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Together or not? The Effects of Individual and Group Work of the Faculty of Philology Students During E-learning Online

Abstract

This article tested a widespread belief that by working in groups distance education students achieve cognitive goals of learning, and develop their social competencies and skills. The subject of the study was the achievements of 655 bachelor and master degree students enrolled in 22 on-campus and blended learning units offered within 2 university courses, full-time and part-time, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e. in the academic years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022. An instrumental case study was carried out: the grades students obtained for individual work were compared with grades obtained for work done in pairs and groups of threes within the same courses. It was found that a statistically significant difference did not exist. But the highest grades (on average 83.81) were obtained by students who had worked individually, and the lowest (81.64%) by those who had worked in groups of three. The highest grades were obtained by the final-year students. They showed an understanding of the assessment criteria and the ability to follow such. Also, they wanted to pass on the first attempt in order to have time to prepare for the final examination. International students were reluctant to work in groups. They focused on achieving good grades and preparing for the thesis due to the time limits of student visas and the unrest caused by the war in Ukraine. First-year students who had no experience in adhering to the assessment criteria and problems with communicating due to isolation caused by the pandemic obtained the lowest grades.

Key words: assignment, assessment, MOODLE, risk, colleagues

Models of Student's Remote Work

Expansion of the Internet has redesigned human interaction. University education has also been increasingly moving away from a one-way transmission of knowledge. Developing a variety of skills and social competencies has become equally important as gaining knowledge.

However, during the COVID-19 pandemic students cooperated remotely less and did not spontaneously form small working groups. It can be argued that such learning groups *could increase students' ability to transfer their learning to new contexts* (Ellis, & Han, 2021, p. 511). Collaborative learning triggers *promoting higher-order thinking and problem-solving, enhancing students' motivation and engagement in learning, as well as achieving better academic outcomes* (Ellis, & Han, 2021, p. 511).

Responsible cooperation assisted students in avoiding mistakes, assigning tasks, saving time and effort, and obtaining higher marks. At the same time, it was observed that the majority of the most diligent students, including international students, chose to learn individually. They were found to avoid collaboration with less committed colleagues.

The final year's students were most committed. During short interviews it was found that they had wanted to be successful on the first attempt to avoid problems associated with postponing the final examination's date. In contrast, observation showed that some baccalaureate students joined study groups in order to reduce effort, get support, and transfer responsibility. That was most likely due to problems they had with verbal and non-verbal communication and working in groups secondary to the COVID-19 pandemic isolation. Moreover, they lacked skills in following assessment criteria.

General Background of Research

According to the assumptions of connectivism, group work results in both: the effective transfer of knowledge and the formation of skills and social competencies (Siemens, 2004; Siemens, 2005; Chatti et al., 2010; Duke et al., 2013). Bo Chang and Haijun Kang also emphasize that online group may optimize learning experience (Chang, & Kang, 2016).

Students learn from each other by sharing knowledge, observing the way other students learn, adapting effective learning styles, allocating tasks, providing advice, and gaining support. Contemporary employers consider collaborative teamwork skills as one of the most important skills of an employee. Natalia Hatalska rightly

noticed that openness to people outside the circle of our closest friends can change our point of view, influence our way of thinking, discover the unknown and give access to the diversity of the world (2021, p. 25). Cooperation has become a way to organize freelancers, small and large companies, and even corporations such as Microsoft, Apple, Samsung, Electronics, Facebook, or IBM (Hatalaska, n.d.). However, some authors emphasize that students prefer to work independently (Bernier, & Stenstrom, 2016, p. 1).

Marking assignments in an e-learning course requires the tutor to create a learning community, and provide appropriate learning conditions and clear assessment criteria. E-assessment „requires the development of a learning environment that provides opportunities for teams and individuals to engage in meaningful, measurable collaborative processes” (Gibson, Irving, & Seifert, 2019, p. 246). Marks can be subjective. Therefore, at Qassim University „[a]n e-assessment committee was established for the first time consisting of thirteen members” (Elzainy, Sadik, & Abdulmonem, 2020).

Some authors suggest that the mark should include the results of both – group and individual work (Fernandes, Caetano, 2020). That is because students benefit from group work by „mutual inspiration, crowdsourcing, problem learning, peer learning” (Gurba, 2021, p. 1), sharing workloads, learning from others and from discussion (Wendell, 2022), better self-esteem, interpersonal interaction and social support (Serrano, & Pons, 2014).

However, the contemporary anthropology of Homo Technologicus, Communicans and Educandus (De Martino et al., 2022, p. 138) mandates consideration of additional prospects. Contemporary interdisciplinary research, so called social networking pedagogy, identifies interactions in social networks, possibility of learning, and collaboration in the context of maintaining the individual identity of learners. According to De Martino et al. [*s]haring one’s knowledge, information and opinions through social networks call the individual to responsibility for one’s social self* (2022, p. 138). Sharing knowledge becomes a very important process shaping identity of an individual and communities.

Nonetheless, 30% of the surveyed students preferred working individually. It could have been due to mediated communication problems, and in the students’ opinion unfair–grade allocation resulting from remote group collaboration. Additionally those students, active users of Microsoft Teams, probably perceived communicating on the Web not as a possibility for cooperation or education, but as a tool controlled by the corporations to make users the passive customers and consumers of Websites’ content. That is because contemporary communication technologies form *corporeal and mental type that modify the practices and contexts through which human beings shape themselves and build their knowledge* (Seery, 2010, p. 66).

Methodology

Aim of the Study

This study aimed to compare the grades obtained by students completing tasks for the unit (course) individually with those obtained by students working in pairs or groups of three to see if cooperation resulted in better grades.

