

Exploring The Influence of Conflict in Group Work

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Abstract

Collaborative group work plays a vital role in fostering the comprehensive growth of university students. Within the context of students' collective efforts, conflict within student collaboration can disrupt harmony or catalyse growth and innovation. Tuckman (1965) introduced the group development model involving forming, storming, norming, and performing stages. This study aims to investigate the impact of conflict in group work on learning the Japanese language, employing (Tuckman's Model, 1965). A quantitative survey was conducted, utilising a Google Form with four sections, including items on demographic profiles and 29 questions rated on a 5-Likert scale. The survey involved 112 students from a public university in Malaysia. The findings have shown effective leadership, positive communication, and consensus on goals play a crucial role in resolving conflicts within a group. Furthermore, the results highlight significant associations and relationships among the four stages of forming, storming, norming, and performing group work. Hence, educators should prioritize guiding students through the norming stage, as successful progression is crucial for achieving a high-performing stage. Further research is recommended to explore common conflicts during group formation and develop effective resolution strategies.

Keywords: Group Work, Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Tuckman Model

Introduction

Background of Study

In higher education, the collaborative nature of group work stands as a cornerstone for the holistic development of university students. In the realm of collaborative efforts, the frequently misunderstood and underestimated factor of conflict arises as a dynamic force capable of either disturbing the harmonious symphony of cooperation or acting as a catalyst for growth and innovation (Rahmat, 2020). This study looks at how disagreements affect student groups and tries to comprehend how these tense moments can help students become stronger, better thinkers and improve their ability to work together.

Bruce Tuckman (1965) initially introduced the model of group development known as forming, storming, norming and performing. According to Tuckman, these phases are essential and unavoidable for a team to mature, confront challenges, address issues, devise solutions, organize work, and achieve outcomes. Tuckman posited that these inescapable phases play a vital role in the growth and development of a team. He came out with the idea that, in conjunction with these elements, interpersonal relationships and task activity contribute to enhancing the four-stage model necessary for successfully navigating and establishing effective group functioning.

Collaborative learning is a vital skill in higher education and modern society. Yet, creating and putting collaborative learning into action comes with a lot of difficulties. Many studies tell us that college students often get frustrated when they have to work together in these situations. Even though there are many suggestions in the literature to improve students' bad experiences in group work, it is impossible to make every group work experience positive for all students (Yang, 2023).

Over the past years in Malaysia, several researchers have also examined how higher education learners perceive group work in their English and Arabic language classrooms, applying (Tuckman's Model, 1965). Based on their findings, they recommend that educators should prioritise pedagogical approaches and incorporate group work activities into teaching and learning to improve language proficiency and achievement (Kamaludin et al., 2022; Zaharuddin et al., 2022; Zakaria et al., 2023; Samad et al., 2023). Nevertheless, there is currently no research addressing the learning of the Japanese language in this context, especially in Malaysia. Thus, it would be meaningful to understand the impact of conflict in group work on university students who are learning the Japanese language in Malaysia, to enhance the necessity of successfully navigating and establishing effective group functioning.

Statement of Problem

Participating in group projects is crucial to the university experience and can help to improve students' interpersonal skills. However, working with a group of individuals might lead to conflicts.

Rahmat (2020) posits that disputes may arise from a total disagreement form, wherein team members appear to be competing with one another. The team members might not be entirely at fault for this argument. The team member who is at odds with the others may choose to accept some of their views. Subsequently, the team member experiencing conflict may opt to prevent future conflicts by incorporating the concepts of the opposing teams into their perspectives. In the last phase, the members of the team decide to work together as a team and work towards a compromise.

Conflicts in group talks arise when team members are unable to explore alternative ideas or simply listen to different viewpoints, according to a study by (Sim et al., 2021). It has been observed that team members tend to remain silent when they disagree. To avoid misunderstandings, they relied on nonverbal communication to express disagreement.

According to Zakaria et al.'s (2023) research, students' group work experiences are positively impacted by all phases. It is also discovered that the stages of forming and performing, as well as between forming and norming, have a somewhat beneficial link. Therefore, to improve group work in English as a Second Language classes, teachers should watch these stages as students move through them and provide feedback to students.

