

# EXPLORING GROUP WORK DURING MANDARIN CLASSES USING TUCKMAN'S MODEL

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## **ABSTRACT**

Group work is commonly used to promote teamwork, problem-solving, and exchanging ideas and perspectives among group members. To explore how Malaysian students perceive the various stages of group work and investigate the relationship between all stages, quantitative research was conducted on 165 university students taking Mandarin as a Foreign Language course. The Tuckman's Model was implemented in this study. The study indicates that learners at the forming stage are more likely to assign specific roles to team members and try to define the goal and what tasks need to be accomplished. During the storming stage, where discussions take place, the findings show that learners agree with the statement that the team leader should be the one who tries to contribute to the task at hand. The norming stage demonstrates that learners tend to achieve harmony by avoiding conflict and accepting each other as team members. During the performing stage, learners agree that they got a lot of work done, they appear to perceive the interactions in the group as positive and cooperative, and they fully accept each other's strengths and weaknesses. The findings also indicate that various stages of group work are linked to one another in a constructive progression, revealing that these stages are not distinct from one another but rather interconnected in a positive progression. It can be helpful to gain awareness of these linkages to guide a group effectively.

Keywords: Group Work, Interactions, Learn Mandarin, Learners' Perceptions, Tuckman's Model

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

# 1.1 Background of Study

Group work is a broad term that encompasses many forms; at its core, it refers to a group of people working interdependently together towards a shared goal (Farivar, 1994). Group work is commonly used to promote teamwork, problem-solving, and the exchange of ideas and perspectives among group members, and it has been implemented in different educational systems all over the globe.

Multiple research findings indicate that group work can be an effective learning strategy and an essential instrument for individual development and growth. Group work is a key feature of every classroom (Thornton, 2004). Group work can offer a concrete opportunity to build knowledge cooperatively, with the potential for the student to relate to knowledge in various ways (Casanova, 2022). The specific methods of group work are diverse, but they



believe that student collaboration enhances learning (Postholm, 2008). In general, group work can support individuals in multiple ways with their learning and developing important abilities.

To develop and enhance students' fundamental competencies in areas like teamwork and collaboration, communication skills, critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and leadership abilities, group work has been widely used in Malaysian educational institutions, especially at the university level. Students who participate in this form of active learning are inspired and motivated to take responsibility for their education. It not only helps students strengthen their essential abilities but also builds intercultural awareness and equips them to enter the workforce soon. To investigate how Malaysian students perceive the various stages of group work and group interactions among students learning Mandarin as a foreign language, a research study was conducted on a group of university students from different majors at Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam who were taking Mandarin as a Foreign Language course, and Tuckman's Model was implemented in this study.

# 1.2 Statement of Problem

Since American educational philosopher Dewey J. emphasised the concept of reflective thinking from a teaching perspective, many scholars have researched teaching (Yang, 2023). Yang (2023) proposed that language is 'learned,' not 'taught.' This idea is thought-provoking. The method of teaching Mandarin as a foreign language has gradually transitioned from conventional teaching to non-traditional teaching in response to changing times, social development, and progress. In conventional teaching methods, the instructor is at the centre of instructional activities (teaching-centred), and students are passive, not actively engaging in critical thinking and proactive learning. Passive learning refers to the conventional method, where learners have less participation in their learning process, relying mostly on instructors (Zaharuddin et al., 2022).

However, the new educational model advocates for instructors as facilitators who inspire students to take the initiative in learning, thereby enhancing students' learning abilities and outcomes. Group cooperation and interactive learning models can effectively improve students' engagement. Group cooperative learning is a teaching approach that takes cooperative learning groups as the basic form, systematically using the interaction between teaching dynamic factors to promote student learning, using the team's performance as the evaluation standard, and jointly achieving teaching goals (Meng et al., 2020).

