

EXPLORING THE APPLICATION OF GROUP WORK IN CHINESE COURSES

Lee Hau¹, Na Hui Imm^{2*}, Nor Syamimi Iliani Che Hassan³

Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, UiTM Cawangan Kelantan

Corresponding author: nahuiimm@uitm.edu.my

Abstract

This study explores the application of group work in Chinese language courses by employing Tuckman's group development model in four stages—Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing. A survey was conducted involving 350 undergraduate students enrolled in elementary Chinese courses at a public university in Malaysia. The study aimed to examine the influence of each group development stage on student interaction and learning outcomes. The findings showed that although students demonstrated clear organization during the initial stage, they still faced challenges in trust and cooperation. As the group work progressed, students exhibited improved communication, collaboration, and task achievement. Overall, the study indicated that structured group work could enhance student engagement, academic performance, and the development of essential soft skills. This study offers valuable insights for improving Chinese language instruction through collaborative learning methods.

Keywords: Group Work, Tuckman's Model of Group Development, Chinese Language difficulties, Chinese Language Teaching

INTRODUCTION

Background of study

In an era of accelerating globalization, Chinese, as one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, has become increasingly important. Whether it is international cultural exchanges or economic cooperation, Chinese plays a key role. In this context, how to improve the teaching quality of Chinese courses and cultivate students' comprehensive language application ability has become an important issue that needs to be solved in the field of education.

The traditional Chinese teaching model is mainly based on lectures, and students passively accept knowledge. This model limits students' initiative and creativity to a certain extent. With the continuous updating of educational concepts, group work, as a student-centered teaching method, has gradually attracted widespread attention in the education community. Group work emphasizes cooperation and interaction among students, allowing students to complete learning tasks together in the process of communication, discussion, and collaboration. It not only improves students' interest in learning, but also cultivates their

teamwork spirit, communication skills, and problem-solving skills, which are crucial for students' future development.

Research Objectives

This study aims to explore the application of group work in Chinese language courses. Through theoretical analysis and practical research, it reveals the impact of group work on the teaching effect of Chinese courses, as well as the problems and solutions that may be encountered in the application process, so as to provide useful reference and reference for the reform of Chinese teaching and promote the improvement of the teaching quality of Chinese courses. Specifically, it includes the following aspects:

- Examining the impact of forming stage on group interaction.
- Examining the impact of storming stage on group interaction.
- Examining the impact of norming stage on group interaction.
- Examining the impact of performing stage on group interaction.

Research Questions

- How does the forming stage affect group interaction?
- How does the storming stage affect group interaction?
- How does the norming stage affect group interaction?
- How does the performing stage affect group interaction?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical significance

From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches the research system of Chinese language teaching methods. Previous studies on Chinese teaching methods have mostly focused on traditional teaching methods or the application of a single modern teaching technology. There are relatively few systematic studies on group work as a teaching strategy in Chinese language courses. This study deeply explores the application of group work in Chinese language courses and analyzes its internal mechanism and working principle, which will help to improve Chinese language teaching theory and provide a theoretical basis and research ideas for subsequent related research.

Practical significance

In terms of practice, this study has important guiding values. On the one hand, for Chinese teachers, the research results can help them understand the specific operation methods and application skills of group work, guide them to use group work scientifically and rationally in classroom teaching, improve teaching efficiency and quality, and enhance students' learning experience. On the other hand, for students, the application of group work can create a more positive and interactive learning environment for them, promote the development of their independent learning and cooperative learning abilities, improve their comprehensive Chinese literacy, and lay a solid foundation for future learning and life. In addition, this study also has positive practical significance for promoting educational and teaching reforms, promoting educational equity, and cultivating innovative talents that meet the needs of social development.

Current status of overseas research

In foreign countries, the application of group work in the field of education started early and has achieved fruitful results. Many educators and psychologists have conducted in-depth research on the theoretical basis, organizational form, and teaching effect of group work. For example, the cooperative learning theory proposed by the Johnson brothers (Johnson & Johnson, 2002) elaborated on the methods and strategies of group cooperative learning, which has had a wide impact in the international education community. In the field of language teaching, foreign scholars have found through a large number of empirical studies that group work can effectively improve students' language communication ability, critical thinking ability, and cross-cultural communication awareness. In China's teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, group work is used to cultivate students' comprehensive Chinese application ability. Through group activities, students not only improve their language ability, but also have a better understanding of Chinese culture. For example, Ruifeng (2007) introduced the advantages, task forms, and design methods of group activities in second language teaching in his paper, and also discussed the ways and methods of task design in teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

