

Alone or Together? Perspective of Teachers on Collaborative Practice Within the Organization

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Abstract: This study explored the challenges teachers face in group work, the coping mechanisms they employ, and the insights they gain from their experiences. Understanding these aspects is crucial in developing strategies to enhance teamwork in educational settings. A qualitative research design using phenomenology was employed to capture teachers' lived experiences in group work. In-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with 10 purposively selected teachers who actively engage in collaborative tasks. Thematic analysis was applied to identify common patterns and insights from the data. Findings revealed that teachers encounter several challenges in group work, including unequal workload distribution, interpersonal conflicts and communication issues, time constraints and scheduling conflicts, lack of administrative support and resources, and differing levels of commitment and professional engagement. To manage these challenges, teachers utilize delegating clear role assignment, having open dialogue and conflict resolution strategies, practicing time management and prioritization, seeking external support and professional networks, and encouraging accountability and motivation strategies. From their experiences, teachers gained key insights: collaboration requires balance and fairness, strong communication enhances teamwork, administrative support is crucial, flexibility improves team dynamics, and a positive group culture motivates engagement. The study highlights the need for institutional support in ensuring fair task distribution, effective communication, and structured time management in group work.

Keywords: *Teacher Collaboration, Group Work Challenges, Teamwork Strategies, Professional Engagement, Qualitative Research.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Group work is widely promoted in schools and educational policies as a key form of collaboration. However, teachers' experiences with group work vary in satisfaction, effectiveness, and productivity. Understanding their preferences for working alone or collaboratively is important to improve professional collaboration models.

Teacher group work is widely encouraged worldwide but faces challenges such as uneven workload, limited time, and varying commitment. Cultural and organizational factors also affect collaboration, with pressures and hierarchies sometimes hindering teamwork. In the Philippines, additional issues include heavy workloads, lack of support, cultural barriers, and resource gaps between urban and rural schools. Despite recognizing its benefits, teachers often struggle with time and responsibilities, highlighting the need for tailored approaches to improve collaboration.

This study aimed to explore teachers' experiences and preferences regarding group work, focusing on the factors that influenced their choice to work alone or collaboratively. It sought to understand the challenges of group work and how collaboration affected productivity.

This study sought to explore teachers' experiences with group work within educational settings, focusing on the challenges they face, the coping mechanisms they employ, and the insights they gain from collaborative practices. The following research questions guided this inquiry:

- What are the key challenges teachers face when engaging in group work within their educational settings?
- What coping mechanisms do teachers employ to manage the challenges associated with group work?
- What insights do teachers gain from their experiences of group work?

The literature on group work in academic settings shows both benefits and challenges. Group work enhances collaborative learning, professional development, and research productivity, especially when supported by institutional policies and digital tools.

However, challenges like conflicts, unequal participation, free-riding, and burnout can hinder effectiveness. Successful group work requires clear collaboration guidelines, fair involvement, conflict resolution, and a supportive organizational culture. Overall, its success depends on careful implementation and ongoing institutional support.

Social Interdependence Theory explained that how goals were structured influenced group interactions and outcomes, with positive interdependence fostering collaboration, trust, and mutual support, which led to better professional development and research results in academic settings. Activity Theory complemented this by examining the interactions between individuals, tools, community, rules, and roles within group work, highlighting how organizational and cultural factors affected collaboration. It helped identify challenges like conflicts and unequal participation, offering insights to improve group work effectiveness in academic workplaces.

II. METHOD

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the effectiveness of group work in academic workplaces. Phenomenology was chosen to understand the lived experiences and personal meanings faculty and staff attribute to their collaborative practices. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the benefits, challenges, and impacts of group work on professional development and workplace dynamics, providing rich insights to address the research questions.

