

# Role of Group Discussion in Education and Skill Development

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## Abstract

*Group discussion is a valuable cooperative learning tool. Group Discussion is more a technique than a conventional test. Discussions provide an individual with an avenue to express their ideas and opinions in a non-threatening environment, and can serve to actively engage one in his own education. In fact it is one of the most important and popular techniques being used for screening candidates as well as testing their potential. They are being extensively used along with personal interviews for the final selection of candidates.*

*There are a number of different sub-skills which students will need to be able to successfully and effectively participate in a group discussion. Students need to develop the ability to analyze, persuade, control emotions, and support. Development of discussion skills is the need to encourage students to become increasingly independent and self-directed in their learning. Oral speech is a fundamental means for communicating with others and the cornerstone of learning in all subjects. Students need to learn listening and speaking in order to understand concepts, solve problems, provide information, explore ideas and concepts, identify and solve problems, organize their experience and knowledge, express and clarify their thoughts, feelings, and opinions, and convey information. Oral communication skills are important because they play a central role in students' learning in all areas. Listening and speaking skills are also essential for co-operative learning activities and for social interaction at home, at school, and in the community.*

**Keywords:** *Group Discussion, Education, Skill Development, Communication, Learning, Confidence, Knowledge Sharing, Discussion Skill*

## Introduction:

Group discussion (GD) is a group activity carried by 8 to 10 member group for 15-20 minutes. GD is designed to exchange thoughts and ideas among the members of the group on a particular subject. It is the best tool to select the prospective candidates in a comparative perspective. It is a useful tool to screen the candidate's potential as well as their skills.

A selected topic is given to the group members and 2-3 minutes time is given for thinking. Group discussion takes 10-15 minutes time based on the given topic. GD evaluation is done by the subject experts based on the discussions. A report is prepared on analyzing the facts at the end of the discussion.

Nowadays Group Discussion is being extensively used along with personal interviews for the final selection of candidates. It plays main role in selecting the best among the best. Having scored high marks, students who get selected for a higher/another course or employment are placed on a par - on equal footing - based on their age, qualification and experience. It becomes necessary to conduct further screening for choosing a few among many. It is here, the Group Discussion plays an important part. It helps in choosing the socially suitable candidate among the academically superior achievers. It is one of the best tools to study the behavioral and attitudinal responses of the participants

Effective facilitation of a discussion involves the recognition and employment of different perspectives and different skills to create an inclusive environment. In order to do so, it is important to consider the features of effective discussions, and conditions that promote small group interaction and engagement. Discussion is a powerful mechanism for active learning; a well-facilitated discussion allows the participant to explore new ideas while recognizing and valuing the contributions of others.

### **Research Methodology:**

This research paper is based on secondary data which has been collected from various articles, magazines, blogs, journals and web sites related to Group Discussion. Internet was explored using the Google search engine using the search terms “Group Discussion”, ”Education”, ”Skill Development”. English language articles were selected for the review if they discussed the following topics: (i) Importance of Group Discussion; (ii) Effectiveness of group discussion in Education; (iii) Skill development from Group Discussion etc. Conclusions were drawn from each of these articles.

### **Objectives:**

This research paper has the following objectives:

- Understanding the importance of Group Discussion in education and skill development

- Identifying the Do's and Don'ts of an effective Group Discussion
- Recognizing the ways in which group discussions are currently used
- To look at the effects of group discussions on an individual's understanding

### **Literature Review:**

*The Act of Teaching* writes, "A discussion is a situation wherein students, or students and a teacher, converse to share information, ideas, or opinions or work to resolve a problem".

*The Act of Teaching* writes, "Discussions serve at least four purposes: they can review and extend knowledge, examine ideas and opinions, solve problems, and improve oral communication skills".