However, it is indisputable that interactions between individuals with different viewpoints can occasionally cause conflicts within the group. For group work to be successful,

participants must collaborate and communicate well with one another. Although group dynamics can differ and groups may not necessarily advance through each stage linearly, the Tuckman model (1965) offers a helpful foundation. Certain groups might go back and revisit previous phases or encounter new difficulties during the process. However, leaders and participants can better navigate and improve group interaction by knowing the Tuckman theory.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

In Malaysia, scholars have investigated the perceptions of higher education learners regarding group work in the context of foreign language learning. Samad et al. (2023) conducted a study involving higher education students to gather insights into their experiences with group work. The analysis indicated moderate to high levels of satisfaction throughout all stages of group work, with particular emphasis on the performing stage. Furthermore, the study identified a positive correlation between performance and the preceding forming, storming, and norming stages, underscoring the significant impact of these stages on overall group work performance.

Another study focusing on Arabic language learning revealed that learners undergo group dynamics, progressing through Tuckman's five group development stages (Zaharuddin et al., 2022). This study unequivocally demonstrated that engaging in group work contributes to students acquiring proficiency in Arabic, improving comprehension, and refining their overall language skills.

Hence, to prioritize pedagogical approaches and integrate group work activities into teaching and learning to enhance language proficiency and achievement, it is essential to investigate the impact of conflict in group work within higher education, particularly involving mature adult learners. This study is done to investigate how group development stages, as proposed by the Tuckman model (1965), are reflected in group work at the university. Simultaneously, this study aims to explore the impact of conflict in group work.

The objectives of this study are as follows

- Identify how learners perceive forming in group interaction for language classrooms
- Identify how learners perceive storming/conflict in the group interaction in the language classrooms
- Identify how learners perceive norming in group interaction in language classrooms
- Identify how learners perceive performing in the group interaction for the language classroom
- Identify if there is a relationship between stages in group work in the language classroom

Specifically, the study is conducted to answer the following questions

- How do learners perceive forming in group interaction for language classrooms?
- How do learners perceive storming/conflict in the group interaction in the language classrooms?
- How do learners perceive norming in group interaction in language classrooms?
- How do learners perceive performing in the group interaction for the language classroom?
- Is there a relationship between stages in group work in the language classroom?

Literature Review

Group Work in the Language Classroom

Working in a group has advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages is when working in groups, or cooperative learning, students show increased individual achievement compared to students working alone. According to Johnson et al (2014), compared to students working alone, students learning in a collaborative environment had higher knowledge acquisition, retention of content, and higher-order problem-solving and reasoning ability. Moreover, it increases students' efforts to achieve, encourages positive relationships with classmates and faculty, and improves psychological health and well-being. However, there are disadvantages too. Some students may have different speeds while doing their work. Members of the group may also have difficulty in working together, and some may not cooperate well. Renandya and Jacobs (2018), listed some issues in cooperative learning including unequal participation in the class or group. A handful of students take center stage in the conversation, with the remaining students either silently following along, responding briefly, or not paying any attention at all. Students do not get along with their groupmates is another issue. They either argue with each other or remain silent and do not cooperate.

Group Interaction based on Tuckman

The Tuckman model (1965) elucidates the stages of group interaction, which include forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning.

Group members gather during the formation phase and concentrate on establishing bonds and comprehending the goal of the organization. When group members voice their thoughts and opinions during the storming stage, conflicts and disagreements may occur. This phase is essential for resolving conflicts, defining personal responsibilities, and creating group dynamics. The group begins to develop norms, guidelines, and ideals during the norming stage. When people start to recognize and respect one another's shortcomings as well as their talents, group cohesion increases. When the group is performing, it is at its most productive because everyone gets along well and uses their talents and abilities to advance the goals of the group. There is good cooperation and synergy among group members, and communication is easy. The completion of the group's assignment or project marks the adjourning stage. It includes concluding tasks, acknowledging successes, and evaluating the group's performance. This phase is especially crucial for putting the group's experience to rest and recognizing the contributions of all participants.

Past Studies on Group Work in Language Classroom

There are many past studies on group work in language classrooms. One of them is research by (Do and Le, 2019). They researched to investigate the English major students' perception of group work, how much they use English in group work engagement, and their opinions about the given suggestions for English-speaking deployment in group work. They collected the data via interviews and a questionnaire distributed to 150 students at a university in Vietnam. The results obtained indicate that the majority of students placed a high value on the importance of group work and the use of English. They also reaffirmed that speaking Vietnamese is still the norm in practice and mostly agreed on several recommendations made to optimize general advantages and additional advantages of language acquisition that come from group projects. Al-azzawi and Al-Khazali (2019), conducted a study to determine whether group work is a useful strategy for teaching English at the University of Kufa, Iraq.

The data were collected via a questionnaire. The paper also discussed the concept of group work, the various types of group work, and the reason why group work is used. It was found that most learners think that group work is helpful and a good method for learning English. The results also indicated that female students favour group work more than male students.

