

Group Work in Post-Secondary Agriculture Education: Do Students Hate It?

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INTRODUCTION

Group work is better known as cooperative learning in scientific literature. Cooperative learning is when a group of students work together to learn and to help the group learn (Herrmann, 2013). Cooperative learning has been highly sought after because it is thought to reduce student competition, promote academic achievement and positive relationships (Othman, et al., 2012). The oral discussion that happens during cooperative learning tends to increase retention and long-term storage of the information discussed (Cooper, 1995) and enables the development of critical thinking skills, comprehension, and motivation (Caropreso & Haggerty, 2000).

Behavioral theory suggests that cooperative efforts are generated by extrinsic motivation to gain a reward (Johnson, et al., 1998) and promotive interaction, when students encourage each other to obtain these goals (Herrmann, 2013).

Some problems are found in cooperative learning despite its many benefits, such as free-riding, resentment towards other students in the group, conflicts within the group, differing levels of ambition, and distrust towards other members (Herrmann, 2013). Benefits of cooperative learning do not happen automatically; it has to be implemented properly to work and see the benefits in students (Othman, et al., 2012).

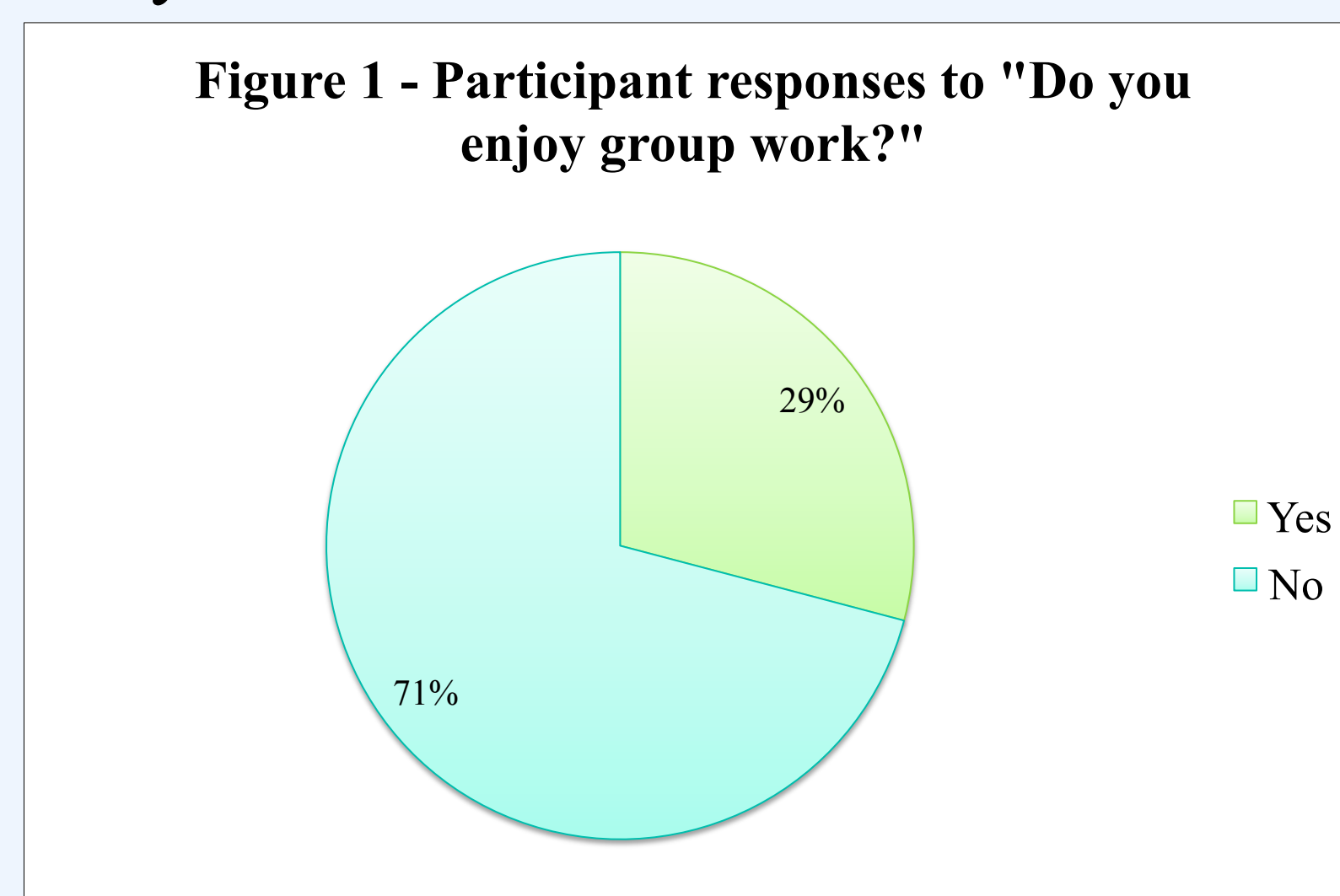
EXPERIMENT

The objective of my experiment was to determine how the students currently enrolled in the College of Agriculture and Bioresources feel about group work and to better understand what group work is, if or why students hate it, and how to better incorporate cooperative learning into classes.

A survey was created through an online program called Survey Planet, and consisted of fourteen questions. Five devoted to finding out more about each participant, and nine on the participants' feelings about group work. A total of 134 participants answered.

