Addressing the Social Loafing Problem in Assessment Practices from the Perspectives of Tanzania's Pre-service Teachers

Joseph Reginard Milinga
Mkwawa University College of Education, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Ezelina Angetile Kibonde
Mkwawa University College of Education, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Venance Paul Mallya
Mkwawa University College of Education, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Monica Asagwile Mwakifuna
Mkwawa University College of Education, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Addressing the Social Loafing Problem in Assessment Practices from the Perspectives of Tanzania's Pre-service Teachers

Joseph Reginard Milinga
Ezelina Angetile Kibonde
Venance Paul Mallya
Monica Asagwile Mwakifuna
Mkwawa University College of Education, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Abstract: Recent developments of higher teacher education in Tanzania have witnessed high student enrolments necessitating change of an emphasis from individual assessment to group-based assessment practices. In this context, informed by the constructivist philosophical perspective, this article reports on the pre-service teachers' voices regarding the prevalence, impacts and counteractive strategies of social loafing. The pre-service teachers are drawn from one higher education institution in Tanzania that serves as a case study. It draws on qualitative data collected from a sample of purposively selected undergraduate pre-service teachers. The study found social loafing tendencies to be commonplace and with far-reaching consequences amongst students as they engaged in group-based assessment tasks, hence calling for measures to redress them. Addressing social loafing in higher teacher education is crucial to avoid compromising the quality of assessment practices in the contexts of ever-rising student enrolments in many lower income countries.

Introduction

The questions of whether social loafing tendencies exists among pre-service teachers in higher education (henceforth HE), and what constitute their impacts on their learning have yet to receive considerable research attention in lower income country contexts including Tanzania. Increasingly, Tanzania has witnessed rapid expansions in student enrolments and number of higher education institutions (henceforth HEIs) (Mgaiwa & Poncian, 2016; United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2016). The rising enrolment of students in HE has an implication for the delivery of quality education, including for graduate teachers (Ballantyne et al., 2002). Assessment of student learning is a key component in teaching and learning processes as it systematically collects information about student progress towards the learning goals (Dhindsa et al., 2007; Mussawy, 2009). The categorisation of learning assessment is based on the intended functions to result in several types of assessments (Miller et al., 2013). In many HEIs, assessment practices broadly fall in two categories: continuous assessment, or formative assessment or assessment for learning; and summative assessment or assessment of learning (Combrinck & Hatch, 2012).

In Tanzania, the higher education system is largely semesterised that divides an academic year into two semesters of 14-16 weeks of teaching and assessment (Khattak et al., 2011; Mohamed, 2006; Sifuna, 2010). Typically, a semester system is a learner-centred system of education with emphasis on learning rather than teaching (Khattak et al., 2011). In many Tanzania universities, undergraduate programmes, including teacher education programmes, include coursework components that formatively assess students throughout their study before they undertake their final university examinations. In this context, summative assessment is essentially realisable through the end of semester university examinations.

Formative assessment aims to improve the teaching and learning processes as well as the instructional practices. This assessment is more of a process than any other type of assessment procedures (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Mussawy (2009) asserts that formative assessments are generally developed directly from classroom instructions, group work, and related classroom activities, and serve as an alternative to traditional assessment practices. Formative assessment provides immediate feedback to inform students on the importance of ongoing teaching and learning processes (Mkimbili & Kitta, 2020; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). On the other hand, summative assessment features at the end of a course or level of study (Combrinck & Hatch, 2012). In this study this refers to end of semester university examinations designed to determine the extent to which students achieve a given study's set objectives. In both cases, assessment practices are integral to the teaching and learning process at all levels of education, including HE, as they play a central role in evaluating students' learning (Combrinck & Hatch, 2012). Indeed, assessment provides information about how learners or students are performing; hence, assisting teachers or instructors in judging academic progress and the achievement of their students.

Using continuous assessment facilitates the gathering of information about students' learning in HE with recourse to different assessment tools such as tests, portfolios, observation, and written work. Thus, depending on the purpose of an assessment, course instructors or lecturers may choose from a wide range of assessment types and modes. Group-based assessment is one of the assessment modes commonly applied in HE as a means for overcoming challenges associated with an increased number of students enrolled in different programmes at the university level. The use of group-based assessment promotes collaborative learning skills among students as they engage learners in different academic and higher order thinking, nurture critical thinking through discussion, clarify ideas, and enhance ability to evaluate other people's ideas (Hassanien, 2006; Kedal & Chiriac, 2011). Group work promotes academic achievement and socialisation among students (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2011; Sokhanvar et al., 2021). The use of group-based assessment is consistent with pedagogical shifts from teacher-centred learning to experiential, student-centred methods (Hall & Buzwell, 2013). The latter methods of teaching and learning enable students to play an active role in their learning. Active engagement in learning helps to achieve meaningful learning, hence a need for its emphasis in HE. Despite the cited usefulness, lack of proper planning of group-based assessment can result in poorly-monitored processes of executing the tasks, with the provision of group-based tasks as part of continuous assessment in HE creating more harm than good because of social loafing phenomenon amongst students (Opdecam & Everaert, 2018).