Conceptual Framework

When it comes to group work, group conflicts may bring many benefits to the teams’ development and progress. According to Rahmat (2020), in group discussions, when conflict occurs, the members learn negotiation and compromising skills. The argument can sometimes lead to the discovery of new ideas and new knowledge. The conceptual framework of the study is presented in Figure 1 below. This framework is rooted in Tuckman (1965) who discovered that during group work, participants undergo the forming stage, the storming of the conflict stage, the norming stage when the conflict is resolved and finally the performing stage. The performing stage is where the team showcases their team success.

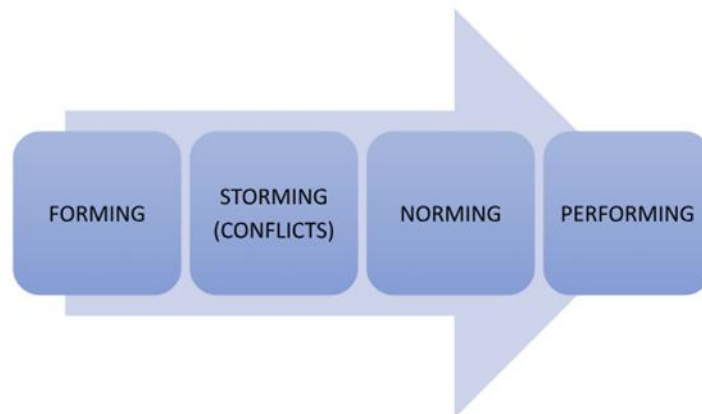


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study-
The Influence of Conflict in Group Work

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore group interactions among language learners. A purposive sample of 112 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is 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	Items
B	FORMING	7
C	STORMING	6
D	NORMING	8
E	PERFORMING	8
		29

Table 2

Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.862	29

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .862, thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

Q1- Gender

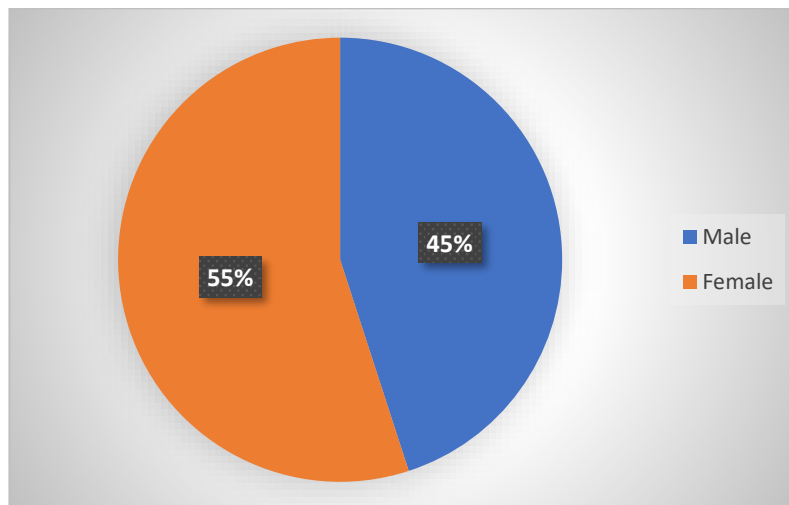


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

Based on Figure 2 above, the percentage of gender is made from 55% male and 45% female.

Q2- Discipline

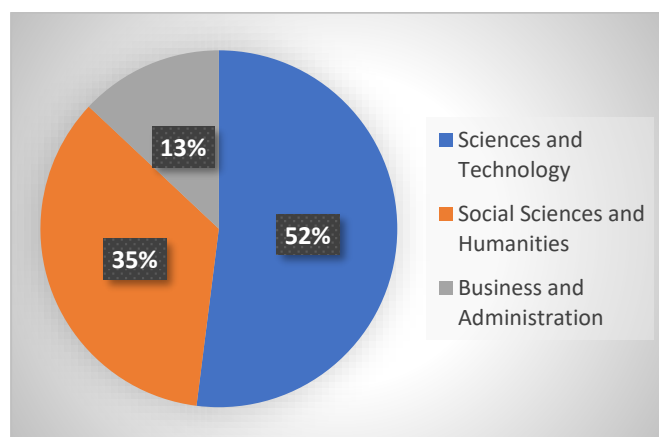


Figure 3- Percentage for Discipline

Figure 3 above shows the distribution by discipline. The majority of respondents (52%) are from sciences and technology, followed by 35% of respondents from social sciences and humanities while 13% of the respondents are from business and administration.