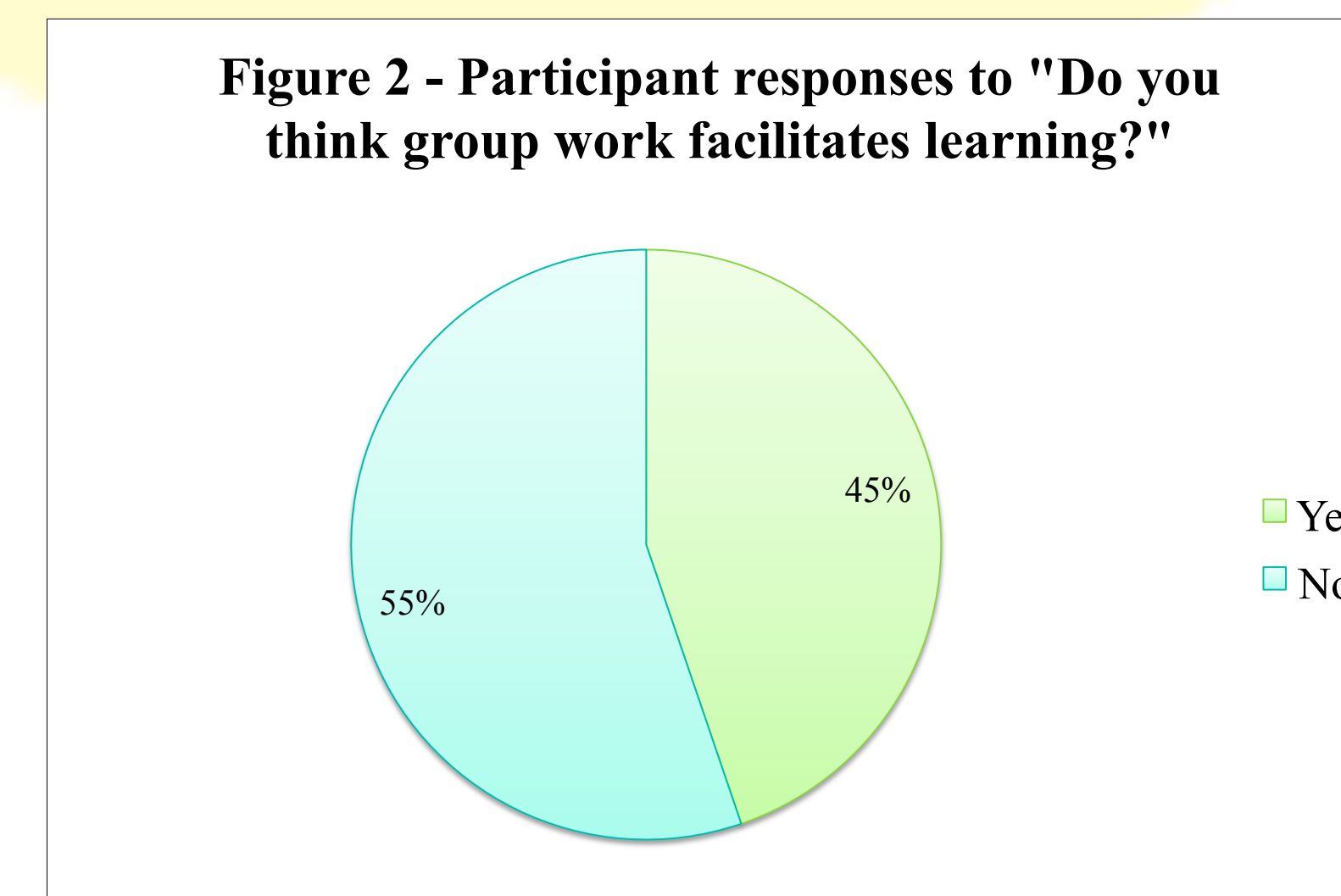
RESULTS

The results of the study showed that 25 participants were in their first year of study, 24 in their second, 41 in their third, 37 in their fourth and 6 in their fifth or more. The most popular area of study was Agronomy degree with 43 participants. The gender was mostly female with 120 participants and only 14 males. There was 114 rural based students that participated. The average number of group work assignments that the participants had done was 0-10 assignments with 90 participants.