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was formulated: *students working individually receive higher grades than those working in pairs or groups of three.*

Instruments and Procedures

An exploratory, *ex post facto*, search of the MOODLE platform resources was performed. The purpose of the research was to analyze student's marks and attempt to establish the factors that led to receiving given marks. The instrumental, collective case study method was used (Stake, 2005; Creswell, 2012, p. 465–466), which allowed to place the cases within a larger social context, understand the problem better, and make comparisons, which provide better *insight into an issue* (Creswell, 2012, p. 465). Exploratory, descriptive research was conducted. The inductive and deductive stages of qualitative methods were used for data analysis (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005). For triangulation, the results of the quantitative and qualitative research were compared. Data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. Features of the Excel program were used to calculate the average grade for each unit of students studying: individually, in pairs, and in groups of three. In addition, Pearson's Chi² coefficient and the Kruskal-Wallis index of differentiation were calculated.

Data Analysis

Results of quantitative research are commented in the context of qualitative research in an attempt to identify trends, variables, as well as similarities, and differences. The qualitative analysis included analysis of individual student and the groups characteristics, and comparing them with results obtained for other groups. The results and conclusions were compared with those published by other researchers.

Calculations were performed using Statistica 13.3 (TIBCO, Palo Alto, CA, USA). The value of the coefficient $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

Research Material

The research material consisted of grades obtained by students for assignments in 22 units, offered at the Institute of Polish Philology at the Pedagogical University in Cracow in the 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 academic years. Units were delivered via the MOODLE online platform in a synchronous and asynchronous mode i.e. study materials were made available for students at the beginning of the semester thus allowing students to study at the most convenient times. Additionally, students were able to meet the lecturer during scheduled online sessions. Face-to-face meetings were also scheduled for students enrolled in b-learning courses, delivered on-campus.

For each unit, students were required to do an assignment. These included:

1. Stationary or remote presentation of the selected reading accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation, or:
2. Participating in online discussion forum on a topic chosen by the student and related to the subject of the unit. Each post was to be based on a research article or a book chapter.

It was required to respect copyrights law i.e. provide references (names of the authors of articles, illustrations, films, and the numbers of the pages cited). Assessed were: substantive correctness of the content of presentations (maximum 40% of the mark), the composition of the overall presentation, the content of individual slides, use of language, the functionality of the film / graphics, editorial quality, and the adequacy and technical correctness of hyperlinks (10% of the score for meeting each of these criteria). During stationary classes, students discussed the issues of their presentations with the whole group. In case of remote classes, they commented on the forum presentations or their colleagues' posts.

It was students who decided whether they preferred to work individually, in pairs or in group of three.

They were given guidance, examples and evaluation criteria, but their work was not monitored. Therefore collaboration and cooperation (Ellis, & Han, 2021, p. 510) were not separately analyzed in this study but grades for works prepared: individually, in pairs and in groups of three. The conversations held with students revealed that some of them met in person and collaborated face-to-face. However, the majority communicated online.

For the purpose of this research, units were selected in such a way as to provide as much information as possible: delivered as part of bachelor's or masters' degree courses, during the pandemic and post-pandemic, lectures, tutorials, and laboratories, containing on-campus and off-campus components, or fully remote. Table 1 presents units analyzed in this study.

Table 1.
Analysed units. R – remote, OC – on campus

Unit	Class, level	Year	Number. of participants
Field of study: <i>Cultural Studies and Media Knowledge</i>			
<i>Basics of Theory of the Culture</i>	Lectures R, tutorials OC and R, bachelor's level	First year, 2021/2022, off campus	25
		First year, 2020/2021	66
<i>Contemporary Media Systems</i>	Lectures R, tutorials OC and R, bachelor's level	First year, 2021/2022	76
		First year, 2021/2022, off campus	22
<i>Basics of Social Communication</i>	Tutorials R, bachelor's level	Second year, 2020/2021, off campus	11
		Second year, 2020/2021	44
<i>Internet and New Media</i>	Lectures R, tutorials OC and R, bachelor's level	Second year, 2021/2022	58
		Second year, 2020/2021, off campus	11
		Second year, 2020/2021	44
<i>Media in the Society</i>	Tutorials OC and R, bachelor's level	Second year, 2021/2022	57
		Second year, 2020/2021, off campus	11
<i>Literary Film Adaptations</i>	Tutorials OC and R, bachelor's level	Second year, 2020/2021, off campus	14
		Second year, 2021/2022	38
<i>Literature and the Social Media</i>	Tutorials OC and R, bachelor's level	Third year, 2021/2022	38
		Third year, 2021/2022, off campus	14
<i>Social Communication in Cultural Perspective</i>	Lectures R, tutorials OC and R, master's level	Fourth year, 2020/2021	14
<i>Media Systems and Media Ecology</i>	Lectures R, master's level	Fifth year, 2020/2021	17
		Fifth year, 2020/2022	13
<i>Literature and the New Media</i>	Lecture R, master's level	Fifth year, 2021/2022	13
Field of study: <i>Polish Philology</i>			
<i>Multimedia in Social Communication</i>	Laboratory R, bachelor's level	Second year, 2020/2021	13
<i>Literary Film Adaptations</i>	Tutorials R, bachelor's level	Third year, 2020/2021	30
		Third year, 2021/2022	26
Total			655

The lecturer communicated with the students on the online forum, via the BigBlueButton application, and in the academic year 2021/2022 face-to-face during on-campus tutorials. The lectures were delivered fully online.

Results of Research

Assessments of Students Working Individually, in Pairs and in Groups of Three

30% of students completed the tasks individually, 60% in pairs, and 10% in groups of three. The proportions are shown in the *Figure 1*.

The Kruskal-Wallis' test showed that there were no statistically significant differences between grades obtained by students working alone, in pairs or in a group of three ($p=0.2341$). However, slightly higher grades obtained students who had worked individually: average 83.82%, median 85.50%; an average achieved for work completed in pairs was 82.42% and median 83.00%; results obtained by students who studied in groups of three were: average 81.64%, median 83.00%. On the other hand, in case of large groups (consisting of 76, 66, 58, 57, and 38 stationary full-time students, and 16 and 15 part-time students) work prepared collectively attracted higher marks.

Details are presented in Table 2.

