From group work to teamwork:

The experiences of Romanian students undertaking assessed group work on UK higher education programmes

Thesis for the Doctorate in Education

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Submission statement

I, John Howell, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract (300 words)

Learners educated in different countries can typically find themselves adapting to unfamiliar ways of learning on UK degree programmes which can lead to a widely contrasting set of learning experiences for them. This study seeks to reveal the experiences of Romanian students in such a context when undertaking assessed group work. The methodology chosen to conduct the study employs a mainly qualitative approach where data has been collected via qualitative face-to-face interviews and a quantitative survey with Romanian students studying on a BSc Business Management programme at a UK HEI. The findings of the study suggest that these students have little prior experience of assessed group work and go through a process of adaptation. This process involves them adapting to working in groups with the challenges of social interaction being of more significance in the early stages and learning becoming of greater significance than social contact later on, as their teamworking ability develops. As students' progress through the stages of adaptation they build strong personal relationships with team members and there is significant experimentation. They face challenges such as relying on others, managing the collaborative creation of work, and overcoming communication barriers. Within the adaptation process there are also major re-grouping incidences where the autonomy to choose teammates is withdrawn at certain points in the programme, forcing further adaptation. As these students' subsequently return to previously established groups, a greater teamworking ability emerges. Although these students typically remain uncomfortable with how group work is assessed, there is overall support for the continued use of assessed group work. The study is significant for UK HEI's as it reveals how educators can support international students as they work through the process of adaptation to these unfamiliar group work experiences and become integral parts of well-established effective student teams.

Impact statement (500 words)

I have identified three main types of impact the study has had or can potentially produce. These are the impact within my personal and professional development, the impact within my workplace and the impact on the wider HE research community.

Personal and Professional Development Impact

Firstly I have experienced personal and professional development as a result of the study, harnessed by the fact that I conducted the research at my own workplace and my current role requires me to manage a faculty of academics delivering Business degrees to large numbers of students from a wide range of international backgrounds that have assessed group work requirements within their programmes of study. Having conducted a study which informed me on the experiences of such students that feature significantly within the scope of my role, I am now actively developing plans for changes in my management of situations that require academic faculty decision making with regard to student group work. Having gained confidence as an expert in the field of international students and group work, I have started to review and implement strategies that will better support the management of group work contexts within the delivery of undergraduate programmes. My professional development has been positively impacted by gaining a deeper understanding of the experience of the international students I am responsible for within my role which is a greatly rewarding outcome of the study.

Workplace Impact

Secondly, impact has already been felt within my workplace, where the study is set. I have begun an initial dissemination of the findings in some small seminars with selected academic colleagues where I have presented the research in a way that allows them to start thinking about what impact the study might have on how international students are supported within assessed group work contexts. There is potential for greater impact later in the year where I plan to deliver a presentation to the wider Business faculty during the annual academic staff conference, with a view to faculty staff potentially acting upon the recommendations identified.

Wider HE Research Community Impact

Thirdly, there is significant potential impact the study can have upon the wider HE research community in the sector. Although I have not organised to present at any external conferences or seminars as yet, there will most certainly be an opportunity to do this soon. Opportunities can be increased by utilising the reach I have with academic faculties at the universities my institution partners with. These university faculties regularly invite us as fellow academics to present at their own staff development activities, thus expanding the potential dissemination coverage beyond my own workplace. Even wider opportunities for presentations at external academic conferences across the UK and in global Higher Education contexts may also provide a reach for the dissemination that extends even further. The study's implications could serve as a potential influence for any educator that has responsibility for international students required to take part in assessed group work, particularly where the students have little or no prior experience.

Reflective statement

I joined the UCL Institute of Education as a transfer from Kings College London where I had previously completed four modules on their Doctorate in Education (EdD). I value the assessment and the supportive feedback gained from each as it provided me with the opportunity to reflect upon my professional practice, develop a greater understanding of areas of educational research I had not previously considered and helped me take the steps needed to be successful as a research academic at doctoral level. My desire to develop as a researcher throughout the whole doctoral journey has been supported by being able to connect the learning gained across the initial preparatory modules, undertaking a small-scale institution focused study, and then subsequently completing the larger research-based thesis study.

My journey started with a module titled Theory and Research in Educational and Professional Settings at Kings College London which introduced me to doctoral level academic research. This module focused on reviewing literature from the psychological, sociological, and philosophical perspectives that underpin scholarly activity in my specialism, which is student learning adaptation. There were opportunities to identify potential gaps in literature and I gained an understanding of how literature should be reviewed at doctoral level which enabled me to develop these essential skills I later relied upon when conducting the subsequent research studies. Getting to know the critical vocabulary, tensions and discourses embedded in current debates within education and exploring the application and relevance of these to my specialism provided me with a grounding later harnessed successfully in the research studies, where unlocking how historical and contemporary literature could be effectively reviewed and inform the findings in the two research studies was of significant value. Gaining critical insights into the factors influencing different conceptions of research and theory and the expectations of stakeholders that might benefit from such research, carried through both studies where for example in the final chapter of the research-based thesis there is consideration of the implications of the study for a range of stakeholders that includes the institution, its teaching staff, the students, and myself as a professional practitioner. Research for the institution focused study and the research-based thesis have challenged me to reflect upon and engage in discussion on the issues and positions of such stakeholders within a variety

of contexts and to consider the implications for my own professional practice which drew directly from skills and abilities developed on the theory and research in educational and professional settings module.

Another key feature of the Theory and Research in Educational and Professional settings module was the opportunities it provided for the articulation of a draft rationale that would later be refined and developed into the final proposal that successfully convinced my supervisor and two UCL academics that I should be upgraded to the research-based thesis. Learning during the module how to formulate the initial designs of a research study within a context relevant to my own individual interests increased my awareness of the interplay between theory and practice. This has been of significant benefit later in the programme where the development of a strong sense of this interplay is featured within the literature review and in the subsequent discussion of theories and their application. I remember using the module discussion forum as means to debate how Hofstede's (2011) theories on culture might inform research on the adaptation of international students and it was these discussions with other students that sowed the seeds of how I might articulate arguments in this theoretical area in the later research elements. Feedback from the assessment submission prompted me to evaluate the potential directions the research could go in which included refining the scope of literature and narrowing my interest towards a specific group of international students and focusing on their adaptation to unfamiliar ways of learning.

The Methods of Inquiry module at Kings College London provided me with an understanding of the nature of educational inquiry and its philosophical foundations. I developed a deeper understanding of the different methodological approaches to research and how to effectively frame a set of research questions with methods that could be used within these approaches. By interrogating the claims made in prior research literature, with a critical eye the assumptions upon which research the research was based, I was able to develop a deeper understanding of how effective the research methodology and data analysis tools employed could be. I developed a far greater knowledge of the qualitative and quantitative methods upon which I was later able to build the subsequent studies I was required to undertake. As part of the

module I designed and carried out an introductory piece of independent research which later formed the basis of what would become the institution focused study. There was consideration of the concepts and skills required in qualitative and quantitative methods which to form my initial proposals when designing the research methodology for the research-based thesis. One of the key developments here was a narrowing of my choices as to which type of philosophical perspective and research methodology might best suit the study I had in mind, which with significant refinement became those chosen for the two subsequent studies. There was coverage of data collection, ethical considerations, the analysis of data and the interpretation of results which were all invaluable areas utlised in the design and operationalisation of the two subsequent studies. Understanding how previous literature had been informed and generated using particular research designs enabled me to develop a more refined structure for how my studies would be carried out. The assessment for the module challenged me to critique prior literature in terms of the research designs employed and this supported my development of a robust research methodology for my own studies.

Where the Methods of Inquiry module had been an introduction to research methodologies, the Advanced Research Methods module built upon this to help me target the development of practical analytical skills, mainly through the critical evaluation of published research and experimentation with the use of mock data sets. There was an opportunity to experiment with the design of a miniature study, practice the skills of observation, conduct mock interviews, and engage in some useful quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Having such a strong focus on the development of practical and analytic skills required for the carrying out of both quantitative and qualitative research in academic settings made the module invaluable in the development of skills needed for the student interviews in both subsequent studies. The qualitative analysis approaches needed for interviewing were particularly useful and informed the methodological decisions I needed to make in my subsequent proposals. The experience of developing analytical skills helped me to understand what would be required for robust research and what might ultimately help me to best answer the research questions set. Developing a greater awareness of how researchers identify what it is they are examining and the diverse methodological approaches they can choose to employ widened my consideration of the variety of

analytical tools at my disposal. I remember there being a pivotal moment in my understanding of the processes when interviewing mock participants within the experimental study which enabled me to form a clearer plan for processes to be followed in the study. Decisions around employing a distinctly qualitative methodological approach to data collection were influenced by consideration of a variety of approaches that might be followed and subsequently both studies have benefitted significantly from the clarity gained, with specific regard to the subjective interpretations of the qualitative data generated. The refinement of my thinking during both the Methods of Inquiry and Advanced Research Methods modules resulted in successful research methods being employed across the research studies.

Although not as practically valuable as the other modules, the Professionalism in Education module introduced me to the broad approaches to studying and conceptualising notions of professionalisation and professionalism. It fundamentally built upon the initial modules by showing how some of the theories and approaches previously discussed could be used to understand and explain arguments about professionalism in teaching. It also built upon the methods of inquiry module by enabling me to explore the complex relationship between research-based knowledge and practice. Considering interrelated perspectives drawn from the sociology of the professions and the epistemology of professional knowledge led to opportunities for critical reflection on the implications of research for my own professional practice. By examining how arguments in selected scholarly articles might relate to my own professional context and how assumptions within the institution I work had been made by a variety of stakeholders, I was able to evaluate the expectations placed upon teachers in this context. By doing this I was able to develop a thoughtful approach to the challenging of assumptions in my own workplace and this informed how I approached the articulation of context within subsequent research studies. For example, I was very careful to ensure minimisation of the impact of my position of authority in the institution within both studies, as I appreciated this might affect the responses of the students participating in the study. Examining professionalism with a keen focus on how much teachers in higher education have autonomy to make their own decisions regarding the assessment of students has directly informed my consideration of this within the research-based thesis.

I took a three-year break from studies when my son was born, so I could fully be there to support in his care during the formative years. During this time, I worked closely with a colleague who was a student of UCL and highly recommended the EdD programme. Having successfully completed the four introductory modules at Kings College London I decided to transfer to UCL and continue my journey on the EdD programme at IFS stage by conducting a small-scale Institution Focused Study within my workplace, giving me first-hand experience of academic research at doctoral level. I gained experience of setting realistic research questions and exploring what evidence was already out there through a literature review which included reflection on how theories and previous studies might influence the study. The experience of conducting research as a staff member of the organisation in focus, effectively as both an insider and outsider was invaluable as the context of the research-based thesis study would also be the same. As an insider, the IFS helped me gain experience of reflecting upon my own practices and knowledge and developing an ability to see the context from the outside, essentially making the familiar seem strange. This experience on the IFS helped me to understand how for instance, the language typically used to make sense of educational contexts can be bound by beliefs and perspectives that can affect the data collected in the interviews. There was also consideration of what the study might aim to achieve and lead towards, regarding the potential implications of the study. There was also an opportunity to make informed choices regarding an appropriate research methodology which helped me to harness the learning gained in the previous modules and gain experience of using the methods chosen before the larger subsequent research-based thesis study. Analysing the qualitative data collected proved to be an invaluable experience as the larger sample on the research-based thesis required considerably more time and depth. I developed effective ways to draw out valuable findings in the institution focused study relating to the experiences of students from Eastern Europe. The study indicated how research in the context of my workplace on the theme of international students and their adaptation to unfamiliar ways of learning could be a viable route for a larger study. There were clearly findings in the institution focused study that suggested many of these students had experienced unfamiliar ways of learning on their programme of study which significantly contrasted with their prior secondary education experiences. The evidence pointed to these students' requiring some adaptation through the development of cognitive strategies and skills needed to decode the new learning

requirements. This is because they faced several significant challenges, one of which had been working for the first time in groups on assessed projects which attracted a significant amount of concern amongst the students in that initial small-scale study. Having a identified a potential research gap meant that, with some refinement, a focus on students from Romania and their experiences of assessed group work had potential to form a viable research-based thesis study.

The inter-connection of the modules of learning across the EdD programme has helped me to develop as an academic researcher with the outcome being the successful completion of doctoral research in the research-based thesis, harnessing the learning gained from each module as part of my personal and professional development. The framing of the study within the context of professional practice in higher education and the opportunity to conduct a study that resonates with my personal and career aspirations too, is something I am particularly thankful for as it has provided me with the keys to fully unlock my academic research potential.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

This is a study with primarily a qualitative approach about the experiences of students from Romania on UK Higher Education degree programmes when undertaking assessed group work projects. There has been a growing interest over the past few decades in understanding more about the experiences of students educated outside of the UK who undertake study at UK higher education institutions (McLeay & Wesson, 2014). Increases in the number of students who study abroad has been driving this, with HESA (2022) statistics suggesting a figure of just over 600,000 students in 2021, which is around 20 percent of the total number of students. Over the past few decades, the increases in international students have led to a much greater interest in the potential global implications for intercultural education and will continue to do so whilst numbers continue to increase (Andrade, 2006). UK higher education institutions in particular, with growing numbers of students from abroad, are likely to have a keen interest in the findings of studies that seek to understand more about their experiences within this context. In terms of the structure of this first chapter, I begin by defining the context in which the study is set from an international perspective and also an institutional perspective as the study is set in a specific institution. I then provide a problem statement identifying the main issues that the study wishes to explore before outlining the structure of the research.

1.1 Context of the study

The highly internationalised context in which students from outside the UK can find themselves in when studying on UK higher education programmes can create a widely diverse set of learning experiences amongst these students. Much of the diversity relates to the cultural differences and the contrasts they experience between learning in their home country and within the UK context (Schartner and Young, 2016). On degree courses offered by alternative providers of HE, in contrast to public sector universities where home students are typically the majority, it is quite often the case that home students are by far the minority (Shury et al, 2016). Therefore, there is

significant value for such institutions in understanding more about the experiences of these particular international students. Choosing to focus on Romanian students, studying on a UK higher education degree programme, is primarily driven by the fact that, as the researcher, I am based in the UK and work for an 'alternative provider' of higher education in the private sector which has seen significant growth over the last seven years in terms of the number of students from Eastern Europe. In fact, Romanian students now account for over two-thirds of the most recent Business and Computing programme student intakes. Romania is considered by the United Nations to be a country within Eastern Europe alongside 9 other countries namely Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Moldova, Belarus, Slovakia, Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Eastern European countries such as Romania have a history of being part of the Eastern Bloc, once governed by Soviet-led communist regimes from behind the 'iron curtain' during the cold war. UKCISA (2020) statistics indicate that the Eastern European countries of Romania, Bulgaria and Poland have been in the top 10 EU countries for students studying in the UK since 2013. In 2020, there were 8,634 students from Romania studying in the UK however, post-Brexit it is acknowledged that overall first year EU domiciled enrolments dropped by 53% from 2020/21 to 2021/22 (HESA, 2022).

The institution where the study is set works in partnership with six different partner universities to deliver franchised courses and although there are some UK home students on each of the undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes, these are by far the minority on each programme and account for no more than 10% of the current total number of students. This context is by no means unique either, as a growing number of higher education institutions have seen significant increases in the numbers of students educated outside of the UK on their degree programmes where they now make up the majority in class (Skipp and Hopwood, 2017). However, despite this happening in a growing number of institutions, HESA data shows that international students still only make up just 25% of the total number of undergraduate students at UK universities in 2021-22 (HESA). This has meant that much of the research on international students has primarily been focused on seeking to understand the impact upon home students of having international students amongst them in class. This study is specifically focused on drawing out the experiences of Romanian students, working on assessed group work projects amongst each other and with other

international students, rather than on the wider intercultural experiences of a range of international or home students.

I carried out the study in 2020-22, during the pandemic and its aftermath, which resulted in the data collection being conducted solely online. There is consideration of this impact detailed in the methodology chapter. The timing of the study also resulted in the participating students reflecting on their experiences of working in face-to-face groups as well as online groups due to periods of lock-down.

1.2 Problem Statement

Assessed group work can be a daunting experience for international students. Prior to studying in the UK, the educational experiences of international students may have been grounded on a teacher-centred pedagogy, in contrast to the more student-centred learning common in UK universities. Teaching may have been particularly theory heavy and much less practical for these students than in the UK and assessment can be more heavily weighted towards traditional closed-book examinations than contextual assignments. In the UK these unfamiliar approaches to learning may leave international students who have little experience of experimentation in activities, such as assessed group work, with a number of specific challenges to overcome. In group work activities, without prior experience, international students may lack an understanding of how to successfully form groups and work collaboratively in groups towards the completion of assessment in line with the required outcomes of the subject being studied. Where international students have some prior experience of group work, it may not have been assessed and there may be problems encountered in their adaptation to these experiences. A lack of familiarity of the typical learning activities and methods predominantly used on UK degree programmes will typically require international students to adapt and their experiences of learning and being assessed in ways that are unfamiliar to them are the focus of interest in this study.

1.3 Structure of thesis

Having introduced the thesis in this chapter, in chapter 2 I move on to present my literature review. I focus on the theories and models associated with research in the field, I critically evaluate the relevant prior literature and discuss multiple areas of reading on a wide range of studies. As Lynch (2014) suggests, the literature review offers an opportunity to identify where this particular study fits in with previous research and why this study is worth doing, in light of the previous research already out there. At the end of chapter 2, the rationale for the study and the research questions are set out.

In chapter 3, I set out my approach to the research, including my epistemological and philosophical viewpoints. I present a description of the research setting and discuss my role as the researcher in this context. There is coverage of the sample size and characteristics of the sample, and also how I collected and analysed the data before discussion of the ethical implications. In chapter 4 I present my findings from the interviews with students and the quantitative survey. Having detailed the findings, there is discussion in chapter 5 of how they relate to the theories and prior literature reviewed in chapter 2. In chapter 6 there is consideration of the implications of the study for application to wider real-world contexts with associated recommendations and also potential future research that could be undertaken in the area.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

In this chapter I review the key theories and strands of literature that stood out for me as being of value to the study and have informed the subsequent research questions set. There is a theoretical framing first and then secondly there is existing research which forms a more traditional literature review before the rationale of the study and the research questions are set out. The structure of this is in four key strands.

In terms of theoretical framing, firstly I review literature on the theories of group dynamics, group development and group roles which explain how students are impacted upon by the structures within their group, the changes they experience as the group goes through various stages of formation and development, and the roles they and other members undertake within the group which impact upon their experiences in such activities.

As further theoretical framing, secondly I review specific learning theories which relate to how students in group work contexts are learning in a social context within which their experiences are influenced by a socio-cultural dynamic. I have included consideration of these theories as it helps to explain how learning includes a social dimension found within the relationships and connections established amongst peers and also between the teacher and the students, within the various learning contexts in which they interact.

Thirdly, I move from theoretical framing to a more traditional review of literature specifically relating to the academic adaptation of what have been commonly homogenised in previous studies as 'international students', with a focus on studies where their experiences of engaging in group work activities have been examined. Reviewing this has provided greater insight into what is known about the experiences of international students, educated outside of the country in which they undertake their degree, when engaging in different activities and where possible, specifically group work activities.

As a final fourth strand to the literature review, I consider prior literature focusing on studies specifically focused on the use of assessed group work projects, as a form of

student assessment and consider its impact upon students unfamiliar with this type of assessment.

With the four key strands of the theories and literature discussed, I then move on to explaining the underpinning rationale for the study by identifying the research gap and how the study resonates with my personal interest in the subject. The research questions then draw together how the overall aim of the study can be met through a thorough investigation leading to answers for each.

The theoretical framing starts with consideration of Bion's (1961) Tavistock model of group dynamics which is explored as a theory relating to student group work activities.

2.1 Group Dynamics

In this section (2.1) I will be discussing the Tavistock group dynamics model originally proposed by Bion (1961) which identifies the emotional concerns amongst group members. I chose to include this model because it offers potential insight into the challenges students face when forming groups and how the changing dynamics of the group can impact the adaptation experiences of the students. As a framework for the exploration of group behaviour, the Tavistock model (Bion 1961) helps identify the roles that individuals typically assume in work groups and how the dynamics of leadership emerge and develop from within. Students can find themselves working in groups on assessed projects and the model can help to understand how that cluster of individuals becomes a group as interaction between members occurs and relationships form. It can also potentially help to explain how a student's awareness of their relationship with others in the group develops.

The dynamics of a group is how its members identify with each other and also the emotional ties that are formed within the group as the students adapt. Schruijer (2021) acknowledges that group dynamics can prevent effective group work although the group members themselves may later reflect upon the experience as being ultimately successful. The Tavistock model can be used to understand why this might be the case as it suggests there are two levels to the group, one being the 'work group' level that is focused on performing specific tasks required to be carried out. The other being

that of the 'basic assumptions' level where the group acts in a way that assumes some specific tacit assumptions which frequently obstruct and divert the performance of the groups from the specific work tasks, due to their strong emotional influence (Bion, 1961 in Jacques, 2007). The Tavistock model therefore suggests there can be challenges for students working in groups that could occur at either level and understanding what assumptions students in these groups operate under can help answer related research questions.

When considering the challenges students face due to group dynamics, the Tavistock model (Bion, 1961) proposes that group members will typically develop dependency emotions with the need to obtain 'security and protection from one individual on whom it can depend' (Jacques, 2007, pg.7). This can be with regard to decisions which are needed about the allocation of tasks and roles or the processes to be followed leading to problems relating to authority which can occur. The authority of an individual to make decisions or lead can come from a particular group member assigned as leader or one who is simply accepted as being in that role. Schruijer (2021, pg. 231) indicates this can happen through unconscious emotional dynamics which emerge within the group with 'an excessive dependency on the leader'. This suggests one of the challenges students may typically face in adapting to working within a group is where a leader either emerges and there becomes an over-dependency problem or there is no leader at all, and students feel insecure. Questions around who can make the final decision on matters that affect the group and who has the authority to do so becomes of significant concern to the group. Challenges might also be faced by the shape of leadership provided externally to the group by the teacher. As the person with authority over the group, who leads by directing the students through remarks typically taken by the group as incontestable wisdom, despite the views of the group members potentially contrasting their own.

Problems can surface when the teacher believes they must provide attention to each individual to a level where everyone in the group is happy and has their needs met fully rather than allowing scenarios to emerge where the students in the group must help themselves and 'develop the student's capacity for self-growth into greater autonomy and responsibility' (Jacques, 2007, pg. 9). The organisational structure of the group can result in challenges for students in several ways. How power within the group is distributed, to what extent external factors determine the power differentials

within the group and how those within the group appraise the apparent abilities, knowledge, or expertise of others in group (Jacques, 2007, pg.7) all have the potential to create challenges for the students within the group. As the structure of the group develops over time, rather than being fully established at the outset, some feelings of mistrust can emerge amongst group members with regard to who should be coming up with initiatives and who checks with whom when decisions are needed. This leads back to the issues identified with an over-reliance on a leader or with a lack of leadership.

The Tavistock model also proposes that group members will preserve the group from destruction and collapse, and so challenges for students can occur as a result of this. Schruijer (2021, pg. 231) suggests there is a tendency 'to fight or flee for a real or imaginary enemy' by either attacking what seeks to destroy it or avoiding it as much as possible. In terms of attacking, this can be internal in the form of group members preventing destruction of the group by finding scapegoats amongst its number to save the whole group from blame. Challenges for students in groups can occur where avoidance techniques occur such as withdrawing completely from specific activities or students becoming highly passive. There is also the potential problem of students projecting negative feelings on to others, the perceptions of students about each other becoming clouded and group members believing as a result, that the group is under attack. This may be caused by them feeling challenged by others in the group when in reality they may simply be challenged by their own capabilities to cope with the situation the group is in. These negative feelings students develop towards their teacher or other groups can end in outward hostility as a result, without full recognition of this happening. The group can expend considerable effort in the projection of their own issues onto other groups or the teacher at the expense of them resolving their own feelings towards particular issues or emerging situations within the group. Whilst the Tavistock model proposes there is an assumption that group members will preserve the group by ensuring potential attacks are neutralised (Jacques, 2007, pg.10), the risks remain that these attacks are mistaken projections of their own internal inadequacies which is heightened amongst students with little or no experience of group work.

A third challenge the Tavistock model indicates might cause a problem for students working in groups is their reliance on a subgroup to emerge which will resolve the

difficulties the group faces in any situation (Schruijer, 2021). The model identifies this as pairing, where in any situation the group faces there are at least 'two people together who will somehow save the group from its current predicament' (Jacques, 2007, pg. 7). The situations where this can happen will typically be where there are challenges such as the group lacking drive, members being confused or members disagreeing. An example of this could be task boundaries, which can be difficult for group members to assume and are less tangible than the rules a group may broadly list for everyone to follow. Although the boundaries determine what group members can or cannot do, group members can find themselves unsure of what they are and may overstep the boundaries, creating uncomfortable situations for each other. Khushk et al (2022, pg.4) suggests one of the ways a group can regulate facets of a members' conduct is by the group being the centre of power for its participants and 'efforts to improve conduct may be helped or hindered by group influence'. This power of group influence emerges as the group develops and regulates the behaviour of the group members in order to save the group. The Tavistock model proposes that in order to save the group, a sub-group of students pull their energies together to solve the issues at hand whilst others become inactive, or the sub-group thrashes out their ways forward whilst others become bystanders. Alternatively the teacher 'may pair with the group as a whole and collude with them in their wish to avoid the appropriate task' (Jacques, 2007, pg. 7). There is a risk that the teacher, as leader of the group by means of authority becomes a target for members of the group to unload their problems or dissatisfaction with a particular person or outcome, in the hope that the teacher will resolve the conflict for them. In reality, students in this situation may simply be unwilling to accept that resolution is their own responsibility as a group member and consequences of their decisions are in fact learning opportunities rather than simply resolving issues or not. How much the teacher allows students in a group to make their own decisions and choose their course of action in a particular scenario can support bringing problems and conflict to a resolution and as a pair, the teacher can support the group to resolve issues together.

Khushk et al (2022) suggests intergroup disputes can be mitigated in this way by preventing and managing the source of the problem and by growing contact amongst individuals within these groups to facilitate resolution however, this requires the sub-group to be seen by others as saving the group rather than simply going their own

way. Although group dynamics can contribute to an understanding of how Romanian students adapt to assessed group work, by providing insight into the challenges students face when forming groups and how the changing dynamics of the group can impact the adaptation experiences of the students, Jacques (2007) suggests the way the group develops over time can also impact the experience of those working in a group or team.

2.2 Group development and the stages of group formation

In this section (2.2) I consider Bligh's (1986) updated model of Tuckman's (1965) original stages of group formation and development. My decision to include this model has been strongly influenced by its simplicity as a social development theory in explaining how student teams that are formed for the purposes of group work projects mature over time through different stages. The model offers an understanding of how the ability of a team can develop and how relationships become more established. Measurement of how a team performs throughout its development is also possible using what could be considered as a standard scale, allowing comparisons between different teams in terms of their development to be considered.

Although group dynamics can explain how group members create emotional ties and identify with each other over a period of time, models of group formation can help to explain how a group can flourish through development and change over a period of time. The model considers how this development can be as a unit and through the interactions that take place within them, as the students adapt to working in a group. Changes in organisational structure of the group can impact upon the participation of group members which can lead to changes in behaviour, expectations, leadership and communication. Bonebright (2010) discusses a combined six-stage model made up of the Bligh's (1986) model and Tuckman's (1965) original model, where six stages in group formation are made up of forming, storming, norming, performing, informing, and adjourning.

Forming

At the forming stage of group development, students who are put into groups by their lecturer or who form groups themselves, will initially have some concerns about what

tasks they will need to perform, how long they will have to complete tasks and what resources they will have at their disposal (Bligh, 1986). In this forming stage, group members are keen to develop a sense of what is considered appropriate behaviour and fitting into this as required. As Jacques (2007) identified, questions around leadership and who is in charge are at the forefront of group members minds, as well questioning themselves on what the purpose of the group is and whether they really want to be in a group at all. Denzin (1969) labelled this as 'self-lodging' and it relates to where a group member restricts certain portions of themselves from being invested in the group, if there is an expectation that others will not reciprocate a full investment of self and if there is dissatisfaction in the experience of being in the group itself whilst each member establishes 'her or his own separate individuality' (Tuckman, 1965, pg. 394).

Storming

At the 'storming' stage of group development students may experience what Tuckman (1965) refers to as intragroup hostility (Bonebright, 2010). This is characterised by the tension and unrest that group members may feel in response to having to work with others. With a lack of independence and feeling as if others have control there can be incidences of 'rebellion, opposition, and conflict' (Tuckman, 1965, pg. 394). Whereas in the first stage of group development the uncertainty manifests itself in interest as what questions can help answer the issues group members have, at the storming stage, deeper emotions rise to the surface around such uncertainties unanswered and through the means of 'projection' mentioned earlier, strong emotions are projected on to others in the group (Bonebright, 2010). Leaders are challenged as are the contrasting views of others by specific members of the group, as their differences are revealed and are 'seen as all or nothing, for or against' (Bligh, 1986).

Norming

In the 'norming' stage of group development, emphasis turns towards concerns that are mutually accepted and the interrelationships that emerge (Bligh, 1986). The hostility of the storming stage is replaced by increased listening, consideration of a variety of viewpoints across the group and individual norms make way for the emerging group norms where there is an agreement of shared goals for the group to work towards. Tuckman (1965) makes the point that during this third phase there is a

strong presence of group cohesion and acceptance. Ground rules and expectations are clearer and some of the boundaries group members have up until this stage been less clear on, become far more defined as behaviours naturally become regulated. There is a keenness amongst the group to ensure task conflicts are avoided and efforts are made to ensure harmony is maintained (Bonebright, 2010).

