



The Benefits of Social Work Student Participation in Group Work Practicum

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to evaluate first- and second-year social work students' experience as group participants. The University of the Free State requires third-year social work students to engage in group work practicum as part of their curriculum. In 2022, the students were returning to face-to-face classes and adaption challenges had been identified. Therefore, the first- and second-year social work students were included in groups to address these challenges. Methodology: Quantitative data were collected among all the group participants by means of a voluntary online self-administered questionnaire. 45 students participated in the study. The results indicated that 80% of the students were first-time group participants. The majority of students had a positive group experience, improved adaptability to their new tertiary environment, and expressed interest in future group participation, recognizing the benefits of group work. Students expect increased confidence as group facilitators in their third year. It can be concluded that it is beneficial for junior social work students to be participants in senior social work students' groups as they are equipped with life skills to adapt to their new environment, develop relationships with various year groups of student social workers and learn how to implement the group work theory into practice.

Introduction

The Department of Social Work, University of the Free State introduced its new B.SW. curriculum in 2022. Field instruction modules from the first year have been included in the curriculum so that students can be assisted in integrating theory into practice.

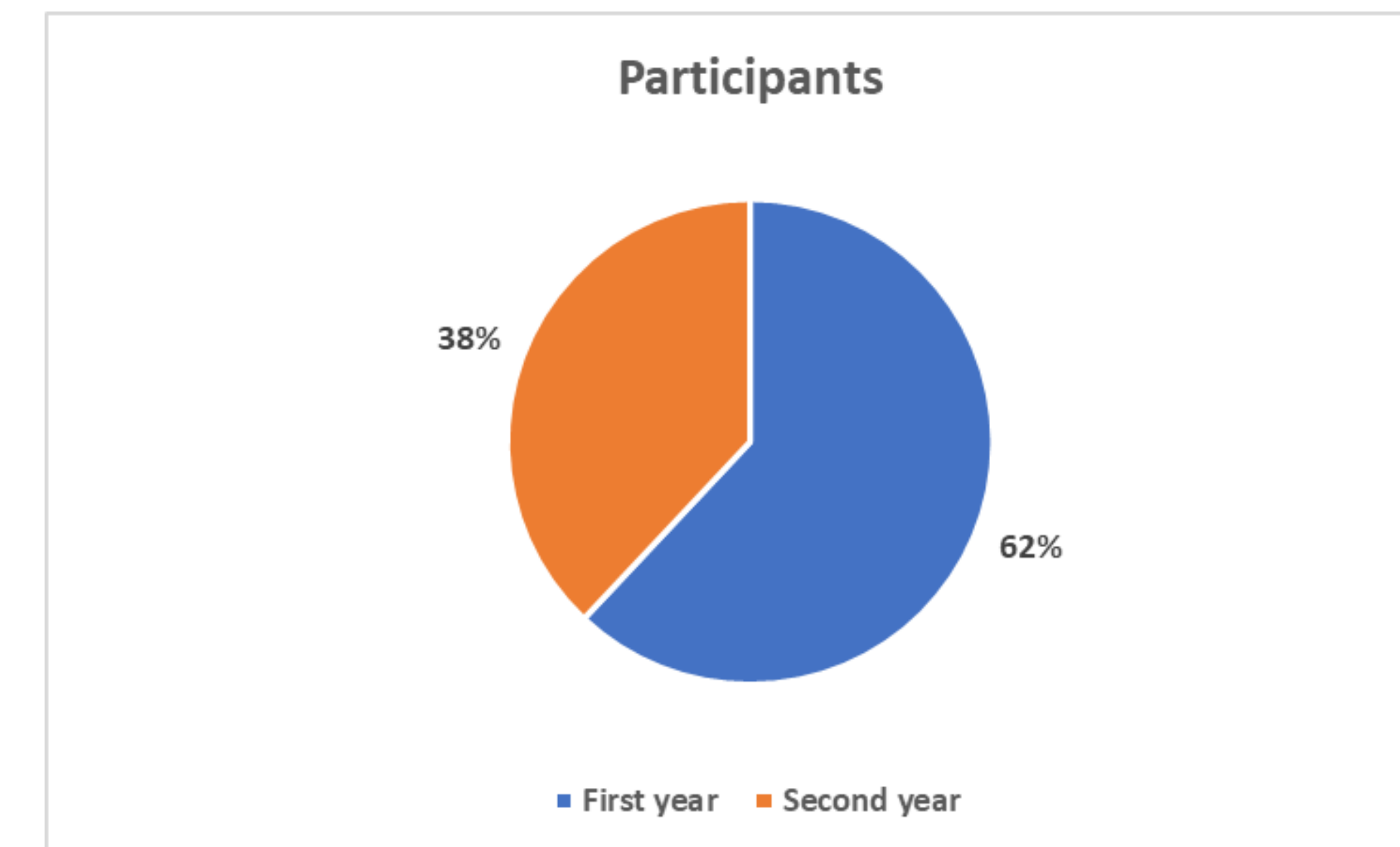
Third-year social work students after successfully completing their group work theory module, are required to conduct six group work sessions as part of their group work field instruction module.