Zahra (2014) mentioned that team-based learning achieves higher levels of achievement and effectiveness compared to passive learning methods. This passive learning environment fails to promote the creation of knowledge and contradicts Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist learning theory, which posits that knowledge is formed through active student interaction (Sari et al., 2021). It's widely accepted that collaborative learning is facilitated through group work, where students engage in meaningful discussions concerning the assigned task (Summers & Volet, 2010). Group work is one of the strategies for teaching and learning. Students can share their ideas, knowledge, and culture when they are grouped. When students with different abilities and knowledge interact in a group, it facilitates the mutual exchange of ideas and knowledge enhancement. Moreover, the benefits of collaborative work extend beyond the confines of the classroom. Through participation in group work, students can hone various soft skills such as communication, leadership, and teamwork, which will serve them well in the workplace and contribute to the success of their organisations (Kamaludin et al., 2022).

Team interactions can encourage team members to understand each other and build trust, which contributes to better teamwork. Only through the establishment of effective teamwork can common goals be achieved. In group work interactions, conflicts, arguments, mistrust, and differences of opinion may arise among team members. However, the forming, storming, norming, and performing stages in the Tuckman model describe the various



processes that team members may go through in group collaboration. Collaboration and interaction within a group can be both challenging and meaningful.

Current research on this subject is limited, indicating the necessity for additional investigation. We extend previous research by using Tuckman's model. Previous studies have primarily focused on examining teaching methods and the benefits of group work for students' learning. However, there is currently a lack of research on group interactions in learning Mandarin as a foreign language using Tuckman's model. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the application of the Tuckman model to students' learning of Chinese as a foreign language. This study is being conducted to answer the following questions: How do learners recognise the four stages of Tuckman's model when learning Mandarin as a foreign language?

# 1.3 Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore group interactions. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions:

- How do learners perceive the forming stage in group work when learning Mandarin as a foreign language?
- How do learners perceive the storming stage in group work when learning Mandarin as a foreign language?
- How do learners perceive the norming stage in group work when learning Mandarin as a foreign language?
- How do learners perceive the performing stage in group work when learning Mandarin as a foreign language?
- Is there a relationship between all stages of group work?

# 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

# 2.1 Group Work in Language Classroom

In foreign language classrooms, group work plays a pivotal role in enhancing language acquisition and promoting effective interactions among students. One of the prominent models used to understand group dynamics is Tuckman's stages of group development, which consists of four stages: forming, storming, norming, and performing (Tuckman, 1965). During the formation stage, students get acquainted with their group members and establish initial connections. Following this is the storming stage, where disagreements and conflicts may arise as students work together on language-related tasks. The norming stage marks the resolution of conflicts and the development of group cohesion, leading to a more harmonious working environment. Finally, in the performing stage, students work efficiently as a team, demonstrating their language proficiency through collaborative projects, discussions, and presentations.

Group work in foreign language classrooms offers diverse benefits. Firstly, it provides students with opportunities to practice speaking and listening skills in authentic contexts, enabling them to improve their fluency and pronunciation (Borg, 2011). Secondly, it fosters intercultural competence by encouraging interaction among students from diverse cultural backgrounds, promoting understanding and tolerance (Fantini, 2009). Additionally, group work enhances students' confidence in using a foreign language, as they receive immediate feedback from peers and can learn from their mistakes in a supportive environment (Slavin, 1995). Moreover, collaborative activities encourage active engagement, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, contributing to a more holistic language learning experience (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

However, group work also has its limitations. One major challenge is the unequal participation of group members, where some students may dominate discussions while others



remain passive (Kagan, 1994). This can hinder the learning experience for those who are less assertive or proficient in the foreign language. Additionally, conflicts that arise during the storming stage can disrupt the learning process if not managed effectively, leading to a negative classroom atmosphere (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). Furthermore, assessing individual contributions in group work can be complex, as it is challenging to determine the exact extent of each student's participation in collaborative tasks (Brindley, 1995).

In conclusion, group work in foreign language classrooms, guided by Tuckman's model, offers numerous benefits, such as improved language proficiency, intercultural competence, confidence, and critical thinking skills. However, educators need to be mindful of the potential limitations, such as unequal participation and conflict management, to create a positive and effective learning environment for all students.