According to *Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (1991)*, there are five essential elements for collaborative learning to work effectively. If students are aware of this, they will be willing to discuss and share, and gain interpersonal skills and Discussion Skills in the process. They increase their skills on the job. These are:

- Positive interdependence: Each member is responsible for maximizing other members' learning.
- 'Promotive' interaction: Occurs as individuals help each other learn, challenge each other, and strive together to accomplish the group's goal. The interactions carried out by the group are meant to promote academic performance of every member.
- Individual accountability: The performance of each member is taken individually and the result will be shared with other group members.
- Interpersonal and small-group skills: Students have the opportunity to know other group members, to support and accept each other, to communicate accurately and resolve different opinions in a positive manner.
- Group processing: Reflecting on the efforts that each member has contributed by checking group progress. This aims to improve the effectiveness of a collaborative group work.

### **Skill Development in Group Discussion:**

- **Communication Skills:** In a Group Discussion there is fair possibility that you improve your communication skills while sharing your opinions and exchanging views with others.

- **Divergent Thinking:** Group Discussion enables a participating candidate to think in divergent directions in order to generate more points and a good presentation of the topic by considering all possible points on the topic resulting in enhancement of one's thinking process.
- **Analytical skills:** In the Group Discussion one has to be careful about the points he discusses and should have enough analytical ability to analyze the topic and then present it in front of others for discussion. Hence there should be no logical inconsistency in points which improves one's analytical skills.

### **Importance of GD in Education:**

- **Discussion Generates Good Questions – Helps in Preparation for Exam**

When you discuss about a topic with your friend in a group, you can freely ask any question which you have in your mind about any point in the topic and you get the answer. Similarly they ask questions. Different minds discussing about a topic, generates good questions and try to find their answers.

- **It shows you your Weakness – it improves you**

Until you don't know about your weaknesses, you cannot improve. In group discussion you come to know that in which areas you are weak and you need to focus more on them to improve.

- **It rectifies your mistakes**

You may learn something wrong. You may make a wrong concept about a topic which you think is correct. When you share it in discussion, you come to know that it is wrong. In this way, your wrong concepts are rectified. If you don't discuss it group, you may write this wrong concept even in exam and get less marks for it.

- **It helps you on “how to study and how to make preparation for exam”**

While discussing on a topic, inspired from a student you ask him how he studies or how he make preparation for exam. In this way, you improve your study method or preparation method.

- **It helps for oral exams – It improves your communication skills**

By participating in group discussions you can improve your communication skills. In this way it prepares you for oral exams and interviews as well.

### **Potential Problems in Discussions:**

Maintaining discussions often means dealing as smoothly as possible with the problems that arise. Here are some common problems with suggestions for how to deal with them.

- ***The participant who talks too much:*** A way to approach the dominant participant and pull in non-participants is to redirect the discussion to another person or another topic. Alternatively, you may wish to reframe their comments, making them viable additions to the discussion. Facilitators might also ask one or more members of the group to act as observers for a few sessions, reporting back their observations to the group. Perhaps assigning the avid talker to the observer role would help the person develop sensitivity. Another approach is to break down the group into still smaller task groups.
- ***The member who will not talk:*** Participants who remain silent: A way to approach non-participants is to provide opportunities for smaller group discussions or pair-share discussions. Smaller groups may help put some students at ease. A second strategy is to ask opinion questions occasionally (e.g., “How do you feel about this?”). This may encourage participation by reducing participants’ fear of answering incorrectly. Another strategy is to have participants write out their answers to a question. Having the words written out may make it easier for a shy or fearful person to speak up.
- ***The discussion that turns into an argument:*** In good discussions, conflicts will sometimes arise. If such conflicts are left ambiguous, they may cause continuing trouble. Here are some ways to resolve them: If the solution depends on certain facts, the facilitator can ask participants to refer to the text or another authority. If there is an experimentally verified answer, the facilitator can use the opportunity to review the method by which the answer could be determined. If the question is one of values, the facilitator may use the occasion to help participants become aware of the values involved. The facilitator can list both sides of the argument on the board. The facilitator can take a strong position as moderator, preventing participants from interrupting each other or speaking simultaneously. She or he can lay ground rules for discussion, such as asking participants to focus conflict on ideas rather than people and to resist being judgmental.

