A local study suggested that not all pupils can benefit from studying in small groups, depending on how they interact in the groups.

The study investigated the interaction of primary pupils working in small groups. The analysis of video-taped lessons and interviews disclosed frustrated cases of pupils studying in small groups. Less able pupils, for example, became frustrated when they taught their group mates the part of the story that they were assigned to read, because they had difficulty to understand the story themselves. Conflict arose when the less able pupils were deprived of their opportunities to complete a task that they felt confident. Whereas, more able pupils, for example, lost interest in the lesson when they had to teach their low ability peers. They thought it would be more challenging to have someone of similar ability to interact with. Quarrel happened in groups when the more able pupils were asked to repeat simple things again and again.

Dr Chan said “though group work has been recommended as a key strategy in small class teaching, research findings indicate that not all pupils can benefit from group work. Pupils may quarrel, feel frustrated and even lose their interest in learning when working in groups.” He called for a need to reconsider the issues such as time, division of work, social skills, awards, matching ability and role when arranging pupils in group work.