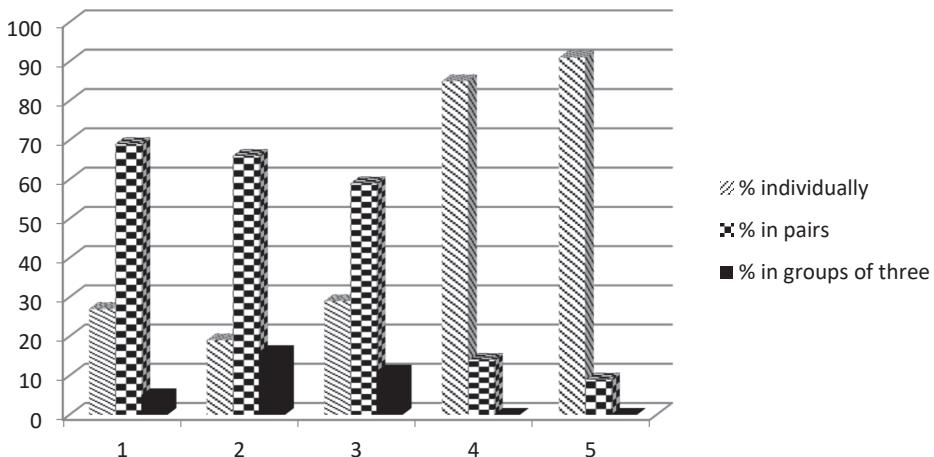


Figure 1. Numbers of the surveyed students studying individually, in pairs and in groups of three. 1, 2, 3 – the first, second and the third year of bachelor's degree course. 4, 5 – the first and the second year of master's degree course

Table 2.
Distribution of grades obtained by 180 students

Way of studying	N of students	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Standard Deviation
Individually	180	83.81	85.50	70	100	10.86
In pairs	409	82.43	83.00	0	100	11.56
In groups of three	66	81.64	83.00	70	99	9.58

Table 2 suggests that independent studying is more effective and less risky (SD=10.86714) than studying in pairs (SD=11.55655). It is not surprising that the most ambitious students preferred to study individually. This is true about each studied group as in each group some students chose to work independently.

It needs to be observed that standard deviation for students working in pairs was slightly higher than in the case of students working individually also for other reasons i.e. one pair of the students failed to complete the task.

None of the students working in groups of three obtained the highest grade (100%) or the lowest grade (0%) which impacted the smallest value of standard deviation obtained for this group. In addition, a very small number of students studied in groups of three. These were all stationary students studying after peak of the pandemic i.e. in 2022.

The number of students working individually, in pairs, and in groups of three (180, 409, and 66 respectively) is not comparable. This is mainly due to the fact that the number of the first and the second year students was the highest and they preferred to study in pairs and group of threes. On the other hand, the most experienced students, i.e. 4th and 5th year's students, preferred to study individually and were not found to study in group of threes. They valued the option of editing their individual posts on the forum. They preferred individual work to presenting a reading to size an opportunity to define and present their identity and individuality.

Due to the numerous and varied factors influencing student's choice of the way of studying, as well as different fields of study, time of the pandemic, and after the pandemic, it was concluded that a more detailed statistical analysis comparing grades obtained for work completed individually, in pairs, and in the group of threes would be unreliable.

Results Obtained by Students at Different Years

The Kruskal-Wallis' test of the grades obtained by students enrolled in a particular year of study was repeated three times. Firstly, the grades obtained by students working individually were subjected to this test, then the grades obtained

for work completed in pairs, and finally the grades obtained for work performed in groups of three. In each case the result was $p < 0.001 < 0.05$, which means statistically significant differences in the grades obtained by students in a particular year of a course. A more detailed analysis of the results is presented below.

Individual work.

The median of 70% was calculated for the first year students indicating that first year students obtained the lowest median grade. The highest median grade of 94% was obtained by final years students i.e. students in 4th and 5th year. The number of points awarded for individual work is presented in *Figure 2*.

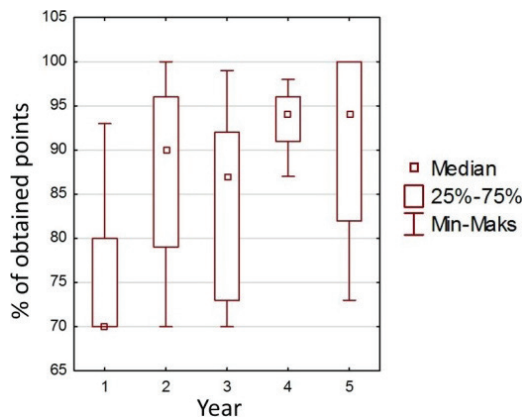


Figure 2. Points obtained for individual work by students in different years

Work in pairs.

For this method of work, the Kruskal-Wallis' index of differentiation of the number of points obtained was $p < 0.001 < 0.05$ indicating significant differences. The 4th year was excluded from the analysis because only two students worked in a pair. Therefore, the group was too small to be statistically analyzed.

True, there were no significant differences in the grades obtained only between 2nd and 5th year students working in pairs. But *Figure 3* clearly shows that students of the 2nd and the 5th year obtained the best results. The median was 95% and 89%, respectively.

The 1st year students obtained the lowest grades. The median reached only 73%, as visualized in *Figure 3*.

Students in more senior years performed better. The median for the 4th year was 95%. However, only 2 4th year students worked in a pair. Therefore this group was excluded from the chart and analysis.

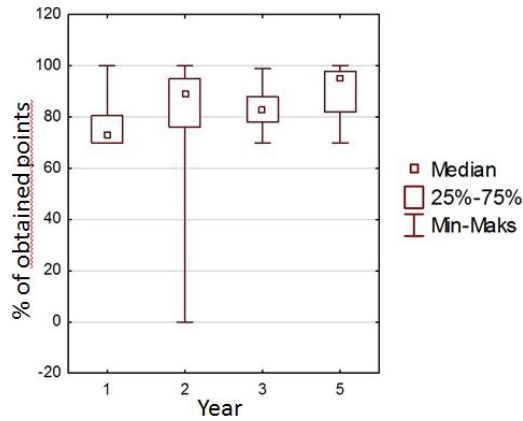


Figure 3. Points obtained for work in pairs by students of different years of study

Work in groups of three.