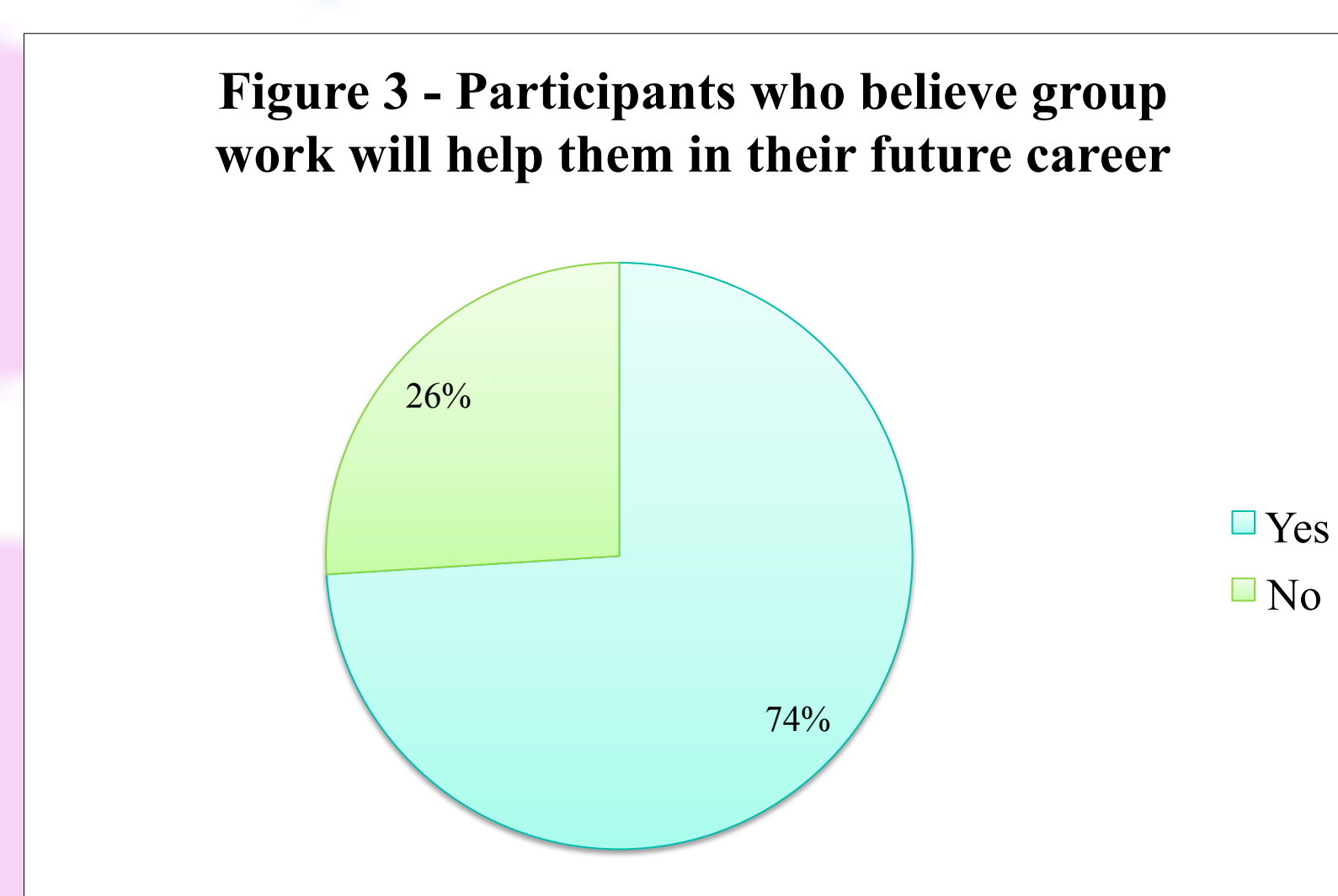


The majority of participants responded that they do not like group work (Figure 1). However, nearly equal amounts of participants thought it facilitated learning (Figure

