

# Learning Outcomes and Student Satisfaction with Group Projects in Marketing.

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## Abstract

Undergraduate students majoring in Marketing are required to engage in group projects throughout their study. The main educational rationale behind requiring students to work on group projects as an integral part of their study in marketing is that the experience of group projects is a good preparation for working in teams and managing work teams in the future. Little research has been conducted which examines how students from language groups other than English perform in groups and whether more culturally diverse groups perform better than more homogenous ones. Results from across three marketing units, from 1<sup>st</sup> to third year (n=233) showed that students in mixed language groups had a much higher view of group work than those in homogenous groups and that non-English speaking students were more positive and learnt more about team work when working in mixed groups rather than homogenous groups.

## Literature Review

There is general agreement in the marketing educational literature as to the importance of group learning or projects to marketing curriculum (Amato and Amato 2005; Deter-Schmelz, Kennedy and Ramsey 2002; Hernandez 2002; Huff, Cooper and Jones 2002 and McCorkle, Reardon, Alexander, Kilng, Harris Iyer and Vishwanathan 1999). Skills learnt from group learning are seen by preparing students to work in cross functional teams in the workforce (Huff, Cooper and Jones 2002).

Both a positive and negative factor in group learning leading to these outcomes has been the element of group diversity. Some researchers in marketing education (Amato and Amato 2005 and Hernandez 2002) have suggested that more diverse student teams in terms of gender and ethnic makeup will produce more positive outcomes of group learning, even when different communication styles existed within a group. This relationship, however, appears to be moderated by group cohesion (Deter-Schmelz, Kennedy and Ramsey 2002). Amato and Amato (2005) also suggest that students need skills to manage personality differences in groups in order to achieve benefits of diversity in skills and backgrounds. Students from different cultural backgrounds may also have different values such as individualism or collectivism, which may also affect group and student learning outcomes (McCorkle et al. 1999) although prior research found no direct relation between the two (Volet, 2001). Furthermore, research on students' appraisals of completing group projects in mixed groups (Volet and Ang, 1998 and Volet, 1999) highlighted the cultural-emotional challenges created by diversity, and the positive impact of personal experience of crossing cultural borders, therefore the first hypotheses of this study was:

**H1:** Learning outcomes and student satisfaction will differ by language of schooling, (English/Non-English) with non-English schooled students being less satisfied and learning less than those with English schooled in group projects.

Asmar (2005, p. 300) in a study of 174 muslim students across 13 Australian universities, found that those muslim students from overseas felt less of a group of students and staff

committed to learning, were less likely to feel like they belonged to the university community but were paradoxically close to local muslim students in confidence to explore academic issues with staff and students. This suggests while content learning may not differ as result of cultural backgrounds, challenges remain with respect integration and team skills of mixed cultural groups. Other research suggests that multicultural groups perform no better than domestic homogenous groups (De Vita 2002). The second hypothesis of the study was:

**H2:** Learning outcomes and student satisfaction will differ by the cultural diversity of the group (in this case, between domestic-homogenous and mixed groups of domestic and international students and there should be no significant differences).

## Methodology

**Participants** were from a three marketing classes, a 1<sup>st</sup> year Principle of marketing class, a 2<sup>nd</sup> year marketing management class and a 3<sup>rd</sup> year marketing research class (n=233), in which students completed short presentations and group reports. Students received a group mark for the group work, which formed 20-25% of their total individual mark for their Marketing unit. The units sampled consisted of around 518 students, meaning a response rate of 45% was achieved for students who completed both surveys. 65.2% of students reported that they had conducted their schooling in English whilst 34.8% indicated that they had been schooled in a non-English speaking background.

## Procedure and Research Instruments

Participants completed two questionnaires in class 9 weeks apart, one at the beginning and one at the end of the group project. The beginning questionnaire elicited information on students' prior experience of group projects in education and team work in the workplace, as well as demographic information, such as age, gender and weekly paid work commitments. In both beginning and end questionnaires, students were asked to rate their self-efficacy, multiple appraisals, and personal goals for the particular group assignment, as well as to indicate their two most important goals for that group assignment. In the end questionnaire, students were asked to rate the extent to which they experienced a number of possible challenges related to the group dynamics, to indicate which one was the biggest (if any) and what they themselves, and separately the group as a whole did to cope with that particular challenge. The end questionnaire also elicited students' perceived cohesion and efficacy of the group, as well as their views of what they thought they had learnt from the group assignment, in terms of marketing knowledge and knowledge and skills to work in teams in the workplace, further details of the measurements used are discussed in (Volet, 2001).

Of interest to this study at the end of group projects student were asked to indicate the following; What subject knowledge they had gained from the group assignment, What skills and knowledge they gained from working in teams in the workplace, and further knowledge they gained from working with culturally diverse groups (which they could ignore if their group was not culturally diverse. These items were all scored on semantic differential scale from 1 (I learnt nothing) to 4 (I learnt a lot). Students were also asked if the group played a positive role in helping achieve learning outcomes rated from 1 (The group played a negative role) to 4 (The group played a positive role). Note that for reasons of privacy, student group project grades could not be obtained. Self reports in adult learning though have been found to be strongly correlated with academic performance (Ferris and Gerber 1994).