Students in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd year decided to work in group of threes. The Kruskal-Wallis score differentiation index for working in groups of three was $p < 0.001 < 0.05$ indicating significant differences. The grades scored by students of the 1st year differed significantly from the grades scored by students of the 2nd and 3rd year.

However, there were no significant differences in the grades scored by students of the 2nd and 3rd year. Students in the 2nd and 3rd year obtained a median score of 86% and 85%, respectively. On the other hand, 9 first-year students obtained median of 70%, i.e. a lower pass threshold. These differences are shown in Figure 4.

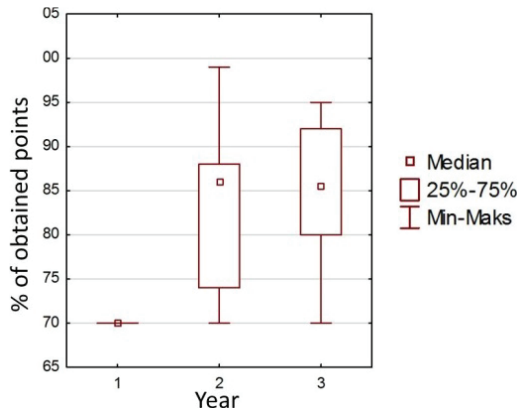


Figure 4. Points obtained for work in threes by students in different years

The Figure 4 suggests that only students in final years were able to work efficiently in groups of three. Students in the 2nd and the 3rd year knew each other from previous years of study from face-to-face interactions. Therefore, their

distant communication was smooth and effective. They were more willing to work cooperatively and obtained higher grades than the 1st year students. On the other hand, the students in the 4th and the 5th year did not work in groups of three. They opted for more independent ways of preparing their assignments.

A high median obtained for more advanced students (86% for students in 2nd year, 85.5% for those in the 3rd year) contrasts with median obtained for 1st year students enrolled in baccalaureate courses (70%).

The above analysis shows that marks obtained for individually completed work in general were the highest. Moreover, more advanced students studied more effectively.

During and after the Peak of COVID-19: 2021 and 2022

To research the effects of studying in pairs and groups of three in 2021 and 2022 i.e. during and after peak of COVID-19, the Pearson's test was applied and the results were analyzed. The popularity of studying alone in 2021 and 2022 was compared. Pearson's Chi² coefficient was obtained ($p=0.26195$), which signified no statistically significant difference. However, in 2021 about 30% of students studied individually, and in 2022 the ratio decreased to 26%. After the peak of the pandemic, students were slightly more willing to work in pairs and groups. The difference of 4% is statistically insignificant. Nonetheless, it indicates the direction of changes – the beginning of limiting individual work and shifting towards cooperation.

In 2021, the tested students worked either individually or in pairs. The *Figure 5* shows the revival of work in groups of threes in 2022.

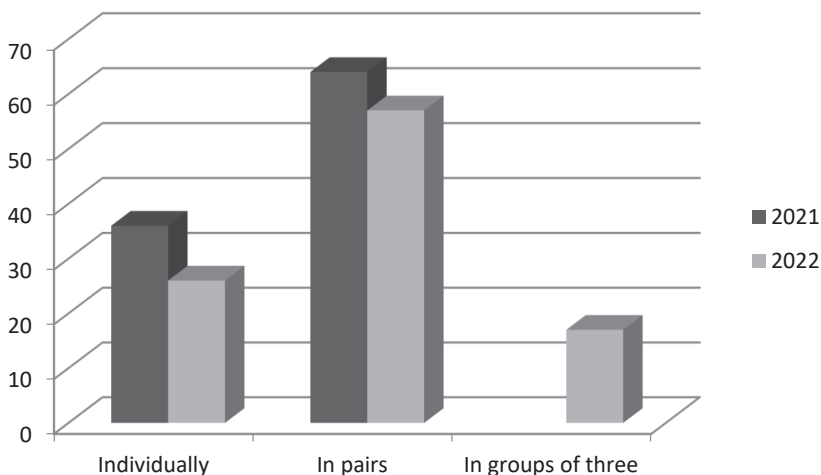


Figure 5. Cooperation in 2021 and in 2022

Cooperation Among Stationary and Off-Campus Students

The prevalence of individual and group work among full-time and part-time students was compared. Pearson's Chi² coefficient ($p=0.00030$) indicated a relationship. Nearly 42% of part-time and only about 25% of full-time students studied alone. These proportions are shown in *Figure 6*.

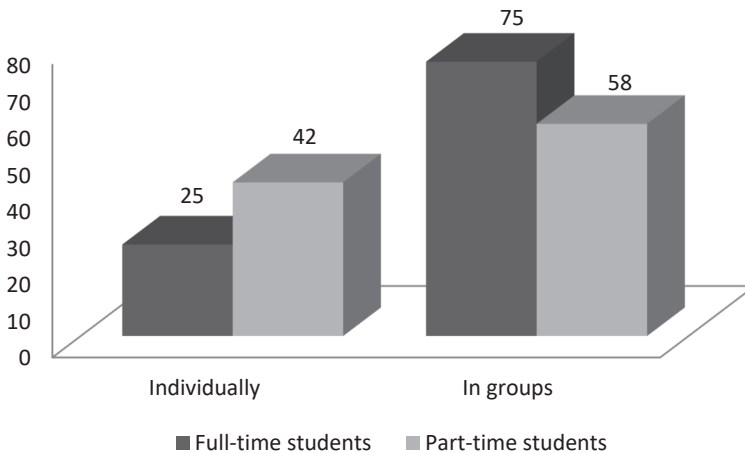


Figure 6. Percentage of full-time and part-time students studying individually

The higher rate of part-time students studying individually resulted from the fact that a part of the classes planned as stationary was held remotely, as well as a smaller number of hours of group classes. Therefore, personal ties among the students were weakened making cooperation more difficult.

