



TEACHERS' VIEWS ON DISTRACTIONS OF STUDENTS DUE TO SITTING IN GROUPS

Digjle Namligji¹

Teacher at SHFMU

„Fadil Hisari“ Prizren, Kosovo

Abstract:

Sitting in a group form is a widespread occurrence in modern teaching. This form represents interactive learning that helps to freely express opinions related to the topic discussed during the lesson. During the course of the lessons, among teachers, besides positive views, also are emphasised negative views, as how group sitting stresses out distraction effects on pupils during the lessons. This paper intends to widely present and address, theoretically and practically, the way of how working in groups in elementary schools of Kosovo is implemented and the deficiencies that bring the way on how pupils are seated while they're not engaged in collaborative group tasks. In this research, respondents will be teachers from grades II – V of elementary schools of Prishtina, Ferizaj and Prizren and three elementary school principals. Referring to different sources from reviewing literature it is esteemed that teachers have primary role in explicating my research. For this reason, I thought of having a survey with them in order to obtain their opinions and views about the topic. In order to complete the data from the survey, an interview with focus group on them and individual interviews with elementary school principals were subsequently carried out. As an instrument for measuring teachers' and elementary school, principals' questionnaires and interviewing protocols were used. The sample of this research is 32 respondents, including teachers and principals of few schools participating in this research. Results of the research show that pupils are seated in groups on daily basis although this form of work is not applied during the lesson, which presents one of the main factors that influences distraction of pupils during the course of the lessons.

Keywords: the form of work in groups, sitting in groups, distraction

¹ Correspondence: email digjlenamlegji@hotmail.com

1. Introduction

In recent years, education in Kosovo faced different reforms. Teachers and principals of our schools are constantly attending trainings financed by different world organizations, which all aim to improve work methodology and increasing the overall quality of education. As part of these trainings, various interventions and reforms in methodological aspect were made but as well in school infrastructure. On behalf of these reforms, in classes of Kosovo schools, among other, started being implemented the form of working in groups, which at the same time was considered to be a separation from the traditional way of teaching and was considered as contemporary one. According to Hastings & Wood (2002), the class in which pupils are seated in rows, facing in front, are considered to be classes of "traditional teaching", whereas in the classes where pupils, in general, are seated around the desks in a group form, although now not as strongly, is associated as "progressive teaching".

We, as former pupils, and now as teachers, are witnesses of that that this form of work, and this system of pupils in benches, continues to be widely present in almost all schools of our country. If you visit any school in Kosovo, it is impossible not to find any classroom where desks are arranged in that way that guides the work in groups. But, a question arises: *"Are the work in groups really being carried out, or is it just the way pupils are seated?"*

It is important and accurate the fact that pupils need to be accompanied and taught to cultivate the feeling of familiarity and respect towards each other, and that the sitting in groups is ideal for collaborating tasks. But, it can be a serious distraction if pupils are working in their own (Budge, 2000). Relying on many practical examples, it is assessed that in our school institutions seemingly is inculcated a "tradition" of working in groups, which in the context it is implemented already can be assessed as the way of how pupils are seated. We should know that, just by placing children around a desk will not teach them the skill of cooperation (Quinn & Kappan, 2012), but on the contrary, it will influence their distraction. Due to this, anticipated reform but incorrectly implemented, will produce adverse effects from those destined to be gained and achieved.

From various conversations with fellow teachers, already is confirmed the fact that distraction of pupils, as the result of sitting in groups, is widely present and displays an issue in itself. There are cases when teachers are blaming pupils and label them as non-cooperative and provoking others, however, the real fault should be sought in the methodological aspects, this is, because according to Panalia (1994), there are specific ways of seating that correspond to different styles of learning among pupils of elementary school.

Influenced by these occurrences of our daily duties, the motive of this research lies in addressing the phenomena of sitting of pupils in groups, and showing teachers' perceptions on the distraction that this way of sitting causes on pupils, hinting on the fact that in most cases it isn't properly implemented, and when needed, because children are seated in groups but are not engaged to work in a group: most of their work is individual, or is an activity with all the classmates (Hastings & Wood, 2002).

