

***Students' Perception on the Formation of Study Group in the University of Maiduguri,
Borno State, Nigeria***

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Abstract

The study examined students' perception on the formation of study group discussion in the University of Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria. It adopted a survey design that sought the perceptions of study group and non-study group students on the benefits of study group discussion among undergraduate students in the University of Maiduguri. Unstructured interview with reliability index of 0.58 was used as instrument for data collection. The population of the study consisted of all the undergraduate students in the University of Maiduguri in 2021/2022 academic session. Fifteen (15) respondents from five study groups volunteered and eight (8) respondents from non-study group students identified through snowball with the assistance of their classmates among the study group students were interviewed on their perceptions on study group formation. Mann-Whitney U Test was used to analyze the data. The result revealed that there was a significant difference in the perception of study group and non-study group students on the formation of study group discussion at Z scores of -3.252 and P-value of .001. It was recommended that

Students' Perception on the Formation of Study Group in the University of Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria

Ibrahim T. Bokko, Ph.D; Umaru Abdullahi, Ph.D & Lawas A. Mbahi, Ph.D

counselling intervention should be extended to the non-study group students to benefit from the use of study group discussion.

Keywords: perception, study, group, discussion, non-study

Introduction

Students conduct their studies in learning institutions the way they perceive better for their understanding. Perception is the process of organizing and interpreting sensory information to give it meaning (King, 2008); this does not only give meaning, it also includes rejection or acceptance. It is an ability to interpret sensation according to one's experience and thinking, as it is carried out on perception of actual or concrete object and/or events. Perception is driven by some psychological processes like motivation, memory and emotions since it is a belief or an image one has as a result of how one sees, understands and perceives the particular object or events (Spencer & Scott, 1998). King (2008) however, categorized perception into two: Bottom-up and Top-down processing. Bottom-up processing is when the information from the environment appeals to the consent of the individual as a motivator. Top-down processing is when the information perceived involves knowledge, beliefs and expectations from the events that involve cultural background in interpretation and it is conceptually driven processing. Perception therefore, helps undergraduate students to rate the benefits of study group in terms of how it could likely help or not help them in their studies in the University of Maiduguri, Borno State.

Forming groups among different categories of persons in schools, work places, markets and in communities for various reasons is not a new phenomenon. People spend about two third of their time and life in the presence of other members of the family, friends and colleagues at work in form of groups and associations. Some students' groups in schools include: group assignment, group projects, small reading groups as well as students' "discussion" or "study groups" as they call it. Such groups could enhance students' academic interactions like communication skills, comprehension of concepts, manipulations of tools and figures, and sharing of ideas and materials. There are non-study group students that do not participate in "discussion" or "study groups" as the students call it. These are students that read on their own in school libraries, lecture halls, under trees and shade. They revise their lecture notes and do their assignment individually.

Benefits of study group among group members have been emphasized by members of the Quality Circle and Study Circle in 1955, where members of the groups were able to improve the productivity of their members through face-to-face interaction over time or in

computer-mediated environment (Cragan et al., 2009). The face-to-face interaction resulted in the development of better communication pattern for public debate and discussion and to participate in group project. The formation of these circles was based on the principles of emancipatory democracy involving struggle for freedom, justice and equity that were lost through organized government. Undergraduate students also want to overcome the deficiencies they observed in studying by coming together as a group to read and interact with course mates.

Darkenwald (1995) observed that group discussion serves the following purposes:

1. it helps members recognize what they do not know,
2. it is an occasion for members to get answers to questions they have,
3. it let members get advice on matters that bother them,
4. it allows members share ideas and derive a common wisdom,
5. it is a way for members to learn about one another as persons and
6. it hastens great retention of learnt materials and positive learning experience.

Knowledge gained through discussion is direct, complete and can be interpreted, retained and remembered because the materials used during discussion were the property of the discussants. Other benefits of study groups include the adoption of new habits, support to one another, giving and accepting information and creation of friendship, in-depth discussion of concepts at hand, reflection and consolidation of learning by the group members. Group study is a forum where members' problems that take an individual more time will possibly take less time as a result of collective ideas. Members reinforce themselves and learn better ways to study and develop new study skills (Raskoff, 1997 & Oxford Brookes University (OBU), 2012).