Commentary on Results

Full-Time Students in *Cultural Studies*: Problems with Group Work

In the second semester, on-campus first-year students completed the *Contemporary Media Systems* unit. In the academic year 2020/2021, an average of 81.6% was obtained for 10 individual assignments, and 82.3% for 56 assignments prepared in pairs. In majority of cases, first-year students were inexperienced in following marking criteria. Therefore, they reviewed and corrected their work several times in order to pass or achieve a higher mark. The most ambitious students, including international students, in most cases, did not risk group work but prepared presentations on their own to ensure they obtained high marks. The pandemic

also hindered the emergence of a learning community necessary for e-learning (Academic E-learning Association, 2008), thus limiting students' interactions.

The following year, students were allowed to introduce corrections to their work to pass the unit. It was when the lowest mark (70%) was awarded. This was the modal value for every type of learning: individually, in pairs, or in groups of three. It can be concluded that students who hardly knew each other in order to achieve good results opted for individual studying. However, the majority of students looked forward to receiving the support of their peers, and reducing their workload. Some of the students, it seems, did not get a chance to get to know each other. In some cases, pairs were made by students whose names were next to each other on the alphabetical list of students enrolled in the unit.

Second-year on-campus students completed the following units in their 1st and the 2nd year of study: *Internet and New Media*, and *Media in Society*. In 2020/2021, in the former of the units, they obtained an average mark of 95.8% for individual work, and 91.3% for work done in pairs. During the pandemic, female students from Ukraine and Belarus studied independently and with great commitment because they were particularly interested in graduating from a Polish university. A year later, in post-pandemic time, a group of 7 students obtained an average mark of 84.9% for individual work, 33 (one student dropped out) students who studied in pairs received the same mark, 18 students achieved 86.5% for assignments prepared in groups of three. Thus, the results obtained in post-pandemic time turned out to be highest. However, group work did not always go smoothly.

Students progressed to completing the *Media in Society* unit, obtaining an average of 93.9% for individual work, but only 84.3% for assignments prepared in pairs. International and most committed students did not risk working in groups and completed assignments individually.

The third year students completed units: *Literary Film Adaptations* and *Literature and the Social Media*. In case of the former unit, the results were similar: the average for 4 individually prepared assignments was 84% (partially thanks to the high results obtained by two international students), 84.5% for 28 assignments completed in pairs, and 85.5% for those prepared by two groups of three. These students knew each other before the pandemic. They cooperated effectively and aimed at completing units before the final examination. Thus, they were willing to work in groups of three to fairly share the workload.

In the *Literature and the Social Media* unit, five students working individually achieved an average mark of 82.2%, 24 working in pairs – 82.8%, and three groups of three – 81.7%. Grades were similar among those students because of congruous commitment: they focused on completing the course on time in preparation for approaching final examination.

Part-time Students: Time Saving

First-year students of bachelor's degree in *Cultural Studies and Media Knowledge* completed two units: *Basics of Theory of Culture* via blended learning and *Contemporary Media Systems* delivered online. In case of the first unit, independent work was of a better quality – attracting an average mark of 85%. On the other hand, students working in pairs obtained an average mark of 68.1%, while one pair failed the assignment. Marks awarded for tasks completed individually were much higher than those obtained for work done in pairs. Some of the students dropped out, which complicated work of their colleagues who were left without a pair. Ambitious students preferred to study independently. They did not know their fellow students and preferred not to risk poor-quality teamwork. On the other hand, the less engaged students seized the opportunity to reduce their workload and avoid responsibility. Students enrolled in the latter unit organized their work in a similar way. Again, independent work attracted the highest marks with an average of 82.3%. Six students working in groups of three achieved the lowest marks: 70%. Students working in pairs achieved the average mark of barely 72%. That was because only two students achieved 81% while eight got 70%, which significantly lowered the overall mark.

Part-time second-year students completed the following units: *Basics of Social Communication, Internet and the New Media*, and *Media in Society*. Twelve students enrolled in the *Basics of Social Communication* unit knew each other well before the pandemic, so they preferred to study in pairs. In units *Basics of Social Communication* and *Internet and the New Media*, independently studied: the most ambitious male student who, due to lack of time, refined his presentations to the point that no corrections were needed, and the student who re-enrolled in the unit due to failing it. Those students obtained 99%, 96%, 0% and 0%, respectively, because the female student dropped out again (thus, her results were excluded from the study). The average rating for individual work was therefore 99% and 96%. On the other hand, students who studied in pairs achieved an average mark of 90% in *Basics of Social Communication* unit, and 86.4% in the *Internet and the New Media* unit. Both marks, however, are much lower than those achieved by the best student who worked individually.

The Media in Society unit required students to contribute to online discussion. There was no time to form groups because the classes were delivered over two days only, towards the end of the semester, and in distance education mode due to the pandemic. Therefore, students were to prepare forum contributions instead of presentations. The average mark for these individual assignments was 83.5%.

In the third year, the same students completed the following units: *Literary Film Adaptations* and *Literature and Social Media*. In case of the former unit, majority of students (10) worked in pairs, achieving an average of 85.6%. Five

students studied individually, including three who changed their enrolment status from full-time to part-time. The average mark for this group was 80%. It was lower than an average mark achieved for work completed in pairs. In case of this group, there was a tendency for group work because the students had known each other for three years. On the other hand, in the latter unit – 10 students who prepared their assignments individually achieved an average mark of 79.9%. Assignments of four students working in pairs attracted only 70%. That was because the students had to supplement their forum posts. Thus, they received the lowest passing mark.

It can be said that a decision to work or not to work in groups was pragmatic. The most ambitious students avoided wasting time and risk of cooperating with students they hardly knew. They preferred to count on themselves and their trusted colleagues. Focusing on writing ambitious bachelor's theses, they tried to avoid wasting time on reviewing and updating other assignments or risking failing the assignment or the entire unit. On the other hand, less ambitious students looked forward to sharing the workload and evading responsibility. They studied in the same pairs in all units.