Current status of domestic research

Malaysia has also gradually increased the number of studies on the application of group work in the field of education. For example, in teaching English as a second language, group activities are widely used, and students' language application ability has been significantly improved in group discussions, role-playing, project cooperation and other activities. In Chinese language teaching, many scholars and teachers have begun to pay attention to the application of group work. Some studies focus on the application effect of group work in Chinese reading and writing teaching, and find that group discussions can stimulate students' thinking and improve their reading comprehension and writing skills; however, although group work plays an irreplaceable role in teaching activities, the interaction between members is more noteworthy, that is, it is important for members to accept and understand each other (Mohammad Nor & Che Hassan, 2023). In addition, there are still some shortcomings in the current research in Malaysia, such as the research content is not comprehensive enough, the practical guidance on the application of group work in Chinese language courses is not specific enough, and there is a lack of targeted research on the application of group work in Chinese language teaching in schools of different levels and types.

METHOD

Questionnaire survey method

This quantitative study was carried out to examine to what extent the stages of small group development have effects on group interaction. A convenience sampling was conducted to obtain information from 355 survey respondents. The respondents were undergraduate students and were enrolled in elementary Chinese language courses at a public university in Malaysia. The respondents consisted of Diploma (52.9%) and Degree (47.1%) students. The instrument used in the survey was a 5 Likert scale survey rooted from Tuckman (1975). The survey was divided into 5 sections: Section A consisted of items on students' demographic profile whereas Sections B, C, D, and E consisted of items related to the four stages of Tuckman's model: forming, storming, norming and performing. Table 1 shows the number of items distributed in each section of the questionnaire.

Table 1 Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	STAGE	Items
B	FORMING	7
C	STORMING	6
D	NORMING	8
E	PERFORMING	8
		29

Research Concepts - Conceptual Framework

Team Stage	Formation stage	Agitation Phase	Standardization stage	Execution Phase	Rest and Recuperation Phase
Main content and features	Team members get to know each other Information Collection Role Division	Interpersonal conflicts and divisions caused by different viewpoints and opinions	Accepting differences Developing guidelines Support each other	Smooth communication Interdependence	Achievements

Figure 1 Conceptual framework of the study

This study adopts the team development model developed and proposed by Bruce Tuckman, a famous psychologist at Ohio State University in 1965, namely the formation stage, the stirring stage, the standardization phase, the execution phase and the rest phase.

In the formation stage, first of all, due to unfamiliarity with each other, the team members have a vague understanding of the team goals, unclear role division, and each member focuses on personal responsibilities and lacks a sense of collaboration; in the next stage, the agitation stage, the team members begin to show their personalities, and interpersonal conflicts and divisions arise due to different views and opinions. They may feel dissatisfied and frustrated with the team goals, roles and responsibilities; after a period of rest, the team members begin to enter the normative stage. In this stage, the team members gradually accept each other's differences, begin to formulate guidelines, and understand mutual support, so that the effectiveness of the team goals can be improved; in the final stage, the execution stage, the team enters the stage of efficient cooperation, with high trust among team members, smooth communication, and smooth completion of the team goals (Aquino et al., 2022). Once the task is completed and the goal is achieved, the group will enter the rest stage and the team will disband. This model can be fully adapted to role-playing projects in Chinese courses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings for Demographic Profile

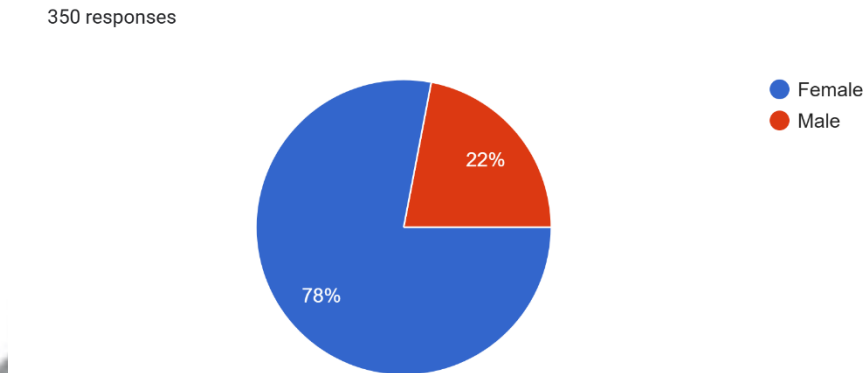


Figure 2 Percentages for Gender

The demographic profile of the students who participated in this study are discussed in this section. Gender distribution of the students is shown in Figure 1 and from the table, we could see that 22% of the respondents were male students whereas 78% were female students. This shows that there were more female students than male students who took part in answering the questionnaire for this research.

