



# Student perceptions on small group learning experience during undergraduate medical training at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya



Group D.1.1

K.M.U. Sandaruwan<sup>1</sup>, W.K.M.N.T. Kumarawansa<sup>1</sup>, W.A.R. Sasala<sup>1</sup>, S.A.M.E.M. Senevirathna<sup>1</sup>, D.C.K.R. Senadhipathy<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya

## Introduction

The global trends in education has highlighted the importance of student-centred methods of learning (1). When such interactive educational methods are employed in continuing medical education, it has resulted in better doctor performance and improved patient care (2).

This area is mostly explored in the western cultural context, with limited studies conducted locally. This study is conducted to bridge this gap in the literature with the general objective of exploring student perceptions on small group learning experience during undergraduate medical training.

## Method

**Study design** - A qualitative study employing focus group discussions

**study setting** - Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya

**Study period** – 25<sup>th</sup> February 2019 to February 2020

**Study population** – Medical students in the Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya

**Sample size** – 16 focus groups. Four groups from each batch of students from 26th, 27th, 28th and 29th batches. Each group comprised of five to eight members.

**Sampling** - Purposive sampling

**Data collection technique** - Focus group discussions.

**Quality of data** - Focus group discussions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. It was facilitated by a discussion guide with follow-up questions asked if necessary.

**Data analysis** - Qualitative data analysis grounded on verbalized learning experiences of study participants was conducted using the Atlas.ti tool. Themes and their relationships were identified to explain the data.

## Results

16 focus group discussions were conducted among participants from batch 26, 27, 28 and 29 as described in the table below (Table-1).

Batch	Focus group code (number of participants)	Total participants
26	FG2(7), FG5(5), FG8(5), FG11(5)	22
27	FG3(5), FG6(6), FG9(6), FG12(5)	22
28	FG4(6), FG7(7), FG10(5), FG14(5)	23
29	FG1(6), FG13(5), FG15(5), FG16(5)	21

Table-1: Demographic details of study participants

Analysis of data revealed four (4) themes. These include student attitudes towards small group learning, benefits of learning as small groups, student expectations and challenges for learning from those methods (Figure 1).