Performing

Following the norming stage, students working in groups will likely find themselves at a performing stage where members of the group will be settling into their functional roles and at this point will begin to be relatively satisfied with these roles. Bligh (1986) describes this as a gaining of autonomy and simultaneous neutrality which accompanies the acquisition of a distinct culture within the group as it develops a full sense of itself. The priorities of the group at this stage tend to revolve around decisions about how to maintain its continuity (Jacques, 2007). Seeing how the group has developed and their place within the group can lead to an increase in confidence a more significant role for them amongst other members can emerge at this stage (Bonebright, 2010).

Informing

As the group develops, the students experience will likely reach an informing stage. At this stage of group development 'informing' takes place, between Tuckman's (1965) original 'performing' stage and the updated 'adjourning' stage (Bligh, 1986). This reflects how group development will include a stage where the group informs others by projecting 'a voice to the outside world, communicating, for instance, with other groups, and agreeing how it will further its work' (Jacques, 2007, pg. 40). This of course assumes that the group has developed through the prior stages of group development without collapse first and that any potential negative influences of others outside of the group do not creep in to neutralise their feelings of connectedness (Bonebright, 2010). This informing stage takes place typically where the group has reached a stage where they are communicating with the teacher to formally update on progress and outcomes or it could be communication with another group, for example in an advisory capacity where they have succeeded in a particular task that the other group has found more challenging, with a view to aiding their development.

Adjourning

Students working in a group are likely to go through a final stage of group development where separation takes place (Bonebright, 2010). It sounds contrary to a model of group development to have a stage involving separation however, when considering the group life cycle experience of students, it is possible to see how this can make sense. The stages of group development do not have neat beginnings and ends, there is overlapping between the stages and the adjourning stage can come at any point if separation is required or inevitable due to for example, conflict at the storming stage where certain members separate to form new groups. Also, on degree courses students typically do group work projects in a variety of groups at a number of different learning levels throughout their time on the course. This means that the groups they are in may temporarily disband and then reform later on the course. Also, there may be occasions where students form new groups where members from previous groups they have been part of join them again, in the re-formed group.

This six-stage model of group formation can contribute to an understanding of how Romanian students adapt to assessed group work, by offering an insight into the stages a group goes through in terms of changes to organisational structure and the behaviour, expectations, leadership and communication within the group. However, throughout the stages of formation and development there are opportunities to also understand how the students' experiences can be shaped by the roles they find themselves in and also by the roles other group members perform within the group, at any stage within the group development model.

2.3 Group roles

In this section (2.3) I consider Belbin's (1981) nine-role team model where each role is defined by a behaviour characteristic relating to how the team member interacts with others in group in pursuit of overall group progress. Behind my decision to include this model is that it offers an understanding of how students' behavioural contributions can be identified as roles within the teams they participate in within group work projects where specific job titles have not been allocated amongst members. The model offers explanations as to how individuals within such teams may have adapted their

behaviours according to the situations they have found themselves in and can help when evaluating the suitability of individuals carrying out particular tasks. The model can also potentially provide insights into behavioural strengths and weaknesses amongst team members when considering the roles they have performed and how this might align or contrast the expectations of others. The model proposes a total of 9 different team roles as illustrated in Table 1:

Team Role Descriptions:	
Team role	**Behaviour description and theoretical association**
Completer-Finisher	Most effectively used at the end of tasks to polish and scrutinise the work for errors, subjecting it to the highest standards of quality control.
Implementer	Needed to plan a workable strategy and carry it out as efficiently as possible.
Team Worker	Helps the team to gel, using their versatility to identify the work required and complete it on behalf of the team.
Specialist	Brings in-depth knowledge of a key area to the team.
Monitor Evaluator	Provides a logical eye, making impartial judgements where required and weighs up the team's options in a dispassionate way.
Co-ordinator	Needed to focus on the team's objectives, draw out team members and delegate work appropriately.
Resource Investigator	Uses their inquisitive nature to find ideas to bring back to the team.
Plant	Tends to be highly creative and good at solving problems in unconventional ways.
Shaper	Provides the necessary drive to ensure that the team keeps moving and does not lose focus or momentum.
Table summary from www.belbin.com (2021)	

Table 1. Team Role Descriptions (Belbin, 2021)

Belbin's (1981) model is helpful in understanding the roles students may play within the groups they participate in and in practice teachers often encourage students to select members in consideration of such roles to create a suitably balanced group. There are likely to be overlaps between roles, role holders change over time, and it is likely that none of the group will fit any of the roles exactly so reviews on a regular basis will help the group to understand how each member of the group is performing in their respective roles at any particular time.

It is highly likely that students working within groups will have noticed themselves and others within their group filling a variety of the roles identified by Belbin (1981) to varying degrees of success which will have impacted upon their experiences in group work. For example, their experiences may include being relied upon for behaviours within a particular role that they found natural to their abilities, or they may have struggled with the expectations of group members where a role was not one they found within their natural abilities but was expected. Experiences within group work activities can be shaped by the requirements of not only the task at hand but the expectations of group members as to who will fill particular roles within the group.

An example of how Belbin's (1981) model connects to that of Bion's (1961) Tavistock model (Jacques, 2007) can be found in the changing dynamic of the group where expectations begin to get clearer for those in the group. Belbin (1981) proposes that the roles within effective teams place certain expectations of behaviour and responsibility upon team members which suggests that as expectations within group dynamics become clearer, team members assume roles expected of them. There is also a connection to be found between how Bligh's (1986) stages of group development identifies from the norming stage onwards that roles within the group are clear (Bonebright, 2010). The experience of students during those stages of group development could then be assumed to be impacted by what the roles are and who is performing them within the group (Belbin, 1981). Having considered theories and models relating to group dynamics, group development and group roles, there is also consideration needed as to how students are learning, within an assessed group work context, and how this learning connects to their experiences of adaptation.

2.4 Learning theories

In this section (2.4) I consider how learning theories with socio-cultural perspectives can help to explain how the learning that takes place in group work activities are in a social learning context. This consideration of learning theories helps to explain how international students adapt to the learning experiences involved in assessed group work. Jerome Bruner's (1966) theory of socio-constructivism proposes that individuals learn and develop their knowledge and understanding through social interaction and context (Adams, 2006). According to Bruner, learning must include both the social and

cultural aspects of an individual's experience. With this in mind, where students are involved in group work, learning occurs through social interactions in a cultural environment that allows learners to construct their own meaning by integrating new information into their existing knowledge structures (Shepard, 2000). In this way, learners construct knowledge not only in a social context but also in a personal context. Learners are responsible for constructing their own learning experiences and this involves active engagement with other students and lecturers. In this context students are active co-constructors of knowledge and socio-constructivism proposes that social and cultural factors influence the development of their understanding.

Learning is considered a primarily social process and students bring their own perspectives drawn from their cultural backgrounds leading to the creation of knowledge within a developing cultural context (Adams, 2006). Socio-constructivist theory considers that learning takes place through the interactions of the learner and others in the context of engaging together with their decisions 'scaffolding' each other as knowledge and understanding develops (Silcock, 2003). This is where learners who are more able, actively scaffold the performance of others beyond the levels those individuals could perform alone (Hickey, 1997). Vygotsky (1986) calls this the 'zone of proximal development' which when applied to group work scenarios would be the students learning with assistance from others within their groups and with assistance from the lecturer. Activities such as group work have a high level of social interaction and so socio-cultural theories can help to understand the potential impact of these experiences upon the students when working in groups. There is a social dimension found within the relationships and connections students build within the groups they form during group work projects.

Situated Learning is an interpretation of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development grounded on a view of learning which prioritises the process of social transformation and the social nature of learning itself (Rogoff, 1990). As a relational view, it focuses specifically on how the learning is situated, in terms of the person, the actions they take and the context in which they do it. Application of this theory helps to understand how students' higher thought processes need to be considered within the context of the wider social circumstances in which they are learning and that the historical social

background of the individual is also of significance with regards to their thought processes which would include how they feel about their experiences of group work. The combination of group dynamics theories, group development theories, group role theories and social learning theories are illustrated in Table 2.

Belbin's (1993) Roles undertaken by group members during each stage of group development

Bion's (1961) Tavistock Model of emotional concerns of group members: Dependency, Pairing and Flight or Flight during each stage of group development

1. Bligh (1986) Forming Stage

2. Bligh (1986) Storming Stage

3. Bligh (1986) Norming Stage

4. Bligh (1986) Performing Stage

5. Bligh (1986) Informing Stage

6. Bligh (1986) Ajourning Stage

Bruner's 1966 Social Constructivist theory of learning and Vygotsky's (1986) ZPD theory underpinning the social learning experience within group work activities

Table 2. Illustration of theories informing student adaptation to group work

2.5 Experiences of international students in assessed group work

Having reviewed theories that have informed the theoretical underpinning of the study and can help us understand the experience of students in group work contexts, in this section (2.5) I move on to reviewing literature that focuses on research seeking to uncover the experience of international students as they adapt to group work and other unfamiliar learning activities.

As an introduction to this, it is commonly accepted that group work aspires to turn the focus of learning from input by the teacher where students passively receive instruction over to the students working in groups instead, where student interactions amongst each other are harnessed as learning opportunities (Windschitl, 1999). The teacher's guidance turns towards a focus on directing and promoting interactions between students who learn through the experience of their own engagement and interaction with peers. Group work seeks to promote student autonomy by offering opportunities for them to engage in deeper learning, gained through the wider contextual perspectives of the group produced by their interactions, rather than by the more typical reliance placed on input from the teacher (McKinney & Graham-Buxton 1993). There is an aspiration with the use of group work for students to develop better social skills and a greater understanding of the values that underpin teamwork as a result of the experience of working closely with others, which can be particularly valuable to career aspirations (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 2007). The use of group work promotes students being able to discuss their views with each other, rather than solely with the teacher which can also offer opportunities for them to reflect upon their personal views and consider new ideas generated by others within the group.

In terms of reviewing literature that covers studies relating to international students, the cannon of research includes studies from a wide variety of countries set in a select number of locations and contexts. In terms of location and context, the literature in this field tends to focus on studies that have taken place in countries such as the UK, United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, at institutions often referred to rather homogenously in such literature as 'anglo-western' and focuses primarily on the potential challenges students from abroad face when studying on degree programmes

in those countries. For example, Lee's (1997) study of 'Asian' students' groups them together without any geographical or localised historical significance to their distinct home countries being taken into account. However, in some of the studies, there is a geographical significance to the groupings of the students, for instance in Roy's (2013) study of the unique barriers and learning difficulties encountered by Chinese, Japanese, and Korean international students when they study at higher education institutions in the US. The results identify where there are similarities and contrasts between students from different countries.

In studies that focus on a broader set of international students there clearly are some findings indicating a variety of challenges of academic adaptation that are experienced by such students. This literature provides an understanding of how these students are impacted upon by learning activities they find unfamiliar and some of this is useful as there are connections to experiences from group work activities and the assessment of group work. There is value in understanding what this literature tells us about the experiences of international students, either studying in the UK or in other anglo-western countries which employ similar learning methods and techniques, when engaging in group work or activities that require skills utilised in group work scenarios.

2.5.1 *International students' adaptation to working in groups*

Research into the experiences of international students in higher education suggests there is a very common need for international students to adapt to unfamiliar ways of learning. Academic adjustment is required because international students that travel to study in countries such as the UK, Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand typically have little or no prior experience of group work (Schartner, 2016). Where some of these students have prior experience, working in multicultural groups still remains a challenge for them to overcome due to their inexperience in working with students from contrasting cultural backgrounds. Early research into international student adaptation such as Lee's (1997, pg. 95) study of post-graduate Asian students at a US University found that where these students had been integrated into a group project they needed to adapt to the challenges of speaking, listening, and writing in English for them to function effectively within a group of learners, due to their limited English vocabulary. From a critical standpoint the limitation of Lee's (1997) study was

that it only focused on students from Asia however, more recent research such as that of Gu & Maley (2008) and Schartner (2016) identifies that English competency remains a significant challenge for international students, despite notable improvements to how institutions provide English language support for such students.

The development of critical thinking skills, which had not been typically required in learning prior to them studying on the programme, was a key priority for international students found in Robertson et al's (2000) study of the adaptation experiences of Asian students at a University in Australia. In the same study findings suggest there were also challenges around them needing to adapt to giving opinions in class-based learning activities and to engage in group discussions (Robertson *et al*, 2000). Asian students were found to have a typical reluctance to argue with someone older which made engaging in discussions with the lecturer, who is in a distinct position of authority, a challenge for these students. Where international students start the programme without prior experience of questioning, analysis, or critical evaluation this can in turn lead them to initially view students who do this as being disrespectful and unable to satisfactorily reproduce what the lecturer has taught them (Howson, 2002, pg. 6). Howson's (2002) study found there is also the added challenge of the students being particularly risk-adverse and fearful of undertaking activities which might lead to failure as they come from countries where such outcomes could lead to the discomfort of a 'loss of face'.

Being fearful of undertaking activities which might lead to failure suggests a lack of confidence is a key challenge for some Asian students to overcome when working in groups, particularly with those older than them, and adaptation to learning in ways that overcome such challenges requires lecturers to use student-centred rather than teacher-centred approaches where independence is encouraged. Indeed, the confidence to interact with others in class and overall development of independence towards their learning is likely to be a key adaptation required as found in Gu and Maley's (2008, pg. 240) study of Chinese students in UK Universities. A lack of confidence can lead to social isolation as found in Hazza's (2016) study of Arab students at a US university. The findings there suggest international students often find themselves isolated from other students where they are the minority in class which

can be caused or exacerbated by the language barriers they find themselves needing to overcome.

Along with the challenges already identified, there are specific challenges that international students can face when working in groups. Schweisfurth and Gu's (2009, pg. 470) study of international students at a UK university found that international students had few concerns about group work upon arrival but during the early stages of the programme had experienced a number of unexpected challenges which they considered to be negative. Within the period of the first academic term, students can find group work combative and a generally uncomfortable experience which they have to work hard to overcome. Managing differences becomes a high priority in the early stages of group work with a need to understand others in the group and the differences being potentially harnessed as a positive outcome of group work (Robinson, 2006).

The development of the skills required to manage that difference were rated highly and the ability of these students to deal with 'difficult people' clearly developed however, this was still not viewed by the students as a positive outcome later in the programme (Robinson, 2006, pg. 6). Schweisfurth and Gu (2009, pg. 470) reinforce how specific experiences in group activities can be impacted upon by international students' often having a 'lack of confidence in their English ability'. The findings also identified that different social life patterns can also contribute to feelings of inadequacy for these students, which might be particularly prominent in group work contexts requiring a higher level of social interaction than a typical classroom learning context. Despite these challenges, international students may still consider the best groups to be multicultural however, students that speak English as a first language are likely to prefer working in groups with native English speakers than those with a lower level of proficiency (Ledwith and Seymour, 2001). Indeed, speaking in groups during the first three months of an undergraduate programme can be particularly difficult for international students where English proficiency or at least confidence in speaking ability may be lower than home students, making it difficult for them to demonstrate their academic knowledge or ability. It can take time for them to gain the confidence to speak up in group discussions however, there is evidence that by the time these students reach graduation and return home, speaking in groups can be of far less concern (Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009).

Some of the intra-group conflict experienced by international students, when working in groups, could potentially be driven by concerns from other students in the group. For example, those with significant experience of group work may have concerns about students with little or no experience and a perceived lack of English language ability potentially bringing the grades of the group down (Peacock and Harrison, 2009, p. 494). Ledwith and Seymour (2001) found in their study at a UK university, that home students with more experience of group work remained committed throughout their programme to their belief that the grades they gained for their individual assessments were more accurate in reflecting their true ability than the group work grades they were awarded where they all received the same grade.

The premise of whether international students were lower performers than home students was empirically tested by Kelly and Moogan in 2012, where they conducted a study of the performance of the home students with more experience of group work and the less experienced international students on a UK university MBA programme during a ten-year period. The study did indeed find that overall, international students did not perform as well as home students on the MBA programme over the ten-year period and that their coursework results were statistically worse than their individual exam results. This finding empirically supports the beliefs the home students had about the grades of international students in their groups being lower. However, there could be something of a self-fulfilling prophecy about this outcome in terms of the role that group work dynamics play in such cases too. The experience of international students can be significantly impacted upon by the perceptions and behaviour of others in the group towards them. Negative perceptions can be particularly prevalent amongst home students if they continue to believe throughout the programme that their grades will be lower if they are in groups that include international students and they themselves behave in ways not conducive to effective teamwork (Moore and Hampton, 2015). It could be that the negative attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours of the home students towards who they perceive as being typically less experienced and lower performing may actually cause the international students to end up feeling marginalised, polarised or at worst isolated, where more positive approaches of the home students to the potential benefits of the multicultural groups they are in could alter the grade outcomes of the group as a whole.

Despite the potentially entrenched beliefs that home students and international students have about each other when working in groups, the collaborative nature of group working can still generate a variety of opportunities for perceptions to be changed. Although Kelly and Moogan (2012) found evidence of the lower average grades of international students, in fact there were higher average marks across the whole student data set, for both home and international students, wherever there had been collaboration in student-centric and cross-cultural environments. This supports Summers and Volet's (2008) findings that overall, multicultural group work is a valuable process where diverse groups of students can engage in learning opportunities that encourage deeper learning than might be achieved individually. Evidence of the positive effects on individual mark averages of working in diverse cultural groups, found in Kelly and Moogan's (2012) study, appears to be consistent with the co-operative effects expected to emerge from work generated by culturally diverse groups despite the challenges those in such groups might face. The initial negative perceptions more experienced learners may have of them, and the variety of challenges that Romanian students may face when working in groups could potentially be balanced against the overall benefits of working in multi-cultural groups.

2.5.2 *International students and culturally diverse groups*

Challenges for international students working in groups can also come from the groups they find themselves in being culturally diverse (Rienties, 2012). Despite heightened opportunities for social contact within universities, particularly where there is a large international student contingent, there is often minimal interaction between students that have contrasting cultural backgrounds (Summers and Volet, 2008). This can mean that where there is an expectation for students from within a range of cultural backgrounds to work closely together in group work, cultural differences can impact upon the experiences of those in the group (Elliot and Reynolds, 2014). Within classrooms and more widely in group work scenarios too, cultural differences can create challenges for students when working closely with each other and when interacting with the lecturer. For instance, there can be differences as to whether the

student feels it is polite to speak or not speak in a certain situation (Minami, 2002) making conversations and in-depth discussions in group work more challenging.

There can also be cultural differences in the time students expect to wait to respond to a comment made by a group member within a discussion where students that expect to wait a short time can often seem rude to those used to longer wait times, feeling their sentences have been cut short (Tharp, 1989). Conversely, students that expect to wait longer to respond may miss their chance to speak as someone else speaks first or may come across as lacking confidence or having a strong argument if the wait feels too long to others in the group. A key difference that contrasting cultural backgrounds within a group can create is where students may differ is on how individualistic or collectivistic they are. These terms can be explained using examples of the trait's students might exhibit in the ways they learn. For instance, students from individualistic cultures are likely to have a focus on maintaining autonomy, working for the sake of their own personal achievement rather than the group, and asking for help on a one-to-one basis if required (Elliot and Reynolds, 2014). In contrast, students from a collectivist culture are likely to lean towards not wanting to individually shine within the group and more towards helping the group to stand out amongst other groups whilst students from individualist cultures will want themselves to stand out potentially as leaders within the group. Students from collectivist cultures are more likely to be focused on mutual dependence amongst the group, the group's overall requirements and their shared aims (Hofstede, 2011).

Where groups are culturally diverse, it may well be challenging for group members to find consistency in their approaches to project work. International students who find themselves having a contrasting culture to the home students may find the academic adjustment experience or at least the transition process of gaining a better understanding of students from other cultures in the groups they are in difficult. This can play a significant part in how well they do this and how easily they can make social connections within the groups they are required to work in which can lead to students experiencing both positive and negative emotions towards working with those who have contrasting cultural backgrounds when working in multicultural groups (Elliot and Reynolds, 2014).

Co-operative learning strategies can be helpful in helping students understand how to best work with others from contrasting cultures, but this can be felt by the students to be at the expense of their learning experience (Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009). In Schweisfurth and Gu's (2009) study of Chinese students at a UK university, participants explained how working on an assessed group work project with home students had been one of their worst experiences during the programme as the home students, who had more prior experience of group work, decided not to participate in the initial group meetings with them. In one particular example of an international students' experience of group work within multicultural groups, the student had been part of a group where a home student had agreed to do a share of the group work but then took three weeks longer than agreed. This had made the experience of group work a particularly stressful event for the student, made much worse by the home student making a complaint about pressure from the rest of the group who were clearly less familiar with group work and not used to deadlines being missed. Combining students from a range of different cultures in group work is likely to have an impact upon the extent to which international students adapt to working in groups as it can increase opportunities for them to communicate more with each other.

There is evidence that group work can facilitate opportunities for students to develop key interpersonal skills through their collaboration with contrasting cultures which can lead to positive outcomes such as higher levels of learning (Schartner and Young, 2016). However, as Sweeney, Weaven, and Herington (2008) found in their study of home and international Business students at an Australian university, these connections and positive outcomes are typically conditional upon students having prior knowledge that multicultural group work will be required and the students then having time to prepare for this through pre-group coaching and having time afterwards to discuss and subsequently reflect upon the experience with their teacher.

Although some studies such as Montgomery and McDowell (2009) have found international students build strong relationships with students from a range of backgrounds providing them with academic and social support, other studies such as Summers and Volet's (2008) have found a tendency amongst international students to primarily network with others from the same culture. This can be dependent upon whether students have the autonomy to decide upon which students they wish to be

in a group with. Being put into groups with members chosen by the lecturer, rather than having free reign to decide who to be in a group with can be a factor impacting upon how closely culturally diverse groups might work together. In Rienties' (2012, pg. 348) study of international students at a UK university, where international students were the minority within established groups, the findings suggest these particular learners were left with 'no choice but to interact with others from a different culture' and in fact then integrated well with the home students. Due to being the minority culture within the group, the findings suggest the more pressing need to develop links outside their own culture within the groups they had been placed in may have been the driving force for this integration amongst the international students. Being doubtful of culture as something that is specifically identifiable, different, and quantifiable which can be developed within an individual helps to keep in context how the complexity of cultural experience can create misunderstandings as to what is causing potential conflict and non-cooperation within a group (Sliwa and Grandy, 2006).

When considering the impact of culture upon groups, Holliday (1999 pg. 248) advocates moving away from solely relying on culture to be directly associated with groups of the same nationality or ethnicity and in contrast considering culture as something developed from within the group whenever members are together. This helps view the group as forming a nonessentialist culture, amongst the social activity of the established group. However, even with a focus on the emerging culture rather than the cultures students may bring with them into the group, such cultures will also often buckle under the strain of power differentials that can manifest themselves amongst those in the group (Holliday, 1999, pg. 250).

Cultural differences can play a part in how successful group work activities may end up being. Kelly and Moogan (2012, pg. 39) identify one of the main contributors as culture shock and in their study of home and international students studying for an MBA at Liverpool University they conclude that strategies where educators expect international students to change and adapt to a new education system within a short period time are often 'not working as effectively as one would assume'. The duration of the transition period may be even longer than the programme itself, particularly for postgraduate programmes that tend to be significantly shorter than undergraduate, meaning more may need to be done to close the transition gap within the required

programme timescale. The provision of support and the resources staff need to ensure students unfamiliar with the typical ways of learning being used are needed to help them adapt more quickly. Without this, cultural differences can make working with others even more difficult for international students. In Schweisfurth and Gu's (2009) study of Chinese students at Newcastle University, cultural differences manifested themselves via an obvious contrasting mind-set where the typically more mature Chinese students were not interested in hanging out socially and going to the pub like the younger UK home students and instead preferred going to the library to read and get information from books for their studies.

Students can often find it difficult to overcome cultural differences when working in multicultural groups, particularly when needing to work in close liaison with other group members that have contrasting cultural backgrounds to themselves and share similar cultural backgrounds to others in the group (Wu, Garza and Guzman, 2016). Strong segregation between the social worlds of home students and international students can exist which can make group work particularly difficult (Rienties et al, 2011). Although being required to work in such culturally diverse groups can enhance opportunities for students to interact with each other, as discussed earlier, social isolation can result and is a common challenge for international students to overcome which may impact significantly upon formal assessment activities such as group work projects.

In a study of the attitudes of both international and home students towards culturally mixed group work projects Summers and Volet (2008) sought to establish what the attitudes were of Business students towards the culturally mixed groups they had worked in, how much the multiple languages they experienced affected those attitudes and whether their attitudes were related to just observed behaviour amongst the groups they were in. Summers and Volet's (2008, pg. 368) study highlights that those who chose to work on assignments in culturally mixed groups 'displayed no significant change in their attitudes towards mixed group work from the beginning to the end of their project'. These findings suggest the students' attitudes remain consistent throughout multicultural collaboration which is problematic if negative perceptions are pervasive. As Schweisfurth and Gu (2009, pg. 469) suggest, despite the committed expectations of those involved with group work, of it being able to help to garner

collaborative outcomes, it can too often easily descend into 'non-cooperation and occasionally conflict' despite committed attempts of teachers to foster cooperative working amongst group members. Having considered the key challenges international students face when engaging in collaborative learning within group work scenarios I am now moving on to review literature specifically about the impact assessment methods can have on those group work experiences of international students.

2.6 International students and the assessment of group work

Literature relating to how international students feel about the ways they are assessed for group work is reviewed in this section. There is a considerable amount of literature on group work assessment across studies with a very broad range of students, some focusing on home students (see for example Hall and Buzzwell, 2012) and a smaller proportion focusing on the experiences of international students (see for example McLeay and Wesson, 2013). The literature on international students tends to focus on the impact of group work being utilised as a tool for assessment and the experiences of the students involved in these specific activities with student perceptions of the fairness of group work assessment taking a high priority. There are clearly a variety of strategies used to potentially increase the efficiency of the assessment, the satisfaction level amongst the students and those used to ensure fairness in the assessed outcomes of the group work for all participants (see Gaur and Gupta, 2013).

2.6.1 *Assessing individual contribution and the free-rider problem*

There are complexities surrounding group work assessment which create debates around the suitability of the various mechanisms used to award marks across a group of students as a singular mark or the variety of ways which can be used to differentiate group member contributions (Nordberg, 2008). Findings from McLeay and Wesson's' (2013, pg. 147) study of Chinese students at a UK university show that these students perceived a 'single assessment from a lecturer or tutor, applied to a whole team, to be more useful, important and fairer than domestic students did'. One of the students explained that in Chinese culture, they frequently work together, and relationships are built within teams to solve problems. Therefore, they felt that 'the whole team should

be assessed equally on the results of a group project' (McLeay and Wesson, 2013, pg. 147). However, there is significant amount of research suggesting a drawback of assessing group work simply by the output of work produced is the problem of free-riders where students find themselves in groups with a team member that capitalises on the strengths of others but does not equally contribute to the work produced (Maiden and Perry, 2011).

Free-riding behaviour can have a significant effect on other students in the group who typically cite frustration with 'receiving the same mark as their fellow non-contributing group members despite producing much of the group's work' (Hall and Buzzwell, 2012, pg. 1). Free-riding is typically assumed by students to be caused by members of the group 'socially loafing' or put more simply not choosing to put in the effort required to meet the expectations of the group with regards to their individual contribution towards the assessment (Maiden and Perry, 2011). However, research has also highlighted that this behaviour is not always 'necessarily due to apathy or a deliberate attempt to do as little work as possible' (Hall and Buzzwell, 2012, pg. 11). In the case of international students, assumptions of other students within the group may centre on social loafing as reason for lower engagement and not take into account their inexperience with group work and what the expectations are of working closely with others on an assessed piece of work. There can also be a number of different underlying reasons that may lead a student not to contribute the same amount or quality of work as others in the group such as their health or the need to balance group work with other commitments outside of study.

Despite the problems associated with students within groups not contributing to the expectations of others in the group, Hall and Buzzwell (2012) suggest there can still be reluctance within the group to confront or challenge those exhibiting free-rider behaviours (Maiden and Perry, 2011). This can leave other members of the group feeling aggrieved yet still reluctant to prevent free-riders from missing agreed meetings, being non-communicative and producing significantly less work than others, for fear of upsetting them.

2.6.2 *Student perception of lower grades in multicultural groups*

Students' feelings towards the assessment of group work can also be impacted by their experiences of working in groups where they are amongst peers with varying levels of ability in situations that require interactive group work. Moore and Hampton (2015, pg. 390) found evidence of a clear pattern of high achievers perceiving their marks for group work were and would continue to be 'below what they would normally receive for individual work'. Equally, those students who were used to lower marks for their individual work perceived their grades were and would continue to be higher for group assignments. De Vita (2002 pg. 159) explains that despite the numerous challenges faced by international students in adapting to new ways of learning such as group work, the findings of his study of international and home students on a Business course at a UK university indicated that overall 'assessed group work has a positive rather than negative effect on the individual average mark of all students'. The study included a data set of "54 culturally mixed groups, consisting of 304 students: 195 home (UK only) students, and 109 international students (within the latter, 24 different nationalities were represented". The findings highlighted that students being in multicultural teams did not pull-down high achievers' mark averages nor pull up low achievers' marks, in fact group work marks were actually more likely to reflect the 'ability of the most able group member' in contrast to what home students assumed would be the ability of the lowest able group members, which they considered to be the international students (De Vita, 2002, pg. 156).