2. Literature

There are large numbers of researches that supported and confirmed the benefits of pupils' collaboration in groups (Biggs & Tang, 1999; Nordberg, 2008; Slusser & Erickson, 2006). Beyond historical and economic explanations for existence of pupils' groups in schools, there are two main theoretical explanations that justify grouping of pupils in classrooms. These are: 1) possible expansion of pupils learning with other pupils, and 2) Development of "socialization" that can reduce the effects of classification of society (based on social, gender, race, ethnicity, etc. classes) (Kutnick, Sebba, Blatchford, Galton & Thorp, 2005). In accordance with these two explanations, can be said that sitting in groups, or grouping of pupils is a good combination of two components that encourage development of pupils in professional and human aspect.

In general, the way how pupils are seated is an indicator and expression of how pupils are treated and which is their role in classroom. Classroom arrangement has considerable influence in a pupil's behaviour and there are information that confirm also the true influence in his achievements (Pace and Price, 2005). While relating with our country, it can be said that very little importance was given to the way pupils are seated and their adoptability in the classroom. Pupils were seated in a row and often sitting 3 persons in a desk, whilst the workplace was very limited. Based to a hierarchy, those that were better always had place in first desks of the class, whilst those poor and problematic were assessed pupils seated in the last desks of the classroom. Our teachers as though weren't so aware in that, although engagement in school might be influenced by a number of factors pertaining to the pupil and school itself (Trussell, 2008), a factor that is relatively easy controllable is physical environment in classroom. From an analytical perspective of behaviour, environment and behaviour are inseparable and should be considered as one unit (Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008). Physical arrangement and attributes of environment in classroom, such are arrangement of seats, lightning and organization, can influence pupils' behaviour and their attention about assignments ([Evans & Lovell, 1979](#); [Fullerton & Guardino, 2010](#); [Guardino & Fullerton, 2010](#); [Schilling & Schwartz, 2004](#)), moreover, pupils' sitting is one of the easiest and least expensive tactics to manage the classroom available to the teacher (Bicard, Ervin,

Bicard, Baylot-Casey & Austin, (2012)). For this reason, teachers should try that, among methodological work, to also use “accompanying elements” inside the classroom in order to fulfil their objectives in the best way possible.

Promotion of pupils’ collaboration in the classroom certainly is an important part of school activities, and a good alternative that enables this is proper arrangement of desks and strategic placement of pupils in them, but first we need to know that collaboration during the lessons has nothing to do with group involvement (Hastings & Wood, 2002). Very often there might be discrepancies between “collaborating placement” in group and individual assignments given to pupils. The result is that this placement (sitting) can distract them from their work (Alexander et al. 1992, para. 96.)

This is due to fact that pupils are often given assignments which they need to complete individually, but sitting in groups and distracted from classmates (Maddern, 2011). In a summarized way can be said that in order to achieve successful group work, teachers should give pupils special activities to be completed, otherwise thing will be chaotic and additional ideas will be exhausted (Wellham, 2014).

3. Methodology of the Research

For researching and studying this problem in a comprehensive way I will use several researching methods. Among those most important are;

- the method of theoretical analysis that I will use before the research, to expand and deepen knowledges on the effect of pupils’ distractions during implementation of sitting in groups.
- descriptive method with which I will be able to describe the occurrence subject of this research, particularly teachers’ perspectives regarding sitting of pupils in groups.
- statistical method that I will use to find the mode, median, percentage and standard deviation of the results obtained during this research.

The survey will be achieved through a questionnaire compiled for teachers and interviewing protocols designed for school principals and teachers as well. The data obtained will be processed using aforementioned methods and from those necessary conclusions and recommendations will be produced. As sample of this research we have designate 3 elementary schools (9 years), SHFMU,, Vëllezërit Frashëri” in Lipjan – municipality of Prishtina, „Ahmet Hoxha” municipality of Ferizaj and „Fadil Hisari” in Prizren. Subject to the survey procedures will be teachers of grade II and V and 3 principals of elementary schools, a total of 32 respondents.

3.1. Overall Hypothesis

For proper studying of this paper we have introduced the main hypothesis and ancillary ones. Both hypothesis, the main and ancillary one, will be elaborated and studied in detailed manner in theoretical and practical aspect through the research in order to certify it.