This qualitative study on group work effectiveness in academic workplaces is grounded in four philosophical assumptions. Ontologically, it adopts a constructivist view that reality is subjective and shaped by individual experiences. Epistemologically, it follows an interpretivist approach, emphasizing co-constructed knowledge through participant-researcher dialogue. Axiologically, the study embraces researcher reflexivity to address biases and ensure ethical representation of participants' voices. Methodologically, it uses a flexible, iterative qualitative design that allows simultaneous data collection and analysis to deeply explore participants' experiences within their contexts.

This study emphasized capturing rich, context-specific insights into group work dynamics in academic settings through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Aligned with an interpretivist approach, it valued participants' meaning-making and allowed flexibility to adapt to emerging themes, recognizing reality as multiple, constructed, and evolving.

The study involved 10 Grade teachers from Maria/Rita Medel Elementary School in Davao Occidental, serving a 100% Manobo Lumad community. Participants were purposively selected based on their knowledge of group work and had to have at least three years of teaching experience at the school. This ensured they shared similar experiences and could effectively articulate their perspectives during interviews.

The researcher collected data through in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) using a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions. These methods allowed for deep exploration of teachers' experiences with group work. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the school, lasting 20-30 minutes each, and were audio-recorded with consent. Notes on non-verbal cues were also taken. Transcripts were then prepared for thematic analysis to identify key patterns and insights.

The researcher analyzed the interview data using thematic content analysis and environmental triangulation through a systematic process. This involved transcribing interviews verbatim, familiarizing with the data, and generating initial codes. Related codes were then clustered into themes, which were reviewed and refined for clarity and relevance. Themes were clearly defined and named before the findings were written up, incorporating direct participant quotes to authentically represent their experiences.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first section highlighted five main challenges teachers face with group work at Maria/Rita Medel Elementary School: unequal workload, interpersonal conflicts, time and scheduling issues, lack of administrative support and resources, and varying commitment levels. These challenges affect both teacher productivity and the success of collaboration, offering important insights for improving group work environments.