# 2.2 Past Studies on Group Work

Research studies using Tuckman's group work model in foreign language learning have provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of collaborative learning environments. Wang and Li (2019) conducted a study that looked at the use of Tuckman's stages in college-level Mandarin language classrooms. The study involved 180 students grouped into teams, and their interactions were observed over a semester. The researchers used classroom observations, student feedback surveys, and final exam scores as research instruments. The findings revealed that groups that successfully navigated through all stages of Tuckman's model exhibited higher levels of Mandarin language proficiency. Specifically, the norming stage played a crucial role in developing a supportive and cooperative group atmosphere, leading to improved speaking and listening skills among students. The implications of this study underscored the importance of promoting positive group dynamics to enhance Mandarin language learning experiences in college classrooms (Wang & Li, 2019).

150 college-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students participated in another study (Lee &Kim, 2018). These students were organised into groups and took part in speaking activities following Tuckman's stages. The research used observations, student reflections, and post-activity surveys as research instruments. The findings revealed that students who experienced effective group development stages exhibited improved speaking skills, demonstrating higher levels of fluency and accuracy. The study highlighted the role of the norming stage in promoting a positive group atmosphere, allowing students to express themselves comfortably, and leading to enhanced language proficiency. This research emphasised the importance of carefully structuring group activities to ensure students' progress through Tuckman's stages, emphasising the creation of a supportive and collaborative learning environment (Lee & Kim, 2018).

Research by Smith and Johnson (2017) focused on integrating Tuckman's stages into a high school Spanish classroom. The research involved 120 students, who were grouped into teams and engaged in various language tasks. The instruments used for assessment included pre- and post-task questionnaires and language proficiency tests. The findings showed that students who progressed through all stages of group development showed significantly higher language proficiency scores compared to those in groups that struggled with the storming stage. The study underscored the importance of guiding students through the entire Tuckman's model, emphasising the significance of conflict resolution and group cohesion in enhancing language learning outcomes (Smith & Johnson, 2017).

In summary, these studies highlight the advantages of interactions in group work when learning a foreign language. They offer valuable perspectives for language instructors aiming to improve language skills through collaborative activities in diverse foreign language contexts.



# 2.3 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. This study looks at how learners view group interactions. Group interactions benefit the team members in many ways. Members gain input to solve problems assigned to the group (Rahmat, 2020). The interactions also lead to the generation of creative ideas. According to Tuckman (1965), during group work, team members go through four stages. The first stage is forming, where the team members begin the interaction with goals for the team. The second stage is storming, where team members undergo conflicts and disagreements. The next stage is norming, where team members stop disagreeing with one another to refocus on the original team's goal. The last stage is performing, where the team completes the group work.

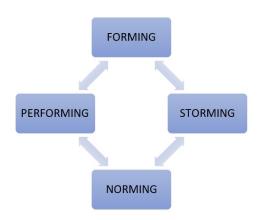


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study Interactions in Group Work

# 3.0 METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study is done to explore learners' perceptions of interactions in group work activities. A purposive sample of 165 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5-likert-scale survey rooted in Tuckman (1965) to reveal the variables in Table 1 below. The survey has 4 sections. Section A has items on the demographic profile. Section B has 7 items on forming. Section C has 6 items on storming. Section D has 8 items on norming, and Section E has 8 items on performing.

Table 1. Distribution of Items in the Survey

Section	Stage (Tuckman, 1965)	Items
В	FORMING	7
С	STORMING	6
D	NORMING	8
Е	PERFORMING	8
		29

Table 2. Reliability of Survey

# **Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.890	29



Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .890, thus revealing the good reliability of the instrument chosen or used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

## 4.0 FINDINGS

# 4.1 Findings for Demographic Profile

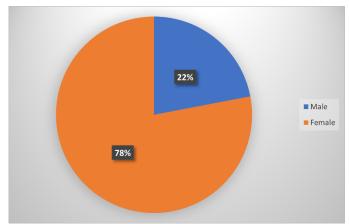


Fig. 2 Percentage of Gender

Figure 2 presents a clear outline of gender distribution, showing that 22% of the group comprises males, while the majority, 78%, consists of females. Essentially, this illustrates a higher proportion of females compared to males in the group.