The authors of this article had experience working as teacher educators at the institution understudy by the time the research was conducted. They had been involved in teaching activities in large classes at this institution following the continual increase of the number of students. Even though research on social loafing abounds elsewhere, the phenomenon has yet to

become a focus of much empirical research in the Tanzania HE context. This is despite the increased use of group-based assessment resulting from increased number of students. In response to this research gap, this article contributes to the existing body of knowledge in two ways: First, it extends the knowledge on social loafing in HE contexts from higher income countries where much of the research on the topic has been conducted to lower income educational contexts. Second, it brings to the literature students' voices using a qualitative approach as opposed to much of the quantitative studies. Given the scarcity of research on social loafing from Tanzania, the article builds on the empirical literature from other country contexts, calling for more studies on the topic to address and understand fully its complexity in HE settings of the country. To that end, the structure of the article is divided into six sections. This section introduces the article by presenting background literature in which the rationale for the study is highlighted. This is followed by section two which presents the theoretical framework guiding the study along with outlining the research questions. Section three presents methodological considerations that were used in data collection and analysis. Section four details the findings of the study in line with the research questions as outlined in section two, followed by their discussion in section five. Finally, in section six, concluding remarks and recommendations are presented.

Theoretical Framework and Current Study

Social loafing is a phenomenon that allows individuals to exert less effort when working in groups to rely on other group members to accomplish such tasks (Horowitz & Bordens, 1995). This phenomenon occurs when an individual's motivation and effort are reduced while working in a group as opposed to individual exertions (Baron & Branscombe, 2012). Njie et al. (2013) contend that social loafing is "the act of gaining reward for work done that one does not either contribute or fall short of the expected contribution" (p. 260). Similarly, Jassawalla et al. (2008) treat social loafing as a tendency of individual members both slacking off and contributing poorly to group task while demonstrating acts associated with disruptive behaviours that can interfere with the smooth accomplishment of the work assigned. Webb (1995) defines social loafing as little involvement or making no contribution of a group member during group work. Metaphorically, Latane et al. (1979) regard social loafing as a 'social disease' because of its detrimental effects on individual persons and societies. For instance, social loafing can demotivate and discourage active members of the group, hence affecting learning in education context (Cheng & Warren, 2000).

Various literature sources (Liden et al., 2004; North et al., 2000; Pieterse & Thompson, 2010) report that group size and how such groups are formed pose big challenges to effective learning assessment in HEI. In this regard, Liden et al. (2004) also associated increases in task interdependence and decreases in task visibility and distributive justice with greater occurrence of social loafing. Again, Hall and Buzwell (2012) revealed that social loafing at the university was the greatest concern across all disciplines, hence suggesting proper identification of students' issues when working in groups, and the provision of the required support to students as means to curb the problem. Njie et al. (2013) reported that lack of supervision, looseness of group formation protocols, students' workloads, and lack of will to translate the strong institutional policies of group-based learning and assessment into relevant actions all contributed to students' social loafing. Frykedal and Chiriac's (2011) study assessed the students' learning

when working in groups and found that teachers encountered difficulties on how to assess appropriately students' group works.

Orr's (2010) qualitative study on students' experiences with group work assessment in creative arts indicated that students valued the opportunity to work in groups because it was seen as an authentic and effective preparation for life after graduation in the creative sector. Group-based assessments should consider both the process and outcome as the two are important parts of the educational assessment since a focus on the former helps students overcome social loafing behaviour (Kuisma, 2007). Careful planning of the scope of the group project, peer evaluations, the size of the group and satisfaction with group members' contributions can discourage social loafing (Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008). Maiden and Perry's (2011) study deals with free-riders assessing group work assignments at a UK university revealed that students' participation in group work increased due to students' experience with group work; outcomes of individual approaches; students' views on approaches and tutors' experience of the approaches. Pieterse and Thompson (2010), who explored whether the academic alignment of teams reduces social loafing, found that the behaviour occurs most often when stronger team members side-line a weak member. On the other hand, the study found that social loafing tendencies to be rare in self-selected teams. Stark et al. (2007) indicated that individual positive attitude towards group work reduces the prospect of social loafing occurring.

Group-based assessment is in line with constructivist learning theories (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010; Santrock, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978). The theories consider social construction of knowledge and learning as its key aspects (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). This implies that, students can learn best when they interact with others in different social situations. According to Santrock (2011), the use of constructivist approach to teaching implies that opportunities for students to learn should be established by ensuring that they interact socially with others in constructing knowledge and understanding of their world. Thus, teachers could serve as facilitators or guides (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010; Santrock, 2011), and provide necessary support to students as they construct knowledge and understanding within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). In general, constructivist learning theories emphasise on students working co-operatively and collaboratively (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010; Santrock, 2011), hence the belief that group work is an important teaching strategy. Although collaboration has always been associated with group work, not all group work is collaborative (Elliott, 2001); meanwhile, social loafing can compromise students' collaborative learning efforts (Le et al., 2018). In line with constructivist learning theories (Fox, 2001), learning in universities is fundamentally intended to create knowledge through meaningful interactions among the key actors in the teaching and learning processes. As such, students can learn with a view to understanding and creating knowledge through a meaningful means (Hall & Buzwell, 2013). Thus, assessment practices, which are an integral part of effective teaching and learning processes, need to be aligned with the constructivist learning theories and their underlying pedagogical practices.