Eguavoen (2011) investigated perception of fresh undergraduate students to library and information service in academic libraries in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The finding revealed that library users perceived that inadequate infrastructure and update academic library were the factors militating against library usage. Jasper et al. (2012) studied perception of undergraduate students towards e-learning and academic performance in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A total of 110 undergraduates (90% female and 10% male, 74% Malay, 21% Chinese and 5% Indians) participated in the study. The finding revealed that there was no association between e-learning scores and CGPA of the undergraduates, and between the time spent on e-learning and CGPA. It was concluded that duration of time spent on e-learning are not associated with students' academic performance and e-learning did not affect students' achievement.

Students' Perception on the Formation of Study Group in the University of Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria

Ibrahim T. Bokko, Ph.D; Umaru Abdullahi, Ph.D & Lawas A. Mbahi, Ph.D

Fabunmi (2012) investigated undergraduate students' perception of the effectiveness of ICT usage in improving teaching and learning in Ekiti State University Ado Ekiti, Nigeria. Survey design was used and 200 undergraduate students were selected from eight Faculties with 25 students each as a sample. Stratified Random Sampling was used to pick students considering gender, level and course of study. There were 200 copies of questionnaire distributed and collected by the researcher. Data collected were analyzed using percentages and frequency count and the result were presented in tables. It was concluded that students found internet usage useful and accessible.

Audu and Egharevba (2016) studied undergraduate students' perception and attitudes towards teaching profession in the University of Benin, Benin City. The study was a descriptive survey design using 120 undergraduate students. The sample was picked with the aid of stratified random sampling techniques. The researchers used self-constructed questionnaire for data collection. The data collected were analyzed using percentages and was presented in tables. The study revealed that there was no sex influence on the perception and attitudes of students towards teaching profession and parents had negative perceptions towards children to pick teaching profession. It was recommended that counselling intervention, seminars and workshops should be organized to develop positive perception and attitudes towards teaching profession.

Michael et al. (2017) studied perceptions of undergraduate students on social media usage for learning as a case study in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive survey design with a sample of 35 undergraduate students of the Faculty of Education, Management Sciences, Communication and Information Science, Agricultural Science, Art and Technology. Purposive sampling was used to select the sample for the study. "Perception of Undergraduate Students on Social Media, University of Ibadan Questionnaire" developed by the researchers was used for data collection. The data collected were analyzed with descriptive statistics using mean and standard deviation and was presented in tables. The study revealed that students subscribe to WhatsApp, Facebook, yahoo Messenger, google+, 2go, BBM and Twitter to exchange information for learning. It was concluded that students should be guided on how to use social media for learning.

Bolanle et al. (2018) investigated perceptions of economics undergraduate on non-usage of University's ICT platform in teaching economics in the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was used with a sample of 278 respondents randomly selected from the Department of Education. The researchers used self-developed

questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed through frequency count, percentage, mean score and standard deviation, while ANOVA was the inferential statistics used. The study revealed that lectures' philosophy, lack of adequate skills, incompatible classroom environment, limited lecture hours and non-satisfaction with ICT results were perceived as reasons for non-usage of ICT platform for teaching economics lessons. None of the previous studies investigated perceptions of undergraduate students on study group formation in a university, hence the need to conduct this research.

The press release of students' end of semester examinations and academic status at the end of every academic session in the University of Maiduguri presents students with variety of academic problems. A numbers of students are found with different varieties of academic problems; a small percentage proceed to next level without problem; some proceed to next academic level carrying over courses; others are asked to repeat; while others are withdrawn from the course and/or the university. This presents students' weakness during examinations. These could be due to lack of ability to master the course contents or poor study habits. Undergraduate students exhibit different patterns of studying to master their learning materials. Do they do group discussion to master their learning materials? How do they perceive the importance of study group among themselves? These and other relevant questions are asked and answered by the study.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to determine:

1. Perceptions of study and non-study group students toward benefits of study groups among undergraduate students in the University of Maiduguri.

Hypothesis

The study tested one null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

H₀₁: The mean ratings of study and non-study group students' perception on study group formation in the University of Maiduguri are not significantly different.

