Evidence-informed social groupwork teaching for social work undergraduate students

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Introduction

Social work undergraduates at the National University of Singapore have to complete a groupwork course in fulfilment of their graduation requirements. Whilst Covid-19 pandemic has caused abrupt and unprecedented disruptions to educational institutions - from preschools to universities, it also offers possibilities and opportunities in innovating teaching and learning.

The poster will highlight (i) thoughtful groupwork teaching, (ii) use of varied assessment methods and (iii) different learning strategies utilised during and after Covid-19 in enhancing the development of students' competency in groupwork practice.

Groupwork Teaching - Learning Outcomes

(i) Learn about the stages of group work development, group processes and therapeutic factors in group work

(ii) Learn about the roles of the leader and co-leaders in facilitating groupwork

(iii) Have a better understanding of the contemporary group work approaches with different population groups

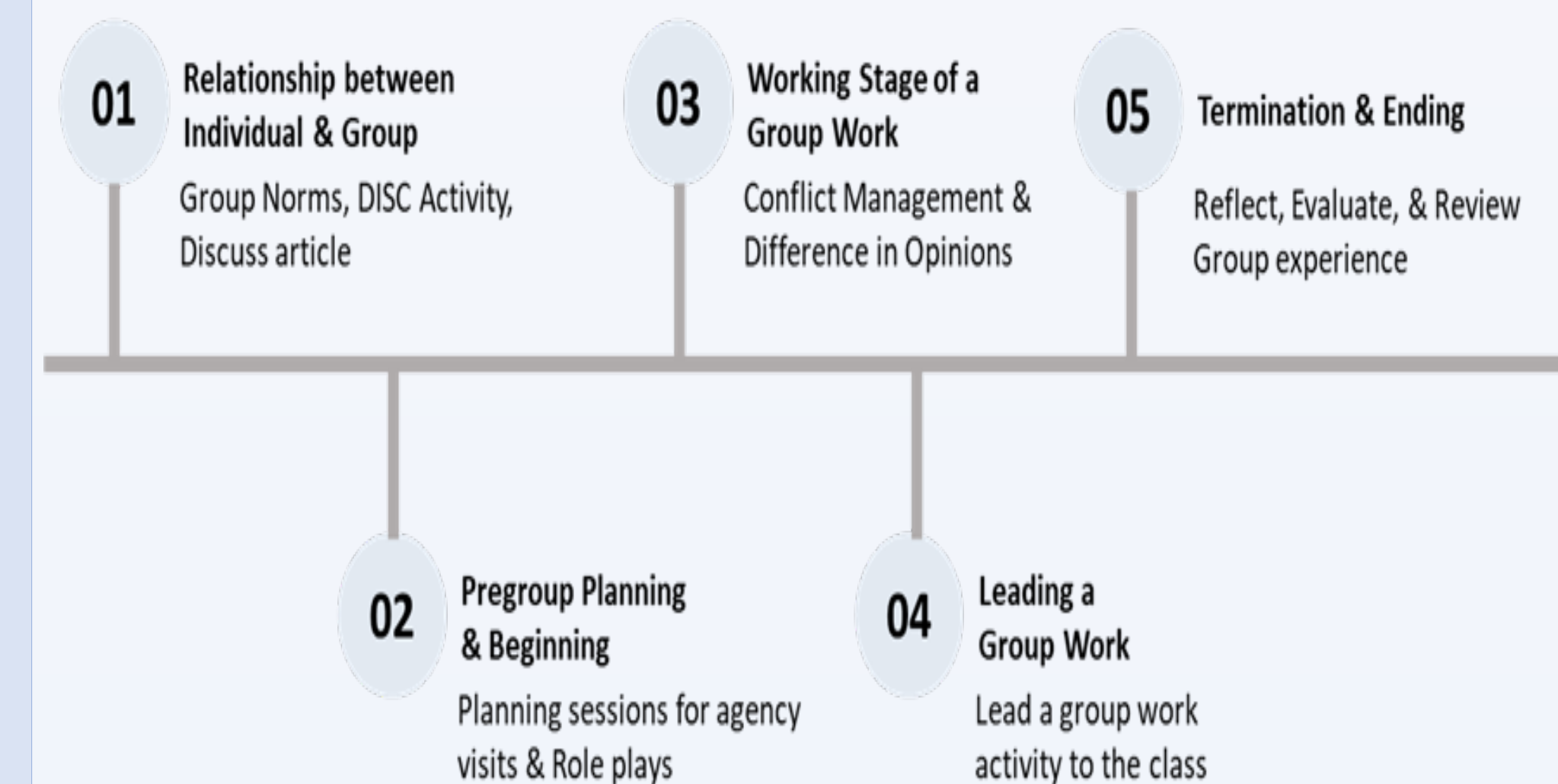| Lecture	Topics
Lecture 1	Groupwork: An introduction
Lecture 2	Working with groups: Theoretical perspectives
Lecture 3 & 4	Understanding group dynamics
Lecture 5 & 6	Group Stages: Initial, transition, working and final stages of group
Recess Week * Agency Visit Week	
Lecture 7	Leadership
Lecture 8	Influence and Power
Lecture 9 - 11	Working with different population groups
	Sharing of groupwork practice (Topics determined by students)
	Agency sharing on (i) working children & youth using the online platform (ii) & (iii) medical and mental health settings
Lecture 12	Use of self & reflective groupwork practice