The literature reviewed underscores the value of the use of group-based assessments in HE given the increasing number of students, especially in Tanzania's public universities. This type of assessment mode is essential when teaching large classes. In fact, the social loafing phenomenon is one of the barriers to achieving the expected benefits of using group-based assessments in the HE context (Maiden & Perry, 2011). Even though student engagement in learning is paramount as it fosters students' motivation and productive learning outcomes, managing students working in groups poses a challenge in the provision of HE (Volet &

Mansfield, 2006). The studies reviewed on social loafing in the context of higher income countries suggest the need for further research on how university students learn and assessed in lower income country contexts. Indeed, little is known on the topic in the context of Tanzania's HEIs where teachers are prepared. Thus, the article reports the perspectives of pre-service teachers on the prevalence of and impacts associated with social loafing, as well as counteractive strategies using a sample of undergraduate pre-service teachers when working in group-based academic assessments in one of Tanzania's HEI. Specifically, the article addresses the following questions:

i. How do undergraduate pre-service teachers view the existence of social loafing behaviour when doing group-based assessment tasks?
ii. How does social loafing behaviour impact on pre-service teachers' learning and social lives?
iii. What strategies do pre-service teachers provide that could be used to reduce social loafing amongst students when engaged in group-based assessment tasks?

Methodology

The findings reported in this article are based on a qualitative study which had explored pre-service teachers' experiences with social loafing in one of Tanzania's tertiary institutions. It used a single case study design. On this basis, the study was informed by constructivism, a philosophical perspective which considers people as active agents in seeking out and constructing their view of the world in particular contexts (Cohen et al., 2018). It holds that "there are multiple realities" and, "each of these realities arises from the 'construction' of meaning and understanding, based on the individual's context, previous experience and knowledge, attitudes and beliefs" (Mann & MacLeod, 2015, p. 52). Relevant to the research was the exploration of pre-service teachers' perspectives on social loafing within the context of HE to ascertain how the social loafing problem was manifested. Our focus on pre-service teachers was prompted by the inherent moral responsibility they have in carrying out the teaching roles in the schools (Anangisye, 2010; Gaikwad, 2011), including decent up-bringing of learners. They are expected to model appropriate values and behaviours such as cooperation, commitment to tasks, sense of responsibility, and communication in their working with them. Effective group-based assessment has the potential to enhance the development of these behaviours and related skills and values in pre-service teachers. By unveiling social loafing in their initial teacher training with respect to group-based assessment practices, interventions can be made to orient them towards more positive behaviours which, in turn, would be transmitted to the learners in schools. In this case, developing sense of responsibility and cooperative skills in pre-service teachers through meaningful group-based assessment practices is crucial.

Additionally, triggered by convenient reasons, we undertook the study in one region, in Tanzania. This is because the authors were working in this region at the study site. By the time of conducting the research, there were three main HEIs operating on full-time basis in the region. Of these institutions, the study site was the only institution specialised in offering undergraduate teacher education programmes. Thus, using a single case study design, the research was conducted with the participants of interest; that is, pre-service teachers to gather in-depth qualitative data on social loafing (Ary et al., 2010).

The study used purposive and convenient sampling to select participants (Bryman, 2016; Teddlie & Yu, 2007), who comprised 18 undergraduate pre-service teachers. Convenience sampling ensured that only those pre-service teachers who had once been group leaders and worked in group-based assessment tasks in different courses were involved in the study. Though the participants for this study were enrolled in a three-year teacher education programme, purposive sampling ensured that only second-and third-year pre-service teachers were drafted into the sample primarily because they had more experience with social loafing at the university level than first-year undergraduates. Indeed, these more advanced pre-service teachers used their first-hand experiences with the phenomenon under study to provide their perspectives during individual interviews regarding the prevalence and impacts of social loafing in group work assignments in addition to what could be done to curb the problem.

The data for this study were collected in 2018 using face-to-face semi-structured in-depth personal interviews held with the participants. Each of the four authors had scheduled interview meetings with the participants for data collection. The interview guides of the study were applied after integrating input from an external review by an expert. Moreover, the study followed research protocol including getting necessary permissions and informed consent. Participation was on voluntary basis and the participants were assured of anonymity with consent preceding any audio-recording following participants. Each interview lasted between 15 and 50 minutes. At 18 interviews the study had reached a data saturation (Bryman, 2016). The interview questions asked included: *"Have you ever experienced/heard about social loafing tendencies of your group members or any other groups?" "What impact did the loafing tendencies have to the group and individual members?" "In your view, what should be done to overcome social loafing at this institution?"*

The study applied both deductive and inductive approaches to data analysis, specifically thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman, 2016; Terry et al., 2017). Re-listening the audio data and re-reading the data transcriptions were at the core of the analysis. The data were transcribed verbatim to represent the real meanings derived from the voices of the participants. Each of the four authors transcribed the interview data independently before finally sharing them for reporting purposes. Based on the central research questions guiding this study, the analysis of qualitative interviews led to the development of themes and sub-themes on the prevalence, impacts, and suggestions for reducing social loafing. Accordingly, themes development was achieved through the use of both inductive coding process and deductive coding process (Terry et al., 2017). On the one hand, the coding relied on what was evident in the data at the semantic level from an analytical lens. On the other hand, the coding process was latent to gain a deeper understanding of the data to develop the themes. In either case, there was collation of relevant ideas into meaningful units as potential themes and sub-themes. Representative verbatim quotations of the participants' voices support these themes as evidential statements.