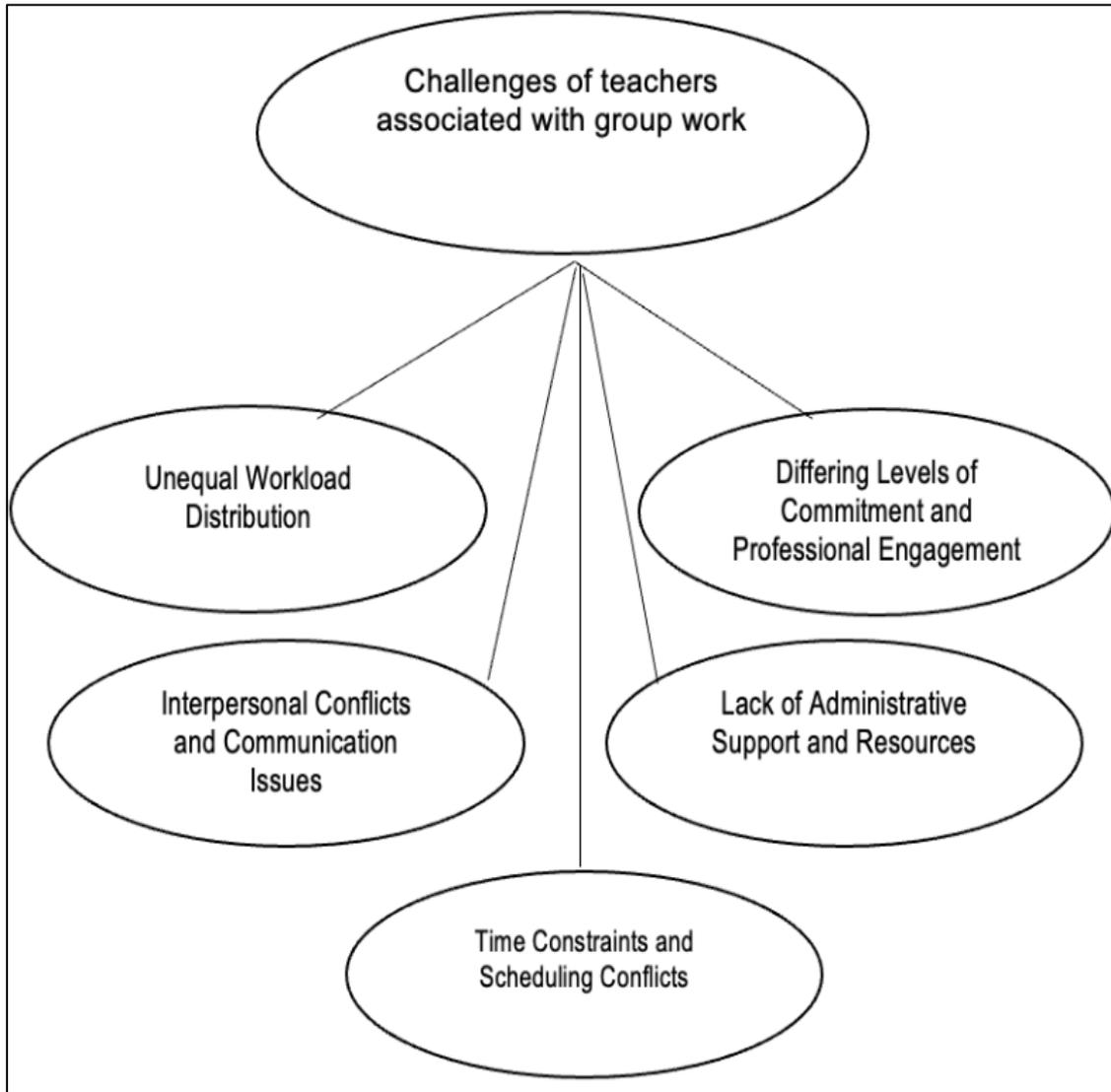


Fig 1 Challenges of Teachers Associated with Group Work

Despite the challenges in group work, teachers developed strategies to manage difficulties and maintain collaboration. They used task delegation, clear role assignments, open communication for conflict resolution, time management, sought external support, and encouraged accountability and motivation. These approaches helped balance workloads, resolve conflicts, and sustain engagement, offering insights for schools to better support effective teamwork.