De Vita's (2002) findings suggest the perceptions of high achieving students with regards to their international student peers in group work pulling their grades down are inaccurate and grades are not affected by being in groups with them. It is more likely that the negative perceptions of high achievers will only have a detrimental effect on the experience of the other students involved, rather than upon their overall group grades. The study supports a view that that being in a multicultural group is not a determining factor in the quality of the output work submitted for assessment and that with the output reflecting the ability of the most able learner, the impact of potentially having free-riders in the group is far more likely to be a factor in the grades of higher achievers not being as high as they might typically have come to expect. However,

critically a limitation of the study is that it cannot affirm the distinction between home and international students and so it may be considered too general when both groups are far from homogenous. Given the significance of student concerns around how accurately they feel their group work assessment is in assessing the distribution of effort across a group of students, effective methods to equitably grade group work and how best to address student concerns on this are clearly of significant importance (Modell, 2013).

2.6.3 *The assessment of intercultural competence*

When considering the feelings students have specifically towards the assessment of group work, students can feel the grades they receive for working in multicultural groups do not truly reflect the full scope of output within such endeavours. In Schartner's (2016) study on the transformative potential of studying abroad upon international students, the findings provide some indication that studying abroad in a multicultural context may impact more on the attitudinal/cognitive aspects of intercultural competence than on the behavioural aspects. Fantini and Tirmizi (2006, pg. 12) define intercultural competence as 'the individual abilities and predispositions needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself'. Assessment of intercultural competencies might include a measure of intercultural effectiveness within a Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) which measures five dimensions including cultural empathy, flexibility, emotional stability, social initiative, and open mindedness.

Schartner and Young (2016, pg. 410) challenges the widely held belief that the development of intercultural competence occurs 'simply by osmosis as a result of being abroad' and suggests that although students were highly motivated and eager to interact with a multiplicity of nationalities, this initial openness may have left students more vulnerable to disappointment with their intercultural experiences. Whilst the findings help understand how intercultural competence may not naturally occur simply because students are studying in a multicultural context, there remains questions about whether group work projects within programmes of study are effective in heightening opportunities for the development of intercultural competence and

whether international students actively seek to work in multicultural groups to achieve this.

When assessment is typically only measuring their performance in terms of their academic achievement alone there is a lack of consideration for the levels of 'intercultural competence' these students will likely have developed during their experiences of working in multicultural groups. Students tend to focus on the grades they will receive for the work their group produces because they are assessed directly on that outcome however, having intercultural competence can assist these students in a number of ways not formally recognised within the typical assessment mechanisms used. Schartner and Young (2016) argue that the experience of studying abroad in a multicultural environment is not necessarily enough to expect an automatic increase in the level of intercultural competence amongst international students and there is a need for them to be guided in how to work with those from other cultures and backgrounds, with an integral part of the assessment hinging on their ability to develop competence in this area. Instances where students report difficulties with intercultural group work can be widespread and communication barriers can be caused by the type of culture exhibited by the particular peers these students are required to work with (Holmes, 2014).

Assessment mechanisms are often weighted heavily or fully towards the output work of the group and students act accordingly by focusing on completion of the output required, despite there being advantages to them in developing intercultural competence during the experience of group work which is typically not included in such mechanisms. Students' concerns over the challenges of working in multicultural groups without acknowledgement of their development being included within assessment could potentially be overcome by motivating these students to develop useful intercultural competencies through the integration of assessment criteria that includes a focus on the teamwork aspects of the activity required alongside the more common aspects of the final output of group work (Schartner and Young, 2016).

2.6.4 *Peer assessment in group work*

Attempts to integrate peer assessment mechanisms have been evaluated in much of the literature surrounding this exploration of mark differentiation within groups, such as that of Dijkstra et al (2016) and Gweon et al (2017) yet still remains a fairly divisive mechanism for allocating marks to students. An exploration of the literature focusing on studies relating to peer assessment is therefore required. Peer assessment requires students to make a judgment about the contributions of each other member of the group and these judgements result in a mark contributing a specific amount towards the overall mark each student will get alongside the outcomes of the group work produced. By requiring students to make judgements about each other, there can be a strong potential for personal conflict to arise amongst group members and disagreements or even arguments can erupt which brings into question how reliable the students' judgements of others in the group might be (Gweon *et al*, 2017). For students to be graded highly by their counterparts there is a temptation for them to simply be compliant and avoid confrontation due to power differentials despite others in the group potentially behaving in non-conducive ways themselves. In the case of international students this could manifest itself due to their lack of experience in group work which can often be in direct contrast to that of the more experienced home students. Group members may find themselves simply setting each other tasks to work on without developing team cohesion first, in order to ensure there is no falling out between counterparts. Each individual focuses on the completion of their part of the work rather than spending time developing the group work synergies that could be generated, leading to an amalgamation of potentially disjointed work prior to submission.

Higher levels of student satisfaction with group work activities can be achieved through the use of peer evaluation as an integral part of the assessment mechanism but can also create some negative outcomes. McLeay and Wesson (2013) measured the student perceptions of group project peer assessment and found there were differences in how the usefulness, importance and fairness of the peer assessment mechanism was graded by students. International students placed higher ratings than home students which appears to contrast what might be expected, as international students are often the ones who are perceived by home students to be the lower

achievers of the group and would therefore be the most likely to feel uncomfortable with a peer review mechanism. However, grading collusion can occur where individuals attempt to ensure that all members of the group will receive the same mark no matter what their contribution, by showing favouritism in their mark allocations to friends within the group (McLeay and Wesson, 2013).

Recent developments in technology and gamification of group work have enabled the inclusion of peer assessment mechanisms that involve the use of 'wikis' to help individual members contribute more collaboratively to group work projects (Caple and Bogle, 2013). It places a responsibility on each group member to document their individual input and its outcomes in order for it to be reviewed by their peers and teachers. In more technologically advanced environments, a collaborative learning platform can be operationalised which allows students to collaborate and make contributions as they progress. Students can benefit from such opportunities to engage within a technologically advanced format and improvements to the collaborative nature of group work can impact upon the student experience (Moccozet, 2015).

2.7 Rationale for the study

The expanding canon of research covered in the literature review indicates there is a growing desire amongst researchers to understand more about the specific experiences of international students when studying on degree programmes abroad. As De Vita (2002) suggests, this specific area of interest should be given special consideration if those involved are to engage in the learning experience enthusiastically and look forward to it. With regard to international students and their experiences of group work, De Vita (2002) found those who are typically more familiar with assessed group work activities within the groups that are formed can feel disadvantaged by having students with less experience of group work working with them. Indeed, from the international student's perspective, Moore and Hampton (2015) found that students with little or no experience of group work can face challenges overcoming the views of the typically more experienced home students who, in their groups, might exert influence on the grades of those students where peer evaluation opportunities are integrated.

Working in groups on an assessed group work activity can create challenges around the close interaction required with others and the findings suggest students with less experience of group work can be at a distinct disadvantage in these scenarios, particularly when required to work with students who have a high familiarity with assessed group work activities. Cultural barriers were found to create obstacles to effective communication and can create unrealistic expectations of self and others, caused by the students' lack of experience of learning activities that require high levels of social interaction. Aggarwal and O'Brien (2008) found that less experienced members of multi-cultural groups are typically the students educated in countries where group work is less common, contributing to them feeling disadvantaged in such the activities. Added to this, Dijkstra et al, 2016 found students in groups typically have concerns about the completion of individual contributions rather than on the dynamics of the team itself as they work towards a shared output. Whilst these findings are useful from the perspective of understanding how international students feel when they are around students with more experience of group work, questions around how they feel when they are in groups with other inexperienced students remain.

There is also the assessment of such group work activities to consider, which can be complex and there are debates relating to the fairness of awarding a mark across a group of students applicable to all students within the group, despite this being a common assessment mechanism in UK HE. The complexities surrounding group work assessment are of interest within this study given the debates around the suitability of the various mechanisms used to award marks across a group of students. Where McLeay and Wesson's' (2013) study of Chinese students indicated they perceived a group grade for assessment was more useful, important and fairer than the home students because it requires students to work together in a way they were used to, towards a shared goal, this study explores whether there are similar or contrasting feelings amongst Romanian students about such assessment mechanisms. The rationale for exploring how these Romanian students feel about the assessment group work is also set in the context of the significant amount of prior research indicating a drawback of assessing by group output is that it can create issues around perceptions of inequality of effort amongst students. For instance, Hall and Buzzwell (2012) found that perceived free-riding behaviour can have a significant effect on other students in the group, but it is not always caused by apathy or deliberate attempts to do as little

work as possible. Such findings lead to a curiosity in this study to understand how these Romanian students feel about such behaviours and its impact upon them and the groups they have been in.

Patton (2012) suggests the integration of peer assessment into group work projects is often used to apply marks for individual student contributions however, the potential impact of personal conflict and disagreements in perception within the group can still create issues around its fairness. Wright and Schartner (2013) found that the Chinese international students had a very low amount of listening and speaking experience throughout the one-year programme and these limited hours closely reflected their frustration about a lack of social interaction. These students identified how speaking remained challenging and they avoided interaction with host country English speakers despite them having a high motivation and a desire to improve interactions with them. The study concludes that sociocultural adaptation is not always a linear and transformational experience, particularly on shorter more intensive programmes of study. Whilst the findings are useful from the perspective of limited social interaction, they leave questions about whether programmes with significant amounts of group work might reveal a contrasting picture.

Other previous studies exploring the academic adjustment experiences of international students such as Rienties (2001) found that Asian international students struggle with acculturation caused by gaps in their cultural knowledge, as to how things are typically done within these new contexts. The findings suggest they have faced challenges building relationships with students from contrasting backgrounds and that their natural inclination was to form relationships with others from similar cultural backgrounds and in particular those with the same nationality, but the study did not specifically focus on the impact of this in group work scenarios. However, neither of these studies of Asian international students revealed whether these challenges were exacerbated within group work activities where students are typically engaging in the behaviours identified as challenging for them. In fact, there is very little on the actual process of adaptation international students go through when working in groups. Studies of this nature on adaptation have tended to focus on how the students adapt across their programme to the multiple challenges faced rather than those specific to group work. Where models of team formation (Bligh, 1986), team development stages (Tuckman, 1965 and Bligh, 1986) and team roles (Belbin, 1981) are useful in

understanding how the group work experiences of students might be understood and form a theoretical underpinning to the study, they do not constitute a process uniquely reflecting their experiences. This supports a strong rationale for understanding the process of their specific adaptation to group work in an education and institutional context.

Also underpinning the rationale is that the students typically in focus within prior research on international student adaptation have been from China and South Asia, providing me with an opportunity to contribute with research on Romanian students on UK degree programmes, examining their distinct experiences which may be similar or contrasting to those in prior research. Previous studies such as De Vita (2002) indicate there are a contrasting set of learning experiences that can emerge amongst learners that have been educated in different countries however, they also indicate that some learning experiences can be very similar, depending upon the similarities students share in their previous education experiences. This study focuses on a context where a specific set of international students are the majority in class rather than the home students. Despite a broad base of research existing on the academic adaptation of international students from a range of regions and countries, there has been a predominance of research on students from Asia. Some of the research has focused on group work but these studies tend to include consideration of these activities as one of a number in focus and none so far have focused solely on Romanian students in these scenarios. As mentioned previously, in some contexts international students can find themselves the majority in class, rather than a minority amongst UK home students more typical in UK universities. This highlights an opportunity to engage in research that can offer an insight into whether Romanian students have the same or different experiences to those international students featured in previous studies from broader geographical areas.

The prior educational experiences of Romanian students are likely to have been typically grounded on a teacher-centred pedagogy, in contrast to the more student-centred learning common in UK universities. Jankowska (2011, pg. 813) describes how higher education in Romania, during the era of socialism, had become 'focused on academic knowledge development in narrowly defined disciplines with priorities set by the state'. However, more recently economic and political pressures have forced higher education institutions in Romania to change radically, leading to them

increasingly becoming more in line with Western approaches to higher education. Despite attempts to change, secondary education in Romania retains a much greater focus on theory and broad background knowledge (Kazellova 1995, in Perry 2005). In Jankowska's (2011, pg. 812) study, the findings underlined that 'teaching is particularly theory heavy and much less practical than in the UK and involves a lot of memorisation' which over time leads to the 'development of higher-level metacognitive skills'. This typical focus on teacher input and learner memorisation leaves little room for experimentation in group work activities and thus little opportunity for assessment of such activities too. A lack of familiarity with many of the typical learning activities and methods typically used on UK degree programmes can create challenges, as these students grapple with experiences of learning and being assessed in ways that are unfamiliar to them. Similar findings were revealed in Cena, Burns and Wilson's (2021) study of the intercultural and academic experiences of international Students at a University in Northern Ireland. For these Asian international students, the differences between the cultural educational learning systems required them to adapt to unfamiliar ways of learning. This is because of the contrasts in experience between the two educational systems, where for example the focus in their home country had been on memorisation and then in the UK, the focus is on writing critically. This highlighted how they had experienced a need to significantly adapt as they had "struggled to meet the demands of learning or knowing how to improve their work" (Cena, Burns and Wilson, 2021, pg. 820).

Having considered a theoretical framework for the study, reviewed the key prior literature, introduced the main focus of the study and provided a clear academic rationale for the research, I will now identify the overarching research question and sub-questions set for the study.

2.8 Research questions

1. How do Romanian students adapt to assessed group work during a UK Higher Education degree programme?

   a. What is the impact of their prior experiences of assessed group work in Romania upon their experiences of assessed group work on a UK Higher Education degree programme?

   b. How do their experiences of assessed group work change whilst on a UK Higher Education degree programme?

   c. How do these students feel about the ways they are assessed for group work on a UK Higher Education degree programme?

The methodology I am using in this study to explore the subject further is covered within the following chapter and details exactly how this particular study has been conducted.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to outline my methodological approach to this research. I begin by outlining by explaining my choice of a mixed-methods study with a primarily qualitative approach. I then explore the research setting and my role as researcher within that. Next I provide details of how the participants were selected and how I collected my data. After outlining my approach to data analysis, I discuss the ethical considerations made throughout the study.

3.1 Overall approach

I chose a primarily qualitative interpretivist approach for this research because I wanted to answer the research questions with a focus on understanding the meanings that social actions have for the participants studied (Timulak and Elliott, 2021). With an interpretive approach theory has been emergent from within the research rather than it having to be initially hypothesised and then fully tested by it, which would have been difficult with the particular research questions I have set for the study. Because knowledge is subjective in interpretivist research I have been keen to ensure there is significant reflection, as the researcher, as to how my interpretation has been formed from the initial interpretations of the participants, in order to produce the findings. The study primarily has a qualitative methodology where I have generated the majority of the data through in-depth interviews with students, but it is also accompanied by a supplementary quantitative survey to understand how typical the findings generated within the interviews might be across Romanian students on the same programme of study at the institution. Using a qualitative methodology to collect the main data for the study provided an understanding of the participants individual experiences of group work, whilst keeping the study as free as possible from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions at the outset (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). As is typical in qualitative studies, in this study there is a focus on behaviour which is 'socially situated, context-related, context-dependent and context-rich' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, pg. 288) leading to a variety of subject interpretations which, in this case, has led me to a greater understanding of these students' experiences during group work activities. By conducting qualitative research in this study I have had the opportunity

to 'get at the inner experience of participants' and 'determine how meanings are formed through and in culture' (Strauss and Corbin, 2008, pp. 11). In-depth data has been generated through an exploration of specific students' feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and values which facilitated a richness of depth that solely quantitative methodological approaches might struggle to have generated. With the specific choice of research questions, the study has been heavily influenced by a natural curiosity to understand the experience of these students, given my own experience of teaching and supporting such students in my workplace over a number of years.

3.2 Institution research setting and role of the researcher

In this section I will describe the research setting for the study and provide details of my role as the researcher within this context and that of the study. I chose to conduct this research in the institution in which I work, because I have direct access to Romanian students studying on undergraduate business programmes who are typical of the students I have gained experience of working with over a number of years and who have become a source of interest for me in this study. The institution is a higher education provider in the private sector that works in partnership with a number of different universities through franchise arrangements to deliver their degree programmes. This means delivery is subject to an agreement that all or part of a degree programme approved and owned by the University can be delivered by the institution (Skipp and Hopwood, 2017, pg. 15). The institution delivers the university partners' degree programmes on its own premises and has in this case, a validated centre status for some partners and branch campus status for others. However, despite the contractual agreement for the institution to deliver the degree courses as a franchisee, the students' relationship is with the awarding provider, and the same assurances apply to them as they would for provision delivered directly by the awarding University.

The institution has been operating as a provider of higher education since 2011 and has campuses in London, Birmingham, and Manchester. The significant increases in student numbers at the institution since it began operating have been significantly driven by an expanding portfolio of degree programmes in business and computing which have attracted an increasing number of students from across the world. By

region, the largest proportion of students on undergraduate programmes have come from Eastern European countries and Romania by far the most represented. More widely, Romania with 12,860 students has replaced France for second position in undergraduate student enrolment numbers from the EU for HE providers in England (HESA, 2021).

The study is set within this particular context of high numbers of students that have been previously educated outside of the UK, studying on an undergraduate Business and Management degree programme. The undergraduate Business and Management programme is designed in a way that enables the study of a full three-year bachelor's degree programme or opportunities for students who do not have the necessary qualifications at the outset to study a foundation year (at FHEQ level 3) first, in order to progress to year 1 (FHEQ level 4). I chose this setting for the study because it has enabled me access to a significant number of students from Romania who currently make up the largest proportion of the international students on the programme within this institution, with UK home students being by far the minority demographic.

Students on the undergraduate Business and Management programme typically study three 20-credit modules each semester involving two hours of lecture input and two hours of seminar classes where higher levels of interaction are facilitated through activity-based learning opportunities. The programme is underpinned by a virtual learning environment fairly typical of most UK universities called Moodle. This supports students through the provision of support materials made available by the academic teaching staff which has recently been developed to include more interactive activities that students can engage with outside of class. Coursework assignments are by far the most prominent form of assessment across the undergraduate business programme the students in this study are on. There are a significant number of group work projects included as assessment across the programme as shown in table 3.

Year	Semester	Module	Type of assessment
0	1	Communication for Academic Purposes 1	Individual
0	1	Operational Mathematics	Individual
0	1	Business Essentials Introduction	Individual
0	2	Communication for Academic Purposes 2	Group
0	2	Business Essentials Advanced	Group
0	2	Disciplinary Investigation	Individual
1	1	Business Organisations in a Global Economy	Individual
1	1	Business Psychology	Individual
1	1	Introduction to Accounting and Finance	Individual
1	2	Principles of Marketing	Group (50% group work, 50% individual work)
1	2	Business Data Analysis	Individual
1	2	Introduction to Management	Individual
2	1	Managing People and Careers	Individual
2	1	Understanding Operations, Logistics and Supply Chain Management	Individual
2	1	Entrepreneurial Opportunity	Group
2	1	Consumer Behaviour (Marketing pathway)	Group presentation (formative) + individual report (summative) Mark only awarded for the individual report.
2	2	Cross Cultural Management	Group
2	2	Project Management	Individual
2	2	Retail Theory and Practice	Individual
2	2	Digital Marketing (Marketing pathway)	Individual
2	2	Services Marketing (Marketing pathway)	Group presentation (formative) individual podcast. Mark only awarded for the individual podcast.
2	2	Business Planning (Entrepreneurship pathway)	Individual
3	1	Business Ethics and Responsible Management	Individual
3	1	Entrepreneurial Development	Group
3	1	Retail Issues and Applications (Optional module)	Individual
3	1	Business and Management Research Methods	Individual
3	1	Branding (Marketing pathway)	Group based report (formative), individual report (summative). Marks awarded only for summative report
3	2	Applied Corporate Strategy	Individual
3	2	Managing Innovation	Individual
3	2	Business and Management Dissertation Pt 2	Individual
3	2	Contemporary Issues in Management (optional module)	Individual
3	2	Global Marketing (Marketing pathway)	Individual

Table 3. Programme modules and assessment

There are no set rules for the organisation of student groups from module to module across the programme. Lecturers for each module have the autonomy to decide whether they allow students to choose who to be in a group with or whether they construct the groups themselves. Depending upon the decisions of the lecturer in each module, at any level of the programme the students can end up working in previously established teams, working in groups with some students they have worked with before or working in newly formed groups.

3.3 Sampling

In this section I explain how participants in the study were selected. Purposive sampling was used, and this included the participants in the study having to be in year 3 (level 6) of the undergraduate BSc Business Management degree programme at the institution where the study is set and initially required participants educated in eastern European countries prior to joining the programme. I felt this was an appropriate sampling strategy to use as it relied on my judgment as to which participants would provide the best information to achieve the study's objectives (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). My interest in the experiences of eastern European students within group work projects meant that I could be sure that this sample of participants would have the characteristics required and would have had sufficient experience of group work to be of interest. After the Registry Team sent out 3 separate participant invitation emails on my behalf (see Appendix 1) during a 3-month period, I initially received a total of 16 responses of interest. After a follow-up email, 11 students responded with confirmation of agreement to participate and 10 of those 11 identified themselves as from Romania.

Due to the number of responses I had received at that point I made the decision to change the focus of the study towards students educated solely in Romania prior to joining the course. This meant I rejected participation of the 1 student from Poland who did not fit that criteria, leaving me with a sample size of 10 Romanian participants. When considering Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria, credibility is of importance, and this has been assured by using a sampling strategy in a standardised format where the volume of data collected is sufficient to draw conclusions from.

3.3.1 *Sample size for semi-structured interviews*

As explained above, a total of 10 Romanian students finally agreed to take part by returning their signed consent forms (see Appendix 2) and by securing these Romanian student participants I was able to ensure the data generated would be manageable for a primarily qualitative study of this type (EdD thesis). The interviews took place across a 5-month period in 2021 and the list of participants with their pseudonyms (the choice of pseudonym for each participant was purposely chosen to reflect their Romanian heritage) and gender is shown in Table 4.

Participant	Pseudonym	Country of prior education	Gender
1	Alexandru	Romania	Male
2	Dragos	Romania	Male
3	Ana	Romania	Female
4	Andrei	Romania	Male
5	Larisa	Romania	Female
6	Margareta	Romania	Female
7	Vasile	Romania	Male
8	Gheorghe	Romania	Male
9	Tatiana	Romania	Female
10	Sabina	Romania	Female

Table 4. Table of participants with pseudonyms

3.3.2 *Sample size for supplementary survey*

Upon request, the institution provided me with basic statistical information indicating the number of students enrolled on the programme at the time of the study which was just over 1,200 with 350 of those at level 6 (year 3). Of those 350, the information indicated 230 were from Romania. A total of 23 students responded to the 3 separate survey invitation emails sent to all 450 students in year 3 (level 6) of the programme, as GDPR restrictions prevented me being able to use the nationality of the students

as a way to send the email to only the Romanian students. To ensure only Romanian students would be able to participate I used inclusion criteria made up of the survey questions which included a question that would ensure that only students solely educated in Romania prior to starting the programme would be able to complete the survey. The email sent to students included a link to the questionnaire and a participation information sheet for potential participants to read before deciding whether to participate (see Appendix 3). Each of the 23 students that completed the survey confirmed their consent to being participants in the study through completion of the survey questionnaire.

3.4 Data collection procedure

I used semi-structured online interviews to collect the initial qualitative data from the initial sample of interview participants and then used a supplementary survey questionnaire to collect data from a subsequent sample of participants on the same programme. The timing of the data collection coincided with the covid-19 pandemic lock-down restrictions which meant that the interviews were conducted online using a video-call application which replaced any face-to-face opportunities that were initially considered at proposal stage. Both data collection methods were used to answer all three of the research questions with the interviews taking place first and then the supplementary survey being used to additionally collect data across a wider set of participants focusing on exploring key content revealed during the analysis of the interview data further. Why I chose to employ these two data collection methods is explained in detail here.

3.4.1 *Semi-structured interviews*

I chose semi-structured interviews because they were able to provide me with an opportunity to utilise the detailed and nuanced verbal responses of the participants (Bailey, 2017). This was generated through the participants' reflection upon their prior experiences of assessed group work activities across the programme. Interviews enabled me to develop open ended questions to be given to the participants which ensured that with carefully chosen wording, the sequence could be tailored to each

individual interviewee depending upon the responses received through various prompts, in order to probe wherever beneficial (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Interviews enabled me to focus on the experience of the participants and where institutional, course specific and social variables are intertwined within the complexity of the learning context I have been able to ensure these are considered. Interviews provided opportunities to explore explanations for why particular situations occurred or why participants may have behaved in particular ways (Bailey, 2017). With a mainly qualitative approach to the study, utilising semi-structured interviews as the main data collection tool and a subsequent supplementary survey, enabled cross-checks on the qualitative data analysis using a contrasting quantitative tool. This helped avoid broad-brush generalisations that reliance on quantitative methods may have potentially resulted in. The study benefits from the inclusion of rich data and thick descriptions that take into account the temporal, spatial and localised contexts in which they take place (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

Although at proposal stage I had initially planned to conduct face-to-face in-person interviews, due to the pandemic lock-down restrictions, I carried out the semi-structured interviews using online recorded face-to-face video-calls. Although I also offered recorded audio calls to the participants, none took up the offer. With the ongoing impact of the pandemic during the period of time in which the interviews took place, in-person interviews were not ethically permissible from the IOE point of view even if feasible. Despite the limitations of video calls, in terms of them requiring reliable technology and the potentially slower gaining of rapport between people on video calls as a result of not meeting in person, there was an opportunity to cover emotionally loaded topics by allowing respondents to 'talk freely and emotionally, with candour, richness, depth, authenticity and honesty in their comments' (Openheim, 1992, pg. 65). The semi-structured format also provided freedom to probe more deeply into the students' experiences where a more structured interview format would have limited participants in their choices on the direction of the interview (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). Less structured formats can cause the interview data generated to become unwieldy and very highly structured formats can limit the study too much, so finding a balance between the two created opportunities for manageable comparisons between the participant's responses. By teasing out the details within interviews the open dialogue encouraged participants to respond on their own terms, with as much depth

as permissible within the timeframes established. There were opportunities to gather data at either end of a sliding scale. At one end, I was able to establish regularities to begin making generalisations from the data and describe what is happening (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, pg. 354). At the other end of the scale I was able to draw out the complexity of situations to understand why respondents had responded in the ways they had.

I ensured each interview was guided by a set of pre-planned questions and supplementary prompts that could be used. To increase the likelihood of the questions being understood by the participants and eliciting responses on the topics the questions were designed to focus on, I first conducted a pilot by interviewing a colleague who had previously been an international student at the institution before becoming part of the teaching team. The process of asking my colleague the questions and seeing what answers he gave, as well subsequently gaining his valuable opinions on each of the questions as feedback helped to develop the interview schedule significantly. As illustrated by the comparison of my pilot interview schedule (Appendix 4) and the final interview schedule (Appendix 5), there are some questions in the pilot that remained but there are differences between the pilot and final interview schedules where improvements have been made. For instance, the pilot highlighted the need to ask how participants had been assessed, if they had prior experience of assessed group work before arriving in the UK. There were also potential prompts added in case answers received provided opportunities for further inquisition.

A significant development of the schedule after the pilot was the inclusion of questions with a more specific focus on subsequent assessed group work experiences, after the participants' initial first experiences. The pilot had revealed that the initial questions did not guide the participant sufficiently to ensure they knew which experiences they were reflecting upon. By including a clear focus in this way, the final interview schedule helped students know what to focus on as the questions proceeded. A further development involved a modification to the pilot question asking participants about the benefits of assessed group work which became more specifically about what had been the best and worst things about it. I identified from the pilot that a wider consideration of their feelings on this would be of benefit. I added to the final schedule a question on whether the participants supported the use of assessed group work on university

courses as the pilot had highlighted that an overall summary question around their feelings towards group work could be useful.

Overall, the final interview schedule was designed in a way that enabled me to start with general introductory questions for each participant to confirm their details before progressing onwards to more investigative questions. I based the structure of the schedule around three sections focusing first on their experiences of assessed group work before starting their current programme of study in the UK, then on their experiences during the programme before exploring their overall reflections of assessed group work, now they are in the final year of study. This helped participants to feel comfortable talking about their experiences of assessed group work and the prompts were used appropriately to tease out more in-depth detail (Bailey, 2017).

The interview questions were not specifically aimed at uncovering differences between each participants experiences of pre-pandemic face-to-face group work and their online group work experiences during the pandemic. This meant that their reflection within the interviews was mainly focused on their on-campus group work experiences but did include some online group work experiences that they had recently experienced too. By keeping to an open-ended format for the questions, I found the depth of responses from participants generated rich qualitative data, which naturally drew upon the participants' experiences through the open interview discussion techniques employed (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). With consideration of the credibility of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), this has been heightened by the participants being able to speak freely with little influence from me as the researcher other than the semi-structured format used to guide them. Throughout each of the interviews I took steps to be reflexive and ensure the power dynamics of me being the Dean of faculty at the institution did not influence how I asked the questions or responded to the participants. I had not directly taught any of the students and had not personally met any of them on a one-to-one or group basis before but acknowledged that I must still be careful to make the participant feel at ease, remind them at the start of the interview that anything they said would not be attributed to them and that they will not be identifiable in any way within the thesis from what they said.