Findings
Prevalence of Social Loafing Behaviour among Pre-service Teachers

This study explored the participants' views on the existence of social loafing among pre-service teachers to ascertain its prevalence at a Tanzania tertiary institution. Consequently, participants' encounter with social loafing behaviour while working on group-based assessment tasks helped to establish its prevalence. Data from all the interviews revealed that the phenomenon was common among the pre-service teachers when working on their group-based

academic assignments and projects, hence making it widespread. When asked about their encounter with social loafing at the institution understudy, the participants shared different experiences as the following statements illustrate:

> *Yes, that [social loafing] exists. It could be in groups in which I have had worked as well as in other groups. Most of them [social loafers] don't participate in the work from day one to the end. They only expect others to do the work and simply wait to get marks from the task done by others. [Participant 1]*

> *This was also shared by another participant who said:*

> *... based on the meaning which has been provided that is obvious. In almost all the groups you are likely to find someone with such traits; if not one, two of them, it is usually like that. [Participant 3]*

> *Another participant explained at length:*

> *Yes! That [social loafing] is common, it is very common. It happens with regard to member participation and varies from one individual to another as each group member has his/her own interest in schooling. There are some members who may be present during the work but do not pay full attention to the work. In my group, the tendency was also present. There were members who participated fully but also a few others that were there only to make up the numbers; I mean they only attended to be included in the work but did not contribute any ideas. [Participant 8]*

These participants offer significant insights into the prevalence of social loafing at the institution under study. The excerpts reveal non-contributing to group tasks and complete non-attendance to participate in group work activities. These statements affirm that social loafing tendencies were widespread and constituted one of the critical setbacks to students' learning and social interactions. Group size concerns are also attributable to creating spaces for loafing tendencies, that is, social loafing was more likely to occur in larger than in smaller groups. Furthermore, according to the non-loafing members, the social loafers provided lame excuses for their behaviour. This parasite-like association with the groups negatively and varyingly affected other non-loafing members. Many of them lamented that such tendencies compromised their learning, especially among non-loafing students. Broadly, the social loafing had far-reaching impacts on students learning and social lives at this institution as presented in the sections that follow.

Impacts of Social Loafing Behaviour on Pre-service Teachers

The second research question sought to understand how the students were affected by social loafing behaviour of some group members. This question was essential in discerning the potential problems among individual students and the assessment practices generally with a view to taking steps aimed to redress such negative consequences. Consequently, the study participants shared their experiences regarding the impacts of social loafing falling under the following sub-themes:

Perceived Low Scores in Assignments and Final University Examinations

Most of the participants recounted that social loafers contributed to low performance of the group, hence the final grades of the individual members. For instance, one of the participants said:

> *The impacts are associated with that behaviour, first, because it lowers grade or the number of points that we can otherwise score. This occurs when the work involves presentations. Sometimes, a teacher may randomly select from the group members to present. So, if someone did not participate in doing the work, that would fail to present if selected. [Participant 4]*

Similarly, other participants were concerned about their overall academic failure in terms of getting low grade point average (GPA) as reflected in the following statements made by one of the participants:

> *… the other impact can make you even fail academically… I mean you may prepare your work based on the way you distributed among yourselves… but the ones who are not committed, social loafers, will not do their portion as agreed upon. … in this way you may find that someone's GPA drops because of somebody who did not do their share as required. [Participant 2]*

Eruption of Conflicts, Social Rejection, and Group Disintegration

Repeatedly, the participants mentioned that the occurrence and recurrence of conflicts and misunderstandings among group members stemmed from social loafing dishonourable acts. They pointed out that their behaviour at times made them get frustrated during their learning. Such conflicts occurred when contradictory views arose regarding the group-based assigned tasks, meeting times, and when one is excluded from work submitted to the instructors:

> *There are several effects that can occur, for example… this social loafing can cause conflicts between group members. For example, if we agreed that we should meet at 4:00 pm, and someone comes at 6:00 pm, everyone becomes frustrated, especially when you ask them for their late coming… or you if you decide to take them out of the group because of the conditions you set. So, already this creates conflicts between the one who has been chased and the remaining group members. [Participant 2]*

Likewise, pointing to undesired consequences of social loafing among pre-service teachers in other groups, the following was expressed:

> *I experienced social loafing in other groups whereby members were quarrelling on whether the names of some group members should be included in the task done. The misunderstanding among members happened when some members did not participate in the arranged group discussion and, instead, asked their group leaders to include their names as participants in the group work. The conflicts started when group leaders and other members refused to include them in the group work done. [Participant 7]*

Time Wastage and Work Overloads

The participants were concerned that social loafing contributed to time wastage and increased workload for active-participating members of a group. They reported that most of the social loafers did not keep time for group work meetings. As a result, active-participating members sacrifice other equally significant engagements and spent much more of their time working for the group. In addition, they often overworked for the group work because of the social loafers' lack of contribution of intermittent absences; these social loafers did not even care about the quality of their group work:

> *It wastes much of our time because others do not attend to participate in the group task. If all the group members could attend, we would use less time doing the work since everybody could have worked on the specific part of the work. [Participant 6]*

Development of Psychological Distress and Demotivation of the Active Group Members

Some participants complained about the unfairness of the practice of awarding equal marks to all group members, including the social loafers. More critically, there were times when the social loafers outperformed other members in individual work such as in-class written tests. Implicitly, such social loafers had knowledge in some courses, but did not simply like to share it with other colleagues in groups. As such, even though they got marks for which they had not worked accordingly and they scored higher than the other colleagues on individual work, this had been creating some psychological distress to some group members, especially when there was no measures taken against the social loafers. As one participant explained:

> *Also, some members experience psychological problems, especially when the group leaders don't take any action against social loafers. They feel bad seeing those who don't participate in doing work are left freely like that… [Participant 6]*

Implicitly, there seems to be more negative impacts of social loafing behaviours than what has been reported. Consequently, strategies to overcome them are crucially needed to understand what could be recommended as possible counteractive strategies to the problem.