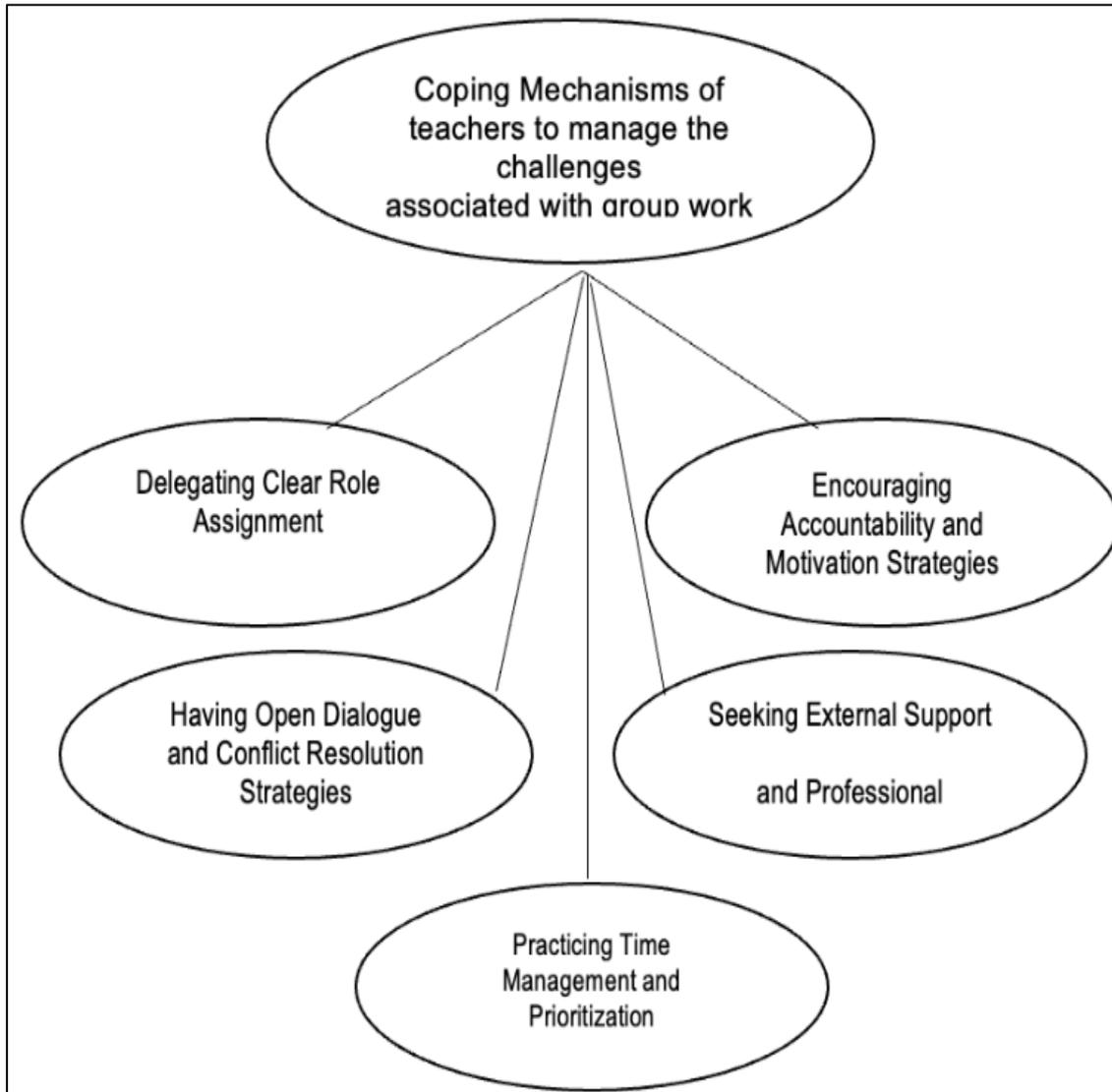


Fig 2 Coping Mechanisms of Teachers to Manage the Challenges Associated with Group Work

Through their group work experiences, teachers gained insights that shaped their views on collaboration. They emphasized the importance of balance and fairness, strong communication, and administrative support for successful teamwork. They also recognized that flexibility and a positive group culture improved dynamics and motivation. These lessons highlighted the complexities of collaboration and offered guidance for enhancing group work practices.