Master's Degree Students: Utilizing Experience

First-year full-time master's degree students in *Cultural Studies...* field of study completed the *Social Communication in Cultural Perspective* unit during the pandemic. The lectures were delivered online. The group work was difficult. 14 students completed assignments on their own, averaging 81.5%. The ambitious female student cooperated with a fellow male student from Ukraine. Their work attracted 95%. Students in this unit achieved high results both for individual and group work. They were familiar with the assessment requirements and were experienced in studying at a tertiary level.

Second-year students, on the other hand, completed the *Media Systems and Media Ecology* unit during the pandemic. They knew each other before the pandemic because they had completed undergraduate studies together. They preferred to work in pairs, averaging 90.5%, with four top marks of 100%. Even the dropout of one of the students did not disturb the group work – the remaining student completed the assignment on his own, obtaining mark of 93%. Marks achieved for these assignments formed part of the final course examination grade.

Another group completed the same course a year later. 11 students worked individually, averaging 83.3%. Two befriended female students who were jointly editing the university newspaper completed assignment together achieving 82%.

In the last semester of the course, students completed the *Literature and New Media* unit. At that time they were preparing their master's theses and devoted most of their time to this task. To avoid the need of redoing assignments, they prepared

them very well and on time. An assignment prepared individually attracted an average of 97.8%, and was prepared by a pair of students – 96%. The scores testify not so much about the difference between the mark awarded for work done individually or in pairs, but to the most experienced student's high competencies and mature approach to the task.

Due to small size of groups of students enrolled in master's degree courses, the results cannot be generalized. Nonetheless, two trends can be noted. The first trend: master's degree students achieved relatively high marks, much higher than the bachelor's degree students. The second trend: master's degree students preferred individual studying. However, it might have been due, at least in part, by the pandemic and post-pandemic conditions.

Polish Philology Students: Individual Success

Second-year baccalaureate students in *Polish Philology* completed *Multimedia in Social Communication* unit. Individually prepared assignments attracted average of 83.4%, and those done in pairs – 79.8%. Therefore, it can be concluded that group working was less effective. The classes were delivered online and thirteen students enrolled in the unit hardly knew each other because specialization *Social communication* was created while they were in their second year. They had limited trust to each other. The most ambitious, therefore, opted for individual success rather than for group work and comradeship.

At the same time, during the pandemic, third-year students achieved an average of 85% for 22 assignments completed individually in the *Literary Film Adaptations* unit; 8 students achieved 81% for works completed in pairs. The results suggest that almost 2/3 of students opted for individual success rather than for cooperation, even though they knew each other for three years and had completed same units.

Interestingly, a year after the pandemic was over, 22 students enrolled in this unit achieved an average of 84.6% for assignments prepared in pairs, 3 students achieved 92% for those prepared in groups of three, and one student got 94% for work completed independently. It seems that after the pandemic, relying on befriended fellow students regain its popularity. The students become more familiar with each other during taking on-campus classes together. Therefore, they had more confidence in each other than their predecessors during the pandemic. However, the most ambitious female student who received the highest mark preferred to work individually.

Statements of Students on Individual and Group Work

Negative ratings resulted from various reasons. The most ambitious part-time Student A studied exclusively individually and obtained the highest marks. He chose to work independently despite being aware that failing to complete a task on time resulted in receiving negative feedback and an additional task to be completed:

Dear Professor, thank you for reminding me about the due date. However, I won't be able to prepare the presentation on time. I have higher priority things to do – I need to work to support myself and earn money for my studies. I realize that by failing the deadline I will fail the assignment and will have to prepare an additional presentation. (Student A).

But the least ambitious students in their 1st and 2nd year and those from large groups, preferred group work and sharing the workload to disperse responsibility.

Moreover, online interactions frequently cause confusion and misunderstandings. Less ambitious students expressed negative emotions when no one from the group was willing to take responsibility for flawed or incomplete work. Thus, responsibility was scattered, especially in groups of several students. In such cases, each member of the group counted on others to produce a quality piece of work because all members of the team were to receive the same mark for the assessment.

The commitment level of the members of other groups was similar: some students were very ambitious but particular showed a lack of commitment which according to some authors (Xie et al., 2020; Saraiva, & Silva, 2021, p. 8) is characteristic of online education. In case where the group work occurred to be effective, it was repeated in the next units. Otherwise – it was terminated, as in an example below:

...This is totally absurd! It was me who changed this presentation and introduced many corrections and it was me who put the penultimate version. Student C did not communicate with me at all. Student C didn't bother to inform me that he was resigning from the cooperation. Only yesterday he contacted me asking for help with the presentation. I had no idea that he broke the cooperation a while ago. I was not informed. I'm just learning about this now and I'm shocked (...). More, Student C has just written to me that he obtained credit for this unit. I don't know how. We did the presentation together, and I have passed all the quizzes. I simply don't understand it all. (Student B 19.02.2022).

Unfortunately, student B did not work systematically. She did not respond to e-mails from Student C or the tutor. She arbitrarily considered the cooperation to be over.

Student C who studied systematically had a completely different view on cooperation with Student B:

I have been contacting Student B on a regular basis in regards to corrections. Ms. Student B did not reply a long time. Therefore, I decided to introduce corrections by myself in order to receive a pass. Regards. Student C.

Student B who arbitrarily withdrew from working with Student C in the above course was unable to find a colleague to form a pair with during the next course. She failed to complete assignments on her own and dropped out. The reasons for the failure had most likely biopsychic and didactic background. Firstly, the student had difficulty concentrating and too little predisposition to cooperate. Secondly, the remote form of classes limited the teacher's control and imposed a learning environment probably not adapted to the cognitive abilities of this student (compare Słomczyński, & Sidor 2012).

Student B's statement shows that, especially after the pandemic, students ought to be practically instructed, on *how collaborative learning (CL) and teamwork skills developed through working in groups* (Haugland, Rosenberg, & Aasekjer 2022, p. 2). In student cooperation, the most important thing is that each member of the group knows what the goal of the jointly performed task is. Whereas Student B correctly believed that

in multi-subject and multi-task activities, everyone does “only their own thing”, without sufficient reflection on what they are doing and what others are doing, what they are aiming at (...) in difficult situations such activities are at risk of failure between the acting people when the ties are broken (Kojas 2021).