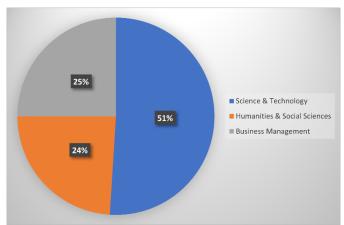


Fig. 3 Percentage for Discipline

Figure 3 displays the distribution of students across various disciplines. Out of 165 respondents, 51% belong to the science and technology field, 25% are in business management, and the remaining 24% are in the humanities and social sciences. This information offers a comprehensive insight into the academic backgrounds of the students involved in the study.



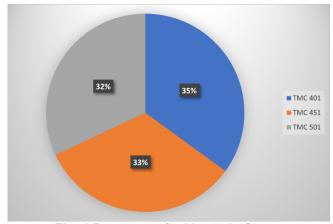


Fig. 4 Percentage for Mandarin Course

As per the data in Figure 4, out of the 165 respondents who took part in the survey, 25% are enrolled in Mandarin Level 1 (TMC401), 33% are in Mandarin Level 2 (TMC451), and 32% are pursuing Mandarin Level 3 (TMC501).

# 4.2 Findings for Forming Stage

This section presents data to answer Research Question 1: How do learners perceive the forming stage in group work when learning Mandarin as a foreign language?

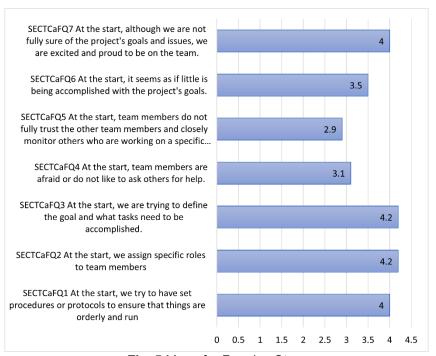


Fig. 5 Mean for Forming Stage

Figure 5 presents the mean score for the forming stage. The data indicates that there are two statements with the highest mean score, which is 4.2 at the forming stage, which corresponds to the respondents being assigned to specific roles and trying to define their goals and tasks to accomplish at the beginning of the stage. The second-highest mean of the study reached a value of 4. The respondents try to have set procedures or protocols to ensure that things are orderly and run smoothly, although they are not fully sure of the project's goals and issues. Meanwhile, they are excited and proud to be on the team. Nevertheless, respondents disagree that they do not fully trust the other team members and closely monitor each other while working on a specific task, with the statement hitting the lowest mean value of 2.9.



# 4.3 Findings for Storming Stage

This section presents data to answer Research Question 2: How do learners perceive the storming stage in group work when learning Mandarin as a foreign language?

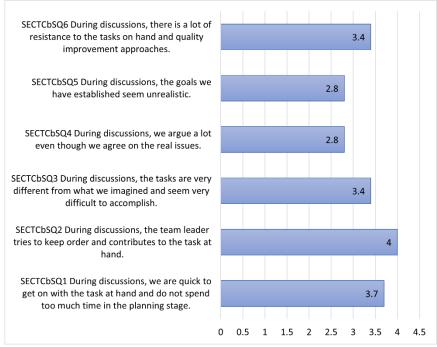


Fig. 6 Mean for Storming Stage

Figure 6 presents the mean score for the storming stage. The results show that respondents' top choice (M = 4) is the team leader who tries to keep order and contributes to the task at hand. The survey findings reveal that respondents prefer to get on with the task at hand quickly and do not spend too much time in the planning stage (M = 3.7). In the newly formed group, respondents disagree with the statements that they argue a lot even though they agree on the real issues (M = 2.8), and the goals they have established seem unrealistic (M = 2.8).

# 4.4 Findings for Norming Stage

This section presents data to answer Research Question 3: How do learners perceive the norming stage in group work when learning Mandarin as a foreign language?