In 2022, with the return to face-to-face classes, adaptation challenges were identified, particularly among first-year students transitioning from high school to tertiary education. It was decided that the first- and second-year social work students would be the group participants so that they could be assisted with these challenges. The first- and second-year students were divided into 15 groups. Each group had two third-year social work students as co-facilitators.

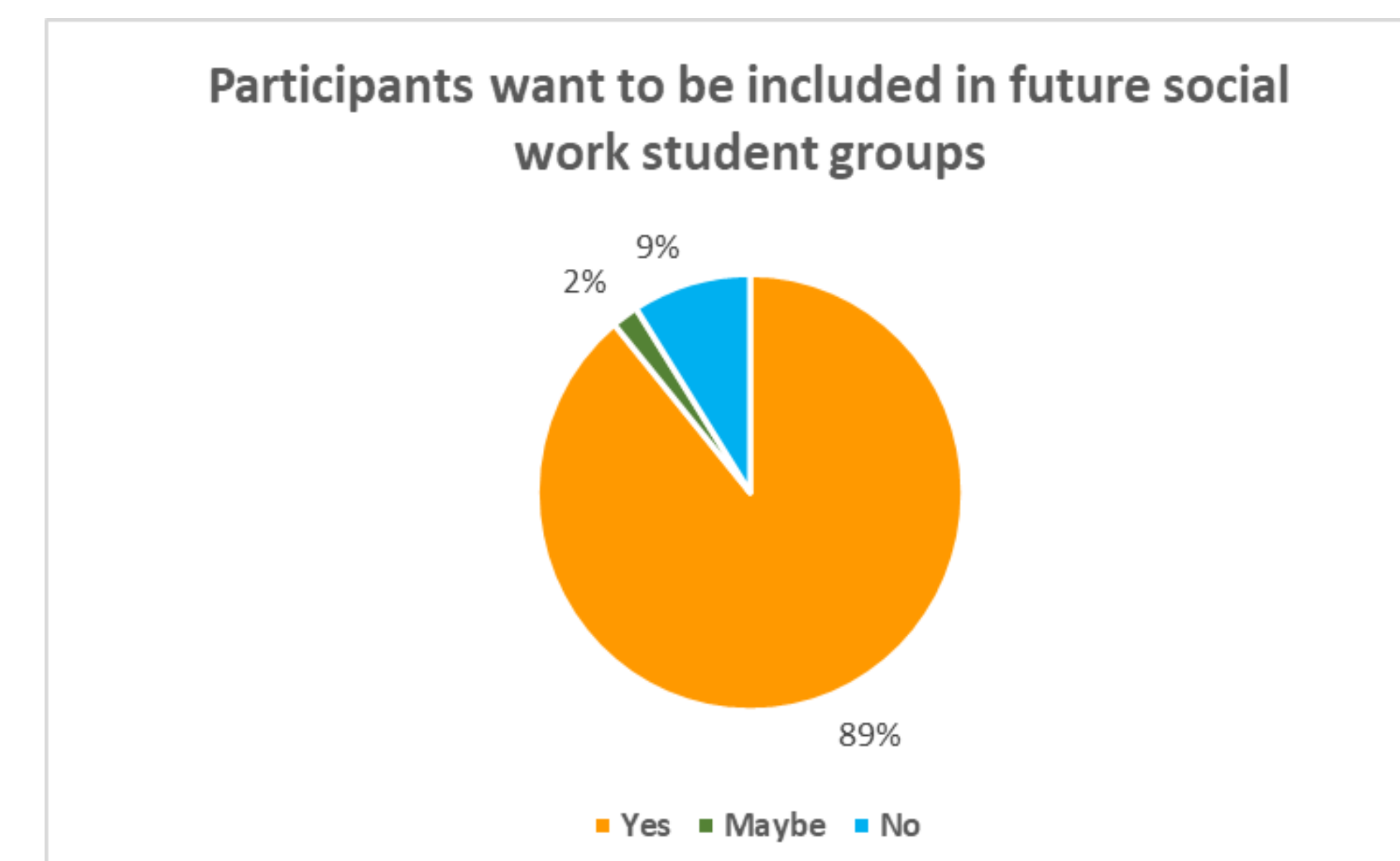
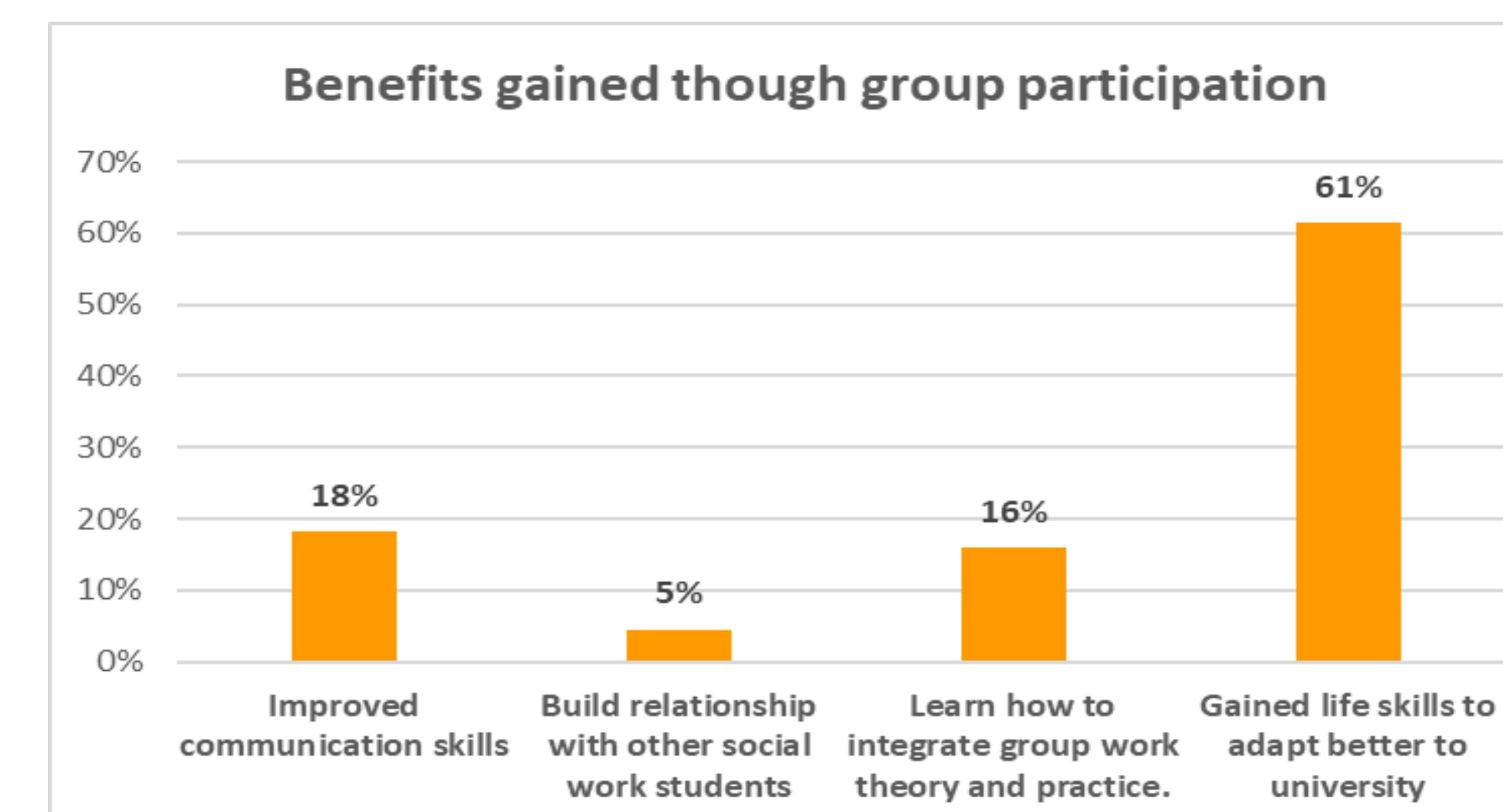
Methodology