Mindlessly completing only “one's part” of the task is characteristic of education in authoritarian and totalitarian systems. In the analyzed courses, students were presented with exemplary tasks and evaluation criteria. Student's work was to be accompanied by self-control and self-esteem, thanks to which *people with a sense of freedom and responsibility are shaped, which in turn favors the formation and functioning of democratic systems* (Kojas 2001).

Discussion

The students enrolled in the courses delivered at one university, in the specific realities of the COVID-19 pandemic and in post-pandemic conditions were subjects of this study. Only the assignment grades were analysed. Marks for the final exam or the tests, active participation during classes, and the fact that a student dropped out during completing a given unit were not taken into consideration for this research.

The results cannot be generalized due to the small research sample: units prepared and delivered by one lecturer, marks taken from one Institute of a particular university, from only two fields of study and achieved over two academic years. The way students worked might have also been influenced by the social context – students were uncertain if they would be able to continue their studies during the pandemic. Thus, they might have been more inclined to study more efficiently during the 2020-2022 teaching period.

Young people have an extremely high demand for peer-to-peer contact and social interaction. During the pandemic, such interactions were prohibited or at least strongly limited. Thus the time of the COVID-19 restrictions deepened interpersonal remote relationships developing the need for closeness with other people, empathy (Gurba et al., 2022, p. 3), and even caused Post-Traumatic Growth (Tedeschi 2018). This may explain why students were quite often so eager to work in pairs and groups during the pandemic. It would, therefore, be worth comparing those results with data obtained after pandemic, e.g. in the academic years 2022/2023 and 2023/2024, to see if students would be equally willingly participating in group work.

The passing criteria changed during the analysed period, because the way the assignments were completed was being adapted to the social context on an ongoing basis. During the academic year 2020/2021 due to the pandemic-related stress, students were allowed three attempts to pass the assignment. The same way they could also improve their final mark for the unit. However, during the academic year 2021/2022 the pandemic was over. Students were allowed to correct errors that led to failure of the assignment, but were no longer allowed to improve their marks. Introducing corrections attracted the lowest mark for the task. Failure to submit an assignment before the deadline meant failing it. It is not surprising then that students often were awarded the lowest passing mark (70%).

Mark for the assignment was either the final grade for the course, or in case of the courses ending with an examination – formed a part of that grade. Assignments within the *Literary Film Adaptations*, *Media in the Society*, and *Multimedia in Social Communication* units were marked, but the unit was Pass/Fail. Therefore, students were not motivated to put an effort into preparing their assignments. Then, it can be said that students studied different units with varying degrees of commitment.

In addition, the presented research offers insights into behavioural patterns of individual students. It happened that an individual task was prepared by one student in group. So, comparing such grade with the average grade achieved by the group does not present a reliable or accurate approach. Failure of a student to complete the assignments represents a similar kind of situation – the average rating for the rest of the students working in same-sized groups was lowered. Nonetheless, the findings of the research allow for applying some identified behaviour to a broader population i.e. other studied groups and the entire population of students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The hypothesis, *students working individually receive higher grades than those working in pairs or groups of three* was only partially confirmed. Students working individually received slightly higher grades, but it was not statistically confirmed.

The insignificantly highest marks were obtained by students preparing their assignments individually: the average grade for individual work was only 1.38% higher from those awarded for work in pairs, and only 2.17% higher from those awarded for work completed in groups of three. Thus, there is no statistically significant difference between grades obtained by students studying individually, in pairs, or in group of threes, because $p=0.2341$.

This means that distance education poses a serious research challenge for networking pedagogy or Internet pedagogy within Internet studies, and also for the fundamental findings of connectivism. E-learning is not about a one-way transfer of knowledge or individual effort. It requires students to communicate, cooperate, make conscious decisions, and defend their identity. However, for passive students, the media power proposes an *“un-educational” scenario of the new society affecting people’s growth and development* (De Martino, 2022, p. 143). That is why post-pandemic students need instructions, on how to work in small groups. Students who are least motivated to work in groups also need the teacher’s admonitions (Stoyanova, & Krämer, 2020, p. 109).

Future Research

The findings of the study are universal to humanities. A comparative research among science students is recommended. Additionally, further research on organization and effects of individual and group work during distance education students

is highly recommended. It would be worth studying student's attitudes to group work and individual work in subsequent post-pandemic years. Further studies ought to incorporate qualitative approach into exploring students' decisions on modes of studying (individually or in groups) because students have very different motives when making this choice.

What effects did the cooperation bring? Future research may also focus on investigating the impact of social media on the communication skills of students, their contribution to acquisition of knowledge, and the relationship between contemporary education and the logic of the market: the transformation of the educational content into profit, political strategies, and turbo-capitalist culture (Luttwak, 2000). Digital communication tools, intentionally or unconsciously used in e-learning, may develop or weaken team spirit, individual and social identity, even democratizing or weakening citizenship and the values of civil society (De Martino, 2022, p. 146).

The author hopes that this partial research will encourage other researchers to conduct recommended research and use results presented here.

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Anna Ślósarz

Razem czy nie? Efekty samodzielnej pracy i współpracy studentów Wydziału Filologicznego podczas e-learningu