- a) **Main hypothesis:** The way of sitting in groups influences the pupils' distraction during the course of the lessons.
- b) **Ancillary hypothesis:** Pupils in aforementioned schools are seated in groups although they don't apply this form of work during the lesson.

3.2. Quantitative data

Results from qualitative data come from the questionnaires that in their content had 18 half structured questions. The nature of these questions was related to basic information on teachers, desks collocation in their classrooms and attitudes towards physical environment in the classroom and on their perceptions regarding distraction of pupils that is caused by sitting in groups. By giving us a first scenery on the physical environment where they work, 18 teachers (62%) told that collocation of benches in their classrooms is in groups of 5-6 pupils, whilst 11 (38%) work with pupils sitting in a row, which information confirms our opinion about the occurrence of group sitting of pupils in a dominant number in our schools.

Table 1: Analyse of question related with the frequency of changing benches

P6			
How many times you change the position of benches?			
Answers		Frequency	Percentage
Less than once a month	1	8	28%
At least once a month	2	9	31%
At least once a week	3	10	34%
Every day	4	2	7%
Total		29	100%
Mode		3	
Median		2	
Standard Deviation		0,923983518	

Table 1 gives us explanations on:

- how many times this form is changed by the teacher.

- about sitting, in classrooms of 22 teachers (76%) pupils do not have complaints or disagreements, whilst in 7 others (24%) they claimed pupils have complaints. Although 18 teachers (62%) have desks arranged in the form suitable for working in groups, only 12 of them (41%) engage pupils in group work on daily basis, whereas 14 (48%) at least once a week, 2 (7%) at least once a month and 1 (3%) less than once a month.
- on how proportional, according to teachers, is changing of techniques/forms of work in relation to the changing of benches, can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Analyse of the question about the report working-arrangement technique of benches

P8			
By changing working techniques/form benches' arrangements should be changed too.			
Answers		Frequency	Percentage
Fully disagree	1	5	17%
I don't agree much	2	9	31%
Partially agree	3	10	34%
Fully agree	4	5	17%
Total		29	100%
Mode		3	
Median		3	
Standard Deviation		0,969204781	

7 (24%) from the participating respondents in the survey are fully agreeing that sitting in groups is suitable to any working techniques, 10 (34%) of them partially agree with this fact, 8 (28%) do not agree much, and 4 (14%) are fully disagreeing with this.

To complement answers given from Table 1, teachers gave opinions about this on how important is the change of benches in their classrooms, which opinions are summarized in Chart 1.

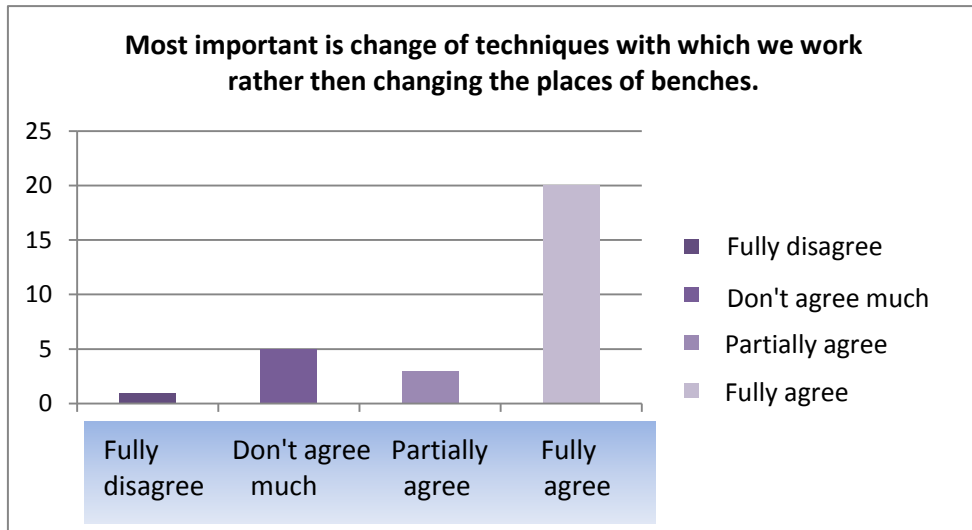


Chart 1: The importance of changing benches compared to the change of working techniques/forms

Although majority of teachers underestimate the change of desks towards the change of techniques, nonetheless, some of them think that continuous sitting in groups might distract pupils. Their opinions are presented in Chart 2.