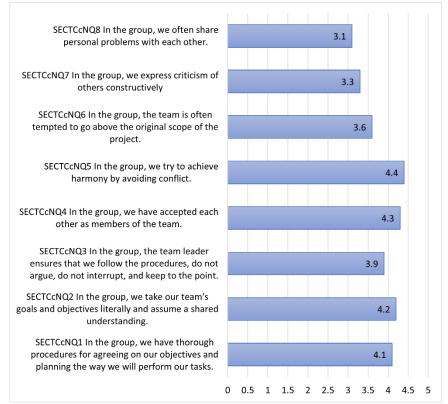


Fig. 7 Mean for Norming Stage

Figure 7 shows the mean score of the norming stage. The data says that most respondents agreed that in the group, they try to achieve harmony by avoiding conflict (M = 4.4). They have also accepted each other as members of the team. (M = 4.3). However, they are less inclined to share their personal issues with each other in the group (M = 3.1).

# 4.5 Findings for Performing Stage

This section presents data to answer Research Question 4: How do learners perceive the performing stage in group work when learning Mandarin as a foreign language?

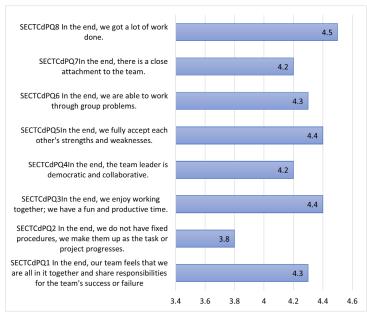


Fig. 8 Mean for Performing Stage



Figure 8 illustrates the mean score for the performing stage. The data reveals that respondents strongly agreed that they got a lot of work done at the end (M = 4.5). Additionally, two statements, scoring 4.4, show that they enjoy working together, have a fun and productive time, and fully accept each other's strengths and weaknesses. However, the statement with the lowest mean score was "In the end, we do not have fixed procedures; we make them up as the task or project progresses." (M = 3.8).

# 4.6 Findings for the Relationship between

This section presents data to answer Research Question 5: Is there a relationship between all stages of group work?

To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between metacognitive, effort regulation, cognitive, social, and affective strategies, data is analysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 below.

Table 3. Correlation between Forming and Storming **Correlations** 

		FORMING	STORMING
FORMING	Pearson Correlation	1	.505**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	165	165
STORMING	Pearson Correlation	.505**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	165	165

<sup>\*\*.</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-...

Table 3 shows there is an association between forming and storming. Correlation analysis shows that there is a highly significant association between forming and storming (r = .505\*\*) and (p = .000). According to Jackson (2015), the coefficient is significant at the .05 level, and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, a moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and a strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between forming and storming.

Table 4. Correlation between Storming and Norming **Correlations** 

		STORMING	NORMING
STORMING	Pearson Correlation	1	.461**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	165	165
NORMING	Pearson Correlation	.461**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	165	165

<sup>\*\*.</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).



Table 4 shows there is an association between storming and norming. Correlation analysis shows that there is a moderately significant association between storming and norming (r = .461\*\*) and (p = .000). According to Jackson (2015), the coefficient is significant at the .05 level, and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, a moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and a moderate positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between storming and norming.

Table 5. Correlation between Norming and Performing **Correlations** 

		NORMING	PERFORMING
NORMING	Pearson Correlation	1	.609**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	165	165
PERFORMING	Pearson Correlation	.609**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	165	165

<sup>\*\*.</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows there is an association between norming and performing. Correlation analysis shows that there is a highly significant association between norming and performing (r =.609\*\*) and (p =.000). According to Jackson (2015), the coefficient is significant at the .05 level, and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, a moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and a strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between norming and performing.

Table 6. Correlation between Performing and Forming **Correlations** 

		PERFORMING	FORMING
PERFORMING	Pearson Correlation	1	.413**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	165	165
FORMING	Pearson Correlation	.413**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	165	165

<sup>\*\*.</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 shows there is an association between performing and norming. Correlation analysis shows that there is a moderately significant association between performing and norming (r = .413\*\*) and (p = .000). According to Jackson (2015), the coefficient is significant at the .05 level, and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive



correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, a moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and a moderate positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between performing and norming.