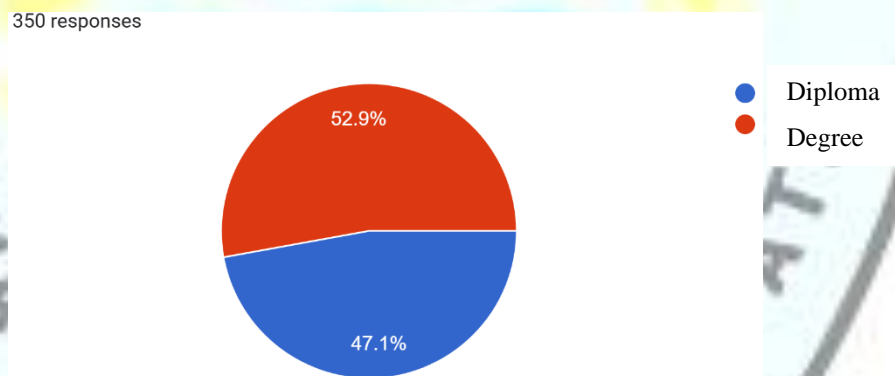


Figure 3 Level of study

Figure 2 listed the academic levels of the respondents in this study. As illustrated above, 47.1% of the respondents were pursuing their diploma level while 52.9% of them were doing degree studies. This means the respondents of this study were dominated by degree students.

Findings for Forming

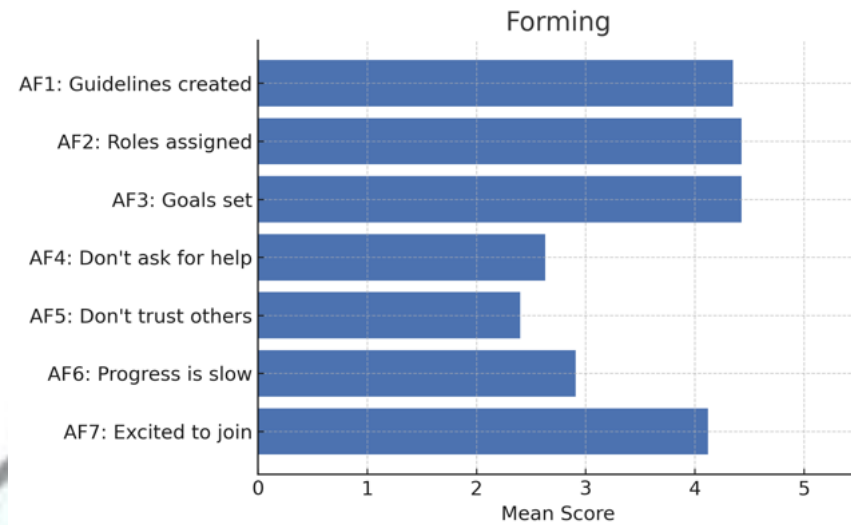


Figure 4 Mean for Forming stage

During the forming stage, students were observed to have a high level of clarity in set up their group structure. High mean scores were recorded for items AF2 related to assigning roles (mean = 4.43) and AF3 setting goals (mean = 4.43). The results show that student groups were effective in organizing their tasks and responsibilities at the outset.

However, lower mean scores were recorded for items AF5 (mean = 2.40). This is possible because those students were still hesitant to fully trust on each other and facing some early difficulties in collaboration studies.