- ***Unclear or hesitant comments:*** The facilitator can encourage participants making unclear contributions to give examples and factual evidence of their points. The facilitator can also restate points for verification or rejection by the participants, or give enthusiastic nonverbal cues and patience.
- ***The discussion that goes off track:*** Some facilitators keep discussions on track by listing the questions or issues they want to cover on the board or summarizing the discussion on the board as it proceeds. Stopping and asking a participant to summarize where the discussion is at the point it appears to go off track may also help.
- ***The participants who attack the facilitator:*** When participants argue for the sake of argument, facilitators will usually lose if they take the bait. Participants or students who attack often want attention, so simply giving them some recognition while firmly moving on often takes care of the problem.

#### **Styles of Communication in GD:**

- ***Aggressive Communication Style:*** Aggressive communication is a method of expressing needs and desires that do not take in to account the welfare of others. A harmful communication style, aggressive communication can end up worsening social anxiety by making others view you more harshly
- ***Passive Communication Style:*** Passive communication is a style in which individuals have developed a pattern of avoiding expressing their opinions or feelings, protecting their rights, and identifying and meeting their needs. As a result, passive individuals do not respond overtly to hurtful or anger-inducing situations.
- ***Assertive Communication Style:*** Assertive communication involves respect for the boundaries of oneself and others. It also presumes an interest in the fulfillment of needs and wants through cooperation. Assertive communication of personal opinions, needs, and boundaries has been conceptualized as the behavioral middle ground, lying between ineffective passive and aggressive responses

#### **Do's and Don'ts of GD:**

- ***Keep eye contact while speaking:*** Do not look at the evaluators only. Keep eye contact with every team member while speaking.

- *Initiate the GD:* Initiating the GD is a big plus. But keep in mind Initiate the group discussion only when you understood the GD topic clearly and have some topic knowledge. Speaking without proper subject knowledge is bad impression.
- *Allow others to speak:* Do not interrupt anyone in -between while speaking. Even if you don't agree with his/her thoughts do not snatch their chance to speak. Instead make some notes and clear the points when it's your turn.
- *Speak clearly:* Speak politely and clearly. Use simple and understandable words while speaking. Don't be too aggressive if you are disagreeing with someone. Express your feelings calmly and politely.
- *Make sure to bring the discussion on track:* If by any means group is distracting from the topic or goal then simply take initiative to bring the discussion on the track. Make all group members aware that you all need to come to some conclusion at the end of the discussion. So stick to the topic.
- *Positive attitude:* Be confident. Do not try to dominate anyone. Keep positive body language. Show interest in discussion.
- *Speak sensibly:* Do not speak just to increase your speaking time. Don't worry even if you speak less. Your thoughts should be sensible and relevant instead of irrelevant speech.
- *Listen carefully to others:* Speak less and listen more! Pay attention while others are speaking. This will make coherent discussion and you will get involved in the group positively. You will surely make people agree with you.
- *No need to go into many details:* Some basic subject analysis is sufficient. No need to mention exact figures while giving any reference. You have limited time so be precise and convey your thoughts in short and simple language.
- *Formal dressing:* Do not take it casually. No fancy and funny dressing. You should be comfortable while speaking in group. Positive gesture and body language will make your work easy.
- *Observation:* During conversation, observe yourself and how others in the group react to you. Pause and restate your point differently if the reaction is not what you expected.
- *Seek Clarification:* When you do not agree with others, express your views politely without interrupting. Express your views by giving examples to substantiate your point of view. Listen to their clarifications and ask questions to clarify your doubts if any. When

you agree with someone else's point of view, express your agreement and the reasons for your agreement

- *Summarizing*: Summarize your and the other person's views and elicit the understanding of all the participants on the views expressed.

### **Conclusion:**

Nowadays Group Discussion is being extensively used along with personal interviews for the final selection of candidates. It plays a main role in selecting the best among the best. Having scored high marks, students who get selected for a higher/another course or employment are placed on a par - on equal footing - based on their age, qualification and experience. It becomes necessary to conduct further screening for choosing a few among many. It is here, the Group Discussion plays an important part. It helps in choosing the socially suitable candidate among the academically superior achievers. It is one of the best tools to study the behavioral and attitudinal responses of the participants.

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