Participants' Perspectives on Overcoming Social Loafing Behaviour

Given the prevalence and impacts of social loafing, the participants were asked about what could be done to overcome the loafing behaviour among students, participants offered different strategies that could be employed:

Giving Students Opportunities to Form Groups

Participants reported that giving students opportunities to form their groups instead of being assigned to different groups by instructors could help ease problems associated with social loafing. In this regard, different problems associated with arbitrary assigning of students to

groups by instructors, and their subsequent cause of social loafing could be eased through the use of self-selection in forming groups:

> *Group members should get a mandate, firstly, to form groups on their own and mandate of reporting to the instructor of the participation of the group members. Here, I mean that when we self-select for a group assignment it will be easier for us to command full participation. You know this will be simple as we know each other. In most cases, such incidences are not reported to the instructors. I suggest that there should be a mechanism that will facilitate the reporting tendency. [Participant 14]*

Reducing the Group Sizes

Participants believed that having smaller groups could help reduce social loafing at this institution. They insisted that groups comprising five or fewer students could be more effective in organising and controlling the group members, hence severely limited opportunities for some of the members to loaf. The following participant said:

> *Groups should consist of not more than six members for the group to be effective. Groups with too many members tend to lead to poor participation as many don't show up for discussions, and in most cases they are generally less committed to the work. [Participant 6]*

In more specific terms, regarding the number of group members to be included in group-based assessment, the following pre-service teacher explained that:

> *I think one of the challenges of group assignment is the number of participants in each group. When a group is formed by 10 members it becomes increasingly difficult for all members to participate fully. For a group of five or fewer members, it is possible for all members to participate without loafing. [Participant 13]*

Training and Instituting Guidelines for Carrying out Group work

The participants further pointed out that the presence of guidelines on how to conduct group work would help determine who should do what and the consequences of any part failing to abide by the guidelines. Other participants highlighted on the need for training students on the use of group work. The following statements illustrate the need for these two issues respectively:

> *For the group works to be effective, there should be strict laws, which will force all students in the groups to perform the tasks given effectively without loafing. For example, taking serious measures to the students who tend to loaf may be helpful. [Participant 9]*
>
> *Education should be provided to the students on the importance of group work and their contribution in their academic performance before the formation of groups ... to understand the importance of the work. [Participant 7]*

Inclusion of Presentation Aspects on Random Assignment

Several participants reported that group work should entail presenting components instead of just the work submitted. During such presentations, instructors could also use random order selection of presenters. Similarly, others insisted on having the marks for presentation in which all the group members should present and be awarded marks based on their presentations, not just having the marks for the work submitted alone. Doing so, as the respondents insisted, could help get rid of social loafing:

> *... I would suggest using random selection of students to present instead of letting the students select among themselves who to present. If students are left to decide who must present, they would more likely exclude social loafers from the presenters; they would choose only those who had participated in the discussion and who can present the subject matter convincingly. [Participant 4] Another way that can help overcome social loafing is for the instructor to avoid to basing all marks on the submitted written work for marking. If the work weighs ten marks, for example, five marks could be for presentation, and the other five marks reserved for a final submitted paper. [Participant 3]*

Individual Submission and Grading of the Group Work

The participants further submitted that individual submissions for group work could help stave off social loafing. Some participants believed that each individual member of the group could be given a task out of the group assignment and work independently. The group could subsequently compile the individual tasks for a complete group submission based on individualised submissions. To them, such a strategy could ensure individual participation as course instructors would see the group work assignment from the vantage point of each member's contribution. One of the participants said:

> *To increase participation, individual work can be used, that is, a task can be provided as a group work but, finally, everybody submits his/her own individual work for marking. Doing so will help reduce social loafing as everyone will fear failing on their own if they do not participate in the group work. [Participant 3]*

Proper Timing of the Group Work and Reducing Students' Tasks

Some of the participants indicated that individuals tended to loaf when they had competing tasks provided by different instructors coupled with the attendance of ongoing lecture sessions and tests. The participants raised concerns about the time at which group-based tasks were provided. In consequence, some individuals gave excuses when called upon to participate in the group work discussion. Proper timing in the provision of group assessment tasks by instructors could also help to reduce students' social loafing behaviour as the following evidential statements attest:

> *Many of social loafers would tell you that, ... I had a test; I had a tight schedule so I couldn't come or do the work. Those are reasons most often given... very few would provide reasons related to social excuses, ...like that I was sick and*

for that case it becomes difficult to tell whether that was social loafing, especially when the person had such valid social reasons…. [Participant 3]

Discussion

The first question of the study aimed to establish the prevalence of social loafing behaviour. The findings indicate that social loafing was widespread and an issue of grave concern among students due to its detrimental effects not only on individual pre-service teachers but also on the education sector. All the participants reported having encountered some form of social loafing in their respective groups, implying the magnitude of the problem was huge. This finding coincides with previous research conducted in other countries affirming that social loafing is common in HE contexts and across disciplines (Hall & Buzwell, 2012). Perhaps, most of the social loafers harboured negative attitudes, and did not value group work (Stark et al., 2007).

