



**PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS OF USING GROUP
DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES IN GENERAL ENGLISH CLASSES
AT DONG NAI TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY, VIETNAM**

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Abstract:

The paper discusses the current state and solutions of using group discussions in general English classes at Dong Nai University of Technology. It shows that using group discussions in English speaking classes is a very active and effective teaching and learning method. However, some teachers still do not understand how to deploy group work for their students to bring the best effect. Besides, many students still face some difficulties when participating in group discussions, there are still shy students who do not dare to express their personal opinions in front of the group; rely on other group members or use Vietnamese too much in the discussion process. At the same time, the paper also points out practical solutions, appropriate to improve the problems that both teachers and students are facing during group discussions. From there, teachers can deploy and organize group discussion activities more effectively; students can be more confident during group discussions.

Keywords: group discussion, problems and solutions, language teaching

1. Introduction

The goal of education is to train all-around, learner-centered people. Schools need to create a favorable environment for learners, allow them to develop their strengths and abilities, and at the same time help good learners develop their skills and share their insights.

In the process of training and higher education these days, group discussion is one of the selected active teaching and learning methods. Group cooperation can help students master many skills such as communication, cooperation, and listening, thereby being able to communicate and expand more opportunities and knowledge for themselves. According to Wilen (1990), group discussions bring many positive benefits

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such as being able to cover the subject matter of the lesson, improving problem-solving skills, develop ethics, attitudes and communication skills of students. It can be seen that group discussions not only bring high learning efficiency but also promote the active role of each learner.

Students of Dong Nai Technology University (DNTU) are already familiar with group discussion activities in English classes. However, not every group discussion time is positive and productive and attracts the participation of group members. Many members are still dependent, passive, and have not actively participated in the group discussion process; students do not know how to organize effective group exchanges, so the results of teaching and learning activities have many problems. This article will clarify the problems of using group discussion activities at DNTU and make some suggestions to improve the effectiveness of this activity.

2. An overview of group discussion

According to Brillhart and Galanes (1992), group discussion is an activity in which students often interact with each other (usually face to face) with the aim of increasing understanding and reaching common solutions. for any problem. Similarly, Dillon (1994) also asserts in his research that group discussion is mutual interaction, which is the giving and receiving of information between the participants in the discussion in order to increase, reinforce and exchange their information and opinions. Therefore, we can see that group discussion is an activity in which all group members must exchange and share personal information and opinions in order to reach a common solution. of the group on a particular problem.

Researchers have shown that group discussion gives learners a lot of benefits in many aspects. First, from a psychological and linguistic view, interaction during group discussion will stimulate learners to use new vocabularies if they have the opportunity to use or even simply repeat those words and receive comments from others in the group. Second, in terms of social and linguistic aspects, regular group discussions are associated with language learning, which results in language transitions between team members throughout the discussion. Third, in terms of education, group discussions provide a friendly and safe environment for learners to share with each other, maximize the level of participation of learners, create opportunities for team members to help each other, reduce the burden on teachers, and the improve communication skills of learners.

3. Problems

3.1 From students

Through observations, I found that there are five typical problems related to student group discussions that still exist in general English classes.

Firstly, the majority of students are not aware of the importance and benefits of group discussions. Students only participate in group discussions as required by their

teachers. They do not care why they should join the discussion and what they can gain afterwards.

Second, students' listening skills in the discussion process are still limited. This is shown through more nonverbal gestures. Many students do not look towards the speaker, lack eye contact, do not look directly at the speaker, do not respond to the speaker, and do not pay attention to the speaker's attitude. Most students sit quietly, do not take notes and as a result, they can not memorize what their friends said and can not repeat it.

Third, most students do not know how to discuss. That is, in the discussion process, students do not know how to express their views. Some are stubborn in their own thoughts and do not accept conflicting opinions. Some students are shy and do not get along with the group, so when they do not understand the opinions of others, they do not dare to raise questions.

Fourth, students have not really cooperated in the group discussion. Sometimes they do not respect each other, argue fiercely and lead to neglect the group work and do not participate in the activity anymore. Some students even do nothing and totally rely on one member who is responsible for the whole task. When the teacher comes to check the progress, he pretends to be involved in the discussion.

Finally, students often get stuck and can not solve problems. That is, everyone in the group has their own points of view and disagrees with each other, unable to come to an end. When the time runs out, the discussion stops abruptly without a conclusion.

3.2 From teachers

Most of the English teachers are very young, very dynamic and full of enthusiasm. Teachers often create a lot of opportunities for students to work in groups, especially exchange and discuss in groups. However, some teachers are also facing difficulties. First, the teacher's requirements are not clear. Some teachers assign group discussion topics too general and broad so that students do not understand where to start the discussion and what to discuss. This creates confusion for students so they are unable to initiate their own discussion.

Second, teachers do not closely supervise the group discussion process of students. Many teachers, after assigning discussion topics, entrust everything to students and let them do and say whatever they want, without having coverage of the class or timely support when students need it. As a result, students neglect the task a lot.