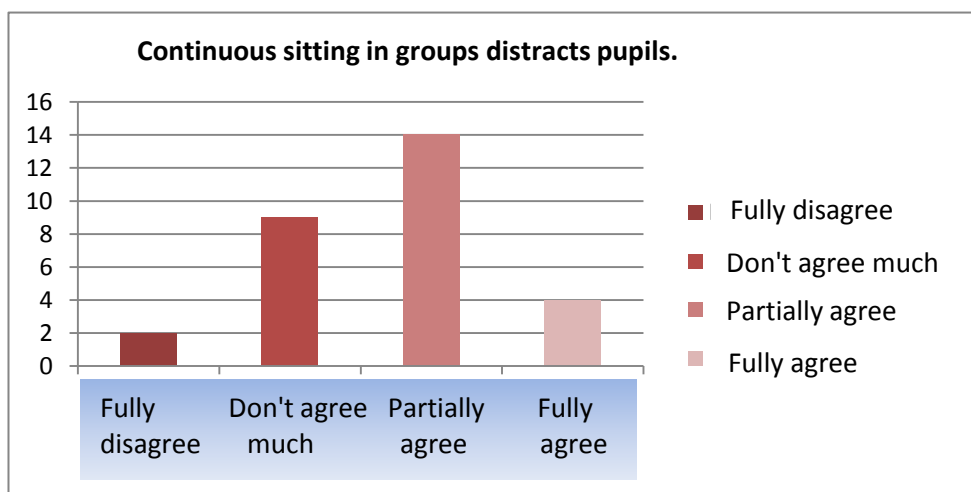


Chart 2: Distraction of pupils due to continuous sitting in groups

9 teachers (31%) do not fully agree that distraction of pupils sitting in groups is due to incompatibility of teaching techniques. 6 (21%) of them partially agree, 7 (24%) don't agree much, and 7 (24%) others fully disagree that incompatibility of techniques influences distraction of pupils.

Table 3: Harassment of pupils due to their distraction

P13			
Distraction of pupils seating in groups is due to harassment of pupils between them.			
Answers		Frequency	Percentage
Fully disagree	1	4	14%
I don't agree much	2	6	21%
Partially agree	3	10	34%
Fully agree	4	9	31%
Total		29	100%
Mode		3	
Median		3	
Standard Deviation		1,019430724	

Another element that affects the distraction of pupils is also harassment between classmates. Answers of teachers regarding this are given in Table 3, whilst Chart 3 presents data related to the claim that has to do with distraction that is due to the uncomfortable body position.