3.4.2 *Supplementary quantitative survey questionnaire*

Once the interview data had been collected and I had carried out an initial analysis, a piece of data of particular significance identified was that all the students had not been involved in group work activities during their education prior to joining the programme. Some of them had specifically commented that it wasn't something they had known anyone to do in Romania and that it was not a unique experience for them to have not been involved in group work. It became clear that the previous experience of Romanian students in terms of assessed groupwork was important and so I incorporated a survey of all the Romanian students on the programme who were at level 6 (year 3). The aim of the survey was to establish whether a lack of prior group work experience was typical of the cohort and not just the students that had participated in the interviews. I set about creating a survey using the Qualtrics software package with a set of questions that would enable useful data to be generated. By conducting the supplementary survey in this way, I was able to uncover whether the participants in the interviews were indeed typical of Romanian students with regard to them having no prior experience of group work before this programme of study in the UK. As a result, the generalised features of interest were identified in the survey and reaching a wider target population provided data in a standardised format where associated correlations could be uncovered (Fowler, 2013).

The survey questions were structured in a way that would address all three of my research questions in some way however, a specific emphasis was placed on establishing the participants experiences of group work prior to undertaking the current programme of study. The full set of questions used in the survey questionnaire are in Appendix 6 however, the main themes of the survey questions were:

- Whether they had experience of working in a team on a group work project during their education in Romania prior to starting their degree programme in the UK.
- If they had prior experience of group work, whether it had any assessment included and if so, whether the group received an overall or individual mark.
- For those with assessed group work experience whether this included a peer evaluation element.

- Whether on reflection, they support the use of assessed group work on university courses.

The aim of these questions was to generate data from the responses that would support arguments in relation to how typical the interview data was amongst the wider population of such students on this programme and the credibility of the research has been heightened by this. The focus of the questions was specifically on drawing out the experiences of Romanian students, working on assessed group work projects amongst each other and with other international students, rather than on the wider intercultural experiences of a range of international or home students.

3.5 Data analysis

In this section I will explain how the data collected in the semi-structured interviews and the quantitative survey was analysed. The analysis conducted on each of the two sets of data is explained in detail here along with an inclusion of the justifications as to why the particular analysis processes have been used.

3.5.1 *Analysis of semi-structured interview data*

In analysing the data I adopted a thematic analysis approach defined by Braun & Clarke (2006, pg. 79) as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data'. By conducting thematic analysis I have been able to describe and organise the data set in rich detail, and this has enabled me to interpret different views of the participants in the study. I used this approach because I wanted to be able to discover themes and concepts embedded within the interviews through an identification of patterns, providing opportunities for me select those of interest and report on them as an outcome. The benefit of this is that each theme identified 'captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (Braun and Clarke (2006, pg. 82). By analysing the interview data at various levels I have been able to compare the views of different participants so that a deep understanding

and interpretation of the different factors at play could be generated (Bailey, 2017). This included analysing the behaviours of the participants, the specific opinions and viewpoints they have with regard to their experiences of group work, the cultural values they have which impact how they work in groups and also their emotions, in terms of how they attach a variety of emotions to different experiences. The analysis conducted helped me to make sense of the participants words and their underpinning meanings, which were expressed in the interviews in non-uniform ways (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). I chose thematic analysis because although the responses to each question were of course distinctly unique for each participant the process enabled me to draw out comparisons between the data using coding techniques applied to the qualitative data collected. Thematic analysis consists of six key phases, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) and consists of the following:

1. Familiarising myself with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

The following is how I conducted each phase.

Familiarising myself with the data

Firstly, I conducted interviews (see section 3.4.1 above) and recorded them using Microsoft Teams automatic transcription. I then familiarised myself with the data by reading and manually editing each transcript to rectify any errors whilst listening back through the recorded interviews until the transcription reflected exactly what was said in the interview. Actively reading each and every word of the interview alongside listening to the audio recording in this way gave me a much deeper sense of the points being made and helped to form an initial reflective view of the key content within the interview transcripts, before a deeper analysis took place.

Generating initial codes

As a second stage of the process I generated initial codes by 'identifying interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code' (Braun and Clarke, 2006 pg. 88). This involved scouring the

entire content of the first interview conducted to find as many codes as possible from the data and each data item was given equal attention in the coding process. Codes are 'a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data' (Saldana, 2021, pg. 30). I then checked in all the other interviews to see if those codes were also there and added new codes where needed as each interview was analysed. I logged the number of instances where the codes had been used across the participants by frequency of occurrence to provide an additional sense of the significance of each code across data, as is typical in analytical coding techniques (Ezzy, 2002). These codes included text that could reveal deeper meanings, in terms of the underlying feelings, attitudes and emotions of the participants. Appendix 7 illustrates an example of how a section of text in Alexandru's interview was coded. Opening up the text in this way allowed me to see the similarities and contrasts between the participants experiences emerging across the data as each text was analysed.

Searching for themes

The third stage of the thematic analysis process involved a search for themes. I collated the codes into potential themes and gathered all data relevant to each theme together using a process of selective reduction from multiple codes into overarching themes. Where the experiences of the participants were similar or contrasting, I used codes and themes to log, in a logical sequence, how these could be connected to form some key findings emerging across the data, rather than considering these to be unique instances for each participant. By the end of this stage of the analytical process, I had conducted a thorough, inclusive, and comprehensive collection of themes and sub-themes. From the NVivo node maps generated, I was able to compile a list of themes and sub-themes identified (see Appendix 8).

Reviewing themes

As a fourth stage of the process I reviewed the identified themes, checking that each theme was 'internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pg. 96). I did this by ensuring that each theme worked in relation to the interview extracts that had been coded and in terms of the complete data set. I made semantic checks to ensure that the different phrases and words included within a theme all had a similar meaning and their inclusion appropriate. Accuracy checks were important to

ensure the process conformed to the standards of the scientific method as much as possible including attention being paid to the balance of objectivity–intersubjectivity (Neuendorf, 2019, pg. 21).

Defining and naming themes

As a fifth stage of the process I conducted a second review of the data. I reflected upon whether the coded data was truly in harmony with the meanings that could be drawn from how the participants had articulated their experiences and it was clear that some of the codes needed to be relabelled or disregarded. I re-coded some portions of the data and once rearranged and reclassified within the themes, I felt I was closer to capturing the meanings that could be drawn from the words of the participants. I then reviewed the themes for a final time to ensure they were named appropriately and as a result of some of the themes became more defined. For example, upon review it was clear that the level of autonomy the students had during the group formation stage played a significant part in their experiences. So the theme of group member choices became more defined in a renaming of the theme to autonomy in group formation. This final review reassured me that I had themes that could tell the overall story of the research.

Producing the report

In the sixth and final stage of the thematic analysis process I wrote up the findings chapter and then moved on to drawing conclusions from these. The later chapters of the thesis are built upon the foundations of the themes and codes identified within the analysis process. From this, I have generated new ideas, notions and findings from the data, and they have been fully considered, which is something Seale (1999) identifies as the hallmark of good quality in academic research studies. I have produced the findings for the thesis in this way through the selection of "vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts and relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pg. 87).

Reflexivity

Stenfors, Kajamaa and Bennett (2020) suggest reflexivity is central to the trustworthiness of research and in this study, and I have been able to heighten reflexivity through the way the analysis has been carried out. The students have interpreted their experiences in particular ways which I have then sought to interpret

myself, in ways that remain thoughtfully reflective. This was achieved by examining what I first see and then reflecting upon how I interacted with the data, how much I could subjectively make sense of what has been said and importantly, to what extent I considered my place as the researcher within this particular context. As the Dean of faculty, I acknowledged that given my role and seniority of position in the institution it was essential to ensure that I was conducting the analysis with a mindset like that of an outsider. It was important to me to ensure the power dynamics of my role in the institution did not influence my thought processes during the process of thematic analysis and during the write up of the findings. To achieve this I constantly questioned throughout the analytical process whether I might be influenced by any pre-conceived interpretations of the data, due to my senior position in the institution. For example, if a participant talked about a particular module I made sure I did not just assume I knew what they meant because I was familiar with the course. Also, where students gave responses that included their views on how well staff had handled certain situations it was really important for me to ensure I stayed unwaveringly impartial. To achieve this I interpreted the data with full consideration of what the student had really meant by their words and avoided making assumptions. There was a significant risk I could be drawn into potentially misinterpreting the participants words in order to promote or protect the reputation of the faculty but with this awareness from the outset, I was able to remain aware of the risks of following those types of thought processes. I believe this has been a key factor in heightening the level of trustworthiness the subsequent findings has for stakeholders in the research. Summarising how the analysis helps answer the research questions and how it contributes to the overall aims of the study is detailed in the findings chapter to follow. This draws upon the key concepts and issues uncovered whilst acknowledging opportunities for further investigation.

3.5.2 *Analysis of quantitative data from the supplementary survey*

The analysis of the supplementary survey questionnaire data collected using Qualtrics, required some basic calculations to make analytical sense of it. The aim was to describe and present the data using a summary of frequency via the 'mode' illustrating the score obtained by the most people (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018 pg. 606). The data neatly reports what has been found and makes no inferences or

predictions, yet was enough to ensure the results formed an effective supplementary cross-check of the findings generated by the interview data (Fowler, 2013). The process I followed was that for each question, a calculation of the number of responses received for each answer option was made. The use of a nominal scale, where each answer option denotes a category, enabled an analysis of whether the participant responded yes or no to being in the category. There was then a calculation of what the number of responses for each answer option constitutes as a percentage of total responses for the question.

3.5.3 Data analysis conclusion

Trustworthiness is of paramount importance when employing interpretivist research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility underpins the trustworthiness of research, and this has been heightened by ensuring that the analysis of the data, aligned with the research questions set. There has been a need throughout the process to fully examine my interpretations critically so that I can be assured I have been rigorous in the process and have questioned my assumptions. This has meant working towards an interpretation that the participants feel represents what they were trying to say. The approach presents the data and findings in a way that does not just report the facts to be objectively verified but works through a process of considering the various subjectivities at play in order to refine the final interpretation, after a rigorous and systematic approach to the analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that confirmability is key source of trustworthiness within research, and this has been achieved by producing results that are plausible and trustworthy through clear links being made between the data collected and the subsequent findings. I have ensured the findings include detailed descriptions and the frequent use of quotes from students participating in the study, to bring their voice from within the data to the forefront of the findings.

3.6 Ethical considerations

I paid close attention to procedural, situational, cultural and relational ethics throughout the duration of the study and have ensured participants and stakeholders connected with the study are treated with the utmost care. Merriam (2009) points out that:

> "*All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner and being able to trust research results is especially important to professionals in applied fields because practitioners intervene in people's lives*" (pg. 209).

I followed the IOE Ethics application process to seek approval from UCL IOE and my employer, in order to satisfy the requirements for this research and ensured I had clearance from all the necessary stakeholders before any research was undertaken. This ensured the main elements of the proposed study were agreed in advance of commencement, as advised by Robson et al (2016). Ethical approval from the Institute of Education, University College London was sought first and granted along with approval from my employer. The institutions' university partner was also approached for approval as they are the programme franchisor and students at the institution are dually enrolled within the scope of both institutions. Approval from each stakeholder was gained before any research was conducted. By strictly adhering to the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018) I have been able to ensure that best practice in ethical research has been maintained throughout the study.

I am the Dean of the Business and Management faculty at the institution however, at the time of the interviews taking place I had not directly taught any of the students on this programme, had not personally met any of them on a one to one or group basis and had not communicated with them in any way at any time prior to this during my time working at the institution. However, I acknowledged that given my role and seniority of position in the institution it was essential to ensure that participants were aware that any data collected will not be attributed to them and as such they will not be identifiable in any way within the thesis. To achieve this, I firstly assured students in multiple ways that the data collected through their participation will not be used for any other purpose than the study and that appropriate pseudonyms would be used

instead of their real names throughout the thesis. This was communicated to them in the invitation email and also in the participant information sheet. The participant information sheet (see Appendix 3) was produced at the time of seeking ethical approval and this was provided to all potential participants as an attachment to the introductory email they were sent, to ensure they have sufficient understanding of what the study involved and were able to decide whether to provide fully informed consent. The participant information sheet gives a full explanation of what the study is about, how their anonymity will be assured through the use of pseudonyms and clarified how giving consent on the form was completely voluntary.

Potential participants were clear from the information they received that despite participating they still retained the right to withdraw from the study should they wish, and the data collected would then no longer be used in the study. No students withdrew from the study at any time. Students who participated in the supplementary quantitative survey who were required to complete a questionnaire were informed before submitting their responses that they had the right to withdraw from the study at that specific point should they wish, and any data inputted into the questionnaire would then be deleted. There were 3 partially completed questionnaires where the potential participants had not ticked yes to the final question requiring them to agree for their responses to be included in the study and so these questionnaires and their data were permanently deleted. Confidentiality has been assured throughout the study with reassurances as to how the data was to be collected and kept securely afterwards prioritised. The confidentially of the data collected has been handled as per guidelines within the UK Data Protection Act (2018) and also the EU GDPR regulations (2018).

3.9 Conclusion

I have paid great to attention to detailing throughout this chapter the complete methodology I have chosen to follow in order to conduct the study appropriately. In terms of the quality of this research methodology, Stenfors, Kajamaa and Bennett (2020) suggest dependability, confirmability, transferability, reflexivity and trustworthiness are the key criteria. In terms of dependability, this research could easily be replicated in a similar higher education institution as there is enough information provided in the thesis to assist another researcher to replicate the

procedural steps taken, with an acceptance that different conclusions could quite possibly be reached. Careful attention which has been paid to the levels of analysis applied and the rigorous data collection process that has been followed. Taking care to conduct the study with a high degree of sincerity, ensuring authenticity and transparency throughout the study has helped meet the standards required for research involving mixed qualitative and quantitative data. In terms of confirmability, I have been able to show a clear link between the data collected and the findings. By including the frequent use of quotes from students participating in the study to bring their voice to the forefront of the thesis, confirmability has been heightened. With regard to transferability, the findings can be transferred to another setting, context or group as the study is set in a higher education institution, on a fairly common undergraduate business management programme.

There is a detailed description of the context in which the study is set and acknowledgements as to how this has shaped the findings. With reference to reflexivity, the experience of being able to stand outside myself and understand how I am interacting with the research and the data has helped me to fully consider my place as the researcher within the context of this study. There are also explanations as to how I have minimised the impact of my role upon the participants in order to conduct the study in an ethically sound and robust way as an inside researcher. It has been imperative to ensure there is trustworthiness, not only in the data collection but also in the subsequent analysis and the composition of findings and conclusions.

Having detailed in the research methodology an accurate account of how this study has been conducted, the next chapter examines the findings that can be drawn from the data analysed and considers the extent to which each of the research questions can be answered with this data.

Chapter 4 – Findings

In this chapter I present the findings of the interviews and the supplementary survey. These findings address the research questions which are to examine the experiences of Romanian students on UK Higher Education degree programmes when they undertake assessed group work including what challenges these students typically face, how those with little or no prior experience adapt in such situations and how they feel about being assessed on group work. The structure of the findings chapter is arranged in order of the importance of each of the findings drawn from the codes of the analysis of the interviews and from the survey data. Findings from the interviews and the survey are presented first, before overall key findings are highlighted.

4.1 Initial awareness of group work stage
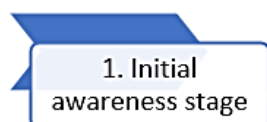
My first research sub-question asks what impact their prior experiences of assessed group work in Romania has upon their experiences of assessed group work on a UK Higher Education degree programme. The interview data relates to the students' awareness of group work at the start of the course and strongly suggests students did not know group work was involved and how their grades might be impacted upon by this. The interview data indicates that prior experience of group work is typically minimal and that the main focus had typically been on learning through memorisation prior to them joining the programme, so this low initial awareness of group work has played a significant part in shaping these students' early experiences on the programme. This finding is illustrated by the data indicating that none of the 10 students interviewed had any prior experience of groupwork from their education in Romania. In terms of what the interview participants thought were the reasons for a lack of prior experience, preferences of school educators in Romania for maintaining focus on developing the individual through individual work rather than working in groups was identified. The closest any of the students had come to group work was in science labs which Dragos said "involved occasional group work in class" with a requirement to do some individual work based on the group work to be submitted

afterwards. Of significance is Tatiana's comment highlighting that the teachers in her Romanian secondary school specifically "did not like us to do group work" with supporting evidence from Ana who said it was "not something they would encourage". Teachers had typically been opposed to group work and as Ana said, the system in education in Romania had "not been built like that" and she had "not been permitted to speak in class". This lack of prior experience can help explain Larisa and Gheorghe's initial resistance to group work which Larisa said had been based on the fact that she "did not fully understand what the benefits of working in a group were" and why Gheorghe felt initially that group work issues "had not been addressed by the teaching staff".

In terms of the survey data, this also indicates that although a minority of the Romanian students on the programme did have some familiarity with group work prior to joining the programme, 74% of respondents had no prior experience and just 26% had any prior experience (see Figure 1). In terms of the 26% of respondents with prior experience, 13% had never been assessed for group work (making a total 87% of students with no experience of assessed group work), leaving just 13% that had any experience (see Figure 2). So, having no prior group work experience appears not only typical of the Romanian students in the interviews but also on the programme, given a total of 87% of the surveyed Romanian respondents had no prior experience of assessed group work at all.
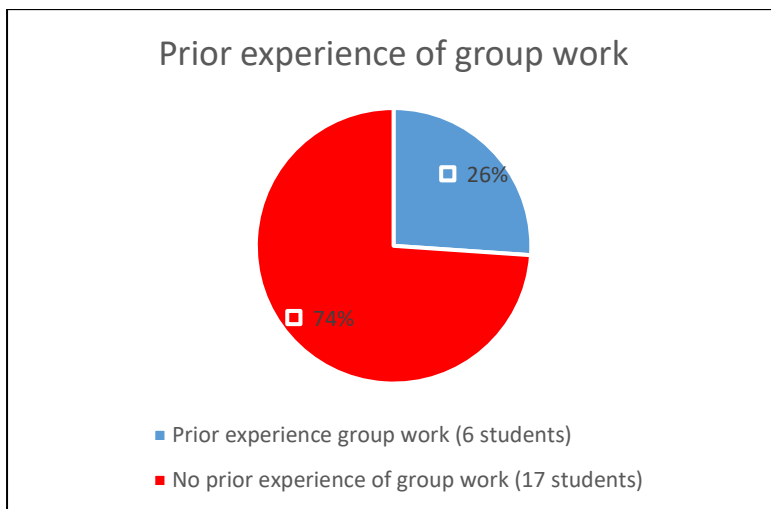
Figure 1: Survey Data - Prior experience of group work
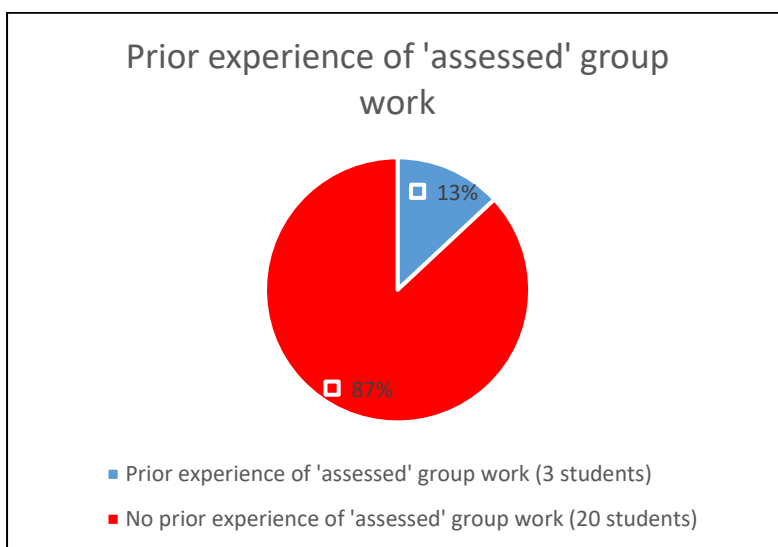
Figure 2: Survey Data - Prior experience of 'assessed' group work

The survey also indicates that 48% of the respondents did not know prior to starting the programme that there would be group work projects. Nineteen percent of these respondents did know but did not understand what would be involved whilst only 33% did know and fully understood what would be involved (see Figure 3). This data suggests there was a high proportion of Romanian students on the programme that not only had no prior experience of group work, but they also lacked knowledge of what it would require of them at the outset of the programme.
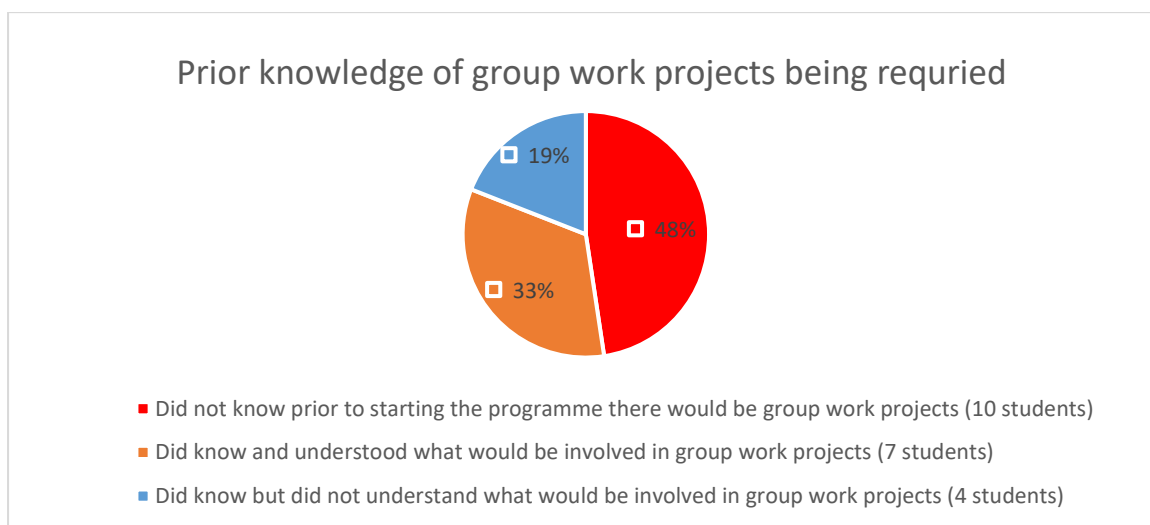
Figure 3: Prior knowledge of group work projects being required on the programme

4.2 Choice of group

My second sub-question asks how the experiences of assessed group work change for these Romanian students during the programme. The interview data suggests group formation choices play a significant part in their adaptation process particularly in regard to the level of student autonomy there is in how groups are formed. A key finding emerging from the interview data relates to the feelings students have towards the level of autonomy they experience during assessed group work. Some of the students expressed how they felt a desire to work in a different group at certain points during the programme, so they could get to know other people in the class, but there remained a far stronger drive amongst them towards forming groups with students they already knew. This articulates well how social concerns are of significant importance to these students at the start of the programme where they are forming groups for the first time and then developing as a team. As an illustration of this, Gheorghe and Sabina both commented that they were not keen to work with students they did not already know and although Ana acknowledged "it would have been very

useful" she had found herself in a previously established team on each subsequent module.

4.2.1 Choosing to be in groups with those who have similar backgrounds

The interview data suggests that the opportunity to choose who to be in a group with had naturally led the students to choose to work with those with similar backgrounds. As an illustration of this, there were examples provided by Larisa about how she had wanted to "mix with students from other backgrounds in groups" but the perceived ease of working with people she knew well already overrode that.

Margareta stood out as one of the only students that had purposely chosen to be with people she didn't already know. Margareta said:

> *"We always wanted to get different mentalities in the group but in the end we stayed working in the same team with the same group members as much as we could throughout most of the group work. It just felt easier working with people we already had something in common with".*

Alin, Sabina, Margareta, and Ana all acknowledged there had been drawbacks to being allowed to work with the same group members each time yet, whilst acknowledging this, they had still maintained it was a priority for them to make demands upon the lecturer to allow them to retain autonomy in group member selection, based on the heightened ease of working with those they knew already knew. This finding indicates that for these students, social concerns are very much a priority at this stage whilst learning concerns are of a lower priority despite knowing that the act of working with the same students each time is limiting them in their groupwork experiences. These students feel compelled to choose to work with those where they will feel the most comfortable with and this is reinforced by lecturers who typically allow this to happen in order to stay in favour with the students. The drive to do this can also be highlighted by some of the students considering making friends and interacting with others to be one of the best things about group work.

Where students have felt the discomfort of working with people they are initially unfamiliar with and are placed into groups by the lecturer, they have acknowledged the benefits but have still maintained a preference for making their own student-led choices as to who to work with, relying on previously established team members.

4.2.2 Maintaining consistent group membership across modules

The interview data suggests that working with the same group members each time can have positive and negative outcomes because where students have been in high performing groups, with students they believed to be of equivalent ability to, they typically perceived the outcomes of group work to be in line with their own individual ability or even above. Conversely though, the negative outcomes may sometimes have outweighed the positives where students formed groups with others they consider as having less ability or less commitment to group work. As Ana explained, this can be where group members "are not doing enough work and bringing down other peoples' grades". In their first experiences of group work the students did not know each other and were unaware of each other's strengths and weaknesses. However, as opportunities for further group work came up as the programme progressed, where friendships had been formed, students were then able to work as a pre-established team again on different modules. The students interviewed all said that lecturers typically allowed them to form their own groups within a set maximum number per group but as Gheorghe said, "if anyone was unable to find a group to be in the lecturer would pull those together in a group". By the lecturers typically giving students the autonomy to form their own groups in the early modules on the programme, the findings suggest that the pressure on students to form new groups on each module had been reduced. This is illustrated by students such as Ana who said:

> *"we specifically chose to be in groups with other Romanian students to reduce the stress of being in a new team. The decision to allow us to keep forming the same teams was clearly not the lecturer's natural choice but we were pushing very hard to choose our own teams, I mean we were kind of begging for that".*

There appears to be some pressure being applied by the students here which may have influenced the decisions of lecturers around how much autonomy to give to students to form their own groups.

4.2.3 Choosing to stay in established groups because of personal friendships

The interview data suggests that in terms of who the students chose to be in groups with, they had typically chosen to be in groups with the people they got along with who had the same background as them, when they first formed their groups. However, some of the students such as Ana felt this desire to be in groups with friends had not necessarily been the best decision on every occasion though. Ana explained that she was "picking people based on her relationship with them which meant that they would not necessarily be more involved" or that they would "be as committed". The findings suggest these students had been working in the same team throughout much of the programme but on reflection some of them had acknowledged this had not been in their best interest. Choosing the people they wanted to work with each time led to them not feeling that they had developed refined abilities to work with other types of people, as they had typically chosen to be in groups with people that were like themselves.

There were some contrasts here in views though and Tatiana stood out as one student that had been more strategic about choices of who to be in a group with. She said she "had in mind who worked better on the first one and to get grouped with whoever is hardest working, who actually cooperates". However, this strategy was employed by a just a small minority of the students and most of the students had not chosen to form groups or re-form established teams in any sort of strategic way. In almost all the examples the students gave, the first time they had to work in a group they formed the group by simply being randomly seated near the person in class but had then later chosen to work with students they had become friends with as an established team. When required to form new groups and work with students they had not worked with before, they are stretched to adapt further without completely understanding the rationale or the benefits of them doing so. On this, Tatiana commented that she felt she had typically "been working alongside other people that just think and behave like I would" felt some regret that the decision to do this had potentially impacted her grades in a negative way because she had not chosen to be in groups with the

students that work the hardest or would be the best students to work with, they were typically friends she thought would be the easiest to get on with.

After the initial first group work project, the students' choices appear to be based on familiarity and their existing relationships, in fact, being able to form friendships this way had been noted by some of the students as one of the best things about group work. This competing pressure of wanting to form and maintain strong friendships throughout the programme which can be achieved by working with the same students in each group work activity appears is set against the pressure of naturally wanting to be in a group with hardworking committed students that will increase the chances of a getting a better group grade for the work produced. On this, there appears to be adaptation amongst the students where for example Ana said she had been thankful at first to be in a group with other Romanian students but as time had gone on realised those students had the same lack of experience of working in a group that she had and through adapting to the challenges of working with those less like her, she had subsequently developed some leadership skills.

4.2.4 The impact of low cultural difference between group members

The interview data suggests there had been very little negative impact felt by the students due to cultural differences as the choices the students typically made over who to be in a group with led them to work with those from similar cultural backgrounds. Where cultural differences had been identified, these were noted as not having a noticeable impact upon the group. By typically joining groups with those who have similar cultural backgrounds a quicker adaptation to working in groups may well have been generated. This is illustrated by students such as Alexandru who said there were "differences between me and a student from Portugal in my group it didn't really affect how we worked in the group" he explained how group members had adjusted how they communicated to ensure he felt included. There were other examples too where students explained how they would want form groups and later re-join previously established teams where their cultural backgrounds were similar. For example, Andrei explained:

"I had consistently been in a team with two students from Bulgaria and one from the Republic of Moldova, all neighbouring countries to Romania, so the differences were not that much. We had found ourselves unified by religion and everyone in our team were Catholics, so we were like-minded people".

In two particular cases (Larisa and Sabina) cultural differences had been identified amongst the Romanians in the group. Larisa put this down to subtle differences in their upbringing in Romania which were relatively easy to overcome by adapting to working in a way that supported taking everyone's views into account.

Adaptation to working in a group amongst others with different cultural backgrounds was supported through programme modules studied by all the students early on in the programme titled 'understanding self and others' and one studied later in the programme called 'cross cultural management'. These modules were identified as having a positive impact on the students by helping them understand how best to work with different types of people. There was an acknowledgement amongst many of the students, illustrated by Larisa who said they had "missed out on working with people from different cultures by being able to choose who work with". However, there was acknowledgment from each of the students that they had benefitted from not having to adapt as much to the challenges of overcoming cultural difference because only the work produced by the group was to be assessed, not the ability to work in a group itself.