Streszczenie

Założono, że zdalna współpraca rozwija kompetencje społeczne studentów, pozytywnie wpływa na osiągnięcie poznawczych celów kształcenia i rozwijanie umiejętności. Badaniu poddano 655 studentów stacjonarnych i niestacjonarnych, uczestniczących w 22 kursach zdalnych i w formie blended learning, prowadzonych na dwu kierunkach, na studiach I i II stopnia, stacjonarnych i niestacjonarnych, podczas pandemii COVID-19 i po niej, czyli w latach akademickich 2020/2021

i 2021/2022. Przeprowadzono instrumentalne studium przypadku: porównano oceny, uzyskane przez studentów za prace indywidualne oraz wykonane w parach i trójkach. Statystyczne różnice nie ujawniły się, jednak nieco wyższe oceny (83,81%) studenci uzyskali, pracując indywidualnie, a niższe (81,64%) w parach. Najzdolniejsi studenci nie ryzykowali współpracy i nie chcieli tracić czasu na zdalne komunikowanie się z mniej ambitnymi rówieśnikami, a najmniej zaangażowani liczyli na zmniejszenie wysiłku, wsparcie grupy i rozproszenie odpowiedzialności. Najwyższe oceny uzyskali studenci ostatnich roczników, którzy najlepiej rozumieli kryteria oceniania i stosowali się do nich, ponieważ chcieli zaliczyć zadanie w pierwszym podejściu, aby mieć czas na pisanie i obronę pracy. Niechętnie podejmowali współpracę studenci zagraniczni, którym zależało na dobrych ocenach i terminowym zaliczeniu z uwagi na krótki okres pobytu w Polsce i napięcie, spowodowane wojną na Ukrainie. Najniższe oceny (70% punktów) uzyskali studenci pierwszych roczników, którzy nie znali się wzajemnie, nie zyskali jeszcze wprawy w stosowaniu się do kryteriów oceny i mieli problemy z komunikowaniem się, spowodowane izolacją podczas pandemii. Najefektywniej współpracowali studenci zaprzyjaźnieni. W najliczniejszych grupach zwykle najlepiej wypadły prace w parach, lecz z uwagi na tendencję najzdolniejszych do pracy samodzielnej najwyższe statystycznie oceny uzyskano właśnie za prace indywidualne.

S ł o w a k l u c z o w e: zadanie, ocena, MOODLE, ryzyko, koledzy

Анна Слосарь

Вместе или нет? Эффекты самостоятельной работы и сотрудничества студентов филологического факультета при дистанционном обучении

Р е з ю м е

Предполагалось, что дистанционное сотрудничество развивает у студентов социальные компетенции, а также положительно влияет на достижение познавательных целей обучения и развитие умений и навыков. В исследовании приняли участие 655 студентов очной и заочной формы обучения, принявших участие в 22 курсах дистанционного и смешанного обучения, проводимых по двум направлениям обучения, на первой и второй ступенях, очной и заочной, во время и после COVID-19. пандемии, то есть в 2020/2021 и 2021/2022 учебных годах. Был проведен инструментальный кейс-стади: сравнивались оценки, полученные студентами за индивидуальную работу и выполненную в парах и тройках. Статистических различий не было, но несколько более высокие оценки (83,81%) были получены у студентов, работавших индивидуально, и более низкие оценки (81,64%) в парах. Наиболее талантливые студенты не рисковали сотрудничеством и не желали тратить время на дистанционное общение с менее амбициозными сверстниками, а наименее вовлеченные рассчитывали на снижение усилий, групповую поддержку и расплытие ответственности. Самые высокие оценки получили студенты последних курсов, которые лучше всего поняли критерии оценивания и придерживались их, так как хотели сдать диссертацию с первой попытки, чтобы успеть написать и защитить диссертацию. Иностранные студенты, которые хотели хороших оценок и своевременного завершения курсов, не желали сотрудничать из-за короткого периода пребывания в Польше и напряженности, вызванной войной на Украине. Самые низкие оценки (70%) получили первокурсники, которые не знали друг друга, еще не набрались практики в соблюдении критериев оценки и имели проблемы с общением из-за изоляции во время пандемии. Студенты, которые ранее были друзьями, работали наиболее эффективно. В самых больших группах

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обычно лучше всего удавалась работа в парах, но из-за склонности наиболее способных к самостоятельной работе самые высокие статистически высокие оценки были получены за индивидуальную работу.

Ключевые слова: задача, оценка, MOODLE, риск, друзья

Anna Ślószarz

¿Juntos o no? Efectos del trabajo independiente y la cooperación de los estudiantes de la Facultad de Filología durante el e-learning

S u m a r i o

La cooperación a distancia pretende desarrollar las competencias sociales de los estudiantes, así como incidir positivamente en la consecución de los objetivos cognitivos de la educación y el desarrollo de habilidades. El estudio abarcó a 655 estudiantes de tiempo completo y medio tiempo que participaron en 22 cursos de aprendizaje a distancia y combinados, realizados en dos campos de estudio, en estudios de primer y segundo grado, a tiempo completo y medio tiempo, durante y después del COVID-19 pandemia, es decir, en los cursos académicos 2020/2021 y 2021/2022. Se realizó un estudio de caso instrumental. Se compararon las calificaciones obtenidas por los alumnos para trabajos elaborados individualmente, en parejas o en grupos de tres. No hubo diferencias estadísticas, pero los estudiantes obtuvieron notas ligeramente más altas (83,81%) trabajando individualmente, y notas más bajas (81,64%) en parejas. Los estudiantes más talentosos no se arriesgaron a cooperar y no querían perder el tiempo en la comunicación a distancia con compañeros menos ambiciosos, y los menos comprometidos apostaron por reducir el esfuerzo, el apoyo grupal y la dispersión de la responsabilidad. Las calificaciones más altas las obtuvieron los estudiantes de los últimos años que mejor entendieron los criterios de evaluación y los cumplieron, porque querían aprobar la tesis en el primer intento para tener tiempo para escribir y defender la tesis. Los estudiantes extranjeros que querían notas y créditos a tiempo se mostraron reacios a cooperar debido a una corta estancia en Polonia y la tensión provocada por la guerra en Ucrania. Las notas más bajas (70% puntos) las obtuvieron los alumnos de primer año que no se conocían, aún no habían adquirido práctica en el cumplimiento de los criterios de evaluación y tenían problemas de comunicación por el aislamiento durante la pandemia. Los estudiantes que eran amigos trabajaron con mayor eficacia. En grupos más grandes, trabajar en parejas a menudo trajo mejores resultados. Sin embargo, debido a la tendencia de los estudiantes ambiciosos a trabajar de forma independiente, estadísticamente las calificaciones más altas se obtuvieron para trabajos individuales.

Palabras clave: tarea, evaluación, MOODLE, riesgo, amigos