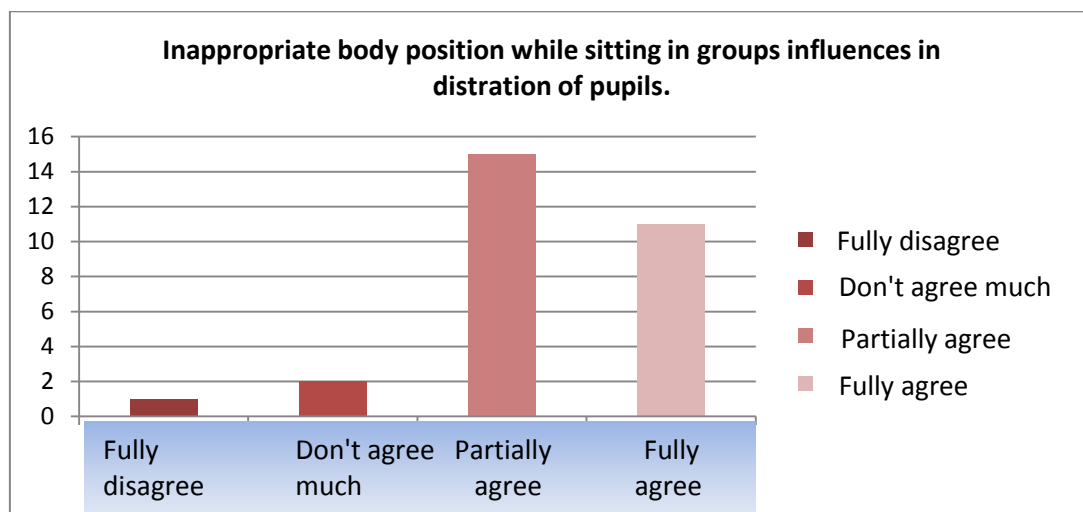


Chart 3: Inappropriate body position as a cause of distraction of pupils sitting in groups

Another distracting element is also copying of assignments. For this fully agree 10 teachers (35%), partially agree 12 (41%), 4 (14%) don't agree much, whilst 3 (10%) fully disagree. Out of the same, 6 of them (21%) agree that mixture of materials affects the distraction of pupils, 13 (45%) partially agree with this claim, 4 (14%) don't agree much, and 6 of them (21%) negate this by fully disagreeing. Frequent forms of distraction are shown in table 4.

P17			
Most common forms of distractions of pupils seating in groups are:			
Answers		Frequency	Percentage
Slumber/Monotony	1	4	14%
Needles conversations between pupils	2	7	24%
Harassments between pupils	3	1	3%
Looking in different sides of classrooms (lack of concentration)	4	4	14%
Failure to receive proper information due to inappropriate vision on the blackboard	5	4	14%
Continuous movements imposed due to uncomfortable body position	6	9	31%
Total		29	100%
Mode			
		6	
Median			
		4	
Standard Deviation			
		1,894983678	

Table 4: Most common forms of distractions of pupils seating in groups

Teachers were asked about actions undertaken in cases of pupils' distractions. Their summarized answers are given in Chart 4.

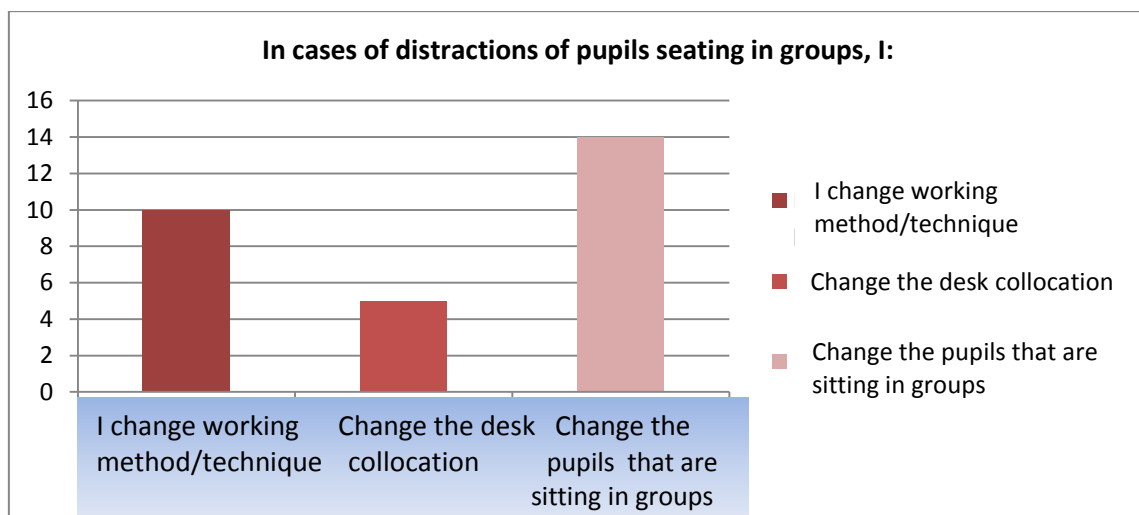


Chart 4: Teachers' actions in cases of pupils' distractions

3.3. Qualitative data

A. Qualitative data from interviews with teachers

From the information it resulted that most of teachers for pupils are practicing the way of sitting in groups. The reasons that make teachers choose this way of pupils' sitting and not changing it, mainly do not depend on them, e.g.: complaints for disorganization

of benches by maintenance employees, remarks to "ultimatums" by principals not to change collocation of benches because in this way they get damaged, age of pupils etc. Assessed as less important in quantitative data about collocation of benches, from the interviews with focus groups we learned that 90% of teachers assess it as important and influential in the pupils performance. Although very conservative in this aspect, teachers during interviews emphasised benefits that change of sitting places bring since it eliminates possibilities that some pupils are seated in the end, and some are always near the window or wall. Cooperation between pupils when they change desks while working in groups was also assessed.