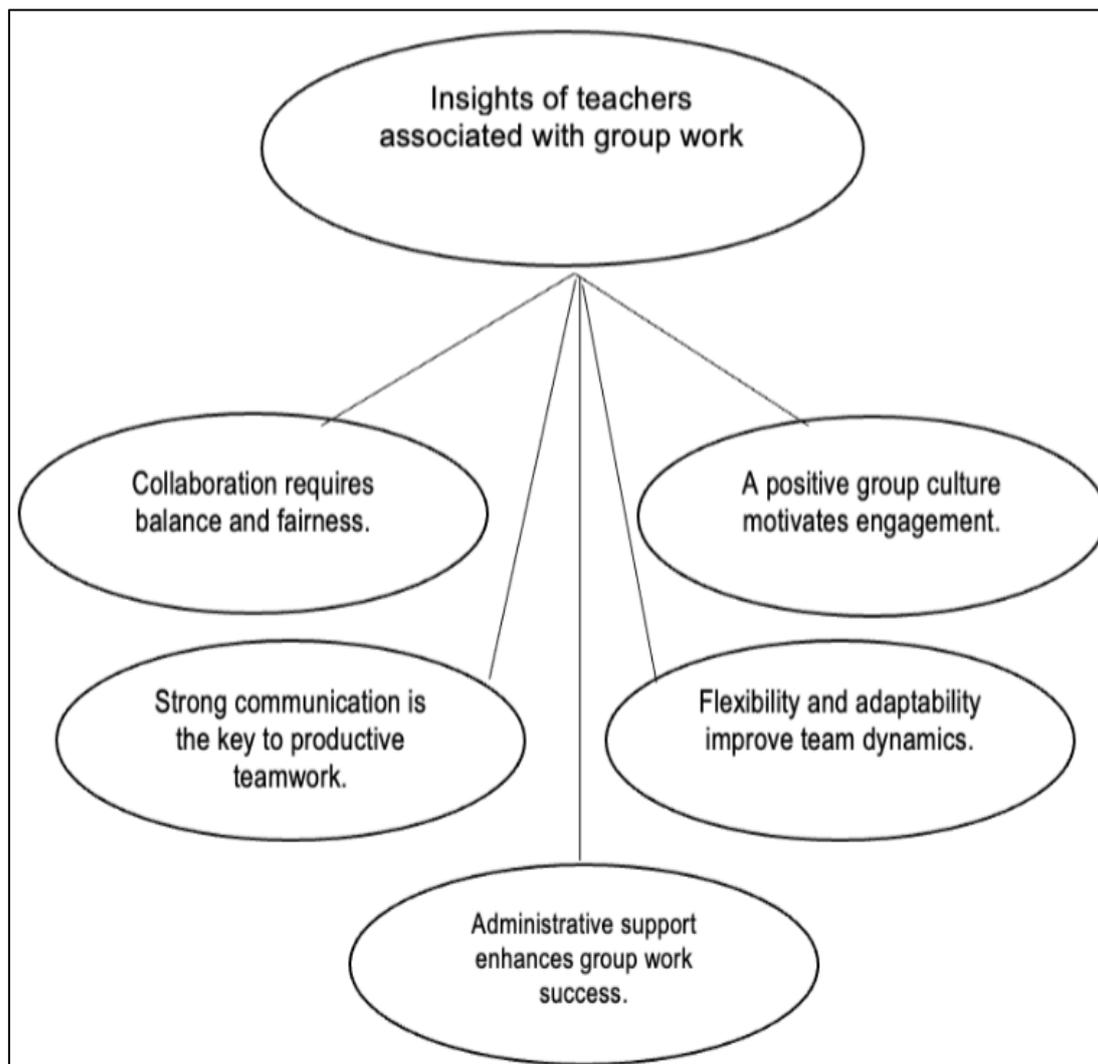


Fig 3 Insights of Teachers Associated with Group Work

Teachers faced challenges in group work such as unequal workloads, conflicts, time pressures, lack of support, and varying commitment, leading to frustration and disengagement. They coped by delegating tasks, communicating openly, managing time, seeking support, and promoting accountability to improve fairness and teamwork. Their experiences taught them that effective collaboration depends on balance, communication, administrative backing, flexibility, and a positive group culture.

The findings suggest schools should address workload imbalances, communication issues, and time constraints by implementing clear policies and providing resources to support effective group work. Formalizing strategies like task delegation, conflict resolution training, and time management workshops can help teachers manage challenges better. Emphasizing balanced participation, strong communication, administrative support, flexibility, and a positive culture is essential for successful teamwork. Creating an environment of respect, openness, and recognition can improve collaboration and enhance educational outcomes.

DepEd officials should develop policies promoting fair workload distribution, teamwork training, and time for collaborative planning to improve group work. School leaders need to set clear expectations, offer conflict resolution training, and provide resources and recognition to support teacher collaboration. Teachers can enhance teamwork through task delegation, open communication, time management, and participation in professional learning communities. Encouraging early student exposure to collaboration can build essential teamwork skills. Future research should examine the long-term effects of collaboration strategies, administrative support, and the impact of teacher teamwork on student outcomes, considering cultural and institutional influences.

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