4.3 Experimentation

3. Experimentation stage
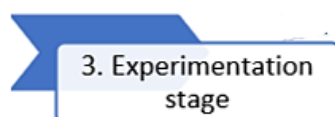
There are further findings revealed in relation to my second sub-question which asks how these Romanian students' experiences of assessed group work change during the programme. The interview data suggests students went through a stage of significant experimentation early on in their experiences of group work and particularly benefitted from the support provided by lecturers during this phase in the programme.

My finding is that social concerns are still a priority for these students, and they are experimenting with ways to work as a group with the lecturers' support which the interview data suggests has been particularly beneficial to them because they were initially inexperienced at group work and required opportunities for experimentation as a group in order to develop their abilities in working in a team.

4.3.1 The impact of staff support on experimentation within groups

The interview data suggests support provided by lecturers in the early parts of the programme was a positive experience for students, but overall experience of experimentation generated some negative feelings. For example, students explained how support from lecturers was very helpful early on in the programme and that it had generally been consistent amongst the lecturers throughout the programme but there were some exceptions on specific modules. This is illustrated by Margareta who said, "the lecturers were mostly helpful in each module, and they were able to explain things to us in our group when we were stuck". The exceptions to the general agreement amongst the students where from Dragos and Larisa who each identified incidents where specific lecturers had underestimated their inexperience in working in a group. Larisa commented that the lecturer had "come across as not being interested in us" on one module. In terms of timing, students felt that the support was greater in their first group activity where lecturers would frequently attend to each group in class "to ensure that what we were doing was on the right track" as Gheorghe had said, because it was a new experience for those inexperienced at group work. On this, Dragos explained that he felt his group "really needed a lot of support from the lecturer in the early part of the programme and the lecturers were a good source of advice where we lacked experience in making decisions". However, the data suggests the level of lecturer support reduced after established teams had gained experience in later group work projects.

The type of support provided by lecturers typically included time with each group in online classes during the pandemic or on-campus post-pandemic and the lecturer would typically stay with the group for ten minutes to help each group. Margareta said:

"lecturers would support the group in the early years of the programme by stepping in to help where needed during a classroom activity or guiding us before leaving us to do our own thing in our own way. Later on we didn't need so much help so the lecturers would just check on us to see how we were doing once in a while and offer to help us".

The main examples where the support of lecturers had been identified as being unhelpful related to the provision of feedback on work before submission and this had not been provided in contrast to other modules where it had. Students explained how they had wanted to know if they were on track to pass but lecturers wouldn't confirm with anything for fear of committing themselves to grades that were not for submitted work. This had infuriated students as they felt their inexperience could be overcome by gaining formative feedback from the lecturer as part of their development.

There is also interview data indicating that study skills tutors, from a central provision provided by the institution, were seen as a positive experience for some of the students. These staff played a part in supporting some of the students to understand how best to work in teams and this supported their adaptation, particularly during the experimentation stage. This included one to one support offered to students facing the challenges of adaptation to group work, having had little or no prior experience previously. Gheorghe said it was good to get support "in a more targeted way, so I could understand how to develop some skills that would help me work better in a group". This development of underpinning learning, with regard to working in a group, outside of the normal class environment has supported development within the teams they find themselves in. Gheorghe went further to explain how the support also included advice as to where to seek further help, which included guidance towards library resources that would help him understand how best to work in teams and Larisa said she was "guided towards resources which would support my development as a good team player" because the challenges of adaptation in the early stages of the programme were, as Larisa said "stressful and it was good to get a bit more advice on this".

4.3.2 *Perceived free-riding amongst group members*

Although the interview data suggests the levels of contribution of group members could still be an issue later in the programme, the challenges faced seem most pronounced during experimentation early on in the programme. The interview data suggests each of the students identified having group members that did not contribute enough early on in the programme and this had been a negative experience for them. Of course, it's hard to fully understand what has caused a lack of contribution in each case however, the interview data gives a clear indication of the impact these Romanian students felt it had on them.

For instance, Alexandru said:

> *"the idea of working in a group made sense but when we never knew from module to module whether we might be in a new group or our usual team, I was worried I would end up with bad colleagues each time that could be a pain because they don't care or maybe they cared but only willing to help rather than fully contributing".*

There was frustration around how other students could get away with putting in less work and Alexandru acknowledged this was mainly because the other group members felt they did not have a means to force them to contribute and the assessment did not factor in individual contributions. In Alexandru's case, he didn't want to just accept the situation and even felt in many cases he "had a good relationship with his teammates" yet was frustrated that they were able to "do less work and still get a good grade".

Not only was there frustration from all the students about the lack of contribution from certain teammates but that the lecturer assessing them had said there was evidence that the team hadn't collaborated enough, leading to the whole group being penalised. Despite it being discussed in some cases with the lecturer, the outcome left students feeling the lack of contribution was unfair. However, despite this lack of contribution, relationships that had been developed with teammates were seen as more important than the grade and as Alexandru said, "it wasn't worth it to argue with their friends even if they did not contribute enough". There was an understanding that they themselves had to be tolerant and understanding of these other students, but it remained a negative experience for the students. Amongst all the students there was an acknowledgment that not everybody had been bringing the same value to the group

or in some cases people had treated tasks superficially and this had generated negative feelings towards group work.

There was palpable frustration around feeling that others had not contributed to the same value as them but were still getting the same grade. Andrei said it was typical for work on a project to be divided up amongst the group and this meant that if someone did not do their part of the work after the work was allocated "others would have to make up for it by either adding the additional work before submitting it or presenting the project work without that person despite not knowing exactly what the content was" which had been challenging and uncomfortable for him. Andrei went on to say that because of this he and the other team members "hadn't spoken to the person afterwards for at least a couple of weeks" but later he had still decided to join the same previously established team with the same person again. An exception to this scenario was explained by Tatiana who said that when a group member did not turn up on the day of the presentation "the part that was supposed to be delivered by that person did not have to be included", leading to a suggestion that across the lecturers on the programme modules there had been inconsistency in decisions on exactly what work needs to be included in different scenarios. Andrei commented that in scenarios like this the lecturer could decide not to give the student a mark at all and ensure only the people who they saw delivering the presentation and working in the group would get the group mark.

In circumstances where group work was submitted, rather than delivered in a presentation, non-contributing students receive the same group grade and feedback. However, despite there being some negative experiences around groups receiving feedback that suggested the collaboration part of the work was not good enough there was a feeling amongst students that this was unfair. This is because the group had typically worked well together on lots of different parts done by contributing students but where one person's part was not as good, they had all received the same negative feedback. When discussing this Vasile felt some reassurance from the belief that the free rider would "not do so well in their own individual assignments" but could not confirm whether this had actually been the case. For Ana, doing extra work for the non-contributing students had been the worst thing about group work.

Ana said:

> *"It was the worst thing because I had been in a group work project where two other students in the group had needed to cover the part of the fourth person because it had to be delivered within a deadline and the person was not co-operating in any way. On the day of the presentation we all realised that the student had not turned up and so we had to cover for the person which was very stressful".*

4.3.3 Challenges of meeting together as a group

The interview data suggests there are challenges around getting students to meet up frequently to discuss the group work project and this was a negative experience for some. This is most notably illustrated by Dragos, Vasile and Alexandru who identified this as being the worst thing about group work. The students explained that when they needed to meet to get a little bit of help from others in the group these students would often not respond to the communication quickly, if at all. Vasile suggested this was because they were "too busy to answer because they have other commitments like kids and other stuff" as he put it. All three of the students that identified this as their worst experience in group work described it as being highly frustrating when team members would not respond and admitted to feeling let down by those team members who they were relying upon for help and support on particular tasks they had been working on. Dragos explained how it was the worst thing about group work because he knew there was "expertise developing within the team, but the individuals would not put aside the time needed to respond". Larisa and Sabina also commented that they felt the need to meet up frequently was a challenge but had not identified it as the worst thing about group work. They were both adamant that the lack of communication from some members of their group had been caused by the group members not living near to the campus and their preference for meeting on-campus rather than online had meant non-attendance at meetings had been frustrating. They explained how the challenges had been reduced by "trying to schedule meetings after classes" but even then, some group members would not be willing to stay behind after classes to work in the library because of their "external commitments". Sabina said this frustration was compounded by the fact that she and the other group members did not come to

campus very often and so when they could not meet up as much as they would have wanted to and others were not able to stay to meet with them, the number of meetings they were able to have impacted their ability to function as a team.

4.3.4 Low engagement of group members in meetings

The interview data suggests that the low participation of some group members in team meetings was a negative experience for many of the students interviewed. This is illustrated by Vasile and Alexandru who both felt there were challenges around getting some of the group members to contribute ideas in meetings and felt this was worse when the group met in online meetings. Vasile said that in meetings, "engagement was an issue, sometimes they are not getting engaged or sometimes they choose to work individually instead which was worse for online group work". Alexandru felt there were specific limitations when working in groups that only meet online. He had explained that he felt he was trying to do his best and engage with the various modules but other students in the group had appeared to be disinterested. He said this was illustrated by their behaviour which suggested they were just logging in to online meetings to register their attendance at it but were not contributing anything of value. With a significant part of the programme taking place during the pandemic, relying on video calls for meetings was seen by Vasile and Alexandru to be limiting and giving low engaging students too much opportunity to hide. In contrast though, Tatiana was keen to express empathy for those who could not contribute as much to meetings saying that some students needed more time "to build their own confidence to speak in group meetings as they had less experience of group work".

4.3.5 *Language translation issues amongst group members*

The interview data suggests that the translation of unfamiliar words into other languages within group work activities was a negative experience during periods of experimentation as a group, for two of the students interviewed. This is illustrated by Alexandru who said that there were several other Romanian students in the group he would typically end up working in and some would often not understand what a

particular English word meant so he would have to spend time translating the words into English. He found this to be a negative experience because it used up precious time when working in a group was often challenging to organise outside of class. Andrei explained a similar situation had occurred his group activities where Romanian words needed to be translated into English which slowed down some of the discussions in group meetings. He articulated how the established team he had consistently been in included four people from Romania and one from Poland, leading to a temptation amongst the Romanians to want to speak in their native Romanian tongue but when that happened the Polish student would need it then translated into English for the student to understand. It was also an exacerbated problem where Romanian students were translating for each other too. On this, Andrei said:

> *"we all knew English and could speak and write and stuff like that but there's some new words and when you don't know them and everyone in the group is translating we would then have to then try to translate to the Polish student as well. So there would be us translating some of the English words into Romanian and then we would be helping to translate some of what we were saying into English to help the Polish student, so he wouldn't feel left out".*

Clearly the level of English was a challenge in certain circumstances, but Andrei acknowledged that working with others in a group helped him with the translation of some words that he did not know himself.

4.3.6 Disband Re-join Loop

There are further findings revealed that indicate there are occasions, for all the students, where a lecturer in a specific module, at any point in the programme, decided to withdraw student autonomy to choose group membership. This led to a disbanding of established teams and negative feelings before a subsequent rejoining. Where students' autonomy to choose their own group members is removed and the lecturer chooses group membership, the data suggests students are blindsided. The challenges of forming a new group and getting through the initial team formation stages where rapport building can robustly test the adaptation of the students where this occurs. As an illustration of this, Larisa and Dragos had both experienced no more

than one or two modules during the programme where the lecturer had chosen who they would be in a group with and Larisa described how it had been "a sudden surprise" when in one module she was asked to "work in a group where she had not been given the opportunity to work with somebody she liked, knew, or wanted to work with". During these scenarios the students have to adapt quickly as the temporary disbanding and major rearrangement of their place in a group can have a detrimental impact. Although they benefit from their previous experiences of forming a group the major rearrangement places additional stressors on their experience.

There is a combination of reignited social concerns and a greater focus towards learning concerns during this experience because these students balance a need to form new groups on a specific module but understand how to harness a developed sense of priority towards the learning outcomes which they have seen pay dividends on in previous assessed groupwork activities at this stage. Some students acknowledged these benefits, like Larisa for example, who had reflected upon the experience decided she now "favoured the decision the lecturer made to put me in a completely new group". An explanation for this could be that these students knew they had been in an established team with the same people frequently before, the change of group formation provided them with a contrasting experience of working with different people again. This subsequent change of attitude towards lecturer-led group formation indicates a developing perspective of the student towards the benefits of working in more diverse groups. Initially these students had begrudgingly gone along with this despite reservations but later in the programme felt far more positive about being placed in more challenging scenarios.

4.3.7 Frustrations from a lack of rationale for disbanding established teams and forming new groups

The interview data suggests these students remain puzzled by the lack of rationale for having inconsistency around group formation from module to module. For example, Larisa said she "grasped the benefits of group work, the benefits of being thrown unexpectedly into a group" where she was with unfamiliar students but remained troubled by the lack of personalised feedback received after assessment which could

have been used to develop their team working abilities further. In terms of the need for further experimentation after the disbanding of previously established teams and formation of new teams in new modules, the students faced similar challenges as they had in the early stages of their first group formations. However, with greater experience of working with new group members at this point, further experimentation took place relatively quickly. For example, Gheorghe said

> "when I was placed into a new group on a module in the second year it was a shock, but I was able to understand what we needed to do to get the work done together a lot better than when I was first in a group. I was thankful that I had experience of working in a group already so I knew more about what I should be doing".

Larisa said similarly that the need to work with people she didn't know again was "stressful and I wasn't sure what it was going to be like but actually it wasn't too bad because we worked through a few different ideas to make things work" which suggests this further experimentation in the new group had been a better experience than earlier in the programme.

4.3.8 Re-joining groups

Further findings have been revealed that relate to my second sub-question asking how these Romanian students' experiences of assessed group work change during the programme. The interview data suggests students can re-join previously established teams and even where students have been through a module where they were forced by the lecturer to form new groups, students can subsequently re-join previously established teams with familiar group members sometimes with minor rearrangements to membership. Without the need to spend time together getting to know how to work with each other, the typical challenges of intragroup hostility experienced during the often-tumultuous early stages of group development can be minimised. This part of the adaptation process is shaped by the development of ability and knowledge from the various experiences that have taken place. The re-forming of well-established teams allows these students to re-form in way that enables them to focus on the

immediate tasks that need to be tackled, without the initial pressure of working with students they are unfamiliar with again.

4.3.9 Improved ability to work as a team when re-forming established groups

The interview data suggests the ability of these students to work within the same or different groups improves throughout the programme. This is illustrated by Alexandru who referred to a development of understanding of how to become more engaged with the project by integrating himself "into the work other group members were doing rather than waiting for others to send him work to be added". He recognised that initially he was working "superficially and not getting involved" but this had developed into greater commitment in later group work where the benefits of being in a well-established team had aided his development of working with others, which made it easier to complete the group work. Dragos also recognised that the amount of effort he had put into group work early on was "less than it had been later in the programme". He said he had learnt through experience that the reward for putting in more effort to attend team meetings and do the required work was "to produce the best work possible and the satisfaction received at the end".

In Ana's reflection about her experiences, she considers her first experiences to have been very challenging and she did not know how to work with other group members on a project. However, she acknowledged that as she gained confidence in how to work with others this changed her views on what was needed to make group work successful later in the programme when previously established groups were re-formed. Other students such as Andrei explained how in later group work experiences he had found himself being more in agreement with other group members than in earlier projects and he expressed how important for him it was to be able to create work with people he hardly knew, who had in some cases "different ideas as to how things should be done", when there were very few opportunities for them to meet up before the work needed to be completed.

4.4 Minor rearrangement of groups

4. Minor rearrangement of group stage

In terms of rearrangement, the interview data indicates there can be subtle group membership rearrangement as the students' progress through the programme. This is not the disbanding and complete change of group membership mentioned earlier but a more subtle change of a member of the group as the students' progress from the experimentation or re-joining stage towards improved teamworking abilities. This was illustrated by Gheorghe who said:

> *"some group members had not returned to their original team after they had been forced by one lecturer on a module to join another team and then he had not come back to our team afterwards like everyone else. It was a surprise to find some of the team members staying in other groups when we were close".*

This finding acknowledges that minor rearrangements to group membership were accepted by the students and did not cause the same kind of challenges identified as those when a temporary disbanding of the team was required on a specific module. Although individual team members might not return to a well-established team, the reaction of the students had been one of surprise rather than dissatisfaction. The indication is that it was accepted in these circumstances that students had wanted to work with different types of students and returning to the same teams after modules where autonomy to do this has been removed, was seen as something of a choice rather than a mandatory expectation of the team.

4.5 Teamwork proficiency

5. Teamwork Proficiency stage

There are further findings to reveal in relation to my second sub-question asking how these Romanian students' experiences of assessed group work change during the

programme. The interview data indicates that as students adapt to working in groups, the well-established teams in which they were able to consistently work operated in a more proficient way as the course progressed. Where social concerns had been a significant priority for the students earlier on in the programme as their group developed and input had been the focus, learning concerns become the priority where the efficiency of the teamwork leads to a greater focus on the output of work instead. For example, Alexandru explained how the group worked better later in the programme when, for a new business creation project in year 3, the team leveraged their prior experiences of group work to "formulate a far better plan than anything we produced within earlier group work activities". Andrei said similarly that experience had shown him how to develop a more organised approach to working as a team and he gave an example about how his team had gathered complex information that was needed to calculate costs effectively during a group project.

Dragos and Ana gave examples where the preparation of a team task list in a year 3 project had helped to organise the group work activities far more effectively than in earlier group work projects where key tasks had been overlooked leaving him initially frustrated with group work. Andrei explained how he had "started to realise the strengths of others in the team when we spent time brainstorming ideas together" and this had improved how he felt about group work. He commented that whereas in early projects people were arguing and not taking responsibility for work, in later projects they were more experienced and doing the work in a far more organised way. Despite having strong emotions of frustration in the first few group work projects, students were keen to express their positive feelings towards developing abilities to work as a team.

4.5.1 Improvements in teamworking abilities

The adaptation process these students go through involves them learning how to work in a group and develop as a team, but the development may be limited to being predominantly in those well-established teams where they are familiar with everyone in the group. The interview data suggests these students have developed well-established teams where they know each other very well-formed strong friendships in some cases. There are numerous examples in the data as to how a change of membership affects the dynamic within the group and when allowed to stay in

previously established teams, this perceived comfort is something they are reluctant to give up.

Adaptation to group work involves these students developing abilities relatively quickly to working in a group with students they typically share the same background with, who they then can work with as an established team repeatedly across a number of modules throughout the programme. Adaptation also requires them develop ways to work in scenarios where there is an unexpected change of group membership. Students explained how their confidence to work in a group had significantly developed by the time they reached year three, due in most part to the opportunities for them to work in well-established teams which had led to what they felt were far more positive experiences.

4.5.2 The impact of increased listening ability and open-mindedness

A finding from the interview data relating to improved teamworking abilities and the feelings of a more positive experience later in the programme during group work projects relates to students feeling they benefitted from the development of better listening ability within group work activities. This is illustrated by comments from two students, Ana and Tatiana, who commented that their listening ability skills had improved.

With regard to her improved abilities, Tatiana explained:

> *"because we had to overcome the challenges of working in groups with students from other countries, learning to listen and not to be so narrow with my ideas and with my opinions was important. I've learned how to widen my thinking, I needed to listen more, even when working with students from the same background as me".*

Ana explained how this was achieved because the outcomes were so beneficial in terms of a better relationship with teammates and the output of work at the end of the submission process which had been improved because of her "increased open-mindedness". Both Ana and Tatiana acknowledged that being a better listener in group situations was a positive experience which they felt could enable them to capitalise on opportunities in the future where effective listening strategies and being open-minded about contrasting views in workplace scenarios would be beneficial.

Three of the students interviewed (Larisa, Margareta and Sabina) advised new students that due to the close working expected with others during group work, listening to what others say will help quickly find out that others can help them develop new ideas and new ways of thinking. This is illustrated by Larisa who said it is key to understand that "you are not always right in what you say and that others can contribute in unexpected ways". Margareta equally felt it was important for students working in groups to be open minded and listen more to others in the team whilst Sabina felt the emphasis should be placed on being able to "accept what others put forward as ideas and try to see that this is a new way to look at things".

4.5.3 Improvements in shared decision-making capabilities

The interview data suggests that some of the students feel they benefitted from improvements in their ability to discuss with other group members the best decision to make within a project, rather than making decisions alone. This was identified as a positive experience in the later stages of group work by several students (Dragos, Larisa, Ana, Gheorghe, Tatiana and Sabina). However, for these students this had not initially been the case as it had taken time earlier in the programme to understand the benefits of having to accept decisions they might not agree with. As they had gained experience of working in a group it had become a positive aspect of group work to learn how to work in team where everybody consulted with each other and discussed what is best to do in a certain scenario. Students felt they had learnt more during the group work activities that had group decisions underpinning the work they were submitting for assessment. For example, Larisa said that when considering a variety of ideas on a subject even if she had felt hers was the best idea the process of group

discussion had ensured she was "able to hear other people's ideas that could be better and new ideas could then come from the group". Larisa said that this sharing of ideas and learning from others, particularly when struggling, was one of the best things about group work because "even if you think you are the best, you will see there are better options". Gheorghe also explained how his team had benefitted from being able to consult with each other and discuss how to do the work in the best way but acknowledged this could sometimes lead to disagreements which might end up in experiences that had both positive and negative emotions attached.

4.5.4 The impact of leadership opportunities

The interview data suggests some of the students felt they had developed useful leadership skills later in the programme as groups developed improved teamworking abilities. In particular, Margareta said she "became a leader of one of the groups and developed some effective leadership skills" which had been a positive experience for her. She explained how in her view, being a good leader involved having to "push people and find what motivates them". She acknowledged that before starting the programme she had no prior experience of group work, and this meant her view had been that she "just wanted to just forget about those people" who didn't meet her expectations. In fact, the interview data indicates that having a leader to motivate group members became one of the best things about group work for some of the students. Of importance though, is that the data suggests there is very little instruction from lecturers to groups about appointing leaders which may explain why Margareta was the only one to detail specifically on her experiences as a leader despite other students mentioning a development of some leadership skills.

Despite having a leader within the group being identified as one of the best things about group work for some of the students, the interview data also suggests that the inconsistent appointment of leaders and behaviours of those leading when the groups remained the same from project to project still created some negative feelings for these students. The reasons for this can potentially be attributed to the fact that there is no obligation for them to adopt any specific behaviours as a leader. Also, where leaders do not naturally emerge, the data suggests there is typically no instruction from

the lecturer to appoint one despite opportunities for that to be of benefit. This is illustrated by many of the students (Dragos, Alexandru, Tatiana, Sabina, Gheorghe) commenting that lecturers did not typically make any suggestions about appointing group leaders in any of the group projects and so often there were no formally agreed leaders appointed.

An effective illustration of how inconsistencies amongst leaders impacted these students is Dragos' example:

> *"a leader emerged within my group but in later projects he was not consistent in his leadership style across all the projects. He ended up having personal commitments that impacted him on one of the projects which meant that he had less time to put aside for us and the group, which really affected us".*

Where a key group member had positioned themselves as leader of a group later on in the programme, there were clear examples of where potential misunderstandings arose as to what they were expected to do, as encouragement from the lecturers to become leaders and take charge was low.

4.6 Dissolution
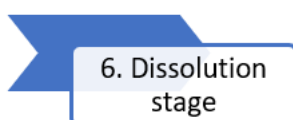
6. Dissolution stage

In relation to my second sub-question asking how these Romanian students' experiences of assessed group work change during the programme, a final finding to consider is that of a dissolution stage in their adaptation to group work, a stage that these students reach towards the end of their programme. There is little in the interview data to suggest these students have been significantly impacted by reaching such a stage and yet there is evidence that it occurs when looking at Table 3, the list of programme modules. It is clear from the programme of module assessments that although there is group work within semester 1 modules of year 3 (level 6), the semester 2 modules are all individual assessments. The implication for these

Romanian students is that the teams they have been working in essentially dissolve at the end of semester 1 as the requirements of working in a group are no longer present in semester 2. The interview data reflects the experiences of these students during group work but from the analysis makes no reference to their feelings in relation to the dissolution of the team. I suspect this is because some were still actively engaged in group work within semester 1 and others were in semester 2 amongst the students they had previously been in teams with when the interviews took place. An opportunity for subsequent reflection after the programme concludes would be an opportunity for further research into the impact of team dissolution on such students.

4.7 Concerns about grading fairness

In relation to my third sub-question about how Romanian students on UK Higher Education degree programmes feel about the ways they are assessed for group work; the interview data suggests these students have mainly negative feelings about the effectiveness of assessment and the feedback they receive on group work projects, and these persist throughout their experiences on the programme. Without prior experience of assessed group work there is also evidence that students did not understand how the grading mechanisms worked and what the implications of each mechanism were. As these students are consistently working in well-established teams with others who in some cases are perceived by them as having not put in an equal contribution and neither the assessment nor feedback accurately reflects individual contribution, negative feelings had emerged.

4.7.1 Impact of the mechanisms used to determine group work grades

In relation to concerns about grading, the interview data suggests students feel the variances of methods used to determine group work grades between each module were unhelpful. This is illustrated by comments from the students interviewed about their concerns regarding why the group project assessment mechanisms employed varied between modules. All the students mentioned that the variety of assessment mechanisms included group grades, individual grades, and combinations of the two employed with a variety of weightings as well as integration of presentations alongside any submitted work either as a group or individually. The inconsistency of the choice of mechanisms between modules had raised concerns amongst the students as to whether they were being fairly assessed in each module across the programme. Although students indicated that their modules would typically have a combination of group and individual grades there were some group work projects where it was just a group grade with no individual grade element, and they struggled to understand the rationale for the variances between the mechanisms employed. The concerns around the inconsistency across the mechanisms used to assess group work projects may also have been exacerbated by an initial inexperience amongst the students of any type of group work assessment.

4.7.2 Lack of prior experience and its impact upon student perceptions of grading fairness

Firstly, the survey data (See Figure 4) illustrates how little prior experience the Romanian students who participated in the survey had; in terms of the specific grading methods they had experienced.
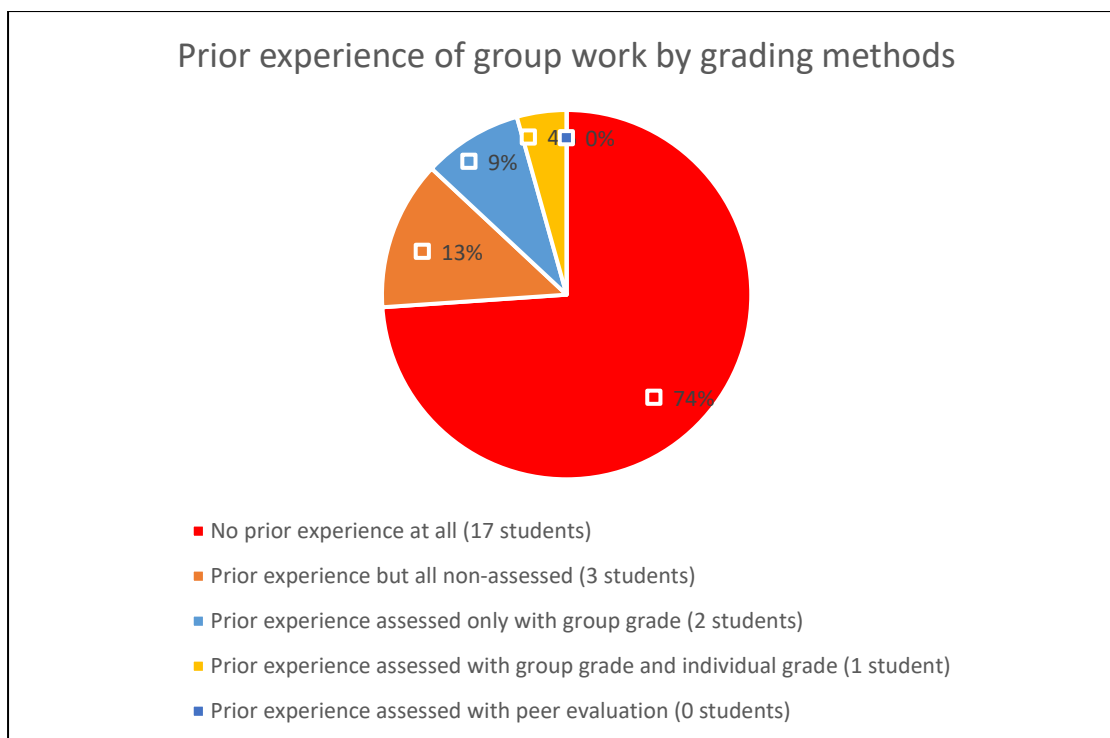
Figure 4: Survey Data - Prior experience of group work by assessment method

In addition to the survey data above, the interview data suggests that none of the students interviewed had any prior experience of group work but since being on the degree programme they had all experienced being awarded group grades. Group grades are based on all students in the group receiving the same grade for the group work and in many cases at least one element of individual assessment based on the group work project is also included.

The inexperience of the students with regards to assessed group work may offer an insight into why some of them were unsettled by the changing assessment mechanisms, particularly if that happened early on in the programme. Five of the students (Andrei, Ana, Margareta, Vasile and Tatiana) explained how doing a presentation as part of the assessment with the creation of slides for delivery in front of the lecturer either as a group or individually was a particularly daunting experience for them early on in the programme.