Setting norms for the tutorial and conducting groupwork

Groupwork Teaching

Lecture/ Tutorial/ Assessment Focus											
Academic Calendar	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3 & 4	Week 5 & 6	Recess Week	Week 7 & 8	Week 9 & 10	Week 11	Week 12		Week 15
Lecture	Lt 1		Lt 3 & 4	Lt 5 & 6		Lt 7 & 8	Lt 9 & 10	Lt 11	Lt 12		
Topics	Introduction to groupwork	Theories of groupwork	Group dynamics	Group stages		Leadership, Power & Influence	Groupwork with different population groups		Use of self & reflective groupwork practice		
Tutorial			Tutorial 1	Tutorial 2		Tutorial 3	Tutorial 4 & Tutorial 5				
Bloom's taxonomy			Understand, apply, analyse	Understand, apply, analyse	Agency Visit	Understand, apply, analyse	Apply, analyse, evaluate and create				
Topics			Relationship between individual and group	Pregroup planning & beginning session (role play)		Working stage of groupwork (role play)	Planning and leading a groupwork activity				
Assessment			Participation during class			Groupwork proposal			Individual reflection paper	Take home paper	
Bloom's taxonomy						Apply, analyse, evaluate and create			Understand, apply, analyse	Understand, apply, analyse	
			Understand, apply, analyse								

Tutorials

01 Relationship between Individual & Group — Group Norms, DISC Activity, Discuss article

03 Working Stage of a Group Work — Conflict Management & Difference in Opinions

05 Termination & Ending — Reflect, Evaluate, & Review Group experience

02 Pregroup Planning & Beginning — Planning sessions for agency visits & Role plays

04 Leading a Group Work — Lead a group work activity to the class

The deliberate use of tutorials to concretise learnings were crucial. Aside from the opportunity to plan and execute groupwork, tutorials allowed students to experience and reflect on the group dynamics and processes that emerged with the guidance of the lecturer.

Assessment components

There are four assessment components and these are (i) Develop a groupwork proposal (ii) Write a reflection paper and (iii) Plan and lead a groupwork session and (iv) Take home paper. These varied assessment components seek to assess students' abilities differently.

Learning Strategies

(i) The importance of a warmth relationship and safe learning environment

(ii) Providing constructive and reflective feedback

(iii) Tutorial mirrors the groupwork process

(iv) Integrate theories with practice - Conduct groupwork activity; Link students with agencies to develop groupwork proposals with sessional plans; Delivery of groupwork session, where possible

Evidence of the impact on students' learning

Two cohorts of social work students completed the validated 70-item inventory foundation competencies in Social Work with Groups (ICSWG) by Macgowen (2012) at the beginning and the end of the course. The inventory measures two domains: importance of item for a successful group work and one's confidence in demonstrating the skills in practice.

A paired-samples t-test was used to analyze the data. For 2021 cohort, students were significantly more confident in executing skills related to group work after the module (M = 3.14, SD = .362) as compared to before the module (M = 2.44, SD = .467), t (33) = 9.19, p < .001, d = 1.67.