Furthermore, social loafing took different forms, such as absenteeism from scheduled dates for group work, arriving late for group work, not contributing to the group work during discussion, and unpreparedness and poor contribution to the group work on assigned portions of the task. Hassanien (2006) reported similar challenges experienced by students when working within a group, highlighting poor attendance at group meetings as the most daunting group work challenge. In a present study, students reported these tendencies as unfair, especially when there were no serious measures taken against social loafers who ultimately shared equal marks with others from the group work. Hassanien (2006) similarly observed that getting equal marks without doing any work was one of the challenges of group work. Consequently, such social loafing students might progress in the teacher education programmes incognito and finally graduate. Such graduate teachers may fail the teaching profession.

Thus, negative impacts of social loafing behaviour on students' academic and social lives at this institution ranged from individual to group level effects. At the individual level, some students experienced stressful situations in their efforts to do group work in the absence of others—the social loafers. Under such situations, the students sacrificed their time and other engagements to accomplish their group work. This sacrifice resulted in overworking for the dedicated students. The worst case scenario, as many participants reported, was the equal distribution of marks among group members, which was unfair treatment for the students that played their part. Such unfairness in grading students also emerged as one of the challenges of using group-based assessment because some students tended to be in favour of distributing marks based on individual efforts and contribution to group work as opposed to equal distribution of the same (Meijer et al., 2020; Forsell et al., 2021). Their proposal seems relevant; however, its practicality rests largely in the hands of course instructors.

At the group level, some of the participants reported that due to the behaviour, they ended up getting a low grades in some of the courses due to unresponsiveness of or lack of participation by some group members, as was the case in Gammie and Matson's (2007) study, which signalled the possibility of students obtain undeserving scores or grades. The rise of conflicts because of social loafing also created unfriendly learning environment among students in which their positive social ties were compromised. Group disintegration indicated the highest level of such conflicts, which made students engage in hostile relationships throughout their studies. Subtly, this affected negatively their overall academic lives in the due course.

Given the far-reaching consequences associated with social loafing, which was common-place as reported by all the participants interviewed, it was imperative to gauge pre-service teachers' perceived strategies that could help to ease the problem. The participants proposed several strategies such as letting students form their own groups, reducing the size of groups, training the students on group work, instituting guidelines for conducting group work, and using individualised assessment of group assignments as a solution to the social loafing phenomenon. These findings support previous research conducted in other country contexts. North et al. (2000), for example, revealed that individuals working within the smaller groups were more productive than those working in larger groups. Similarly, in the current study the participants raised concerns on the huge number of group members contributing to social loafing, hence reducing group effectiveness. Regarding the number of group members, many participants reported that effective group work required restricting the group size to five or less members.

Additionally, the present study found that social loafing behaviour tended to increase during 'peak periods' for students. During such periods, many students seemed to have more work from all the courses piling up, hence making them overloaded with assignments, preparing for tests, alongside attending lectures. These competing demands were associated with increased social loafing tendencies at the study site. These findings support previous studies such as that by Njie et al. (2013), who found that students' workload was one of the factors which made them engage in free riding behaviour at Malaysian university.

For the group work to be effective, the instructors need to provide ongoing support and guidance as students engage in different tasks consistent with their ZPD (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Such support and guidance can enable the students to develop the potential skills out of working in groups (Meijer et al., 2020; Sokhanvar et al., 2021). Even though self-formed groups are less likely to experience social loafing as students get an opportunity to know each other and work more co-operatively as a result (Opdecam & Everaert, 2018), the same can be the source of the loafing behaviour. As such, students need empowerment in employing peer assessment when working in groups to overcome the malignant problem of social loafing (Cheng & Warren, 2000). One way of empowering the students is through guidelines from the formal authority (Barfield, 2003) to guide the best practice for group-based assessment in this institution.

Furthermore, group formation needs to be done carefully because some students in this study tended to loaf due to the nature of the people constituting their groups. The correct formation of small groups may result in decreasing social loafing. In this study, participants suggested that students should be given opportunities to form their own groups rather than being superimposed by instructors, contrary to what is suggested by Synnott (2016). In addition, reducing the group size received special mention as a viable solution to social loafing problem congruent with available literature (Liden et al., 2004; North et al., 2004). Though research does not suggest an optimal group size, smaller groups tend to perform better than larger groups (Davies, 2009; Hoegl, 2005 cited in Synnott, 2016). The participants raised alarm on larger groups because such a bloated composition could lead to work ineffectiveness, particularly loafing tendencies. Hence, strict observance of the number of group members needs to be considered for effective group-based assessment. This would then help reduce the incidences of social loafing.