# 5.0 CONCLUSION

The study indicates that learners at the forming stage are more likely to assign specific roles to team members and try to define the goal and what tasks need to be accomplished at this beginning stage. During the forming stage, although the learners are not fully sure of the project's goals and issues that might occur, they are excited and proud to be on the team, and they will try to have set procedures or protocols to ensure that things are orderly and run smoothly. Nevertheless, learners disagree that they do not fully trust the other team members and closely monitor each other while working on a specific task. Jaqua (2021) emphasises the importance of the forming stage in building trust, assigning appropriate tasks, and fostering motivation among team members because the forming stage is significant since it makes way for the smooth development of the following group stages. The forming stage is not the time to expect free and open discussions or to create a consensus, but fostering trust, encouraging relationship building, and clarifying purposes and expectations take precedence over making decisions or taking action (Johnson, 2010).

During the storming stage, where discussions take place, the finding shows that learners agree with the statement that the team leader should be the one who tries to keep order and contributes to the task at hand. Learners also prefer to get on with the task at hand quickly and not spend too much time in the planning stage. Learners disagree with the statements that they argue a lot, even though they agree on the real issues. They also do not think that the goals they have established seem unrealistic. Nevertheless, interstage awareness during group formation is crucial to ensuring that conversation in the storming stage may proceed smoothly and effectively. Similarly, research focuses on interstage awareness in group formation, particularly in educational contexts, and recommends strategies for leaders to reduce the negative effects of the storming phase on group dynamics (Lail, 2019).

The results of the norming stage demonstrate that learners tend to achieve harmony by avoiding conflict and accepting each other as members of the team in the group. However, the result also shows that learners would not often share personal problems, even if the connection and understanding were starting to form during this stage. Learners tend to avoid conflict and accept team members to facilitate group work. They commonly adopt ignoring or avoiding conflict as a strategy and then try to resolve it through discussion (Abbasi, 2017).

While during the performing stage, learners agree that they got a lot of work done at this stage. However, learners appear to perceive the interactions in the group as positive and cooperative. They agree that they fully accept each other's strengths and weaknesses at this stage. They also enjoy working together and having a fun and productive time while completing the group work. Learners value the social interactions and friendships that develop through group work (Vera, 2020). The learners will be most productive when working on a project in collaboration in small groups due to harmonious relations and mutual solidarity (Tolstoukhova, 2023). At this stage, learners disagree with the claim that they do not have fixed procedures; they make them up as the task or project progresses.

Lastly, the result reveals strong positive relationships between all stages of group work. The fact that various stages of group work are linked to one another in a constructive progression reveals that these stages are not distinct from one another but rather interconnected in a positive progression. It can be helpful to gain awareness of these linkages to guide a group effectively.



## 6.0 PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Group work is a widely adopted pedagogical approach in the field of education. It encompasses complicated social interactions that include various degrees of involvement. The investigation of learners' perspectives on group interactions and their comprehension of the relationships between various stages of group work will provide valuable insights into individuals' collaborative processes, knowledge acquisition, and problem-solving strategies. By researching group interactions, it is possible to enhance the efficacy, productivity, and collaboration of groups.

The value of group work in the field of education has been widely recognised, and there is a continuous development of research endeavours targeted at enhancing its educational worth and effectiveness. The utilisation of group work as a pedagogical strategy in higher education demonstrates significant potential for enhancing the learning experience. Future research in the field of group work may consider exploring strategies for assessing individual contributions within a group. Additionally, conducting comprehensive evaluations of group processes, such as decision-making and conflict resolution, could provide valuable insights into how these activities contribute to overall group interactions.

Besides that, future studies might also investigate ways that educators can strengthen their facilitation skills and establish an environment that is conducive to learning. Also, there is a need to investigate how group work can be effectively implemented in online and hybrid learning environments, as well as the long-term effects of group work on the professional and personal development of students. Exploring these areas of research can help us understand how group work influences learning and enhances its efficacy for the benefit of learners and educators overall.

# **CO-AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION**

The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. On Yee Min carried out the fieldwork and data collection. Lim Siew Mei wrote the research methodology, did the data entry, and overlooked the write-up of the whole article. Teo Ai Min prepared the literature review. Teo Ai Min and Ho Wee Chee carried out the statistical analysis and interpreted the results. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the article.

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