"In my classroom I always apply the form of group sitting because it is a XXI century classroom financed by USAID and designed in that way to seat in groups, in the shape of hexagon, pentagon, rectangle and circle." (Teacher of grade IV)

"The form of work in groups brings only disorder in the classroom and with this there cannot be fair evaluation of pupils' work." (Teacher of grade III)

Opinions of teachers about sitting in groups are different. According to a generalization of their answers, sitting in groups is a positive and contemporary form because through it pupils can exchange different ideas while completing their assignments, establish positive communication with their classmates, learn each other's characteristics, create a sense of respect between them, etc.

Besides positive assessments, there were ones that saw this form of work as "difficult to manage" due to pupils' distractions, a form during which disturbance is created and pupils make noise, they don't do the assignments given by teachers, engagement of pupils is unequal and by which unfair evaluation of their work is done.

From the interviews with focus groups, majority of teachers claimed that sitting in groups might cause distractive effects among pupils. This is because they are free in communicating with each other, do not listen for given assignments and speak nonsense. There are opinions that their distraction comes in cases when teachers don't know to properly manage their work, and opinions that link pupils' distraction and de-concentration with the noise that is created while they move the desks.

Teachers also agreed that friends affect distraction of pupils while sitting in groups, mainly through a form of non-contribution within the group. They said that unequal engagement within the group causes nervousness and disagreements between them. Distraction among pupils come out also when pupils are not calm and move from one desk to another, and when some pupils didn't understand their assignments and make constant questions, which is impediment for others.

“Yes, it is very important the way they are seated, because it may happen that they don't have good view on the blackboard while seating in groups and tiredness cause from turning their body causes them distraction. “ (Teachers of grade V)

Besides this, teachers think that proper body position has effect on pupils and their task is to create comfort and suitable working environment for them. Answers from them confirm the data obtained from the survey, where 31% of them as the most frequent form of pupils' distraction considered being due to uncomfortable body position.

Teachers also mentioned a number of other types and forms of pupils' distraction. Starting from useless conversations on topics that are not related to lessons, quarrels between pupils due to entangled textbooks, slumbers by passive pupils during which are distracted those that are working, monotony and frequent moving, provocations, loud conversations, multiple movements from hyperactive children within the group, etc. In cases of evidencing these forms of distraction, most used action by teachers is removal of pupils from the group and relocation to another group, or even individual work.

From the interviews with them, we've learned that teachers also change their assignments, because when they don't understand them they become cause of pupils' distraction, whilst there are very few of them that completely change the work approach by moving from the group to the form of working in pairs.

From quantitative data, 62% of teachers showed that they placed pupils to sit in groups, whilst think that pupils should sit in groups when it is planned depending on the content of the lesson, more during discussions and during Calculus and Handcraft classes.

According to teachers, sitting in groups has these advantages: pupils sitting next to each other can collect and exchange their ideas; cooperate between them; freely express their ideas; avoid monotony; *“affects the activation of analysis of mental operations”*; makes them proactive; improves irritated relations between classmates; the feeling of respect and tolerance is developed; they socialize; they enrich the vocabulary from one another; gender and religious differences are eliminated; assignments are completed in a shorter time, etc. Within its advantages, one of the teachers thinks that with this form of sitting is only developed the sense of helping classmates and nothing else. There are even those (1 teacher) who think that sitting in groups doesn't have any advantages.

As disadvantages of sitting in groups, the following were mentioned: when 4-6 pupils are seated together distraction and generation of noise in the classroom is inevitable; working with unequal pupils and their engagement; difficulties in managing the lesson time; evaluation of pupils is not objective; unnecessary movements and conversations, difficulties teachers facing in achieving teaching objectives, etc.