At the beginning of the group project and at the end students were also asked for their current views of group projects which were rated from 1 (Not positive) to 4 (Very positive). This allowed for maturation and history effects to be studied as part of this research. In order to identify whether groups were culturally diverse or not, the makeup of each group was coded according to whether all students were International, (homogenous international), mixed, which consisted of both local and international students or local, homogenous, group consisted of only domestic students. The study contained 120 students classified as working in mixed groups, 95 in homogenous local students and only 14 in international homogenous groups. For ease of analysis the results contain only those students from the two main groups, homogenous local and mixed groups.

## Results

Table 1, shows the abridged ANOVA results. There was no support for **H1** (Learning outcomes and student satisfaction will differ by language of schooling). Support was found for **H2** (Learning outcomes and student satisfaction will differ by the cultural diversity of the group). Generally students in mixed groups reported more positive results than those in local homogenous groups. This was with in terms of role of group learning, ( $F=2.84, p<.10$ ) mean of 3.38 versus 2.91 for those in homogenous local groups and for their current view of group projects; ( $F=3.96, p<.05$ ) mean of 2.88 for those in mixed versus a mean of 2.39 for those in local homogenous groups, although the effect size or eta-squared in terms of percentage of variance for both findings is small at 2% for role of group learning and 3% for current view of groups. The interactions shown in figure 1 and 2 shows that non-English speaking students benefited most in mixed groups in terms of knowledge of workplace teams (or teamwork,  $F=3.20, p<.05$ ) and therefore probably reported a much more positive view of group projects ( $F=5.40, p<.05$ ). Although, again the effect sizes for this interaction appears to be small, 2% for knowledge of workplace teams and 3% for current view of group projects.

**Table 1: Abridged ANOVA Results**

Source	Knowledge of			Role of group for individual learning	Current View of group projects
	Marketing	Work-place teams	Culturally diverse teams		
English/Non-English Schooling (E-School)	.19	.25	2.56	.63	.28
Homogenous/mixed group (Homo-mixed)	.10	2.41	.44	2.84 <sup>m</sup>	3.96*
Interaction Eschool by Homo/mixed	.02	3.20*	1.18	.41	5.04*

Note: <sup>m</sup>marginal,  $p<.10$ , \* $p<.05$ , F values shown in the table. All F values had a d.f of 1.

Figure 1: Interaction of Homo/Mixed and Eschool for Knowledge of Workplace Teams

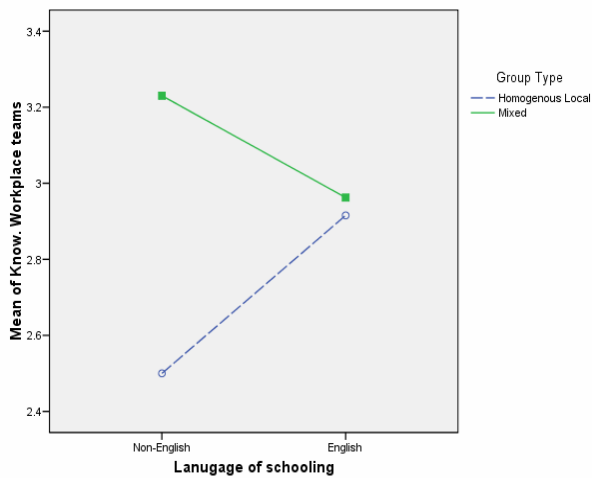
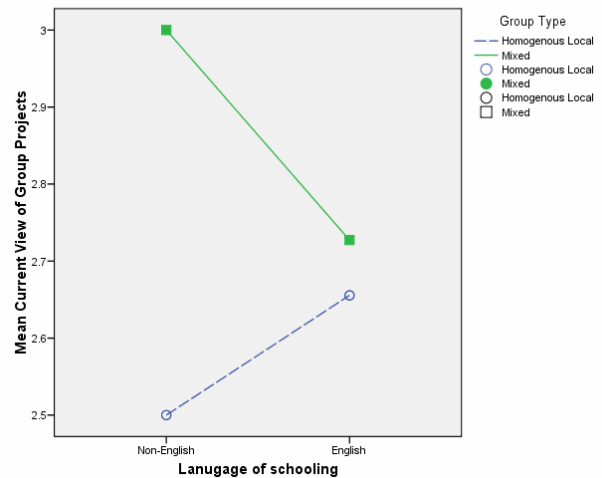


Figure 2: Interaction of Homo/Mixed and Eschool for Current View of Group Projects



### Figures 1-2

## Interactions for Language of Schooling by Homogenous-Mixed groups for Knowledge of Workplace Teams and Current View of Groups

### Conclusion

The results show that marketing students' perceptions of learning outcomes out of group projects differ within and across sub-groups. In particular, it appears that the composition of groups does significantly impact on students learning, especially those from a non-English speaking background. The effect appears to be small but over time can become more significant. As Asmar (2005, p. 291), notes with around 12.5% of all students in Australia now from overseas countries and contributing \$4 billion to the Australian economy, there is a need to ensure that all students have a positive learning experience and benefits from group learning. On the flipside, in group learning environments of mixed language groups, local English speaking students may have extra demands in assisting students who are less proficient in English. The extent to which this experience affects their attitude towards group work needs to be fully investigated. Some research has already documented the positive impact of culturally diverse groups on students' performance (Watson, 1993) and on their attitude towards mixing local and international students for group work (Summers & Volet, submitted).

Research like this is important as the ability to work in groups and teamwork are important graduate attributes of many universities and are skills in demand with employers as well. Balancing these demands is that student population in Australia is diverse and tailored teaching approaches may be required especially in the area of group learning.

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