A quantitative research method was used to evaluate first- and second-year social work students' experience of being participants in groups presented by third-year social work students in April and May 2022. The study employed a non-sampling methodology for data collection. All the group work participants (N=75) received self-administered questionnaires. This approach was chosen to maximize the data obtained, considering the typically low response rates associated with self-administered questionnaires. Self-administered surveys have the benefit of being simple and inexpensive (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 74). The participants received follow-up communication to increase the response rate. The quantitative data obtained from the online questionnaires were collected, assessed, and presented using Google Forms. Google Forms is a web-based application that allows for the development and completion of online questionnaires on various electronic devices. This platform made the process of gathering data easier, and the data could be transferred to a spreadsheet for additional analysis (Love, 2014). Graphs and discussions were utilized to present and interpret the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires by descriptive statistics, applying measures of central tendency and measures of dispersion.

Results



98% (N=44) of participants reported that they feel it is beneficial to attend social work student groups



Conclusion

The majority of students had a positive group experience, improved adaptability to their new tertiary environment, and expressed interest in future group participation, recognizing the benefits of group work.

Students expect increased confidence as group facilitators in their third year.

It can be concluded that it is beneficial for junior social work students to be participants in senior social work students' groups as they are equipped with life skills to adapt to their new environment, develop relationships with various year groups of student social workers and learn how to implement the group work theory into practice.

References

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