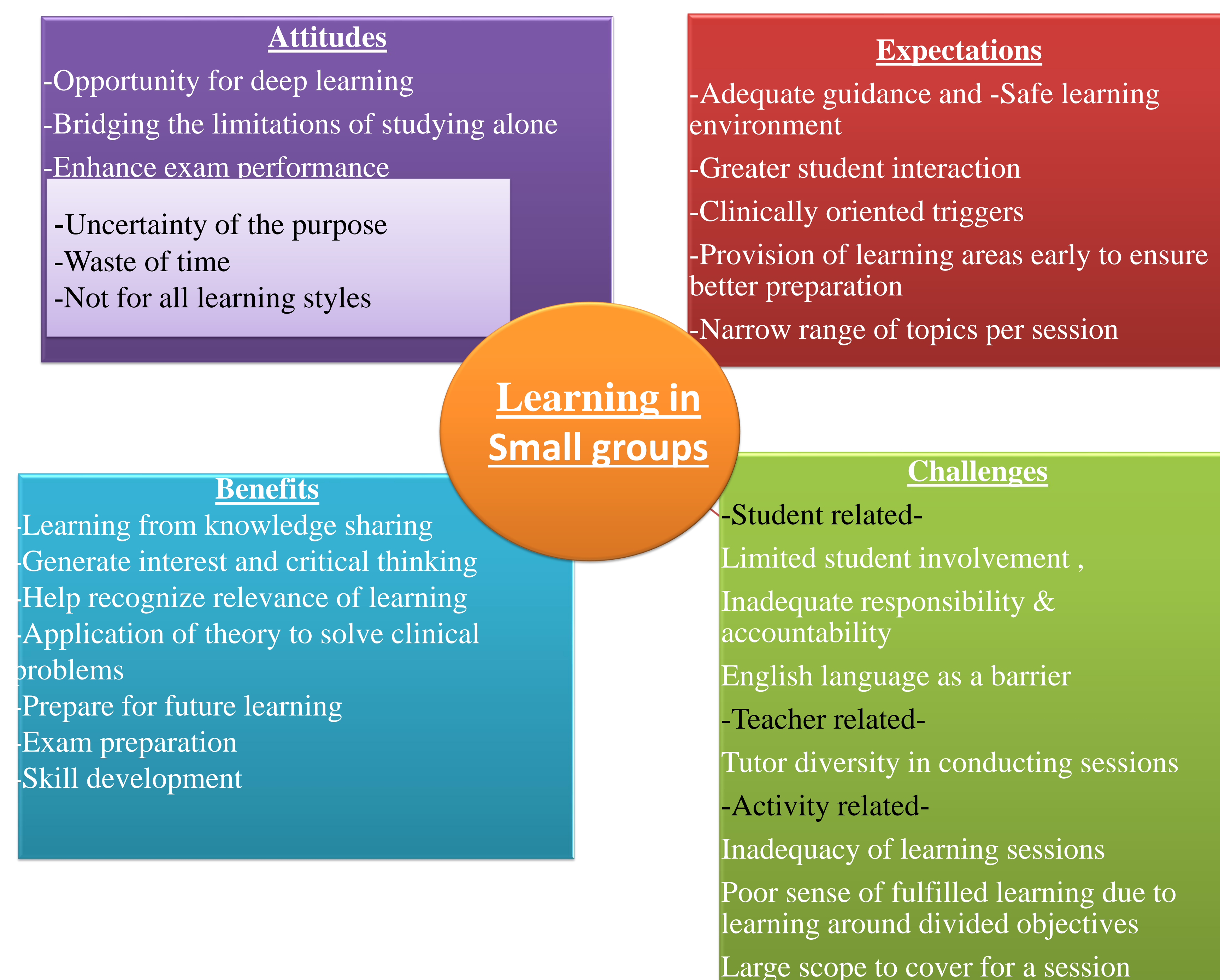


Figure 1 –Conceptualisation of learning from small group activities

### Attitudes

“... in PBLs we got to know what is the actual point of teaching these things and we learned to correlate the study material with what we see clinically...” (Batch 28,FG10)

“If someone is more prone to learning by discussing, ...this method is so good...But, a person who is always want to do like self- studying might err be a bit confused...” (Batch 26,FG11)

### Benefits

“...PBLs are more comfortable, students also discuss more. When we consider tutorials, it is like, only one person stands up and read while the teacher is listening. So, that surrounding is more tense. But when we consider PBL, it's a more relaxing environment. Other students also feel free to share their ideas and this helps us to discuss more and more .” (Batch 28, FG10)

### Expectation

“...in preclinical phase, anatomy questions were just the questions, but at one time as I remember only once ,they gave a session based on a clinical case which was appendicitis , we were ..very interested to answer the questions. We were able to correlate our knowledge with the clinical picture. So, I think without giving questions directly, if it can be combined into clinical scenarios, it will be more interesting. Students will understand the real purpose of learning these things .” (Batch 28, FG10)

### Challenges

“It will be much efficient if all the group members are participating in an equal manner in a beneficial manner, if not our time is also get wasted by that.” (Batch 26, FG11)

Results also highlighted that students in clinical years are benefited more by small group learning methods compared to pre-clinical students, as they are exposed to real clinical scenarios and can easily correlate the triggers discussed. However, many claimed that, it can be beneficial for the pre-clinical years, but, only if the triggers are made more clinically related.

Tutorials are preferred more for the pre-clinical years as a means of preparing for examinations, revisiting theory and to clear doubts on difficult topics.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- Different methods of small group learning create opportunities to learn in novel and holistic ways, which make learning more active and interesting than traditional methods of learning.
- Students expect more independent and practical type of learning experience rather than ordinary methods of learning facts. However, some have mixed feeling on the role of small group learning.
- Students have many expectations on teachers, learning environment and the contribution of peers to benefit maximally from small group learning.
- Re-structuring the programme of small group learning with a view to limiting the scope covered by one session, increasing the number of sessions, ensure uniformity in tutor facilitation, recognizing means of guiding and proving more freedom for student learning and encouraging active student participation is fundamental for benefiting from these activities.

## Limitations

- Results are localized to one university and can get a broader view if the study is conducted in other medical faculties in the country and also collected teacher perceptions

## References

1. Rasika DGL. Student Centered Curriculum A higher education case study in Sri Lankan university system. Researchgate [Internet]. 2018 [cited 2019 Jul 15]; Available from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328930009\\_Student\\_Centered\\_Curriculum\\_A\\_higher\\_education\\_case\\_study\\_in\\_Sri\\_Lankan\\_university\\_system](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328930009_Student_Centered_Curriculum_A_higher_education_case_study_in_Sri_Lankan_university_system)
2. Fischer RL, Jacobs SL, Herbert WNP. Small-Group Discussion Versus Lecture Format for Third-Year Students in Obstetrics and Gynecology. Obstet Gynecol [Internet]. 2004 Aug [cited 2019 Jul 15];104(2):349–53. Available from: <https://insights.ovid.com/crossref?an=00006250-20040800-00023>

## Acknowledgement

- Students from batches 26, 27, 28 and 29 who participated in the research.