Individually-based assignments, as some participants suggested, could make students more responsible for their work. Yet, this tact could be burdensome for students as it would increase instructors' workloads in addition to multiplying pressures in HE teaching, something

that could further erode the quality of assessment practices, and the service being provided generally. In addition, Meijer et al. (2020) argued that an emphasis on individual assessment tends to hinder students' collaborative learning when in groups; thus, what the students propose in the current study needs to be taken with caution. Overall, course instructors should consider appropriate ways of forming groups and their sizes when providing group-based assessment tasks to students to ensure their effective participation in group work. This approach encompasses providing ample time for students to complete their group tasks (Davies, 2009). Insistently, earlier provision of the tasks could help address the peak periods concerns among many students and allow them to undertake group work in a more meaningful manner rather than just working towards meeting deadlines.

Conclusion

The use of group-based teaching and assessment in HEIs favours developing co-operative teaching and learning skills amongst pre-service teachers. However, developing these skills has been challenged in part by the existence social loafing among the students. Other challenges have been associated with the increased number of student enrolments, which have raised concerns about effective and quality delivery of the educational services at university level in Tanzania in terms of assessment practices. Thus, achieving quality and equitable teaching using effective and relevant assessment practices in HE can be celebrated confidently only if all the students participate fully with learning desire in the teaching and learning processes. This calls for redressing the problem of social loafing in HE contexts, especially in institutions where teachers are prepared. To facilitate the call, students' voices may contribute to the success of efforts geared towards eradicating the problem consistent with the findings presented in this article. The present article sheds light on the potential consequences associated with social loafing and suggestions to reduce them from participants' perspectives. The voices of pre-service teachers in the current study align with the existing theoretical literature on social loafing, as well as the research findings reported in higher income countries on the subject. As such, the study contributes to the body of knowledge on issues associated with the use of group-based assessment in HE contexts by bringing forth pre-service teachers' own perspectives regarding the impacts of social loafing behaviour, and how the phenomenon could be addressed to make group-based assessment useful. It provides practical implications for quality assurance processes to improving teacher education at the university level in Tanzania.

Based on the findings, the article recommends that institutional-based interventions through instituting guidelines for conducting group-based assignments may help curtail the behaviour as this will help empower group members to take more appropriate actions against the social loafers. As this research could not address all key areas concerning the problem of loafing among pre-service teachers due to its limited sample size and scope, two lines for future research are suggested: One is that similar studies adopting larger-scale empirical approaches could be conducted for understanding the problem of social loafing within the context of HE. And two, studies focusing on the experiences of course instructors regarding the use of group-based assessments in relation to the social loafing problem in HE context could be conducted.

References

Aggarwal, P., & O'Brien, C. L. (2008). Social loafing on group projects: Structural antecedents and effect on student   satisfaction. *Journal of Marketing Education*, *30*(3), 255-264. https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475308322283

Anangisye, W. A. (2010). Promoting teacher ethics in colleges of teacher education in Tanzania: Practices and challenge. *African Journal of Teacher Education*, *1*(1), 64-77. https://doi.org/10.21083/ajote.v1i1.1578

Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., & Sorensen, C. K. (2010*). Introduction to research in education* (8th ed.). Wadsworth CENGAGE Learning.

Ballantyne, R., Hughes, K., & Mylonas, A. (2002). Developing procedures for implementing peer assessment in large classes using an action research process. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 27*(5), 427-441. https://doi.org/10.1080/0260293022000009302

Barfield, R. L. (2003). Students' perceptions of and satisfaction with group grades and the group experience in the college classroom. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 28*(4), 355-370. https://doi.org/10.1080/0260293032000066191

Baron, R. A., & Branscombe, N. R. (2012). *Social psychology* (13th ed.). Pearson.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1191/1478088706QP063OA

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Cheng, W., & Warren, M. (2000). Making a difference: Using peers to assess individual students' contributions to a group project. *Teaching in Higher Education, 5*(2), 243-255. https://doi.org/10.1080/135625100114885

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315456539

Combrinck, M., & Hatch, M. (2012). Students' experiences of a continuous assessment approach at a higher education institution. *Journal of Social Sciences, 33*(1), 81-89. https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2012.11893088

Davies, W. M. (2009). Group work as a form of assessment: Common problems and recommended solutions. *Higher Education*, *58*(4), 563-584. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-009-9216-y

Dhindsa, H., Omar, K., & Waldrip, B. (2007). Upper secondary Bruneian science students' perceptions of assessment. *International Journal of Science Education*, *29*(10), 1281-1280. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500690600991149

Elliott, A. (2001). Introduction. In M. Richards, A. Elliott, V. Woloshyn, & C. Mitchell, (eds.). *Collaboration uncovered: The forgotten, the assumed, and the unexamined in collaborative education*. Bergin & Garvey.

Forsell, J., Frykedal, F., K., & Chiriac, E. H. (2021). Teachers' perceived challenges in group work assessment. *Cogent Education*, *8*(1), 1886474. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2021.1886474

Fox, R. (2001). Constructivism examined. *Oxford Review of Education, 27*(1), 23-35. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054980125310

Gammie, E., & Matson, M. (2007). Group assessment at final degree level: An evaluation. *Accounting Education, 16*(2), 185–206. https://doi.org/10.1080/09639280701234609

Gaikwad, P. (2011). Teaching with integrity: A focus on higher education. *International Forum Journal, 14*(2), 22-38. https://journals.aiias.edu/info/article/view/159/148

Hall, D., & Buzwell, S. (2012). The problem of free riding in group projects: Looking beyond social loafing as reason for non-contribution. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 14*(1), 37-49. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787412467123

Hassanien, A. (2006). Student experience of group work and group assessment in higher education. *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism, 6*(1), 17-39. https://doi.org/10.1300/J172v06n01_02

Horowitz, I. A., & Bordens, K. S. (1995). *Social psychology.* California: Mayfield.