Methodology

The design of the study adopted a survey design. The population was all the undergraduate students in the University of Maiduguri. Five Faculties were selected from Thirteen Faculties in the University of Maiduguri through Faculty cluster using Number Generation Software. Five study groups were identified, one from each of the five Faculties. Unstructured interview schedule was used for data collection. Fifteen (15) study and eight (8) non-study group members were identified and interviewed on what were their

Students' Perception on the Formation of Study Group in the University of Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria

Ibrahim T. Bokko, Ph.D; Umaru Abdullahi, Ph.D & Lawas A. Mbahi, Ph.D

perceptions on study group formation. The study group respondents were selected through volunteering to respond to the interview and non-study group respondents were identified through snowball with the assistance of study group members interviewed and they are from the same Faculty, Department and course with the study group members.

The unstructured interview schedule used for data collection was developed by the researchers and pilot tested on students from other faculties that were not part of the study with reliability index of 0.58. Unstructured Interview using open-ended questions were used as a means of interacting with the target groups to obtain information about their thoughts and opinions, beliefs, benefits, reasons and motivations, their knowledge and feelings about study groups formation (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Unstructured interview schedule was used to allow participants express themselves using their own words without been restricted. Kothari and Garg (2014) suggested the use of unstructured interview since the major emphasis is on the discovery of ideas and insights to explore the problem under study. Open-ended interview clearly differentiates qualitative research from quantitative research where the later uses structured interview. The interview was done within the period of one week. The qualitative data collected were coded for content analysis. The coded data were grouped to give an abstraction of the original data. Mann-Whitney U Test was used to analyze the data because it tests differences between two independent samples drawn from continuous population and the data were in frequency, non-parametric and the number of respondents was small.

Presentation of results

Ho1: The mean ratings of study group and non-study group undergraduate students' perception on study group formation in the University of Maiduguri are not significantly different.

Table 1: Mann-Whitney U Test Statistics on Groups Ratings

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Decision	
Study Group	16	20.3	325.50		
Non-study Group	14	9.96	139.50		
Mann-Whitney U test				34.500	
Wilcoxon W				139.500	
Z				-3.252	Ho Rejected
Asymp. Sig. (2 tailed)				.001	
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed)]				.001 ^b	

a. Mann-Whitney U Test

b. Grouping Variable: Groups

N= no. of identified variables

The results in table1 revealed that the mean ratings of study groups and non-study group students on perception on the study group formation were significantly different (mean rank study group was 20.3 and mean rank non-study group was 9.96). The sum of ranks indicated that highest ranked scores were not the same across groups. The Z score of -3.252 and P-value of .001 imply that the rankings of study group and non-study group undergraduate students on their perceptions towards study groups formation were significantly different hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The result is presented in Figure.