Findings for Storming

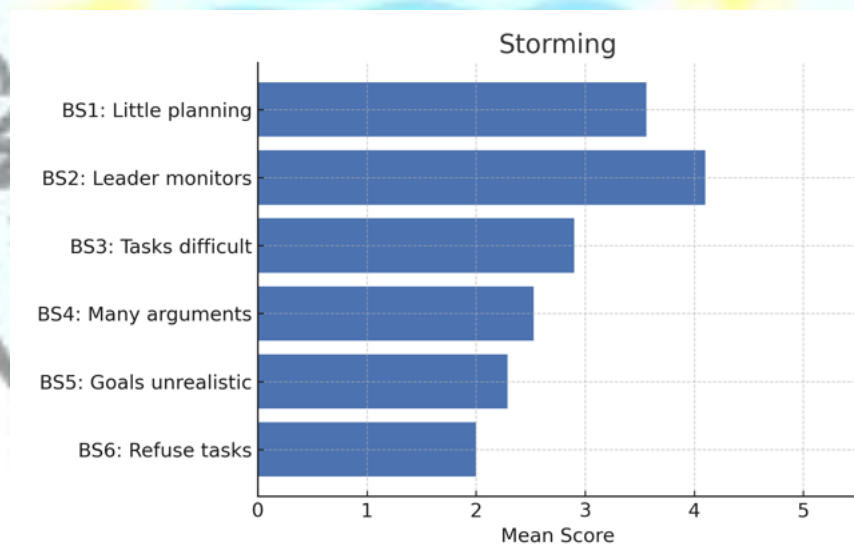


Figure 5 Mean for Storming stage

This stage is often marked by interpersonal conflict and challenges. The findings reflected with lower mean scores for items BS6 related to refuse tasks (mean = 2.00). These responses show that many students faced disagreements and lack of motivation from some group members.

However, the group leader's monitors was noted positively high mean for item BS2 (mean = 4.10) suggesting that active leadership helped to solved some of the conflict between the group members.

Findings for Norming

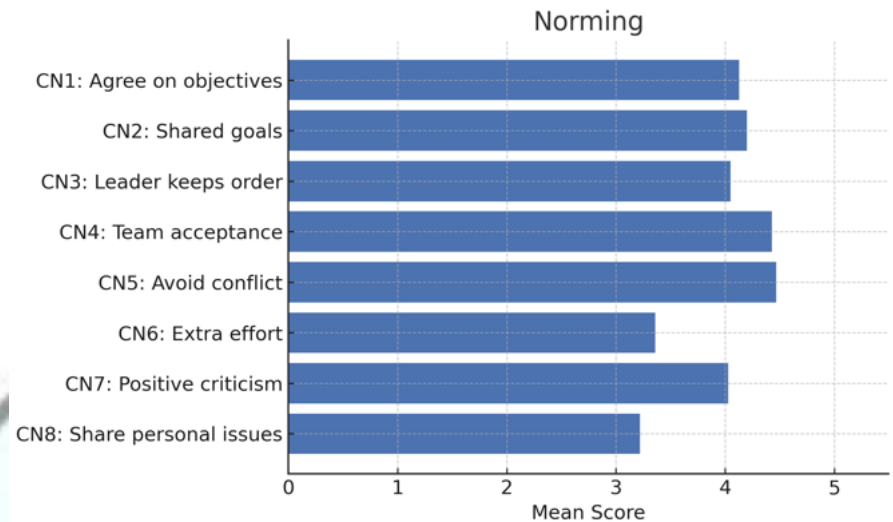


Figure 6 Mean for Norming stage

The norming stage showed significant improvement in group interaction. Students reported high mean on avoidance of conflict for item CN5 (mean = 4.47). These findings show that the group had started to function with cooperation and understanding each other in the group of the task.

Although the group showed positive communication and collaboration, the lower mean scores were recorded for item CN8 in sharing personal issues (mean = 3.22). This suggests that the respondents did not frequently share personal problems with each other in their group as their focus would be more in functional teamwork.