Jassawalla, A. R., Malshe, A., & Sashittal, H. (2008). Student perceptions of social loafing in undergraduate business classroom teams. *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education, 6*(2), 403-426. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4609.2008.00183.x

Khattak, Z. I., Ali, M., Khan, A., & Khan, S. (2011). A study of English teachers and students' perception about the differences between annual and semester system of education at postgraduate level in Mardan. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *15*, 1639-1643. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.03.345

Kuisma, R. (2007). Portfolio assessment of an undergraduate group project. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 32*(5), 557-69. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930601116904

Latane, B., Williams, K., & Harkins, S. (1979). Many hands make light the work: The causes and consequences of social loafing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *37*(6), 822-832. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.37.6.822

Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Jaworski, R. A., & Bennett, N. (2004). Social loafing: A field investigation. *Journal of Management, 30*(2), 285-304. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jm.2003.02.002

Maiden, B., & Perry, B. (2011). Dealing with free-riders in assessed group work: Results from a study at a UK university. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 36*(4), 451-464. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930903429302

Mann, K., & MacLeod, A. (2015). Constructivism: Learning theories and approaches to research. In J. Cleland **&** S. J. Durning (Eds.), *Researching medical education* (1st ed., pp. 51-65). Wiley Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118838983.ch6

Mgaiwa, S. J., & Poncian, J. (2016). Public-private partnership in higher education provision in Tanzania: Implications for access to and quality of education. *Bandung: Journal of the Global South*, *3*(1), 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40728-016-0036-z

Meijer, H., Hoekstra, R., Brouwer, J., & Strijbos, J. (2020). Unfolding collaborative learning assessment literacy: A reflection on current assessment methods in higher education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 45*(8), 1222-1240. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2020.1729696

Mkimbili, S., & Kitta, S. (2020). The rationale of continuous assessment for development of competencies in Tanzania secondary schools. *Advanced Journal of Social Science*, *6*(1), 64-70. https://doi.org/10.21467/ajss.6.1.64-70

Mohamed, H. I. (2006). *Academic writing as social practice: A critical discourse analysis of student writing in higher education in Tanzania* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Western Cape). http://etd.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/handle/11394/1468

Mussawy, S. A. J. (2009). Assessment practices: Student's and teachers' perceptions of classroom assessment. *Master's Capstone Projects*. https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=cie_capstones

Nicol, D. J., & Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006). Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in Higher Education, 31*(2), 199-218. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070600572090

Njie, B., Asimiran, S., & Basri, R. (2013). An exploratory study of the free riding debacle in a Malaysian University: Students' perspectives. *Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 22*(3), 257-262. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-012-0029-x

North, A. C., Linley, P. A., & Hargreaves, D. J. (2000). Social loafing in a co-operative classroom task. *Educational Psychology, 20*(4), 389-392. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410020016635

Opdecam, E., & Everaert, P. (2018). Seven disagreements about cooperative learning. *Accounting Education, 27*(3), 223-233. https://doi.org/10.1080/09639284.2018.1477056

Orr, S. (2010). Collaborating or fighting for the marks? Students' experiences of group work assessment in the creative arts. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 35*(3), 301-313. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602931003632357

Pieterse, V., & Thompson, L. (2010). Academic alignment to reduce the presence of 'social loafers' and 'diligent isolates' in student teams. *Teaching in Higher Education, 15*(4), 355-367. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2010.493346

Pritchard, A., & Woollard, J. (2010). *Psychology for the classroom: Constructivism and social learning* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Santrock, J. W. (2011). *Educational psychology* (5th ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Sifuna, D. N. (2010). Some reflections on the expansion and quality of higher education in public universities in Kenya. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, *15*(4), 415-425. https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2010.526803

Sokhanvar, Z., Salehi, K., & Sokhanvar, F. (2021). Advantages of authentic assessment for improving the learning experience and employability skills of higher education students: A systematic literature review. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, *70*, 101030. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2021.101030

Stark, E. M., Shaw, J. D., & Duffy, M. K. (2007). Preference for group work, winning orientation, and social loafing behaviour in groups. *Group & Organization Management*, *32*(6), 699-723. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601106291130

Synnott, C. K. (2016). Guides to reducing social loafing in group projects: Faculty development. *Higher Education Management, 31*(1), 211-221. https://ssrn.com/abstract=2890604

Teddlie, C., & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed methods sampling: A typology with examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*(1), 77-100. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689806292430

Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 17–36). Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848607927

United Republic of Tanzania. (2016). National basic education statistics in Tanzania (BEST) 2012 - 2016. Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.

Volet, S., & Mansfield, C. (2006). Group work at university: Significance of personal goals in the regulation strategies of students with positive and negative appraisals. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *25*(4), 341-356. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360600947301

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Webb, N. M. (1995). Group collaboration in assessment: Multiple objectives, processes, and outcomes. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *17*(2), 239-261. https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737017002239

Acknowledgements