As a further example of this, Margareta explained how:

"the experience of group members being graded differently by the lecturer depending upon how they performed in the presentation was uncomfortable because this had not happened in other group work projects previously. We were surprised and couldn't understand why the rules changed for this".

It was clear from what Margareta said that the individual work which contributed to some of her grade was seen as an opportunity to "make up for the potential low group grade" as she put it.

4.7.3 Group grade concerns

The interview data suggests there are negative feelings amongst the students towards the effectiveness of group grades which were often negatively impacted by group members who did not contribute enough. This is illustrated by Alexandru who commented that he felt "upset at having worked hard for the whole project and still ending up receiving a low grade because of others in the group who were not working anywhere near as hard as I was". Students such as Larisa were able to articulate how the initial excitement of working in a group had faded when group members were not producing their contributions of work. However, development of her own ability to work in a well-established team enabled her to later see that working more closely with other group members could make up for the lack of contribution of specific group members. There was widespread satisfaction amongst the students about there being an individual element within some of the group work to counteract the impact of a potential low group grade. However, it was noted it typically had a smaller weighting placed upon it and therefore could not always ensure an accurately balanced overall module grade. Ana said she felt disappointed that the grade she had got was "caused by a lack of contribution from certain group members" which impacted negatively on her experience of group work. She felt that inevitably this had also affected the individual grade she got her for individual work too because this was reliant upon work being carried out by others within the group that she was then required to include within her own work. The interviews uncovered that some of the students were surprised to find

that group work involved their grade being impacted by the contributions of group members. In each case, students said there was a significant part of the assessment in every assessed group work project where a group grade was awarded, and they were typically inexperienced at group work projects prior to the programme starting. Margareta even went so far as to say that "having my grade impacted by others in the team was the worst thing about group work".

4.7.4 The absence of peer evaluation within grading mechanisms

The interview data suggests that the absence of peer assessment within the grading mechanisms of group work caused some frustration for students. For example, Larisa perceived this as "the group grade allowing people to let down the group". Likewise, in Margareta's interview I asked her if she would have liked to have had an opportunity to peer review other group members to contribute towards the grade, based on observations of other group members contributions and she said yes. Gheorghe similarly expressed disappointment that an opportunity for peer assessment was not offered as "it would probably have made a difference". Students such as Margareta and Vasile explained how they had developed a fear of the negative influence of others in the early projects because they were usually self-sufficient in individually assessed tasks. Vasile described situations where he said:

> *"the group would split up to go and do research individually and although others had said they were going to go do their work they didn't do what they said they would do. Without an opportunity for peer evaluation and the inconsistency of effort amongst others in the group I felt that the assessment did not reflect our individual abilities accurately".*

Conversely, Dragos was vocal in his support of some of the positive aspects of working towards a group grade when he said how it "inspired me get involved more because I did not want to let others down". Gheorghe similarly expressed support for this increasing involvement as he said it "forced him take notice of his responsibilities". Larisa also acknowledged that although she did experience other students not putting in as much effort as her and receiving the same group grade, she felt in some group

projects her "grade had gone up" because of being consistently in what she considered a high performing team. She explained how this belief was grounded on the lower individual grades she was receiving early on in the programme and her inexperience with group work activities at the start of the programme which contributed to her initially struggling with some of the group work. She felt the strengths of others had likely had a positive impact upon the grade she received later in the programme.

4.7.5 The absence of intercultural competencies assessment

The interview data indicates that these students were not assessed on their intercultural competency on any modules during any stages of the programme. With the interview data indicating a low prevalence of cultural difference experienced across the groups that these Romanian students had been in, these findings suggest the students may have either developed sufficient intercultural competency early on in the programme to ensure differences were minimised during their early experiences of group work or that their cultural backgrounds were so initially aligned that differences were minimised from the outset leaving intercultural competency levels high from the outset. It could also be the case that in fact it is a bit of both where there are similarities in cultural backgrounds and also a relatively quick development of less developed competencies through their initial group work experiences with the other students. Gheorge said that he had found "working with students from other countries exciting and when you get to know them you realise they see things a lot of things the way you do". During group formation these students were clearly not strongly motivated to work with students from contrasting cultures and lacked a desire to interact with a multiplicity of nationalities however, for those that did, as discussed earlier in 4.2.4 this initial openness appears to have created some intercultural experiences that were useful for their development. For instance Ana said that working with a student from Portugal was really good because he would say things that us from Romania had not thought of which really helped". This indicates that the assessment of intercultural competencies is a piece of the group work assessment picture that is currently absent but intercultural competency is likely being developed all the same.

4.7.6 The impact of lecturer feedback

The interview data suggests that feedback from lecturers on how grades were awarded contributed to both positive and negative feelings amongst the students. This is illustrated by Ana and Tatiana who were generally positive about the feedback they had received from most lecturers but were both particularly critical of the feedback they had received from specific lecturers about particular group work submissions. Ana explained how in the feedback after a group presentation despite having seen wide variations in presentation skills across the group "the feedback was very general, and I was frustrated not to be sure of what feedback was for me and which was for others in the group". Ana was one of three students (along with Tatiana and Dragos) that felt that it would have been helpful to have feedback about her own performance so she would have known what to improve or do in future presentations rather than having "general opinions about the group".

Across the majority of students interviewed, the data suggests getting feedback on how grades had been awarded, based on individual involvement, would have been welcomed. There was a feeling amongst most of the students that it was hard to assess from the feedback what the lecturers' perspective of everyone within the group was. Tatiana was more specific with her frustrations when she said she had "noticed the feedback was generally the same content each time" and as group feedback she couldn't "take much from it about her individual contribution because feedback about the whole assignment as a group doesn't help me understand how I can improve". Alexandru explained that it was "frustrating that the feedback really only focused on what work we had done rather than how we had worked together". Tatiana also explained that "where the submitted work included mention of specific team members not contributing anything to meetings" there was no acknowledgment of this in the lecturers' feedback which she had found frustrating.

Despite these negative feelings towards the quality of group feedback, some students (Dragos, Andrei and Gheorghe) explained why they had found the feedback helpful and how it had contributed to their development of an ability to work as a team.

For instance, Dragos said:

> *"Our lecturer motivated us by giving feedback that his group had created the best work of all the groups and explaining in detail why. This motivated not only me but the whole team and with the level of detail about what was good and what could be improved it was really motivating".*

Such feedback appeared to overcome the limitations of it being just about the group and not about the student's individual performance.

4.8 Student group work adaptation process

My main research question asks how Romanian students adapt to assessed group work during a UK Higher Education degree programme. The interview data suggests that although initial experiences of group work felt disorganised for these students, changes in group work experience over time led to a developed ability to work in groups and groups worked in a more organised way as the course progressed. Having considered how the interview and survey data inform the findings, my analysis draws me towards a key finding and contribution to knowledge. I believe these students travel through an adaptation process which relates to the various stages of group development they experience, which have all been revealed within previous sections of this chapter and are now illustrated in Figure 5**.**
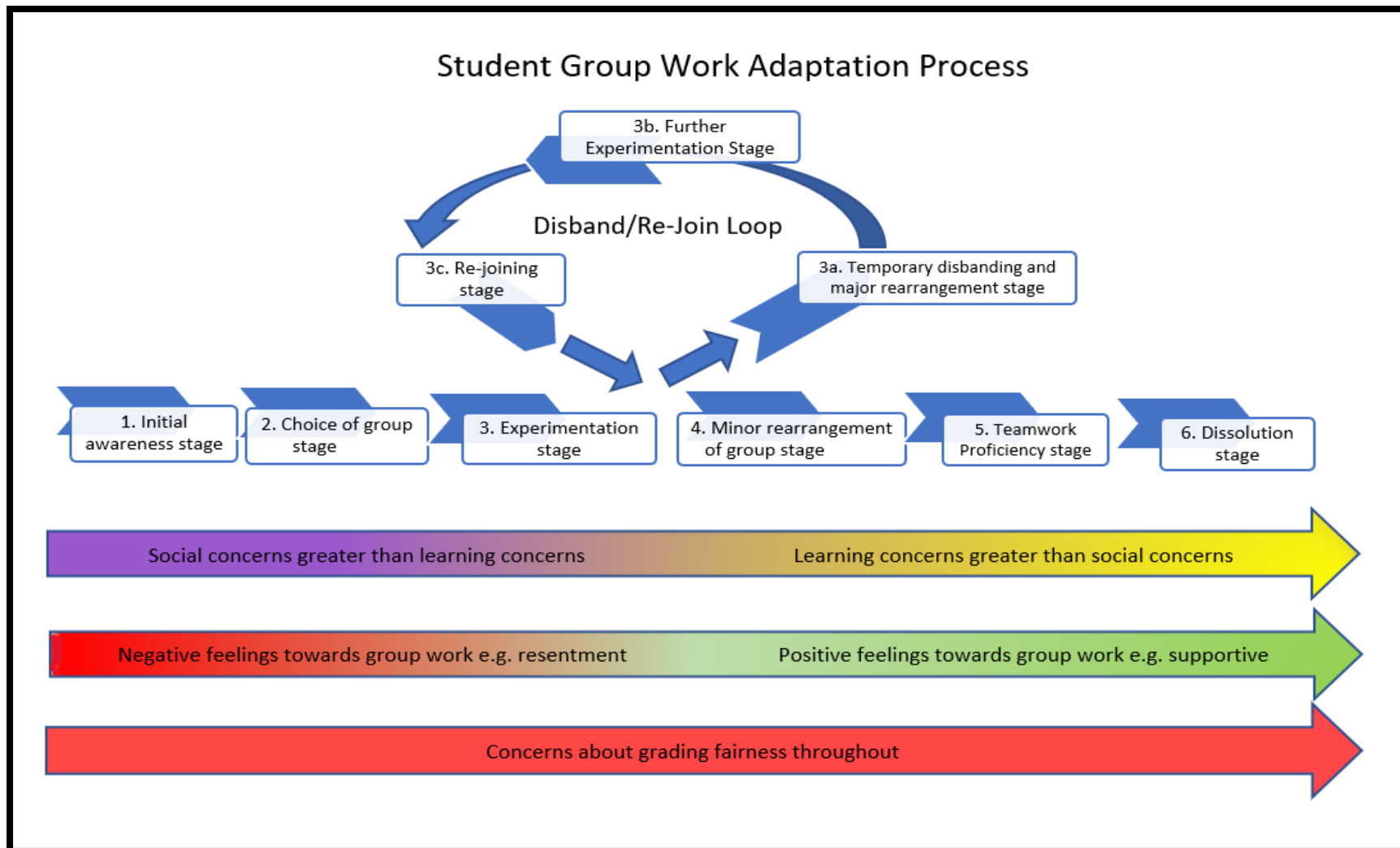
Figure 5: Student group work adaptation process

This adaptation process in Figure 5 is characterised by six main stages with the inclusion of a further three additional stages in the middle which I have called a disband/re-join loop. This loop illustrates a part of the process where the sudden change of group members requires further adaptation from the students before they typically re-join their previously established groups. Each stage of the process is informed by particular values and accompanied by a range of emotions I have articulated within the findings. As you can see, each stage of the adaptation process in Figure 5 now illustrated links to each of the subheadings within this findings chapter.

At the first stage, because these students typically have little or no experience of assessed group work there is low initial awareness of group work which has played a significant part in shaping these students' early experiences on the programme. Social concerns are of a high priority in the early stages of the adaptation process (see Figure 5) because students are primarily concerned with how they will work with others and the challenges associated with this whilst the learning to be gained from being assessed on the module is of a lower importance.

At experimentation stage their views on the support received from lecturers across the various modules were significant and although there are positive experiences for the students during their early adaptation experiences in terms of learning how to work effectively in newly formed groups. There were many experiences students considered had been negative, particularly in the experimentation stage, most notably that of the varied levels of engagement, perceptions of others as 'free-riders' and translation issues amongst non-native English speakers. The interview data suggests the student's adaptation to effective group work is significantly helped by the autonomy the students had in choosing who to work with in their group work projects and although this is generally consistent throughout the programme.

Where there are sudden changes in autonomy and the lecturer takes over group decisions on group membership there can be a temporary disbanding. This can cause stressful periods of further experimentation for the students before they can re-join previously established teams. They are then typically able to move into a greater efficiency of teamworking despite minor rearrangements in team membership. As the negative experiences associated with early formation, experimentation, occasional

disbanding and then re-joining are moved through, the interview data suggests negative feelings are replaced through positive experiences as the students work far more effectively in their well-established teams. Where social concerns were of importance early on, learning concerns became of greater priority later on as they became more experienced in working as a team.

At the Teamwork proficiency stage students are working more as a team (rather than a group of individuals) now having developed strong friendships which make it easier to work together and have better developed skills that support effective teamwork. This includes clearer assumed or allocated roles within the team, improved patience towards others that might have different opinions, improved shared decision-making abilities and being more committed to the team. Students are more willing to support each other as they have forged stronger bonds. Teams at this stage are placing more priority on the subject matter of the modules and their capability to complete the tasks set rather than how to work as a group. Friendships and close bonds permeate their experiences on other modules that do not require groupwork as these students found and offer support to each other's' learning outside of group work too. The illustration includes an acknowledgement that students felt a number of frustrations throughout the programme relating to grading mechanisms, exacerbated by the fact they experienced students contributing less than themselves and there not being an effective way for the lecturers as the assessors to account for those variations in contribution within the assessment grades and feedback.

4.9 Conclusion

To conclude, the findings suggest that Romanian students typically adapt to assessed group work during a UK Higher Education degree programme in a distinct process which provides answers to my main research question and all three sub-questions. As the students travel through the adaptation process illustrated in Figure 5, at each of the stages of group development there are changing experiences for them. Having detailed the findings of the study, in the next chapter I will be discussing these findings in light of the theories and prior literature discussed in chapter 2 as a discussion chapter.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

The following discussion centres around the significance of the findings in chapter 2 and the key issues that have arisen from those. This includes reflection upon how the findings align with or contrast existing literature within the field and what new contributions to knowledge these findings can offer. This provides an exploration of the meaning and significance of the findings, in a wider context. Claims are made and to ensure a full justification, are backed up with the data highlighted in the findings and the literature review. Importantly there is a significant contribution to knowledge here where the main focus of the discussion centres on the process of adaptation to group work that these students have gone through, which has not been detailed in this way before in prior literature. Having found a process that offers something new and exciting within the field of international students in higher education, there is an opportunity to look at the student group work experience in a different way, despite it taking place within fairly typical contexts on UK higher education degree programmes. The structure of the chapter follows the student group work adaptation process identified in the findings and seeks to consider how it might align or contrast previous literature.

The process of adaptation these Romanian students go through in their efforts to work in groups on assessed projects has been positively impacted by them being able to predominantly choose who to be in a group with across the programme. As the programme progresses, being able to re-join previously established teams with the same or at least similar membership across most of the modules has reduced the frequency of new group formation and the challenges that come with that. Being able to initially choose who to be in groups with facilitates the students' autonomy to make choices around who to form groups with and then re-joining previously established teams with students who have similar cultural backgrounds, has reduced the impact of such challenges. Where the proposed student group work adaptation process differs from previous team formation processes such as Tuckman's (1965) or Bligh's (1986) updated version of the group development model is that it combines the stages of team development with the experiences of the students within various scenarios that include the disbandment of well-established teams and re-joining at a later stage.

There are distinct similarities between these group development models, and the adaptation process proposed but the stages indicate distinct experiences for the students that contrast the experiences of those in teams that move through the stages of such group development models. The discussion in the following sections looks at how each stage of the process and accompanying experiences within the illustration such as the change from negative to positive feelings, the change from social concerns to learning concerns and the consistent feeling of dissatisfaction with the grading mechanisms, bring new knowledge to our understanding of the experiences of such students.

5.1 The impact of prior experience and choice of group

The findings revealed that the lack of prior experience of group work contributes to a need for these students to adapt within this unfamiliar context, which is particularly challenging for these students at the choice of group stage, in the student group work adaptation process. One of the specific challenges is that opportunities for taking charge of the group were not routinely encouraged by lecturers leaving some of the students frustrated as to how decisions would be made in the newly formed group where there was disagreement amongst members. This aligns with Tuckman (1965) because within group development there are questions around who is in charge which will typically be at the forefront of members minds in newly formed groups. Where Denzin (1969) proposes a feature of behaviour at formation stage as self-lodging, where team members restrict their involvement, findings suggest there is alignment in this study. This is because some of the Romanian students displayed such behaviour by initially restricting their involvement in the group, preferring instead to take away tasks to work on individually away from the group. However, there is contrasting evidence indicating that in the later stages of adaptation, a full investment of self was made by these students in order to make team decisions and take part in assessment together. An example of this is their participation in team presentations, indicating development of the team at later stages of the programme.

Inexperience amongst group members at the choice of group stage may cause groups to take longer to fully form due to each member needing to establish her or his own

separate individuality and this is illustrated in the students' comments about struggling at first to accept the views of others in the group. Where Tuckman's (1965) group development includes a 'forming' stage there is some alignment because of the inclusion of a similar stage in the student group work adaptation process, where these students choose their groups or are put into groups by the lecturer depending upon the lecturer's decision. There is evidence that these students have faced some challenges at this stage which they have had to adapt to, and alignment with what Tuckman (1965) proposes as concerns about the tasks team members will need to perform at the formation stage appears. For instance, these Romanian students said there was significant discussion in the early formation stages about how to divide up work, as different tasks for each group member would help each of them know what they would need to produce and play to their strengths. There were also examples of these Romanian students developing a sense of what would constitute appropriate behaviour and fitting into this as required at an initial formation stage.

5.1.1 Lecturers influence on student autonomy to form groups

The findings indicate that these students applied considerable pressure on the lecturer to allow them to maintain the autonomy to choose who to be in a group with and consistently choose to work in previously established teams as a priority. It is clear from this that retaining the autonomy to choose their own groups is likely to not have necessarily been the lecturer's natural preference, but these students admitted that they had pushed the lecturers in each module very hard to be able to work in their previously established teams and as one student put it, were "kind of begging for that". By being allowed to be in previously established teams the group behaviour aligns to some of the typical features of the Tavistock model of group dynamics (Bion, 1961 in Jacques, 2007). Where the Tavistock model indicates group members will preserve a team from destruction by attacking what seeks to destroy it, the external threat of destruction came for these students from the lecturer who they perceived as acting outside of the consistency the students are used to. This came in the form of feeling at the mercy of lecturer-led group formation in opposition to the usual process employed by other lecturers who allowed complete student autonomy. Further alignment with behaviour featured in the Tavistock model (Bion, 1961 in Jacques, 2007) came where the team members behaviour, when under threat, included them

withdrawing completely from specific activities, becoming highly passive or simply distracting group members from the tasks required. This was most prominent in contexts where these students found themselves in newly formed groups amongst students they have not been in a group with before. The behaviour included a significant struggle to initially adapt and there are examples of them withdrawing from certain activities organised by the group.

5.1.2 Forming groups with those from similar cultural backgrounds

There was a strong tendency amongst these Romanian students to network more closely with others from the same culture which appears to be facilitated by the lecturers' decisions over providing that student autonomy in group formation. The initial choice of group stage can be a challenging experience for these students as they typically lack prior experience. These findings appear to contrast those of Rienties' (2012) where the students were left with no choice but to interact with others from a different culture as they were the minority in classes with home students. These Romanian students were amongst many other students from the same backgrounds and so rather than feeling the minority group in class, they were the majority and as a result had less inclination to develop links outside their own culture. These students typically gravitated towards those with similar backgrounds due to their underlying inexperience with group work whereas the international students in Rienties (2012) study had little opportunity to do this.

These Romanian students' attitudes to multicultural collaboration remained consistent throughout the programme and their attitudes towards this are fundamentally that because of the inexperience in group work it is better to be in a group with students who have the same cultural background as there are increased challenges if placed into more diverse multicultural groups. This is an attitude they have typically held throughout the programme. This aligns with the findings in Summers and Volet's (2008, pg. 368) study, albeit from a different perspective, which highlighted how students who chose to work on assignments in culturally mixed groups 'displayed no significant change in their attitudes towards mixed group work from the beginning to the end of their project'. These Romanian students have purposely sought to avoid

being in multicultural groups throughout the programme and there is little acknowledgement that such team composition would have been preferential. The evidence suggests they feel this way because they have maintained fears over how little the assessment grades for group work will reflect their efforts to overcome the challenges of working in newly formed groups with students from contrasting cultures. This contrasts Ledwith and Seymour's (2001) findings where the experience of working in groups had left the students steadfast that the best groups are multicultural. In this study the findings reveal a contrasting picture, in that Ledwith and Seymour (2001) base their view of multicultural teams as being 'best' on how the students view the less tangible personal development outcomes of group work. These outcomes would typically include the work the team produces for assessment and in fact the findings suggest these Romanian students do not typically see a multicultural team as advantageous to this cause. In fact they tend to see it as a disadvantage because they lack a fundamental prior experience of working in any sort of group prior to starting the programme.

5.2 Experimentation stage

At the 'experimentation' stage of the student group work adaption process (Figure 5) the students' experience intragroup hostility which includes elements of behaviour that align with Tuckman's (1965) 'storming' stage of group development. Once the students have chosen who to be in a group with, effectively the group is formed but the findings indicate there is a substantial period of experimentation that follows for these students where conflicts can break out. At this stage of the adaptation process there is tension and unrest amongst the group at having to work with others and these align with the incidences of rebellion, opposition, and conflict that Tuckman (1965, pg. 394) identifies as characteristic. These students typically expressed strong negative emotions towards other students contributing less than themselves and there are examples of what Bonebright (2010) identified as 'projection' where their strong emotions were projected on to others in the group. First experiences have been very challenging for these students at this stage because they did not know how to work with other group members on a project and some had hostility shown towards them where they did not support the views of more experienced group members. As students gained

confidence in how to work with others this changed the views of the students to what was needed to make group work successful. Students reflected upon how group work conflict and disagreements had been a significant feature of group work in the early stages of the programme.

Where there is a contrasting experience to the expectations of Tuckman's (1965) group development model is mainly in how the lecturer could be considered as having a soothing effect upon the storm that ensues at this stage. The impact of the lecturers' interactions upon the students, essentially as an external source of guidance, has typically had a positive effect upon the experiences of these Romanian students and supports them to understand how to work together and essentially adjust through supported experimentation. This contrast could potentially be attributed to the kind of practices advocated by Kelly and Moogan (2012). They proposed that institutions should spend time supporting students to adjust to unfamiliar learning and assessment methods, like group work, rather than supporting lecturers to adjust their teaching and learning methods to those that are more familiar to students.

It was Trahar (2010) that recommended how lecturers should question even their most tried and tested western approaches to learning as these may be stifling the learning of those with different prior experiences of learning, which resonates with how lecturers have interacted with these students at the experimentation stage. At this stage there is evidence that Romanian students typically rely more heavily on support from their lecturers than later in the programme and although there are some negative experiences with the support the findings indicate the support has a positive effect upon group work adaptation. Although Baker and Clark (2010) argue that lecturers' may be so used to supporting learners comfortable with the methods employed that they underestimate the challenges international students face when attempting to adjust to them, the findings in this study suggest the approaches lecturers are using are generally meeting the needs of such learners and their estimations of the needs of these learners appear generally accurate.

5.2.1 Intra-group conflict during experimentation

In previous studies of international students' group work experiences the findings have identified that intragroup conflict in the experimentation stage of group work adaptation can potentially be driven by students with experience of group work feeling that those who are inexperienced within the group will bring down their grades. Although there was intra-group conflict identified, the findings suggest these Romanian students believe this has not been caused by the reluctance of other group members to work with them. The findings detail how it was their shared lack of experience in working in groups that had caused the conflict predominant in the early stages of the programme. This contrasts Peacock and Harrison's (2009, pg. 494) findings where the international students had perceived a lack of English language ability and group work experience as a reason for reluctance. In that study students more confident in English and more proficient in group work believed their grades would be lower as a result and were therefore reluctant to work in groups with them whereas for the Romanian students in this study, there was little impact on them because of the shared lack of prior group work experience.

Adjusting to new ways of learning can be significantly impacted upon by the perceptions and behaviour of others in the group and this study aligns with Moore and Hampton's (2015) findings with regard to international students' experiences of group work. The attitudes of other students in their teams towards adaptation to group work is likely to have had the most significant impact upon them, rather than reluctance, as Moore and Hampton (2015) also found. These Romanian students were typically unified within their groups because of the shared experiences of having little or no experience of group work at the outset of the programme. This shared inexperience supported a change in behaviours across the group through adaptation which has been internally supported within the emerging teamwork efficiencies of the group rather than it being reluctantly accepted. Where Peacock and Harrison (2009) had found that home students were reluctant to work with less experienced students, the findings in this study indicate there was little impact from any of the other students in their groups, and so they did not experience the same reactions.

There were reflections in the interview data indicating how group work conflict and disagreements had been a significant feature of group work in the experimentation

stage of their adaptation. Some frustrations were caused by a need for some of these students to provide language interpretation for some of their team members, where there were language issues. This aligns with the prior findings of Schweisfurth and Gu (2009) who found that specific experiences in group activities can often be impacted upon by international students' lack of confidence in their English ability. These findings suggest that although having multiple students in groups who speak Romanian would typically be viewed as a valuable asset to the group in overcoming the frustrations of having to consistently communicate in English as their second language, in fact the experience of translating words for less confident speakers appears to be viewed with frustration and the experience has left them with negative feelings towards some of the experiences early on in the programme, despite appreciating occasions where they had benefitted from translation themselves.

5.2.2 Free-riding and levels of engagement and participation during experimentation

The findings suggest a very significant cause of intra-group hostility can be attributed to negative experiences in the experimentation stage caused by them being in groups where particular members' engagement and participation has been below expectations. These findings align with Maiden and Perry (2011) who suggest a drawback of assessing group work only by work outcome is the problem of free-riders. These Romanian students typically find themselves in groups with a member that capitalises on the strengths of others but is perceived to not equally contribute to the work produced within the group they are in. This perception-based thinking aligns with the findings of Hall and Buzzwell (2012) who suggest this kind of free-riding behaviour has a significant effect upon students leading to frustration wherever group grades are awarded without recognition of the contributions of individuals. However, where further consideration is needed is how the students' perception may not necessarily be accurate. Consideration of whether the student is simply more able to reach higher standards of work in comparison to others in the group are of importance here.

Those familiar with group work may be highly proficient in the creation of work contributing to group grades whereas those inexperienced in this may struggle to create work to the same standard but the effort is perceived as 'free-riding'. Indeed, the findings suggest most of the students did not typically see free-riding behaviours

to be caused by social loafing and the reasons for non-contribution were accepted as being due to differing work styles that lead to the misidentification of free-riding. There is an acknowledgement amongst many of the students that personal commitments outside of study were too great for some team members to allow their full commitment requiring coordination in making up for less contribution in certain situations. Where students commented about finding it difficult to get everyone in the group to attend team meetings because of the personal commitments other students had illustrated this well. As Hall and Buzzwell (2012, pg. 11) suggest, free-riding behaviour is not always necessarily due to apathy and even the term 'free-riding' is far too broad to describe the difference between one students' efforts within a group when compared to another. The frustrations the students feel can be attributable to differences in ability within the group as much as they can be attributable to perceiving someone as riding freely to a better grade without an equal contribution of work.

The findings also align with the Tavistock model (Bion 1969 in Jacques, 2007) in that there is a basic assumption within the group that pairing will take place where needed, within the context of group dynamics. This assumes that in any situation the group faces there will be two people who can somehow save the group from a predicament. Free-riding behaviour was challenged and where improvements to contributions were not forthcoming there were others in the group to step in and complete the work on their behalf, rather than allow potential failure. In some cases, this was attributed to a lack of task boundaries which can be difficult to establish and are typically less tangible than the formal rules a group may broadly list for everyone to follow. Although in some cases boundaries were clearly defined in order to determine what group members could or could not do, the findings suggest group members believed free-riders either ignored what had been agreed or were unsure of what had been assumed as acceptable behaviour. In order to save the group from failure, other students in the team have pulled their energies together to solve the issues at hand whilst others became in some cases inactive.

5.2.3 Assumed roles within groups and expectations during experimentation

There is evidence that at the experimentation stage students have initially struggled with the expectations of group members. This is due to the role expected of them not initially being within their natural abilities and they have then later adapted as the team becomes more organised and their performance becomes more effective. The findings suggest that experiences within group work activities are shaped by the requirements of not only the task at hand but also the roles of team members and how they fulfil those roles. This aligns with Belbin's (1981) group roles in how these Romanian students, in the most part, struggle with the roles they are initially required to perform yet later successfully adapt to working in groups in later stages by developing behaviours as their ability improves. This alignment extends to the negative experiences these students have faced with regard to particular team members engagement and participation at the experimentation stage which can be partially explained using this model of roles. I say partially because although the findings suggest these Romanian students' experiences in group work activities may have been shaped by roles in ways that align with Belbin's (1981), the assumption is that the roles proposed are required in order for a team to be successful. There is evidence in the findings suggesting many of the students were still successful in gaining the grades they hoped for in group work despite there not being a clearly defined set of roles within the group and students were not performing the roles to any great extent.