Likewise, for 2022 cohort, there was a significant increase in students' overall confidence score after the module (M = 3.04, SD = .275) as compared to before (M = 2.62, SD = .361); t (43) = 7.07, p < .001, d = 1.31. The findings suggested that students were significantly more confident in demonstrating the groupwork skills in practice after the end of the groupwork course.
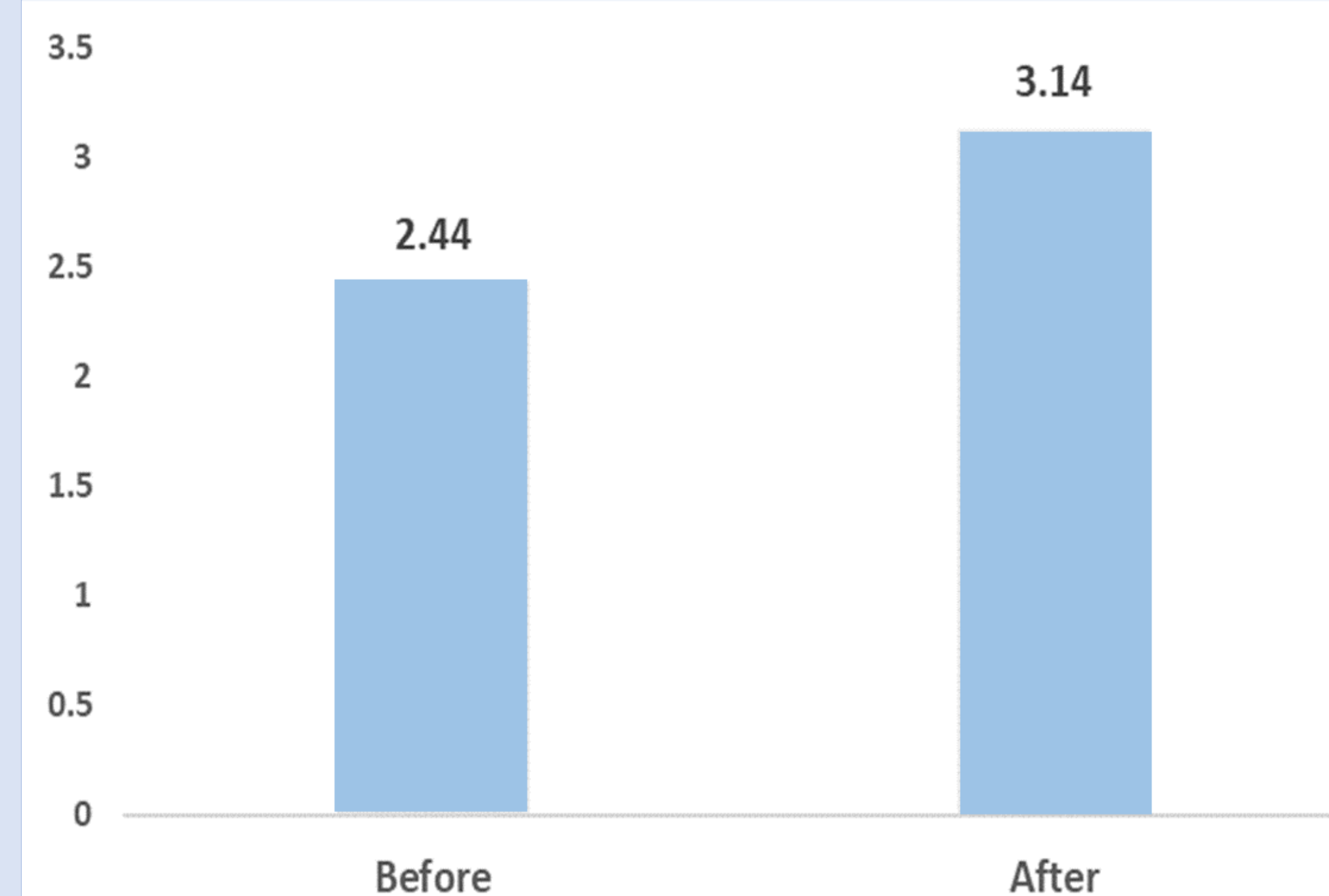
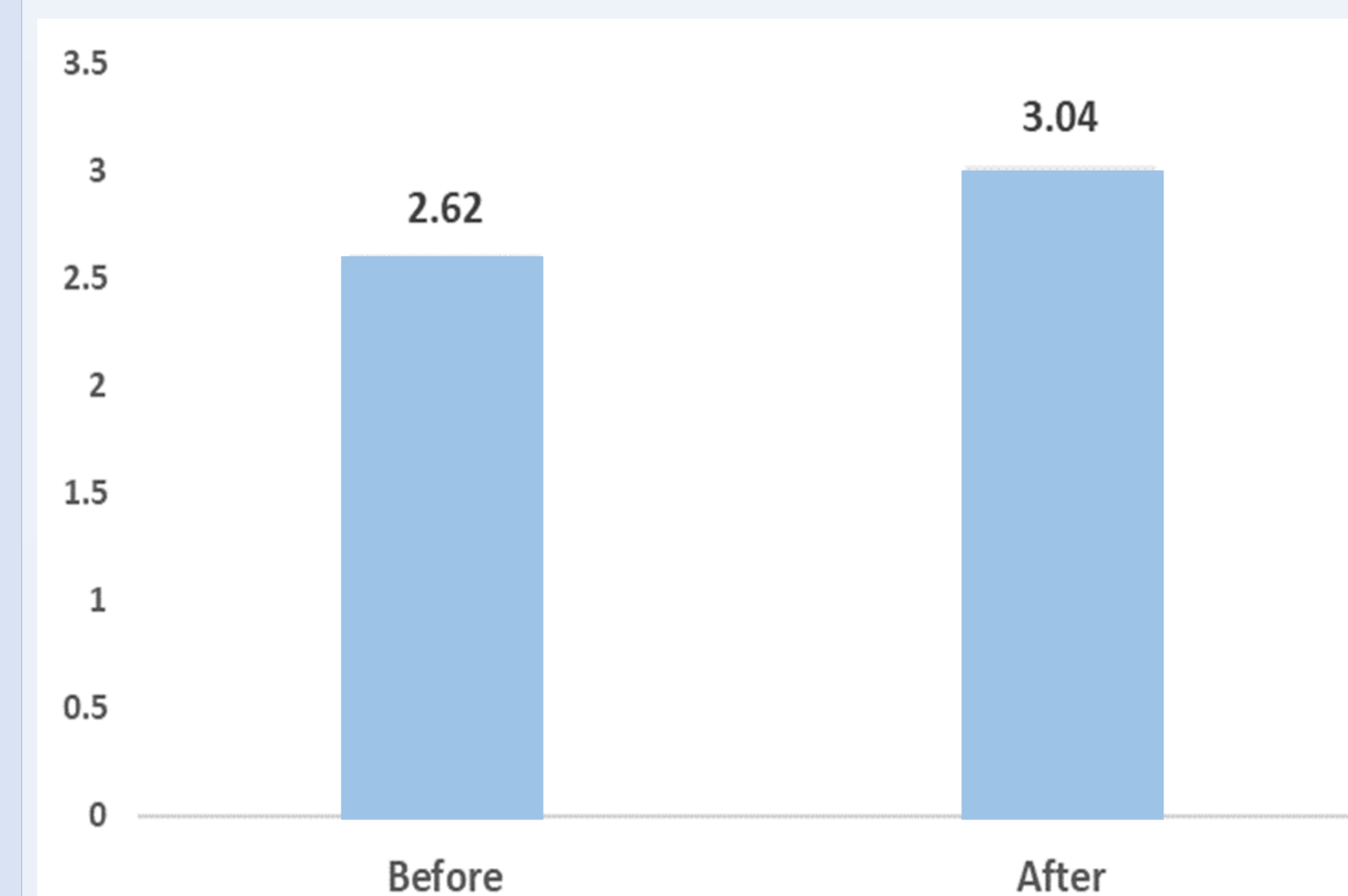*Figure 1 Changes in confidence level for 2021 cohort*

