysä-Tarhonen et al., 2016). Educators are encouraged to:

- introduce a clear understanding of teamwork, its importance to various personal and professional settings, and how it contributes to success.

- provide resources on effective teamwork, such as case studies, videos, and exemplars. In addition, tools

can be established for collaboration and communication. For example,

- Jamboard, Google Docs, wikis, Padlet, and Comprehensive Assessment of Team Member

- Effectiveness (CATME) are some tools that have been found to assist the collaborative process, especially for online, remote, and hybrid learning environments.

- facilitate team building activities through teaching lessons ranging from icebreakers to solving more complex problems.

- emphasize the importance of effective and regular communication, trust, accountability, respect, conflict resolution, listening skills, and giving and accepting feedback in teams.

8.3 Team Formation

Team composition is a deciding factor in whether teams are successful or not (Arora et al., 2023; Brennan et al., 2013). For student teams to be effective, educators must intentionally identify optimal strategies for assigning students to work together. Two common methods for assembling teams are student self-assignment and teacher assignment. The teacher's assignment may be random or purposeful. Educators, however, need to be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of each approach before choosing one, as well as communicating with students their rationale for selecting a particular method. The following factors should also be considered for team formation:

- prepare students for the team formation strategy selected.

- team size (ideally 3-5 students per team)

- diversity in team members' abilities, experience, culture, etc. (The CATME team-maker feature is a tool that allows educators to use appropriate criteria to assign students to teams.)

8.4 Team Roles and Responsibilities

Establishing roles and responsibilities in teams is another crucial support mechanism that can promote the effective development of teamwork skills in student teams. Therefore, students should be guided in assigning team roles and responsibilities. Clearly defined roles help hold each student accountable and can help reduce instances of social loafing, groupthink, and control freak behaviors. Additionally, facilitators should assist students with the following:

- developing ground rules or team expectations.

- crafting team goals.

- developing a team contract.

- conducting regular team meetings.

8.5 Monitoring and Invention

Given the challenges involved in teaming experiences, facilitators must constantly support student teams once team assignments are established and students are placed in teams. As such, facilitators determine and implement appropriate strategies to monitor student teams. The frequent monitoring of teams also allows for identifying problems early in the process. It provides an opportunity for the facilitator to intervene and/or provide guidance on improving the teamwork experience. Therefore, facilitators are expected to:

- develop ongoing evaluation tool(s) (weekly, midpoint, progress report, team log, student team forum).

- keep track of student team meetings and reports/minutes.

- address and resolve conflicts as soon as they emerge.

- allocating time within the class to get updates on students' team progress.

8.6 Team Evaluation

The assessment of team-based activities and projects is challenging on many levels. Therefore, educators, from the outset, must determine what they are assessing and how they go about assessing these projects. Therefore, goals should be established. It is crucial to assess individual and group performance to assist learners in developing their collaborative skills, reflecting on their experiences, and making improvements. Some of the strategies include:

- peer and self-evaluation- learners can evaluate themselves and their peers' contributions to the group project using self-assessment forms, rubrics, or rating scales. This type of assessment will provide insights into each person's experiences and shed light on issues that may have been present in the team.

- group evaluation- since learners are being tested to produce a project collaboratively, the team will be

graded on their collaboration. Therefore, the final product should be assessed.

- instructor evaluation- the instructor has a major part in the evaluation process as we encourage evaluation as a continuous process, not just a final product. As a result, the instructor should observe the team dynamics by checking the participation, communication, task completion, and adherence to deadlines for each team member. Additionally, reports can be requested on how the team is progressing. It is vital to listen to concerns that may arise and guide the team in resolving conflicts. Major dysfunctions can be identified at this stage, and steps can be implemented to reduce issues like social loafing, control freak behaviors, absence of trust, and disrespect.

- individual reflections- allowing learners to write reflective essays or journals to analyze their strengths and weaknesses throughout the teamwork experience can promote and emphasize the importance of teamwork and self-development.

Finally, since organizations have become more team-oriented, teamwork must become vital to the higher education curriculum. The researchers are proposing that relevant stakeholders in HEIs, including curriculum specialists, should consider either of the following:

- designing and delivering a module or course that teaches students how to develop team skills.
- teach students the skills needed to function collaboratively.

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Informed consent

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.