Where students have performed the roles themselves, with varying levels of success, and have also been impacted by the roles other group members perform alongside them there is room for consideration that not being clear on the roles required to be a successful team has not led to the team being unsuccessful, even later in the programme. That said, there is evidence that these Romanian students with little or no experience of working in groups initially felt their roles within newly formed groups emerged without their full control causing some negative experiences and some of these experiences may also have been impacted by them being relied upon for behaviours within a particular role that they have not found natural to their abilities. Where students have explained frustrations about group members they considered to be in charge, changing their leadership style across group work projects, this can

indicate frustrations that align with the expectations of a 'completer-finisher' role (Belbin, 1981). For example, the role is particularly effective at the end of tasks to polish and scrutinise the work for errors, subjecting it to the highest standards of quality control. I believe that rather than seeing themselves as the leader as such, it is more likely that the student had assumed their role to be that of 'completer-finisher' who took responsibility for reviewing the team members' contributions as a complete piece of work and then feeding back across the group as to what could be improved. Then when the assumed leader did not fulfil that role again in later projects, students have felt frustrations around the inconsistency, and it has negatively impacted their views on how team leaders have performed, despite their performance of a group developing successfully.

5.2.4 Team Leaders within groups during experimentation

The findings suggest groups were not required to appoint leaders and so without express guidance on this, it could be argued that students within the groups assumed such roles instead and if roles were not assumed leadership decisions were made democratically across the group. The opportunity to lead appears not to have been a common experience amongst these Romanian students and many of the students interviewed did not mention having leaders in their groups or having had the chance to lead but they still felt the team had developed successfully from an initially chaotic group. For some, this caused a negative experience which aligns with the previously discussed Tavistock model (Bion 1969 in Jacques, 2007) in so much as the Romanian students who were typically unfamiliar with working in a group at the outset of the programme have had early experiences on the programme where worry and confusion has ensued around who is 'in charge'.

5.3 Major Rearrangement of groups and further experimentation loop

A discovery emerged with new knowledge of how the rearrangement of groups impacts upon students within the student group work adaptation process. Despite the findings indicating considerable efforts by these Romanian students to keep their well-established groups together across the modules of the programme had frequently paid

off, there were examples from each student interviewed about occasions where they had been forced into forming new groups on specific modules and a number of challenges were faced upon the disbanding of the established team. This adjournment of the team can be likened to that of the adjourning stage of Bligh's (1986) team formation stages however, the findings indicate this is different as it is only a temporary adjournment for these students. The separation from others away from their well-established teams has led them to temporarily work in a newly formed group, typically for just one module, making the experience for each individual one of separation. Major rearrangement of group members within their team becomes an integral feature of their adaptation to working in groups. This means the alignment to the 'forming' stage of the group development model (Tuckman, 1965 and Bligh 1986) reoccurs within the proposed student groupwork adaptation process at the 'disbanding/major rearrangement' stage because students are either re-arranged into new groups by the lecturer or are forced into forming new groups themselves. There is evidence that at this stage, these students have to face some similar challenges to those they have initially overcome when forming their initial groups earlier in the programme. The Disband/Re-Join loop, illustrated in the student group work adaptation process, reflects how these students experience a further period of experimentation, similar to when they formed their previously established teams, but with the added benefit of their group work experience and ability development.

5.4 Re-joining groups (Disband/Re-Join loop)

As these students found opportunities for autonomy in choosing group members again on subsequent modules, the findings indicate new knowledge has been revealed. Where the previously established teams were re-formed often with minor rearrangements to group membership, the forming and storming stages of group formation within the group development model (Tuckman 1965 and Bligh, 1986) are essentially avoided due to their greater proficiency in working together. Typically, the two stages of forming and storming do not appear to be repeated when students re-join previously established teams as they typically re-join at a stage where norming is already present, having worked together previously. The findings suggest adaptation has taken place through the development of ability and knowledge gained from the

various experiences that have taken place. As the students re-form previously established teams, they quickly re-settle into their functional roles and at this point are relatively satisfied with these roles which leads towards more effective teamworking abilities.

5.5 Teamwork proficiency

Teamwork proficiency is a stage in the student group work adaptation process I would define as being where the initial groups become significantly more bonded as the programme progresses, despite these students having potentially experienced some periods of major rearrangement and then rejoining of the team. From this, there appears to be greater teamworking proficiency amongst the students and they are working more as a team than a group of individuals. This comes from having developed strong friendships within the groups which makes it easier for them to work together, better developed listening skills to support effective teamworking, more patience towards others who may have different opinions and them being better able to actively engage in shared decision making. Essentially this is a higher level of teamworking abilities being demonstrated. These Romanian students initially find themselves in a group of students gathered together to work in collaboration however, as they individually adapt to group work activities and develop ways to work together more effectively over time, a team mindset emerges to replace the collective group mentality, driven by their shared focus on achieving a common goal of assessment outcomes leading to combined action. These students initially experienced understanding how group work is done, forming the groups, experimenting within the groups and then within one or more modules experience disbanding before re-joining what could be considered at that point a previously established 'team'.

5.5.1 Teamwork proficiency and groups 'norming'

There is evidence that re-joining established teams has aided these Romanian students' development of a deeper consideration of a variety of viewpoints across the team and when making decisions this has proven to be beneficial. This indicates an alignment with some of the typical experiences characterised in the 'norming' stage of

Tuckman's group development model (1965) which is characterised by an emphasis within the group towards concerns that are mutually accepted and the inter-relationships that emerge.

This is significant because the adaptation requires the students within their group to understand each other and feel connected which is something that clearly develops over time rather than in the early stages of the programme. If there are problems at this stage which create negative experiences the group may not develop in an effective way. However, equally the students can develop skills that aid their adaptation but also use those skills to build improved inter-relationships which can have a lasting effect upon the development of the group into a team. Bonebright (2010) suggests there is likely to be a keenness to avoid task conflict which can be achieved through an improved capability to listen to each other, and these students benefit from this at such a stage.

5.5.2 Teamwork proficiency and groups 'performing'

There is alignment in the teamwork proficiency stage of the student a group work adaptation process with Bligh's (1986) 'performing' stage where the priorities of the group typically revolve around decisions on how to maintain the teams' continuity. These Romanian students, who have typically experienced significant challenges at earlier stages of group development, find the performing stage to be a key development point in their personal acquisition of team working skills. As students gain experience of working in a group, consulting with each other, and discussing what is best to do in a certain scenarios, for some students this experience became what they consider to be the best part of group work. Individual norms make way for emerging team norms where agreement is reached on approaches towards the shared goals the group works towards, which firmly aligns with the performing stage of Bligh's (1986) group development model. The significance of this is that during this phase of group development there is considerable adaptation taking place where a strong presence of group cohesion and acceptance is developed through the students' willingness to cooperate in ways they may not have done previously. This aligns with Bligh's (1986) model because at this point in group development the ground rules and expectations are clearer, and it is the case that these students are indeed adapting

more successfully to being bound by those rules at this stage in the adaptation process.

5.5.3 Teamwork proficiency and groups 'informing'

The findings indicate that communication between team members and the lecturer to formally provide updates on progress towards the outcomes of the project even early on in the programme occur but then this takes increased significance in later stages of the programme. This indicates alignment with Bligh's (1986) model at the 'informing' stage because for example, discussions have taken place with the lecturer about gaining an increased amount of feedback on assessment outcomes. However, prior to this, students have also informed others of their group work project findings via their submissions of work for assessment or during presentations of content to audiences. Another way this aligns is through the students' sharing of experiences with other student teams. An example of this is where some of the students mentioned how they assisted students in other teams to adapt. This appears to take place typically in an advisory capacity where the more expert students who have adapted more quickly support members of other teams who are facing challenges they have already overcome. However, although the act of informing is probably an easier task for these students this stage, it is clearly not a separate stage in itself with differentiated activities and the teamwork proficiency stage in the proposed adaptation model encapsulates better how it is the team working proficiently that characterises the experiences of these students at this stage in their adaptation process.

5.5.4 Teamwork proficiency and the impact of roles

As these students re-form previously established teams there is also an indication in the findings that they quickly re-settle into their functional roles and at this point are relatively satisfied with these roles. For example, as these Romanian students in the most part successfully adapt to working in groups through developing behaviours within particular group roles their ability improves. This aligns with Belbin's (1981) group roles as these students have initially struggled with the expectations of group members due to the roles expected of them not initially being typically within their

natural abilities and have later adapted as the team becomes more organised and their performance becomes more effective. The findings suggest that experiences within group work activities are shaped by the requirements of not only the task at hand but also the roles of team members and how they fulfil those roles.

The findings have also revealed how for some of the students one of the experiences during group work projects they identified as the most positive was taking the role of leading the team, later in the programme. Leadership roles had emerged within some of the groups these students have been in, and this aligns with the Tavistock model (Bion 1969 in Jacques, 2007) due to the changing group dynamics within this context that have had an impact. In some cases a pecking order was experienced by these students early on but more so later in the programme where it had changed due to a changing level of perceived significance within the group of certain key members. This occurred where they moved places within the group over time, depending upon the requirements and role needs of the task at hand. The initial unfamiliarity with group work across the groups placed many of the students at a lower level of significance early on in the programme and particularly within the newly formed group however, as these students' developed familiarity with working in this way, they found themselves leading the team at certain points in time within the established team.

5.6 Negative feelings replaced with positive feelings

Although there has been discussion already on some of the negative feelings these students have felt towards some of their experiences it's important to also discuss how there is a marked trajectory towards them having more positive feelings as the programme progresses. Students moved from a typically negative set of feelings early on in the programme where they struggled with the challenges of their first experiences of working in groups to far more positive feelings later in the programme as they travelled through the student group work adaptation process. Although some parallels can be drawn between these findings and Schweisfurth and Gu's (2009) study of Chinese students who were also on an undergraduate UK degree programme, there is a contrast where Schweisfurth and Gu (2009) found that the Chinese students had been through similar negative experiences during the early stages of the programme, but there was little evidence these had turned more towards positive experiences by

the end of the programme. Working in groups had been one of the of the most common challenges the Chinese students had faced due to their inexperience which aligns but the replacement of negative experiences with more positive ones by the end was contrasting. The Chinese students were also found to be combative in some of their group work situations and this does align with the experiences of these Romanian students too. However, there are contrasts where these Romanian students' experiences created more positive feelings later in the programme. The findings suggest this was due to what these Romanian students identified as their development and adaptation towards teamwork whilst the Chinese students in Schweisfurth and Gu's (2009) study had typically found it an uncomfortable experience throughout.

5.7 Social concerns make way for learning concerns

As these Romanian students incrementally adapt to group work through the various stages of the group work adaptation process during the programme there is a shift in attention away from the strong focus on social concerns that they have early on. For instance, the building of rapport and the gaining of an understanding of how to work together shifts away towards a greater focus on learning concerns later in the programme, such as the quality of work to be submitted. Socio-cultural perspectives can help explain how early on in the programme the learning that takes place for each individual in the group work activities are heavily influenced by how they interact with others as they are developing groupwork abilities within an unfamiliar social learning context.

When considering the work of Bruner (1966), the findings in this study indicate these individuals learn and develop their knowledge and understanding through the experience of social interaction which is of high importance to them in the early stages of the programme. These students have been active co-constructors of knowledge and have been impacted by the social factors associated with working in a group, and the cultural factors associated with how their prior experiences of group work have, as Shepard (2000) proposed, influenced the development of their understanding. The findings align with what Adams (2006) proposed in that these students do bring their own perspectives to the group context, drawn from their own cultural backgrounds

leading to the creation of knowledge within a developing cultural context. The learning that takes place early on in the programme is challenging as these Romanian students have less experience of engaging together in group work. So, although the findings indicate an alignment with what Silcock (2003) proposes in relation to group members effectively 'scaffolding' the learning of others within the group as knowledge and understanding develop, there is an extension of this to elements of new knowledge. This is where the study has revealed a greater focus is placed by the students on the scaffolding of learning within the group on how to work together early on in the programme which then shifts towards the scaffolding of learning more keenly focused on the curriculum content, later in the programme.

The scaffolding that takes place within the identified group work adaptation process, involves learners who are more able within groupwork settings to actively scaffold the performance of others beyond the levels those individuals could perform alone. This is supported by an understanding of Vygotsky's (1986) 'zone of proximal development'. This is because there is a strong social dimension found within the relationships and connections these students build within the groups they form during group work projects early on which is of significant value to their own overall success on the programme. Although their experiences throughout the programme have been shaped by the context of the wider social circumstances in which they learn and their historical social backgrounds, the focus for these students switches in the later stages of the proposed student groupwork adaptation process towards developing higher abilities in the curriculum content and assessment submission and less on how to work together, as these abilities have been well developed by this stage. This focus shift is natural though, as students recognise the need to learn how to work together takes priority early on in their experience of groupwork and then gives way to a greater focus on how to develop ways to improve the standard of the work they produce as a group later on.

5.8 Group work assessment concerns

In terms of what these students' feelings are about the ways they are assessed for group work projects on a UK Higher Education degree programme, the findings indicate they remain typically negative throughout the programme, and this is illustrated in the student groupwork adaptation process I have proposed. Negative feelings towards the assessment of groupwork are caused by the assessment mechanism's inability to allow the lecturer to differentiate between contributions from different members within the group and also by the lack of consistency in how these group work assessment mechanisms have been applied across modules. These findings contrast some of those found in previous similar studies focused on international students. For instance, McLeay and Wesson's (2013) study found that although Chinese students had a similar lack of prior group work experience at the outset of the programme, they were typically more supportive of the group-based assessment mechanisms employed. The contrasting findings appear based on the contrasting beliefs of the students, on how problems are typically solved within their respective cultures. For instance, the Chinese students perceived a group mark from a lecturer replicates their collectivist culture, where problems are typically solved in teams so there is ease around the whole team being assessed equally on the group's outcomes. In contrast, these Romanian students are typically more familiar with working alone on projects and despite a similar lack of prior group work project experience, are frustrated by group-based assessment mechanisms that they see as lowering the weighting of individual elements to become unfavourably imbalanced against them.

5.8.1 Student perceptions of lower grades in group work

For these Romanian students there is a perception of themselves as potentially being disadvantaged by being in groups with other inexperienced students and their grades being lower than in their individual work, despite their own inexperience. This is to some extent an alignment with Moore and Hampton's (2015) study that found that home students perceived their marks for group work would typically be below what they might normally receive for individual work because of being in groups with students less experienced in group work than they were. However, where intra-group

conflict was driven by the more experienced home students feeling that international students with less group work experience would bring down their grades in that study, in the case of these Romanian students, there could be new knowledge here in the finding that the same feelings appeared to be generated by these inexperienced international students being in groups with other inexperienced international students. As with Peacock and Harrison's (2009) study of home and international students, it is the perception of inexperience which generates the concern around grades being potentially lower when working amongst those inexperienced in group work. As Kelly and Moogan (2012) suggest there remains a real risk of such behaviour being counter-productive, if particular students within the group end up feeling isolated and the speed of adaptation to group work is then negatively impacted as a result.

The potential reluctance amongst team members in working with those who contribute less indicates further alignment with Bligh's (1986) model of group development due to the retained perception that their grades will be lower if they work with other inexperienced students. The lack of prior group work experience does not alter their perception of the potential negative impact of others in the group. The frustrations of these Romanian students with group-based assessment mechanisms remain significant throughout the programme and they typically perceive the assessment mechanisms to be ineffective in fully tackling free-riding, a problem that they feel has not been routinely confronted. This reluctance within the group to confront or challenge those exhibiting free-rider behaviours also aligns with similar findings in Hall and Buzzwell's (2012) study, where the students' perceptions of the assessment mechanisms employed were jaded due to the vulnerability they believed the mechanisms had to free-riding behaviours.

5.8.2 The absence of peer assessment mechanisms

The integration of peer assessment mechanisms to potentially reduce the impact of free-riding behaviours within groups was not included in any group work projects across the programme and this caused significant frustration. This indicates some alignment with the findings of McLeay and Wesson (2013) in that these international students' perceptions of group project peer assessment were highly favourable

because of the desire to reduce the grades of those contributing less. However, as McLeay and Wesson (2013) advise, peer evaluation is clearly not a complete solution as the mechanism risks creating grading collusion which can occur where students attempt to ensure that all members of the group will receive the same mark within peer evaluation no matter what their contribution. There are examples where these Romanian students' tendencies towards this type of behaviour have already been identified, for example where they mentioned their allegiance to friends they had made within their group. They explained how they would overlook free-riding behaviours on previous modules and still re-join with these students for the sake of maintaining friendships. Such behaviour indicates that if peer assessment were to be introduced there is a risk of potential grade collusion leading to the peer evaluation not sufficiently the resolving their frustrations with group grades and lower levels of contribution. Within potential peer evaluation mechanisms there remains the question of how reliable the students' judgements would become of others in the group. However, without peer assessment there is a risk that group members focus more narrowly on the outcomes of the assessment and less on how to work effectively together. Indeed, Gweon et al (2017) found that requiring students to make judgements about each other has a strong potential for personal conflict to arise amongst group members and in the case of these Romanian students, the impact would most likely affect them at the experimentation stage of group work adaptation due to the stronger effects of what Bligh (1986) proposed as storming behaviours.

Where there is new knowledge and a contrasting picture emerging against the backdrop of prior literature is in how there is a strong prevalence amongst these Romanian students to democratically delegate each other tasks to work on separately, away from the team which are then only brought together for collaborative group submission at the very end of the time available, early on in the programme. This behaviour appears to have encouraged a greater sense of individual responsibility but equally created some fractures within group cohesion. This is because each individual focuses on completion of their own allocated specific part of the work rather than spending time developing the group work synergies that could be generated by greater time spent working together. However, as the programme progressed and teams developed, the findings suggest these Romanian students recognised that the amalgamation of potentially disjointed work prior to submission was not as effective

working more collaboratively and there is evidence they shifted behaviours towards greater collaboration group work projects later in the programme. This also indicates that there might be a greater potential for the effective use of peer evaluation in later stages of the programme where students have seen the outcomes of working collaboratively more visibly.

5.8.3 The absence of intercultural competencies assessment

In terms of how these students feel about what is assessed and how the assessment is carried out, the assessment of intercultural competence in the early stages of the programme is not currently included which aligns with Schartner and Young (2016) who suggest that, to their detriment there is an absence in UK degree programmes of mechanisms that include intercultural competence assessment. The findings in this study suggest introducing an assessment of intercultural competence in the early stages of the programme could be beneficial. This is because in the early stages of the programme students form new groups and I can see how there could be value in assessing how effectively they work amongst others in a multicultural group and might also fuel their motivation towards successful group work adaptation.

Where the findings contrast Schartner and Young (2016) is in the consistency of the approach towards assessing intercultural competencies. Where they advocate a consistent approach to this throughout the programme I would advocate it only in the early stages of the programme. This is due to understanding how the challenges of adaptation are most prominent early on in the programme and the most use would be gained in assessing intercultural competencies during these early stages. However, where these students' focus has been seen to move from social concerns around working in a group towards more of a learning focus and the typical challenges of producing work for the module assessment outcomes, I feel the added the expectation of intercultural competency assessment later on in the programme might end up counterproductive. This is because later in the programme where students would typically be re-joining existing groups and developing synergies within well-established teams, the continued assessment of their intercultural competency might be a distraction to their focus on the learning outcomes of the module which in later stages of the programme will become of more importance to them. Adding the expectation of

the continued assessment of intercultural competence, once students move past the periods of experimentation and on to more proficient teamworking, could be counterproductive, so only assessing these competencies in the early part of the programme and essentially in the early stages of their group work adaptation might be the most effective way for it to be included.

5.9 Conclusions

By conducting this study on the assessed group work experiences of Romanian students on a UK undergraduate programme I sought to understand the impact of their prior experiences from Romania, their experiences during the programme and how they feel about the ways they have been assessed. The contribution this has made to new knowledge in the subject is through its revealing of a process of student group work adaptation that has not been documented in such a way within literature before. Although there is a solid foundation of literature based on models and theories of team formation such as the Tavistock Model (Bion 1969 in Jacques, 2007), the group development model (Tuckman 1965 and Bligh 1986) and team roles (Belbin, 1981), the proposed student groupwork adaptation model attempts to illustrate how the experiences of these international students, with little prior experience of groupwork, adapt in a process of stages that includes an acknowledgement of how they may need to form new groups at certain points during the process and enter a disband/re-join loop as they progress towards the refinement of more proficient teamworking abilities.

5.9.1 Prior experience of groupwork

In the initial stages of the process, these Romanian students' experiences have been significantly impacted by their absence of prior experience with regard to assessed group work when starting the programme and the supplementary survey carried out as part of the study suggests this is typical for the Romanian students in the study. Their lack of prior experience aligns with prior literature highlighting how in Romanian secondary education there is a much greater focus on theory and broad background knowledge acquired through individual memorisation techniques than on development through group work activity. This also aligns with the findings in Cena, Burns and

Wilson (2021) in terms of the view that a lack of prior experience of such learning activities in their home educational system, drives these students to adapt. This study has highlighted how for Romanian students that process of adaptation, in their efforts to work effectively in groups on assessed group work projects, has been harnessed.

5.9.2 Group formation autonomy

This process of adaptation is positively impacted by them being able to choose who to be in a group with and then later being able to re-join previously established teams with the same or similar membership across most of the modules. Being able to choose who to be in groups with facilitates choices of re-joining with those from similar cultural backgrounds each time, thus reducing some of the significant challenges of new group formation highlighted in models such as the Tavistock (Bion 1969 in Jacques, 2007) and group development (Tuckman, 1965 and Bligh, 1986). This reduction of repeated challenges is facilitated by the lecturers' decisions over whether to grant student autonomy in group formation or not across each module on the programme. These Romanian students have purposely sought to avoid being in multicultural groups and the findings suggest they have done this because of fears over how much the assessment will reflect their efforts to overcome the challenges of working with students from contrasting cultures. Being able to re-join peers from similar backgrounds within previously established teams enables these students to adapt quickly to being in group work scenarios again, in essence skipping the early stages of group formation and creating conditions conducive to effective teamwork.

5.9.3 Supportive modules for initial group work experience

The most significant challenges these students face during the adaptation process occurred early on in the programme, where quick adaptation has been required of them, were overcome in part by the learning gained on accompanying modules supporting the development of the knowledge, skills and abilities the students need in order to adapt to working in groups. These supportive modules, focusing on how to work as a team are influential in respect of them understanding how best to work in group work projects so that when faced with the challenges of being in groups with

new members, they have been able to adapt effectively to this within appropriate timescales. Initially these students found themselves in groups where they have simply gathered together to work in collaboration through individual and group contributions. However, as they individually developed ways to work together more effectively, a team mindset and effective teamworking behaviours have emerged at the teamwork proficiency stage of the proposed student groupwork adaptation process, harnessed by their shared focus to achieve a common goal of assessment outcome. The findings revealed how the group work experiences of international students can be impacted upon by the perceptions and behaviour of others in the group, and their expectations around group grades being of concern.

5.9.4 Development of teamworking and team values

The Romanian students in this study identified how behaviour, within newly formed groups and well-established teams during the adaptation process, has been conducive to effective teamwork later in the programme. This has mainly been due to most of the team members within their groups also initially having little or no experience of group work and their development experiences being shared within the group. The initial shared inexperience of groupwork amongst these Romanian students has supported the development of adaptation behaviours within groups, in contrast to how groups might typically tolerate such behaviours where students with prior experience are mixed in and have to support others less experienced. Where student autonomy for group formation is not granted by the lecturer these students typically faced increased challenges due to repeating the initial stages of new group formation. Threats, to the teams these students have been in, have typically come from situations where lecturers have attempted to reduce student autonomy and enforce lecturer-led group formation. These students have seen these situations as a threat to the teams' survival and have led to behaviour amongst the group that included begging lecturers to allow them to be able to choose who to be in teams with, so they can continue to work in their previously established groups. However, despite a reluctance to initially work in groups, where these students have found themselves in new groups later in the programme they have adapted to the challenges faced and a change in mindset has occurred. The findings indicate that upon reflection these students have subsequently felt more positive about the benefits to their development of having adapted

successfully to these challenges and towards the approaches their have lecturers used to support them. In previous research Baker and Clark (2010) had argued that lecturers may underestimate the challenges international students face when attempting to adapt however, the findings in this study suggest the approaches lecturers are typically employing support these students effectively.

5.9.5 Assessment mechanism conclusions

There is evidence to suggest these students have experienced a variety of mechanisms for assessment of their group work, and their holding of these negative feelings throughout the programme appear to be driven by the inconsistency of application across the modules on the programme (see Table 3). Despite the lecturers' decisions over which mechanisms to employ being potentially justifiable in each case, without lecturers explaining the rationale for their decisions, these learners have remained unclear throughout the programme as to why the variations occur between modules. Missed opportunities for these mechanisms to include peer assessment which could, if supported adequately, mitigate the effects of some team members contributing less than others, has left these students typically frustrated. In terms of group grades, these students indicate a desire to be able to reduce the grades of those contributing less using peer evaluation so that impact of free-riding behaviours within the group have less impact upon overall group grades. However, despite these reservations amongst the students, there is a general acceptance that the use of assessment for group work is an acceptable feature of the programme. With a detailed discussion of the findings concluded along with consideration of how the overall quality of the study has been assured to reach conclusions, I will now move on to propose the potential implications of this study for practical application, dissemination and my professional development.

5.10 Limitations

There were a number of limitations that impacted upon the study. The study took place during the Covid-19 pandemic which placed limitations upon the size of the sample for the qualitative interviews, because of the low response rate to each of the requests for participants that went out from the Registry team to the students. Some students who

began to engage in email responses to me about participating lost their willingness to participate as they said mentioned they had so much else going on due to the pandemic lockdown impact. Household lock-downs made it more difficult to organise available times with participants because they were unable to attend campus and therefore the convenience of timings was reduced. Participants were at home and needed good broadband connection and a quiet environment to participate in the interviews and for some they had families and other commitments that were impacting upon their availability. In order to arrange the interviews there were often multiple emails back and forth to the students which in a few cases ended up without a convenient date or time. The impact of this also posed challenges for me, as a researcher, as the pressures of lockdown meant I had to spend more time at home where my family were around me and coordinating available time to conduct the interviews was more difficult as a result. The time it took to conduct all the interviews was longer than I had planned as a result.

The study is also limited in terms of its lack of attention on wider intercultural experiences within student groups. The data uncovered how these Romanian students were typically in groups with other Romanian students, thus reducing the numbers of students from contrasting cultural backgrounds they were required to work with. The findings reveal how few intercultural experiences these particular students had, and this might not be typical of other HE institutions where a greater diversity might be found within the groups international students are in.

6 Implications and Recommendations

The wider implications of this study for practical application are grounded on the findings in chapter four and the discussion of applicable theory and previous research covered in chapter five. When considering the needs of students involved in assessed group work, institutions should be aware that there is a strong likelihood these students may have little or no prior experience of working in groups nor of being assessed in this way. As a result, they should prioritise consideration of how to support such students to adapt quickly and effectively to working in groups. This should include preparation for students before they commence the programme and lecturers providing support for students during their initial group work experiences by ideally, providing a high level of support to them during periods of experimentation within the newly formed groups. This can include lecturers encouraging the creation of team charters, allowing students to re-join previously established groups and by ensuring study skills tutors offer group work support outside of class. There are also implications for institutions in their design of group work assessment mechanisms and the potential for an integration of intercultural competencies assessment into modules with assessed group work early on in the programme. The full implications of this for institutions and lecturers are explained within this chapter.

6.1 Preparing students for group work

One of the key implications emerging from the study is that institutions should ensure, in advance of the programme, that students know they will be exposed to group work projects, and that this could occur as early as their first semester of study. Students joining the institutions' programmes may not appreciate the expectations of the group work involved and even for those that do, some may not know the extent to which they will need to be involved. Programme outlines on institution websites should give detailed module descriptions that include information on the expectations of working in groups and admissions teams can raise the awareness of these amongst applicants in advance. This is likely to have a positive impact on the mindset of students starting the programme towards their first group work experiences and provide them with a clearer understanding that some of their grades will be dependent upon how they work

with others. Institutions should ensure that students know before the programme starts that at least some of the group work will be assessed in a way that reflects contributions of the whole group, not just their individual contributions. This will help to minimise the initial concerns students inexperienced in group work are likely to have about the implications of working in a group where the assessment includes a reliance on others for contribution. Group work experiences can start very early on in a programme of study and where they do, promoting a full understanding and the need for full engagement in these activities from the start, should aid the adaptation of students inexperienced in group work.

Institutions ensuring there are modules on their programmes in the first semester that prepare students for group work and the expectations of working with others can provide useful, early support in how to effectively work in groups and what the benefits are of them doing so are. Such modules can help lecturers to ensure students have introductory information on what will be required, enable students to begin to experiment working in groups preferably without the burden of assessment on them, before other subsequent modules require them to apply what they have learnt. Lecturers spending time in this way explaining why there will be an emphasis placed on the practical application of knowledge and doing this in groups, rather than in ways the students might be more familiar with, such as through individual memorisation techniques, is likely to support the students' development. Helping them to fully understand how they will gain knowledge in a variety of ways that exams, with which they might typically be more familiar, cannot reliably assess, the outcome is likely to include a greater 'buy in' from students if they are inexperienced with group work. This can also prepare students, particularly those with little or no experience of group work at the outset of the programme, for working in groups with peers from different cultures and provide opportunities for lecturers to outline the likely experiences students will have during adaptation. Group-based ice-breaker activities across modules in the early stages of the first modules on the programme should also be used as a way to increase the level of interaction between students, especially those from contrasting backgrounds. The overall aim of this being to help them to quickly adapt to the challenges of forming new groups in an unfamiliar environment with students they might not typically be used to spending time with. By lecturers remaining sensitive to the needs of their students in the potentially uncomfortable early stages of group

formation, students are more likely to overcome their inexperience by the time they face modules where group work is used as an assessment method.