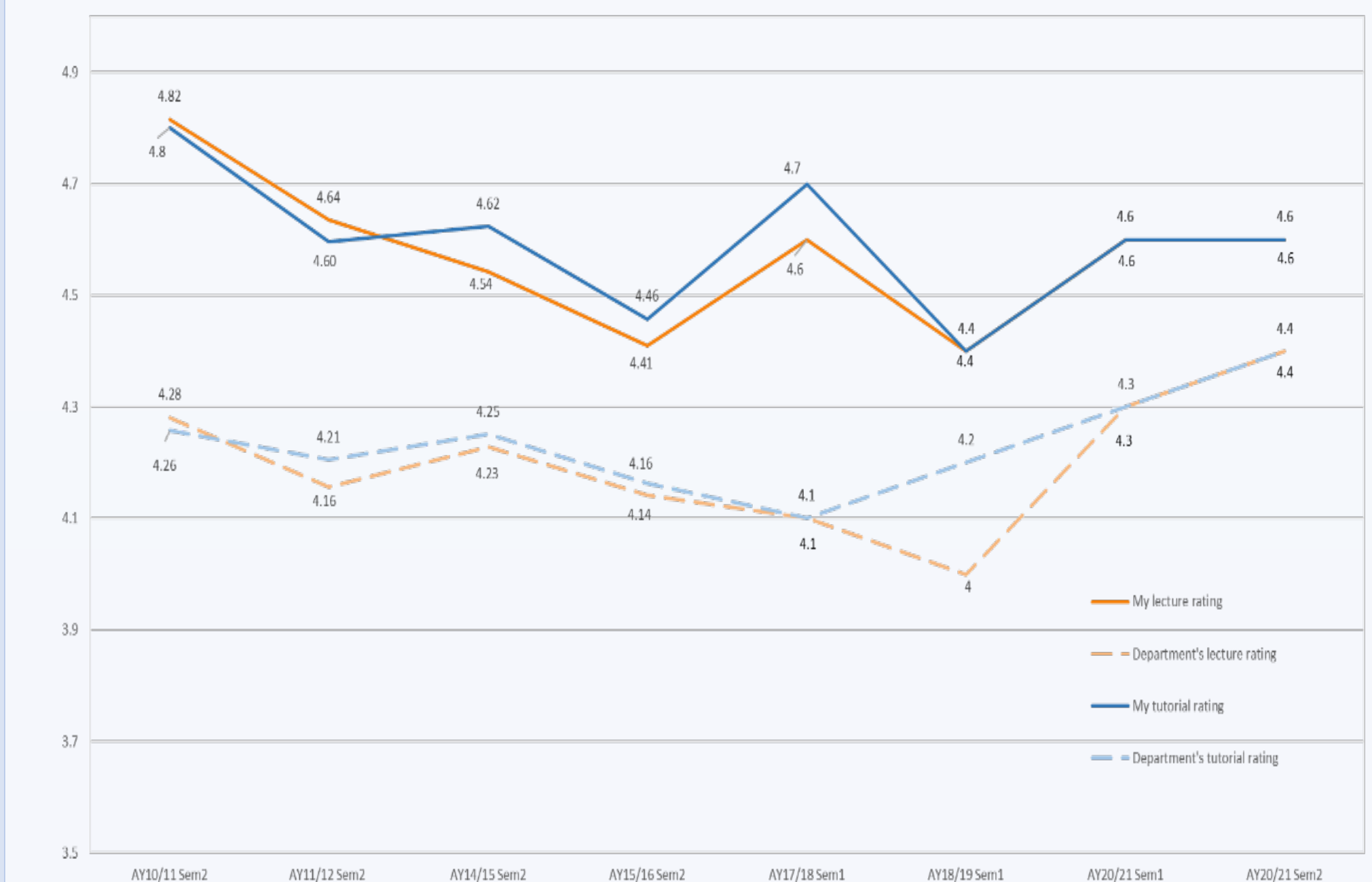*Figure 2 Changes in confidence level for 2022 cohort*

Figure 3 Feedback by students about the course effectiveness

Reflection

(i) Possible use of the inventory developed by Macgowan (2012) to ascertain the effectiveness of their teaching in helping students develop competence in social groupwork practice.

(ii) Importance of reflective groupwork practice in developing students' groupwork competencies

(iii) Maintain relevance in teaching by staying in touch with contemporary group work approaches with different population groups

References

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Toseland and Rivas (2017). An Introduction to Groupwork Practice. New York: Allyn and Bacon.

Macgowan, M.J. (2012) A standards-based inventory of foundation competencies in social work with groups. Research on Social Work Practice, 22. 578-589.

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