Q3-Language level

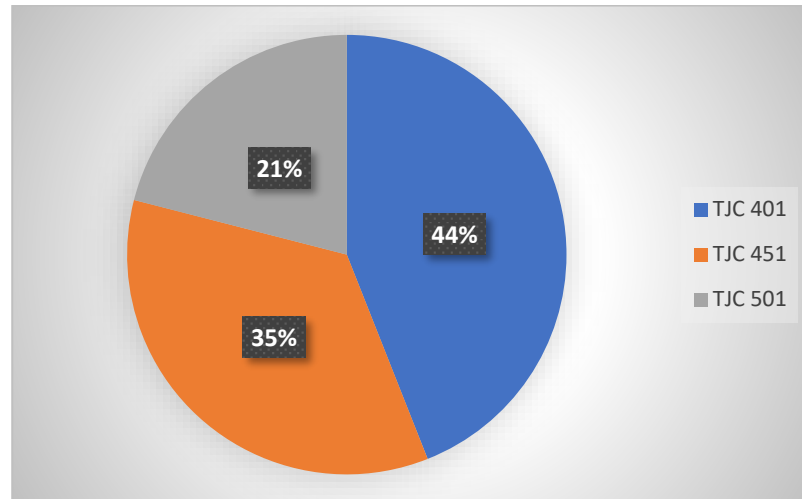


Figure 4- Percentage for Language Level

Figure 4 shows the distribution by language level. 44% of the respondents are from level 1 (TJC401), followed by 35% of level 2 (TJC451) and 21% of level 3 (TJC501) respondents. The majority of the respondents are at the beginner level of Japanese language learning.

Findings for Forming

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive forming in group interaction for language classrooms?