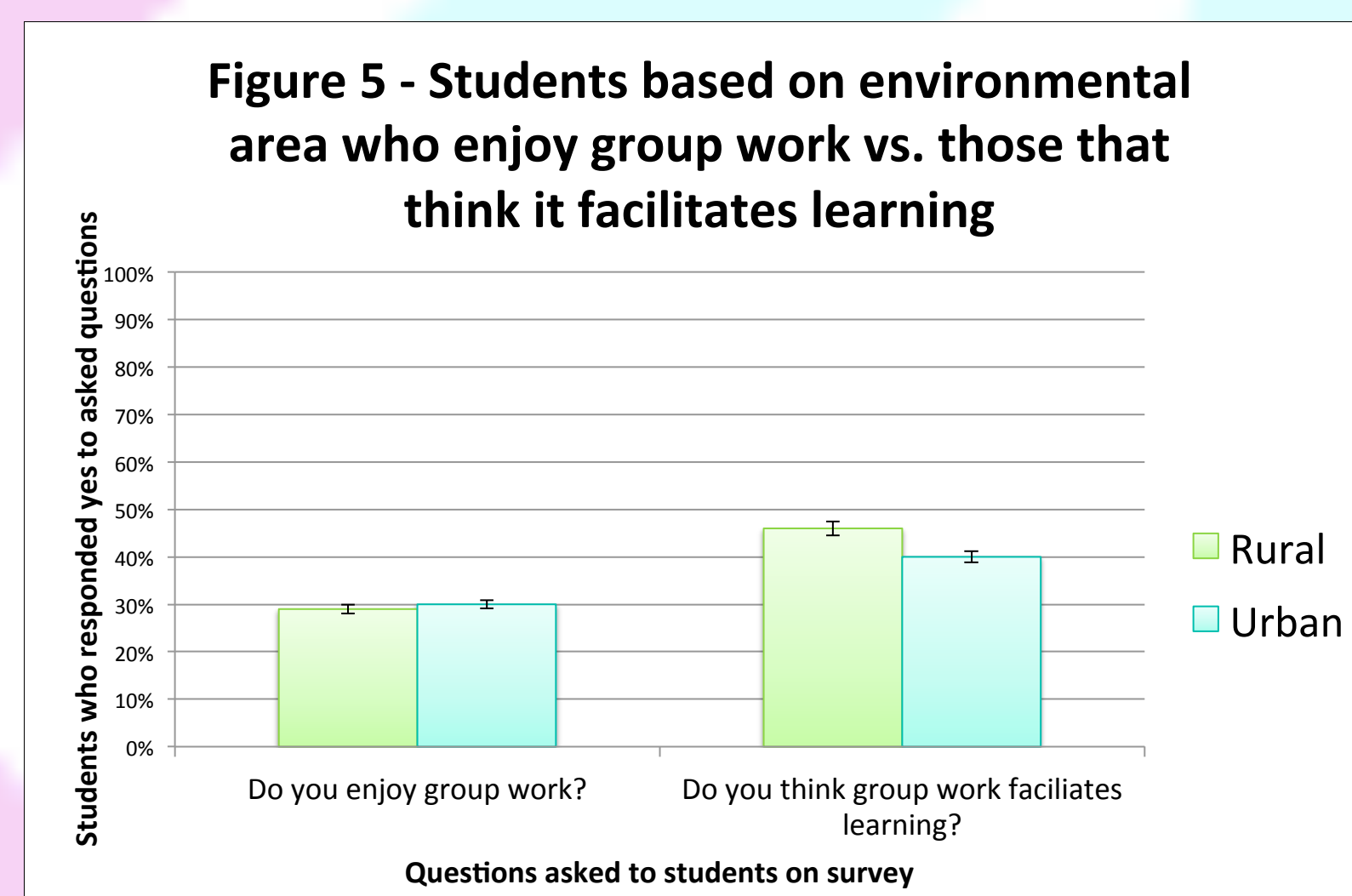
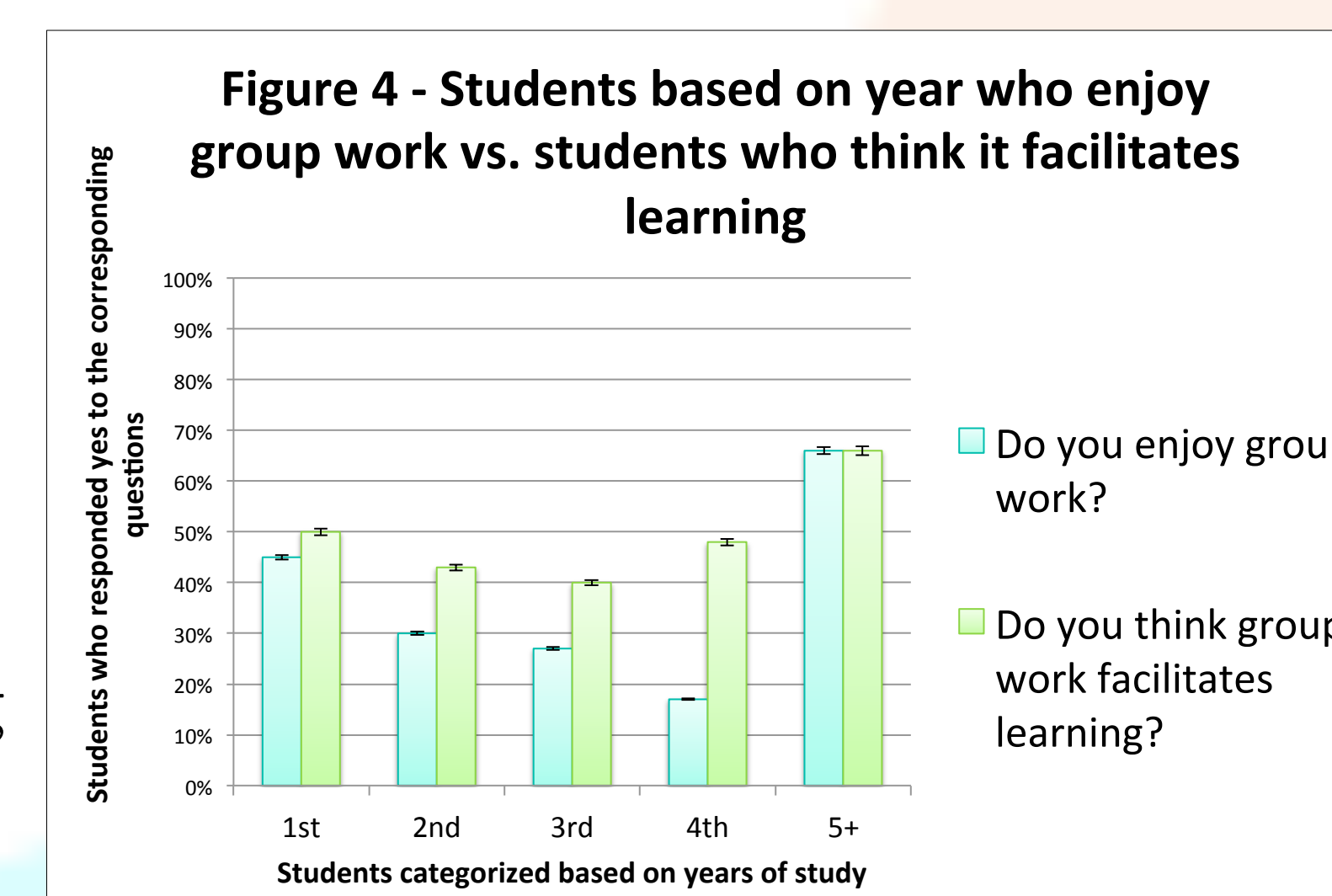
2). The most common responses for what they enjoyed about group work were being able to split the work amongst the group and having more ideas and perspectives.