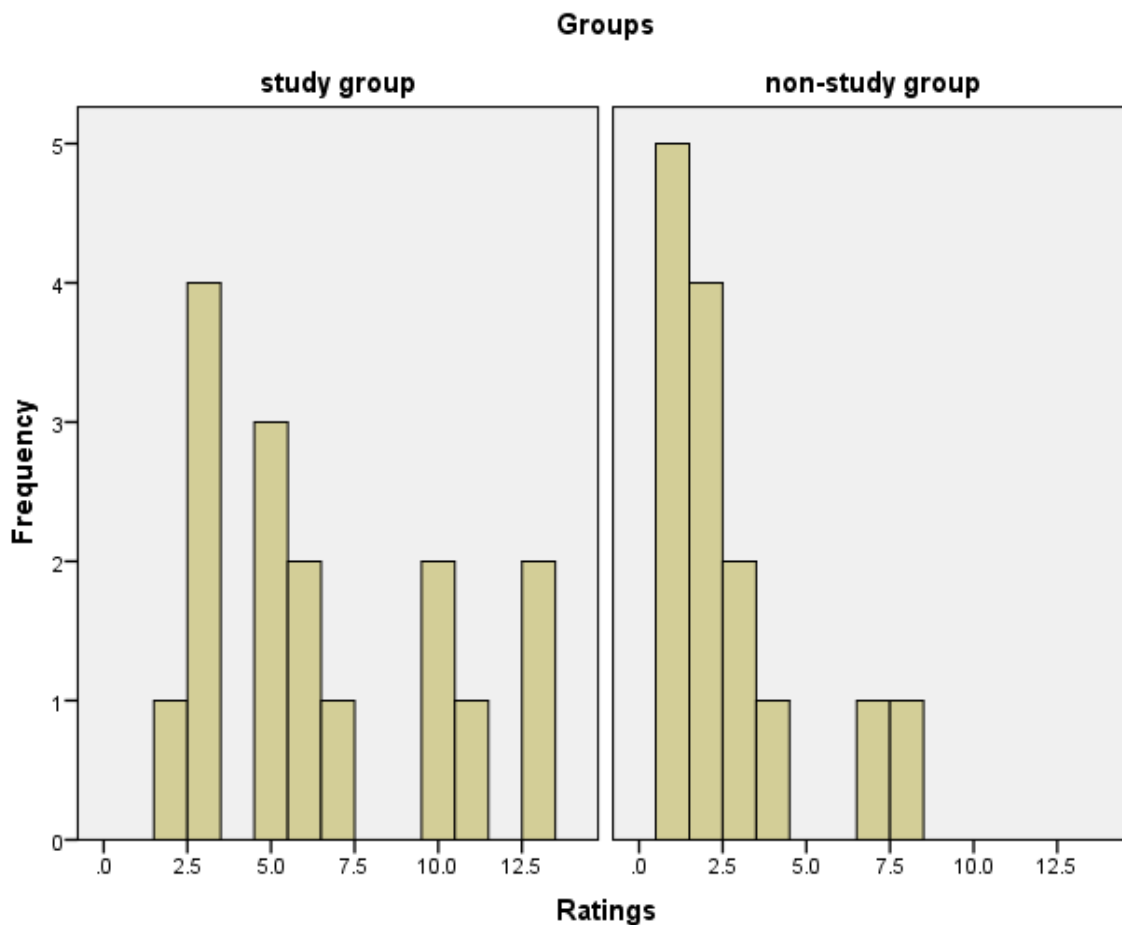


Figure 1: Histogram on Mean Ratings of Study Groups and Non-Study Groups

Result from figure 1 suggests that the ranking of study group and non-study group students on their perceptions on study group formation was not normally distributed. This is confirmed by the histogram which has a long left tail. This means that irrespective of group, the students' perception on study group formation were significantly different hence, they rated them equal. However, non-study group had low ratings on interaction with other students for studies and orientation by students union and no rating on other variables like tutorial class and assistance by senior students in the department. Whereas, the study group students had high rating on variables like discussion, sharing of ideas, comparing notes and teaching group members.

Summary of findings of the study

There were differences in the perceptions of study group and non-study group students on study group formation.

Discussion of the finding

Although there was no normal distribution of rankings on perceptions of study group and non-study group students on study group formation, the ranking was found significantly different. Study group had the highest ranking up to 12.3 on some variables and non-study group's ranking was 7.5 respectively. This confirms the desire of each group to practice what it feels better toward its studies in the university and translates to the democratic nature of an academic environment. Academic environment has that liberty to give students chance to conduct their study the way they think better for them. The study relates to a study conducted by Audu and Egharevba (2016) on undergraduate students' perception and attitudes towards teaching profession in the University of Benin, Benin City. Their study revealed that there was no sex influence on the perception and attitudes of students towards teaching profession and parents had negative perceptions towards children to pick teaching profession.

Although the study could not link students' perception on study group discussion to their academic achievement, study groups' students will have better interactive and communication skills, interpersonal relationships and ownership of knowledge since students use their own language during discussion than the non-study group students. Education industry encourages group studies among students because of proximal field according to Lee Vygotsky. It is believed that students learn better when they are with their classmates.

Conclusion

Perceptions of study group and non-study group students were significantly different. Study group students had better understanding of the importance of study group discussion among themselves. The non-study group students need orientation and counselling towards realizing the importance of group discussion among students at all levels of education.

Recommendation

It was recommended that counselling intervention should be extended to non-study group students to realize the benefits of study group discussion.

Students' Perception on the Formation of Study Group in the University of Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria

Ibrahim T. Bokko, Ph.D; Umaru Abdullahi, Ph.D & Lawas A. Mbahi, Ph.D

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