6.2 Lecturers support during initial modules with assessed group work

There are implications for lecturers that teach on the first modules within a programme of study where assessed group work is used as an assessment method. Activities that encourage all students engaging in assessed group work to interact with the lecturer and other students in their group could aid the adaptation of those that are inexperienced. This should also extend to the encouragement of all students in each group to play a supportive role for each other, no matter what their level of experience in group work. New ways of learning could be significantly impacted upon by the perceptions and behaviour of others in the group, and also by lecturers encouraging all students to accept their differing levels of experience. Cultivating behaviours amongst the group towards adaptation early on in the programme could potentially support effective teamworking practices to emerge more rapidly. Although lecturers may not naturally choose to encourage the appointment of group leaders, providing students with a chance to lead the group and for those inexperienced in group work to potentially benefit from having someone within the group lead them, is likely to be beneficial. Students that are unfamiliar with working in a group are likely to feel a heightened sense of security from this and it can help to avoid confusion amongst group members about who is in charge when there are strong differences of opinion during decision-making. Lecturers who encourage leaders to be appointed within groups and guide students with prior experience of group work to undertake this responsibility early on in the programme, can provide opportunities for those inexperienced in group work to see how appointing a group leader can potentially benefit group development in a variety of ways.

6.3 Providing support during periods of experimentation

An implication for lecturers delivering modules with assessed group work is that they should support students at the experimentation stage of the student group work

adaptation process where 'norming' (Tuckman, 1965) takes place in their group development.

6.3.1 Lecturers encouraging the creation of team charters

Support can be generated by lecturers through encouraging groups to create a team charter, rather than allowing rules to naturally emerge later in the re-joined groups. Although students may eventually decide, through their own experiences of group development to create a charter later in the programme, lecturers should actively encourage their creation during the experimentation stage of group development. Where the attention of students in groups turns towards concerns that are mutually accepted as norms (Tuckman, 1965) and inter-relationships begin to emerge, support from the lecturer at this critical stage to improve team working through team charters is likely to be of significant value.

6.3.2 Lecturers allowing students to re-join previously established groups

One of the most significant ways lecturers can support the adaptation of students to working effectively in groups is by supporting their desire to re-join previously established teams. Hostility that can be experienced at the storming stage of group development could potentially be avoided by students being able to re-join teams that have been established in previous modules. This is likely to increase the development of useful listening skills amongst group members and open-mindedness to the views of others. Students that re-join established teams in the disband/re-join loop of the student group work adaptation process could harness a deeper consideration of viewpoints in decision-making which can support the achievement of shared goals. Avoiding the task conflicts associated with the forming and storming stages, through an improved capability to listen to each other and more effective consultation processes, can support students to work in highly developed and efficient ways rather than repeatedly face the challenges of new group formation each time they start a new module. New group formation is likely to distract them from the outcomes of assessment so where hostility can be avoided, students can remain focused on the subject studied and less on the group formation itself. By lecturers encouraging students to re-join previously established teams there could also be greater

consideration of the roles each team member might play in each group work scenario. Introducing students to Belbin's model (1981) of group roles in the initial modules of the programme can help students inform those discussions in class and then within groups as an aid to their recognition of role contribution.

6.3.3 Study skills tutors providing support outside of class

Study skills tutors, provided by the institution as a centralised provision external to the core lecturers delivering the modules, can play a part in supporting the adaptation of students with less experience of group work. Their support can include helping students to understand how best to work in teams and support their further adaptation to group work in the later stages of the student group work adaptation process. Offering one to one support in this way can help students face the challenges of adaptation and can provide support in a more targeted way, developing key skills that will underpin their development within the teams they find themselves in. Such support can also include guidance towards library resources on how best to work in teams which can provide additional support as these students face the challenges of adaptation.

6.4 Group work assessment implications

There are implications for institutions in terms of the design of programmes that include assessed group work on selected modules, which involves them carefully considering the mechanisms to be used in the assessment of students and how these mechanisms are operated.

6.4.1 Group work assessment mechanisms

Reducing the variations in group work assessment mechanisms across a programme of study could have the potential to improve the perceptions of students towards group work. Using assessment mechanisms that ideally comprise of a group submission with an equally weighted individual submission (based on the activities of the group) and

an integration of anonymous peer evaluation within the group submission, could help tackle the challenges of free-riders. The potential anonymity of peer evaluation could increase the likelihood of students feeling more comfortable grading each other however, it should be acknowledged that it may still cause some challenges for students in terms of the risks of grade collusion. When integrating peer evaluation, lecturers should consider how some of the recent developments in technology and gamification of group work, such as the use of 'wikis' (Caple & Bogle, 2013) might help encourage individual members to contribute. Such innovation might typically require students to document their individual input and its outcomes which could then be reviewed by their teammates and the lecturer upon submission. Alternatively, in a more technologically advanced environment, a collaborative learning platform could be operationalised which would allow students to make contributions collaboratively where they can all see the work being produced developing in real time. Integrating a chat forum into this platform might also overcome some of the challenges students might find getting everyone in the group to attend team meetings because of the personal commitments each may have. Ultimately, there is no perfect assessment mechanism for all group work contexts but applying a consistent assessment mechanism across group work assessed modules, within a programme of study, should lead to a more consistent experience for the student and thus reduce anxieties around how they will be assessed.

6.4.2 Assessment of intercultural competencies

As a final implication for institutions designing modules with assessed group work, an assessment of intercultural competence, in the early stages of the programme, could be beneficial in supporting students to adapt where they are amongst students from other cultures. Connecting a non-credit bearing assessment to the potentially multicultural nature of groups that students can find themselves in could help to acknowledge the student's development of intercultural abilities, without compromising their attention to the assessment of module learning outcomes. This could be achieved by integrating an assessment of their intercultural ability within the first initial group work projects they undertake. I advocate keeping assessment of intercultural competencies to the early stages of the programme in order to allow

module assessment throughout the programme to focus on the output of work produced by the team, rather than on how it was produced, having discussed how important I feel it is for these students to be able to re-join existing groups in later modules. This acknowledges that the experience of studying in a multicultural environment is not necessarily enough to expect an automatic increase in the level of intercultural competence. It also considers that they typically adapt to working in multicultural groups quickly where there is not extensive diversity, so assessment of these competencies would be more beneficial in the early stages of the programme. Institutions that design their modules to include such assessments within a context that includes international students are likely to increase the opportunity for teamwork to reflect the demonstration of knowledge, skills, and abilities in specific subjects. It would help students to benefit from the assessment of intercultural competencies without it being at the expense of the module assessment, and ensures the overall assessment of international students is not too heavily impacted by the challenges of forming new multicultural teams.

6.4 Professional implications of this study

For me professionally, there are some significant implications that can be drawn from the study. My professional development has been positively impacted by gaining a deeper understanding of the experience of the international students I am responsible for within my role in the workplace which is a very rewarding outcome of the study. Having conducted this research at my own workplace and my current role requiring me to manage a faculty of academics delivering Business degrees to large numbers of students from a wide range of international backgrounds, there are implications for the decisions I can make with regard to assessed group work within the portfolio of undergraduate programmes the institution offers going forwards. Having gained expertise in the field of international students and group work, I am now reviewing and implementing strategies across multiple undergraduate programmes of study that will better support the management of group work. Working with the institutions' franchising university partners at my workplace to introduce elements of peer evaluation to all assessed group work scenarios is a key development initiative I have become keen to deliver on, given the findings of the study.

6.5 Directions for future research

Conducting future research could provide opportunities to understand more about international students and their experiences of assessed group work. Research involving a greater number of participants in a larger sample of international students from a range of cultural backgrounds could extend our understanding of assessed group work experiences. Future research that takes place within institutions where there are significant numbers of students from more diverse cultures would enable a focus towards understanding more about the development of the students' intercultural competencies and their experiences of working in multicultural groups that have more significant diversity.

This study took place during the pandemic Covid-19 lockdown implications which meant these participants had predominantly had on-campus opportunities for assessed group work up until the point at which they participated in the study. This meant their reflection within the interviews was mainly focused on their on-campus group work experiences pre-pandemic rather than their online group work experiences. Future research could focus on how the experiences of students involved in purely online group work might differ from those who have experienced a mix of online group work and post-pandemic on-campus group work experiences too.

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8. Appendices

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8.1 Appendix 1 – Invitation email to participate in interview

Dear Student

I would like to invite you to participate in an interesting doctoral research project on the experiences of students from Eastern Europe in assessed group work activities.

I am recruiting participants who are from Eastern Europe studying on the **BSc Business Management programme** and are in **Year 3 (level 6)**.

The aim of this research is to gain more understanding of the experiences of students from Eastern Europe when they undertake assessed group work, what challenges, if any, they face when undertaking assessed group work and how they feel about the ways they are assessed for group work. The possible benefits of this research will include teachers and support staff being more aware of how such students can be supported in group work activities and them being better able to consider the impact of the particular assessment mechanisms being employed.

Participants will take part in an interview (of up to 45 minutes in duration) which will either be in the format of a recorded video call or a recorded audio call using the MS Teams call app, with questions asking them about their experiences of assessed group work project activities prior to studying in the UK and then since joining the programme. Please take time to read the attached Participation Information Sheet carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Don't hesitate to ask any questions if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. You should only participate if you want to. Choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time. In addition to withdrawing yourself from the study, you may also later withdraw any data/information you have already provided.

If you <u>do</u> wish to participate, please ensure you have read the attached Participant Information Sheet and respond to me using the following email address with your expression of interest:

Email: john.howell.18@ucl.ac.uk

by **Monday 2nd July**

I will then reply to your expression of interest with either a consent form if you have been selected for the study or a reply to confirm your participation will not be required.

Your participation will only then be confirmed once a reply of consent from you is received.

Many thanks,

8.2 Appendix 2 – Participant Consent Form for Interview

UCL RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of research:

The experiences of students from Eastern Europe on UK Higher Education degree programmes undertaking assessed group work.

If you are happy to participate in this study, please respond to the invitation email from **John Howell** with this completed form indicating your answers to the following consent questions:

1) I have read and understood the participation information sheet about the research.
    Please circle: **Yes** or **No**

2) I agree to participate in an interview which will be recorded.
    Please circle: **Yes** or **No**

3) I agree for the format of the interview and recording to be:
    a) a **video** call interview which will be recorded as a video.
    Please circle: **Yes** or **No**

    if you answered **no** to **3a**, please confirm if the following is acceptable instead:
    b) an **audio** call interview which will be recorded as audio only.
    Please circle: **Yes** or **No** (only answer this if 3a is a no)

4)   I understand that if any of my words are used in reports or presentations, they will not be attributed to me and my identity will remain unknown to the reader.
    Please circle: **Yes** or **No**

5) I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time and that if I choose to do this, any data I have contributed will not be used.

Please circle: **Yes** or **No**

6) I understand that I can contact John Howell at any time and request any further information about my involvement in the study.

Please circle: **Yes** or **No**

Signed _____

Date _____

John Howell
UCL Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way London WC1H 0AL
John.howell.18@ucl.ac.uk

8.3 Appendix 3 – Participants information sheet for supplementary Survey

Information sheet for Participants

The experiences of students from Romania on UK Higher Education degree programmes undertaking assessed group work

Introduction to the researcher and the project

My name is John Howell, I am a doctoral student at UCL Institute of Education and currently one of the staff at QA Higher Education. I am inviting you to take part in my research project about the experiences of students from Romania undertaking assessed group work. I have carried out previous research in this field and would like to understand more about the experiences of students from Romania studying on a degree programme in the UK.

I am looking for participants to take part in a short survey (takes about 3 minutes) who are students from Romania in Year 3 (level 6) of their undergraduate business degree programme. I very much hope that you would like to take part, although participation is completely voluntary. This information sheet will try and answer any questions you might have about the project, but please don't hesitate to contact me for more information.

Who is carrying out the research and what is it about?

I will be carrying out the research myself as the sole researcher on this project and my interest in this particular subject comes from working in a higher education institution where students from Romania make up a significantly large part of the student cohort and are expected to work on assessed group project activities which may be an unfamiliar experience for them. I hope to be able to identify ways in which higher education providers might improve their support of such students and consider the impact of the assessment mechanisms they choose to employ.

Will anyone know I have been involved and could there be problems for me if I take part?

I will ensure that no one will be able to identify you from what is written in the final report. Records of your name and questionnaire answers will be kept in safe data storage (see below for confidentiality). You have full control over whether you take part or not, whether you answer all the questions in the questionnaire or not and if a sensitive issue becomes apparent or you feel in any way uncomfortable you are entitled to withdraw your participation in the study at any time.

Protection Privacy Notice

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice. For participants in research studies, click [here.](here) The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices. The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data is: 'Public task' for personal data. Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible. If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

Contact for further information

If you have any further questions before you decide whether to take part, you can contact me:

Email: john.howell.18@ucl.ac.uk

8.4 Appendix 4 – Pilot version of Interview Questions / Schedule (11th May 2020)

1. Could you start by telling me which country/countries you grew up in or have studied in prior to joining the course?

2. Tell me about your experiences of group work prior to studying on your current degree programme in the UK.

- o Prompt: were these group work activities assessed?

3. Your current programme requires you to do assessed group work, can you tell me about your first experience of this on the programme you are on?

- o Prompt: how were the groups formed?
- o Prompt: how did you feel about working with other students in a group?
- o Prompt: what kind of challenges, if any, did you experience with the assessed group work and how did you respond to those?
- o Prompt: (if they had experience of group work prior to this) what did you notice as the main differences between this and your prior experience?

4. Since that first experience of assessed group work on the programme, could you tell me about any other assessed group work activities that have you been involved in?

- o Prompt: how were the groups formed?
- o Prompt: what was it like working with other students in a group?
- o Prompt: what kind of challenges, if any, did you experience with the assessed group work and how did you respond to those?

5. During your experiences of assessed group work, can you explain how you were assessed?

- o Prompt: did you all get the same grade?
- o Prompt: was there any peer grading?

6. What was it like being assessed in these ways for your assessed group work?

   o Prompt: are there any changes might you suggest?

7. To what extent do you feel assessed group work has been of benefit to you?

8. If you were able to talk to your younger self, what would you tell yourself before starting assessed group work?

9. Is there anything else you would like to say?

8.5 Appendix 5 - Schedule of questions for interviews

Questions

Prior *education before UK degree programme*

1. Could you start by telling me which country/countries you grew up in or have studied in prior to joining the course?

2. If needed …. Tell me about your experiences of group work prior to studying on your current degree programme in the UK.
    o   Prompt: were these group work activities assessed?
    o   Prompt: impact of teacher on activity and group

3. If needed …. during any of those experiences of assessed group work before arriving in the UK, can you explain how you were assessed?
    o   Prompt: did you all get the same grade?
    o   Prompt: was there any peer grading?
    o   Prompt: what feedback did receive?

4. If needed … What was it like being assessed in these ways for your assessed group work?

*During current UK degree programme – **first experiences***

5. Your current programme requires you to do assessed group work, can you tell me about your **first** experience of this on the programme you are on?
    o   Prompt: how were the groups formed?
    o   Prompt: do you remember the details of the task, deadlines, activities required?
    o   Prompt: what was the impact of the lecturer on the group and the activity (supplementary question?)
    o   Prompt: how did you feel about working with other students in a group?
    o   Can you remember if there were home students in your group?
    o   Did you notice any cultural differences amongst the group?

- o Prompt: what kind of challenges, if any, did you experience with the assessed group work and how did you respond to those?
- o If needed .... What did you notice as the main differences between your prior experience before starting the programme and this experience?

6. In this **first** experience of assessed group work, can you explain how you were assessed?
   - o Prompt: did you all get the same grade?
   - o Prompt: was there any peer grading?
   - o Prompt: what feedback did receive?

*During current UK degree programme – **subsequent experiences***

7. Since that first experience of assessed group work on the programme, could you tell me about any **subsequent** assessed group work activities that have you been involved in since then?
   a. Prompt: how were the groups formed?
   b. Prompt: do you remember the details of the task, deadlines, activities required?
   c. Prompt: what was the impact of the lecturer on the group and the activity (supplementary question?)
   d. Prompt: How did you feel about working with other students in a group?
   e. Prompt: can you remember if there were home students in your group?
   f. Prompt: did you notice any cultural differences amongst the group?
   g. Prompt: what kind of challenges, if any, did you experience with the assessed group work and how did you respond to those?
   h. Prompt: what do you feel you learnt from the experience of working in a group?
   i. If needed .... What did you notice as the main differences between your prior experience before starting the programme and this experience?

8. During your **subsequent** experiences of assessed group work, can you explain how you were assessed and how you felt about being assessed in that way?

   o Prompt: did you all get the same grade in the group?

   o Prompt: was there any peer grading in the assessment?

   o Prompt: what feedback did you and the group receive?

Overall reflection

9. What would you say has been the best thing and worst thing about working in a group on assessed group work?

10. On reflection, do you support the use of assessed group work on university courses?

11. If you were able to talk to your younger self, what would you tell yourself before starting assessed group work?

12. Is there anything else you would like to say?

8.6 Appendix 6 – Supplementary survey questionnaire schedule of questions

Questions in Questionnaire using Qualtrics

Your name: _____

Question 1:

Do you consent to participation in this study about '*the experiences of students from Romania on UK Higher Education degree programmes undertaking assessed group work'* and can confirm the following:

a) I have read and understood the participation information sheet about the research.

b) I agree to participate in a survey by completing this questionnaire.

c) I understand that any questionnaire responses I give that are used in reports or presentations will not be attributed to me and my identity will remain unknown to the reader.

d) I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time and that if I choose to do this, any data I have contributed will not be used.

e) I understand that I can contact John Howell (UCL Institute of Education 20 Bedford Way, London, WC1H 0AL, John.howell.18@ucl.ac.uk) at any time and request any further information about my involvement in the study.

Yes or No? (if no is ticked, the respondent is <u>exited</u> from the questionnaire)

2. Are you in the final year of your undergraduate Business degree programme?

Yes or No? (if no is ticked, the respondent is <u>exited</u> from the questionnaire)

3. Were you educated (e.g. school, college, university) only in Romania prior to joining the UK degree programme you are on now?

Yes or No? (if no is ticked, the respondent is <u>exited</u> from the questionnaire)

4. Did you have any experience of working in a team on a group work project during your education in Romania prior to starting this degree programme in the UK?

   Yes or No? (if no is ticked, the respondent is moved on to the next question)

   a. If yes, was the group work project assessed (e.g. given a mark)?

   Yes or No? (if no is ticked, the respondent is moved on to the next question)

   b. If yes, did the group get an overall mark (e.g. your mark was the same as everyone else in the group)?

   Yes or No? (if no is ticked, the respondent is moved on to the next question)

   c. If yes, did the group mark include a peer evaluation element (e.g. your group mark included an element where you were graded by your peers in the group)?

   Yes or No? (if no is ticked, the respondent is moved on to the next question)

5. Did you know when you started the degree programme in the UK that you would be required to be in a team to work on assessed group work projects?

   Yes or No? (if no is ticked, the respondent is moved on to the next question)

   a. If yes, did you know that your mark for assessed group work projects would be a group mark rather than an individual mark?

   Yes or No?

6. Now you are in the final year of your degree programme in the UK, on reflection, do you support the use of assessed group work on university courses?

   Yes or No? (if no is ticked, the respondent is exited from the questionnaire)

8.7 Appendix 7 – Alexandru interview section coded for assessment category

Grading category nodes identified within Alexandru's interview section:

Name	Nickname	Created
Feedback on grading provi		06/03/2022 16:39
Feedback on grading was		13/03/2022 10:38
Grade not what was expe		27/02/2022 16:33
Grades impacted by team		27/02/2022 15:17
Group work should not be		27/02/2022 17:17
Happy with number of gro		06/03/2022 17:26
No Peer Assessment		27/02/2022 15:58
Positive feelings towards		06/03/2022 17:14
Preconceived idea of grad		27/03/2022 15:51
Presentation graded sep		27/02/2022 15:57
Report part graded separa		13/03/2022 11:01

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Alexandru (Student)

At the end of the day it is the same every time. I made my own experience each year I had to work in the group project. Even if it was like an exercise or examined, it was the same problem.

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Alexandru (Student)

So I was not getting engaged at all or they choose to work individually. So in my opinion I don't know, I'm not questioning the academic way of doing things, but in my in my opinion online group works worse and assessment based on the group work is not a good idea when only online.

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Howell, John

So your experience is that it's got harder to work in a group when you've moved online and that has made the problem that already existed even worse.

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Alexandru (Student)

Yes, because we are participating online, so for example, I'm trying to do my best and engage with all my courses because I'm trying to follow a career after

I finish the university in management so my academic profile, if you look at it I consider that I have a good grades, not bad but good, which I think will help me in the future, so I did my best all the time to be engaged with the lecturer with the seminars. But on the other hand, other colleagues that might not be interested, they just log in and the online they come just for the attendance and that's it.

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Howell, John

Yeah. So in terms of how you were, you were assessed in each of the pieces of group work that you've done. Have you always received the same grade everyone in the group gets the same grade.

. .

Howell, John

So I'm interested in digging a little deeper into what you mentioned about the marks and your experiences of the assessment. So could you just tell me a little more what happened when you got the lower mark than other people in the group. Could you just tell me a little bit about that please?

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Alexandru (Student)

Yeah, so we had a module called entrepreneurial development and we had to create a new business idea and provide evidence of doing the research, so basically it was kind of the same structure but different business from what we've used in the past. This includes the Business model, the strategies and everything that's involved to develop a new business idea. I had the role of chief Financial Officer when other colleagues had the different roles, SEV Marketing Officer, Chief Operation Officer and we all had to contribute together to create this assignment. So basically, each one of us had to do his own research in on his part for his role and all of them had to share with me their findings for example, for each department so I can make the financial analysis. Basically, I had some issues with the Operations officer, he did some calculations, and it was very hard for me to guess what exactly he wanted to do and based on that was the mark I had. This meant that when we brought the work together at the end my work didn't match his work and so we did not get the mark we hoped for and I felt it was not fair on me.

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Howell, John

Yeah.

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Alexandru (Student)

One of the comments was that there was evidence we didn't collaborate enough so basically I wrote back to the module leader and explained that I'm not happy with this because it's unfair. It was a quite a massive project which involved a lot of calculations doing the cash flow, the breakeven point, the

margins Also we had the same situation in previous years where we were more engaged with the project, while the other ones they just sent me the information which I need, but like superficially and not getting involved and not developed enough which made it much harder to complete my assignment properly.

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Howell, John

OK, but you know you were talking about the so the first time you did it when you were graded, was it a surprise when you got a group mark or did you know you were going to get a group mark?

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Alexandru (Student)

Uh, so for that project, in the first year we had to have assessments where there was an individual written assessment and a presentation as a group so we had to present as a group. All of us, we had good grade as a presentation. So as far as I remember, we had the same grade because for the presentation we have and I remember I did better in the written assignment so the average was then overall average. The final grade was better.

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Howell, John

OK, so are you saying that in your first experience of group work, when you got that mark for the presentation, that was actually a higher mark than your individual?

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Alexandru (Student)

yes, yes

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Howell, John

Yeah. So in terms of how you were assessed in each of the pieces of group work that you've done. Have you always received the same grade everyone in the group gets the same grade.

. .

Alexandru (Student)

Yes, yes for the work, because, uh, for this year we had a presentation as well. We had to create the PowerPoint presentation which comprises the business

model and all elements and little bit of theories. The little bit of primary research using the online tools for questioning. The mark, let's say like that, it was like green was good to go, yellow satisfactory and red meant that we need to be reworked.

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Howell, John
And then in terms of how the grades were awarded, were they always awarded by the lecturer? Or did you get to do some peer grading where you give a mark for someone else's contribution to the group?

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Alexandru (Student)
No, we never had this this situation. So basically we just completed the assignments, uploaded it and received a grade.

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Howell, John
So in a way, it's just the work that you produce at the end that is graded but does the lecturer also comment about how you've collaborated as a group as well from sort of observations of you in class or anything like that?

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Alexandru (Student)
Uh, basically comments on what we have done, we put some evidence on the presentation that we have had the online meetings on WhatsApp, on the zoom, so we took some snapshots as evidence that we worked in the group and we had some meetings but the colleagues we had I felt they joined only for attendance with zero contribution and to be quite honest I felt we provided most of the work as a team work.

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Howell, John
Yeah.

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Alexandru (Student)
So, really all was decided on the individual assignment which I had the low mark on. This work was my own but was based on the group work project.

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Howell, John
Yeah.

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Alexandru (Student)

Surprisingly, the module leader gave me the feedback, the lecturer looked so impressed about my work before I submitted it but then this is not the same thing as when you get the grade because although she said she was impressed with it she actually gave me a lower mark than I was expecting. I don't even know who actually marked my work because I knew the work was going through different markers so I'm not sure if she gave me that herself. The mark was based on the feedback that I received but was not what I expected as she had said she was impressed by the work.

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Howell, John
OK. so you have expressed a little bit of concern about the group mark that you got. Could you tell me a bit about that then?

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Alexandru (Student)
Yeah. I was unhappy with the individual work because the lecturer gave us instruction about adding our individual part but said then that we were not collaborating with each other, I only needed to provide the cost structure for each department. I put the evidence of the business in the appendix with everything what was required and when I saw my comments on the module, there were some comments saying that there was not enough evidence of work group, so it's a bit confusing.

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Howell, John
So to clarify, you had to do a piece of group work and a piece of individual work and there were quite strict rules for both parts. As in, you are supposed to work as a group on particular bits, then work as an individual on your part, but the individual part relied on a part that was in the team or group as well.

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Alexandru (Student)
Yes, to be more precise the group part was to identify the business idea. Once we had the idea, we had to work as a team to create the business model. We had to create we design together, how the product will look, snapshots of our meetings were taken and we had to explain why our business idea can be considered as a lean start up entrepreneurial opportunity. We had to create the value proposition and the business model, we made some primary research using online tools to do some research and all of that to be supported by the references and data. So this is the part which was the group work and then the individual part, we had each one of us, we had a specific role, like for example there was a financial officer, a marketing officer, a Human resource officer, so each one of us we had to do the research in our field and know the cost for each department and have the cost structure. The financial officer had to create the financial analysis, calculating the break-even point, profit margins, the cash flow so all the financial statements that we were required to do. They

had to identify correctly the proper costs that are involved in their department and to be as much as real as possible so we can estimate what will be the cost to our business when started.

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Howell, John
Yeah.

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Alexandru (Student)

So as an example, in our group the operation role person didn't identify all costs for the raw materials that are involved, so he just put like a vague cost but didn't calculate each element. He assumed that he will produce a hundred each year when, for example, the financial officers salary is nearly one hundred a year. So with the production it would be impossible, you will go nowhere. So to start that business we had to make some assumptions to base on the operation costs, to raise the production at that level when the company produced the proper amount of money to be able to have the break-even point.

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Howell, John
Yeah. So in terms of your individual assignment was there an element of it that was dependent on the success of the group work? Or was it completely separate, had no connection?

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Alexandru (Student)
The individual work was dependent on that group business idea. So they had to do their research to find the approximate cost of their department. For example, the human resource department officer had to find out all salaries. How much is for every employee.

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Howell, John
Yeah.

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Alexandru (Student)
So, although we had the cost for the human resource department if you looked at the operational officer you would assume that you will produce a hundred a year or more even. So even if we produce that many a month, we will still not be able to cover the cost that involve for human resource not

mentioned. The marketing too, it was very, very expensive so maybe it was a mistake, I don't know. This meant that when we each produced our individual work the work didn't match up and so our grades were lower.

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Howell, John

Yeah.

8.8 Appendix 8 - List of themes and sub-themes from thematic analysis

1. Prior experience of assessed group work
2. Autonomy in group formation
   - Student-led group formation
   - Lecturer-led group formation
   - Student orientation towards group formation
3. Support from lecturers
4. Positive experiences in group work projects
   - *Leadership of a group not typically undertaken*
   - *Improvements in listening skills*
   - *Opportunities for shared decision-making*
5. Challenges faced
   - *Engagement and participation in learning*
   - *Language and translation issues*
   - *Inconsistent leadership*
6. Adaptation to group work
7. Assessment and feedback
   - *Group grade concerns*
   - *Lecturer feedback*
8. Continued use of assessed group work
9. Advice for students new to group work
   - *Group work concentration and focus*
   - *Development of listening and compromise skills*
   - *Development of a positive mind-set towards group work*

8.9 Appendix 9 – Initial conceptual Framework (Pre-Data Analysis)

Group Development

1. Experiences change dependng upon stage of development

2. Expectations of the group change over time

3. Group performance changes over time

Group Roles

1. Clarity of roles

2. Perceptions of group members about roles

3. Impact of changes to roles and changing expectations of individuals in roles

Group Dynamics

1. Challenges working in groups with more experienced students

2. Challenges with language and communication ability

3. Impact of negative perceptions of their abilities formed by others in group

Support from Teacher

1. Impact of the extent to which teacher intervenes in group

2. Impact of the quality of support provided

3. Perceptions of level of teacher support for those inexperienced in group work

Romanian Students' experiences of group work

Learning from others in the group

1. Opportunities to learn from more experienced group members

2. Gaining mutual trust and receiving support within a community of learners within group

Group Work as an Assessment Method

1. Student perceptions of fairness of group work assessment and impact of free-riding behaviour

2. Experience of Peer Review assessment strategies and in-group collusion

3. Perception of high achievers with regard to group versus individual marks

4. Marks in multicultural groups not reflectng full scope of endevours

Cultural Diversity in Group

1. Interaction between students with contrasting cultural backgrounds and impact of culture shock

2. Developing key interpersonal skills through collaboration with students with contrasting cultural background

3. Social isolation when working in groups and 'othering'

4. Misperception that students will get on if they are from neighbouring countries