23 participants stated that group work had already helped them obtain a job. When asked if they thought group work experience would help them in their future career, most said yes (Figure 3).

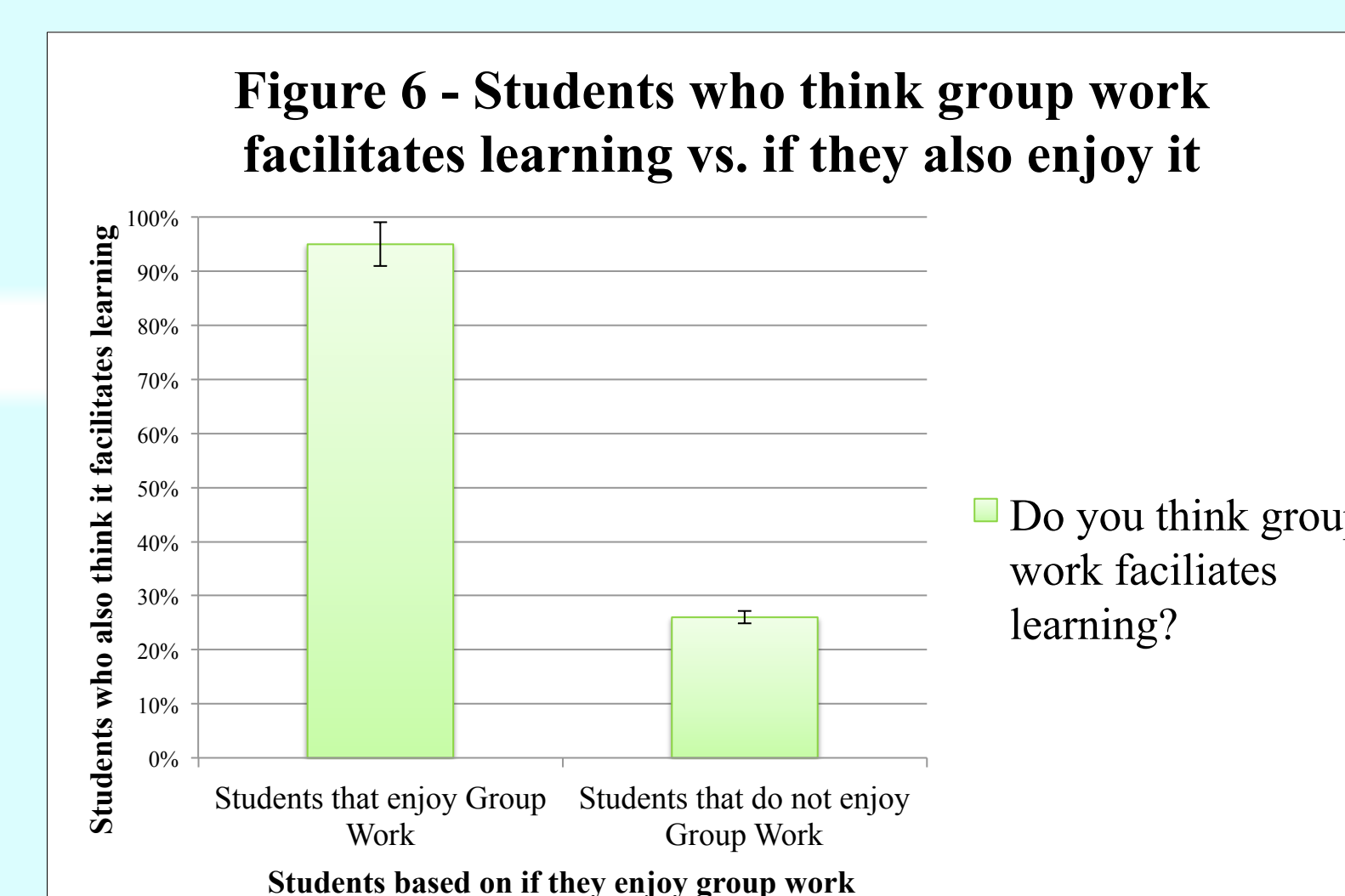


The next question asked how the participants thought group work could be improved. They responded: more individual assessment, peer ratings, more guidance, and being able to pick their own groups. Fifth or more years of study students showed a higher level of enjoyment and learning from group work than other years (Figure 4).



Rural versus urban students showed no statistical difference in enjoyment towards group work or usefulness of it (Figure 5).

The last investigation made was if the students said they enjoyed group work how many of them also said it facilitated learning, and if they said they did not enjoy group work how many still thought it still facilitated learning (Figure 6).



CONCLUSION

The survey suggested that students do not enjoy group work and the literature also states that cooperative learning is not well liked by students. This is commonly because of the social aspects, not academic. Students do not like having to rely on others to gain a mark, nor do they like upholding more weight than they think they should. This was shown though the trend that even though students do not like group work half of them thought it facilitated learning. The literature showed this as most students showed increased cognitive learning and understanding of the subject matter. Students who liked group work were more likely to rate group work as facilitating in their learning.

The percentage of urban students who enjoyed group work was not statistically difference from rural students. As students go from first year to fourth year their dislike of group work increases, as does the perceived benefit in their learning with the exception of fourth year. However, students who are in programs for more than four years, perceived group work as more important than students with only four years of school. Students believe that participating in group work will help them in their future career. This is because group work can help them be more employable by making them more approachable, cooperative and outgoing, as well as gain leadership skills and social skills. In conclusion, yes students do hate group work, but they also see that it benefits and facilitates their learning.

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