B. Qualitative data from the interviews with principals

Interviewed principals told about the working conditions and environment in which teachers are working. Schools that they manage have average satisfactory conditions, while classes of these schools, though in generalized numbers, have 18 to 41 pupils. Arrangement of desks in their schools is present in two different forms, in a row and in groups. The latter is considered as a good form of work, but less applied by senior teachers, even there is a division based on schools cycle, where in grades 1-5 the classes are held in groups, whilst in grades 6-9 they are seated in rows.

“Methodology of teachers’ work and the way pupils are seated are dependent components in the sense that the work methodology should be adjusted with the way pupils are seated and vice-versa”. (School principal)

The respondents in question admit that they give instructions to teachers about placement of pupils in desks; however, they don't impose these decisions, although one of them said that he had intervened in their work by prohibiting them to change the forms of desks because they get damaged.

“This form is applied in our school but I’m not a proponent that pupils placement should always be in groups. I am saying this because majority of those working with new methods are constantly applying sitting in groups” (School principal)

Principals are aware for the way of teachers’ work in their schools and believe that teachers are placing pupils in groups only when they have such duties. The way they seat plays an important role in pupils’ performance, but this depends from the subject, type of lesson and teacher’s methodology, because the latter one is interlinked with the way how pupils are seated.

In general, there are good opinions about the group method of sitting of pupils, but limited within the character in which it is used. This form should not be always applied. Compared with teachers, principals do not think that pupils’ sitting in groups can distract them when teachers are prepared for the lesson. Even distraction from other pupils can be prevented if the teacher is the one that monitors the situation.

As about distracting factors, interviewed principals gave different opinions. They gave these answers, summarized below: disengagement of all pupils by the teachers, conversations that do not have to do with the unit being discussed, harassments between group members, copying of assignment from each-other, entangled teaching materials and tools, uncomfortable body position of pupils as factor that isn't directly related with the pupil, etc.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

In classes of 62% of surveyed teachers, pupils are seated in groups, although only 41% of them are practicing working in groups on daily basis. More than methodological, the reasons this form is selected are mainly because they don't want to damage desks while changing their places, but as well from the fact that 69% of them assess more changing the techniques they work with. From the interviews with focus groups, we have learned that this form is changed only during evaluation of pupils. Despite this, 90 % of teachers think that sitting of pupils affects their performance. According to principals, younger teachers and those working with lower grades are those that more collate pupils in groups.

A large number of teachers agreed that pupils' distraction is due to this form of sitting, emphasising that as indicators of distractions 31% are due to incompatibility of teaching techniques and 31% are from harassments between classmates. By assessing it as an important element, 52% partially agree and 38% fully agree that uncomfortable body position while sitting in groups is influencing in distraction of pupils. 34% of teachers agree that copying of assignments also influences their distraction. Entanglement of materials is as well part of this component. Principals share different opinions, which don't think that sitting in groups might distract pupils as long as teachers know to plan and manage their lesson time. In this context, they believe that working methodology and the way pupils are sitting are components dependent on each other.

When pupils are distracted, 48% of teachers change their places from one group to another, 34% change the working method, and 17% change desks, whereby we understand that teachers blame pupils for that, although this contradicts with claims of majority, which by 31% assesses one of most common forms of distraction is movements affected by uncomfortable body position.

Both, teachers and principals, consider working in group as a good way of cooperation between pupils, where they develop communication and socialization, nevertheless, it is considered also as difficult to manage because a mass and noise is created when solving assignments and moving desks. The latter one seems to obstruct teachers more. Principals estimate that unequal disengagement of pupils by teachers influences their distraction.

In support to data from qualitative and quantitative analysis, we can give few recommendations on the topic subject to the research.

A. For principals:

- To work in improving school infrastructure and provide spaces and possibilities to achieve different school activities that support different forms of teaching.

B. For teachers:

- To provide pupils with suitable and comfortable spaces during learning, while focusing in their desires and needs.
- To cultivate a teaching led by flexibility in selection of working forms and techniques.
- To assess and consider the importance of the pupils' body position and sitting.
- To do an adjustment and interlacement between the teachers' methodology and physical environment where the lessons take place.

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