Third, when there is a conflict between members of the same group during the discussion, many teachers do not know how to handle it satisfactorily. Although the students are mature enough to solve the conflicts with their classmates, the teachers need to intervene and help them solve the problem in the best way. That trains them in compromise and negotiation skills.

Last but not least, some teachers have not thoroughly dealt with the students depending on friends, not participating in group discussions, but in the end, still enjoy the same benefits as other students in the group. This causes a loss of interest in student

group discussions because many students have thought that if they do not do it, someone else will do it, and they still get the same results as other students. Therefore, teachers need to overcome this problem for the group discussion to be effective.

4. Solutions

4.1 For students

In order to improve the effectiveness and positivity of group discussion activities, students themselves must be aware of the importance and benefits of group discussions for their whole learning process. In addition, in order to have successful discussions, all students need to practice and enhance the following essential skills.

- **Planning skills:** Students need to know how to make a work schedule, make an outline and set personal ideas, divide the work according to the ability of each member, plan the work before doing it, prescribe the operation and deliver the expected results.
- **Listening skills:** Interact by turning to the speaker, making eye contact, looking directly into the speaker's eyes, responding with gestures, words and movements, recording or noting down the necessary information, paying attention to the speaker's expression and exchanging with the speaker while listening to their ideas, must be able to repeat the content they have presented.
- **Group discussion skills:** When discussing, members should prepare the content to be discussed in advance, try to convince others to agree with their point of view, change their point of view, and refrain from voicing their opinions in the discussion process. Discuss, accept opposing opinions, ask questions when you don't understand, and give feedback when discussing.
- **Collaborative skills in teamwork:** Team members need to respect, share responsibilities with each other, learn and help each other, participate in group work sessions with a spirit of voluntary responsibility, and complete successfully assigned work.
- **Problem-solving skills:** The point here is to resolve conflicts in the group, observe, collect all information before making the final plan, discuss and exchange with the group, persuade the opponent, take responsibility for their decisions and make timely decisions.

4.2 For teachers

Along with the efforts of students, teachers also need to change a number of factors to make the lessons more active. First, teachers need to assign discussion topics as clearly and in detail as possible, and do not assign topics that are too broad or too general. For example, if a topic of discussion is too broad, the teacher can break the large topic down into many small problems and assign each group a different problem. Thus, the class can still cover the big topic without making students feel overwhelmed. In addition, the teacher must choose a leader for each group. The group leader will divide the work

among group members so each student will know what he needs to do and not be confused.

Next, after assigning the discussion to the students, the teacher also needs to observe and support the students if necessary. In order to do this skillfully without making students unnatural, the teacher should keep a certain distance from the group of students. Teachers can walk around the classroom or choose for themselves a view that covers the entire class, observes and take notes, this can help teachers support students discreetly. At the same time, teachers can use the notes taken to evaluate groups.

In addition, teachers need to prepare as well as anticipate groups that will have conflicts between members from which to propose appropriate measures. This sounds simple, but it is very difficult because this problem depends on the ingenuity of each teacher. If a teacher has many years of teaching experience, they can solve these problems very well. However, for teachers with little experience, it is necessary to read documents related to handling conflicts between members when working in groups, and at the same time can learn from their colleagues.

Finally, the correct assessment of each student's ability when discussing in groups also needs changing to motivate students to participate in the discussion process. To do this, teachers can design member evaluation sheets for the leader of each group. This form will have the criteria for scoring components for each element such as participation in presenting ideas, listening, interacting when you are in the group speaking, participating in criticism, etc. During the discussion, the leader will accumulate the factors that each of his members achieves. At the end of the lesson, the teacher will collect these cards and compare them with the general content that they observe and record to give the closest and most accurate student assessment.

5. Recommendations

The problem of improving the quality of group discussion activities requires not only the efforts of teachers and learners but also the intervention from school leaders because the school is a stepping stone, a cradle for learning to enable both teachers and students to show and get the best out of them.

The school should organize group discussion skills lessons for students in order to help students realize the importance of group discussion not only in the classroom but for future work. During these sessions, the school should inform students of the essentials for a successful group discussion and have plenty of activities for students to practice. In addition, the school also needs to have more group competitions for debate and criticism because these activities contribute to promoting not only students' group discussion skills but also many other soft skills.

In addition, schools should create more short courses on team management for teachers. Things like how to manage a team in the teaching process, how to resolve conflicts that arise during student group work or even ways to evaluate group activities as well as assess the capacity of each individual. Or it could simply be a meeting with

experts so they can share how they manage and evaluate the team in their classroom. I believe that not only me but also all teachers will find such topics very useful and bring a lot of novelty to their teaching.

6. Conclusion

Group discussions really bring a lot of benefits to both learners and teachers as long as we can overcome the limitations that I have mentioned in this article. I hope that this paper will be useful to those who are interested in student group discussion.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

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