Findings for Performing

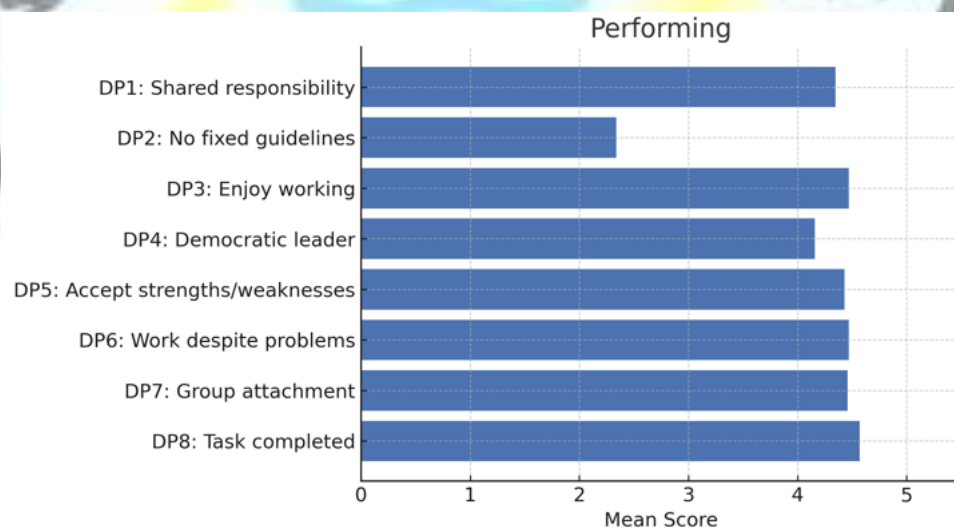


Figure 7 Mean for Performing stage

In the performing stage, the group reached a high level of productivity. Students expressed strong satisfaction in working together effectively for item DP8 in completing tasks (mean = 4.57). These responses indicate that most groups achieved effective collaboration and successfully completed their group work.

The lowest mean value for this stage is for the item related to having fixed guidelines of DP2 (mean = 2.34) which that it show the flexibility rather than rigid planning, contributed to successful complete their task.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to explore the application and effectiveness of group work in Chinese language courses by examining student group interactions through the lens of Bruce Tuckman's group development model—Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing stages. The model was useful to guide students in communicating about the assignments and organizing them well. Using a quantitative survey of 350 undergraduate students, the study gathered insights into how group dynamics evolved and how each stage influenced student collaboration and learning.

The findings reveal that students were clear on tasks and excited to begin, but early trust and cooperation had yet to develop fully and weak. In the Storming stage, this phase involved struggles with conflict and coordination, with leadership playing a critical role in managing the situation. It also highlights the challenges students faced when adjusting to diverse working styles and expectations. However, as students moved into the Norming stage, groups established shared goals, cooperation, and smooth working relationships, although emotional connection was less emphasized. Finally, during the Performing stage, most groups demonstrated effective communication and high productivity, indicating that group work had a meaningful impact on student engagement.

Overall, the study confirms that structured group work development stages can enhance not only students' academic performance but also their teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills. As such future research can include more respondents in order to examine the differences between genders, study programs, and language proficiency. Therefore, we hope that more research on Tuckman's model will be conducted to address the limitations of our study.

REFERENCES

- Aquino, J. F., Riss, R. R., Multerer, S. M., Mogilner, L. N., & Turner, T. L. (2022). A step-by-step guide for mentors to facilitate team building and communication in virtual teams. *Medical Education Online*, 27(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/10872981.2022.2094529>
- Awang-Hashim, R., Yusof, N., Benlahcene, A., Kaur, A., & Suppiah Shanmugam, S. K. (2023). Collaborative learning in tertiary education classrooms. *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, 20(2), 205–232. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373266043>
- Casanova, M., & de Andrade, M. F. R. (2022). Group work as a learning strategy in higher education. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science*, 22(G5), 9–17. <https://socialscienceresearch.org/index.php/GJHSS/article/view/4072>

Chau, M. H., & Jacobs, G. M. (2021). Cooperative learning: A foundation for project work. In *Cooperative Learning for Project Work* (pp. 123–132). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357858466>

Chen, H. (2021). Practice and reflection on group cooperative learning in primary school Chinese classroom. *Educational Practice and Research (A)*, (3).

Govindarajoo, M. V., Aboudahr, S., & Cheong, Y. Y. (2023). A case study on the implementation of collaborative learning in the Malaysian lower secondary classroom. *Journal of Education*, 11(2), 438–455. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370645798>

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2002). *An overview of cooperative learning*. <https://media.sabda.org/alkitab-1/Pdfs/Roger-David-Johnson-Overview%20of%20Cooperative.pdf>

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2018). Cooperative learning: The foundation for active learning. In *Active Learning – Beyond the Future* (pp. 59–70). <https://scispace.com/papers/cooperative-learning-the-foundation-for-active-learning-357wfpswfi>

Ma, L. (2019). Research on the application of group cooperative learning in high school Chinese classroom teaching. *Curriculum Education Research*, (29).

Mahamod, Z., & Somasundram, B. (2017). Effectiveness of cooperative learning on the achievement and motivation of the student in learning Malay language. *Creative Education*, 8, 2438–2454. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321908535>

Mohammad Nor, N. H. & Che Hassan, N. S. I. (2023). Exploring group interactions in group work. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 13(11). <https://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v13-i11/19436>

Wang, R. (2007). Task forms and design methods of group activities and their application in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. *Language Teaching and Research*, (1).

Wang, X. (2020). Research on strategies to improve the effectiveness of group cooperative learning in junior middle school Chinese classes. *Chinese Teaching Newsletter D (Academic Journal)*, (1).