Section B -Forming Stage

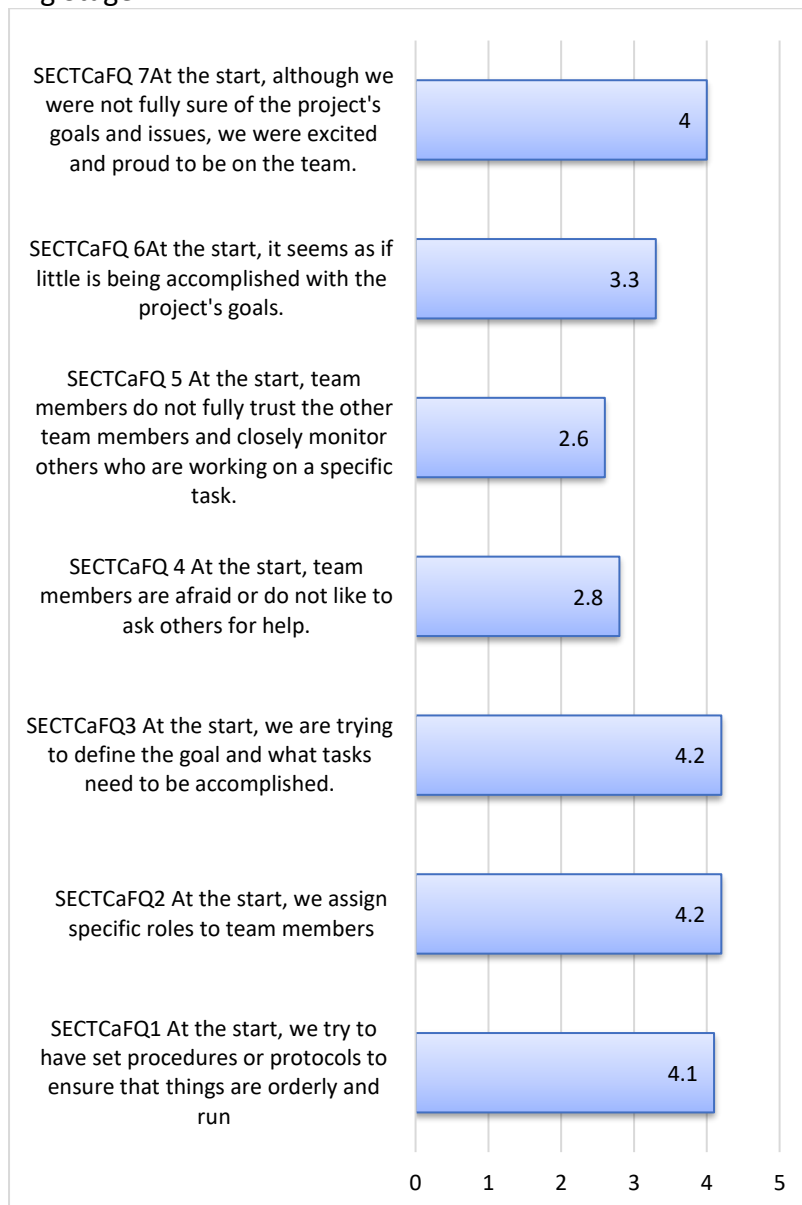


Figure 5- Mean for Forming Stage

Based on Figure 5 above, the 2 questions that achieved the highest mean score (4.2) are “At the start, we assign specific roles to team members” and “At the start, we are trying to define the goal and what tasks need to be accomplished”. This indicates that learners know what they need to accomplish and quickly define their position on a team. The second (4.1) and third highest mean scores (4.0) are “At the start, we try to have set procedures or protocols to ensure that things are orderly and run” and “At the start, although we are not fully sure of the project’s goals and issues, we were excited and proud to be on the team” show that learners are well-organised and positive thinking during teamwork forming stage. Meanwhile, “At the start, team members do not fully trust the other team members and closely monitor others working on a specific task” has achieved the lowest mean score (2.6) for this question.

Findings for Storming/Conflict

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How do learners perceive storming/conflict in group interaction in the language classroom?

Storming/Conflict Stage

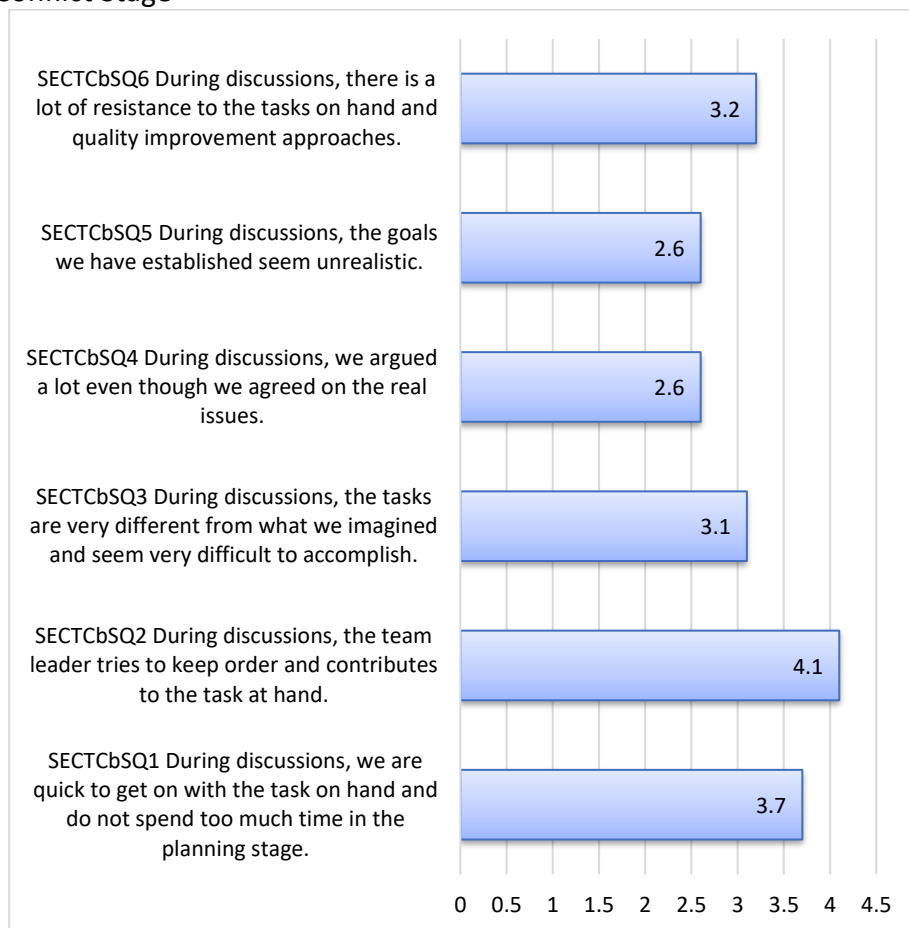


Figure 6- Mean for Conflict Stage

Figure 6 shows the mean of the Storming/Conflict Stage. Based on all 6 items, the mean scores range from 2.6 to 4.1. This shows that the respondent perceives storming/conflict in the group interaction in the language classroom. The item “During discussions, the team leader tries to keep order and contributes to the task at hand” recorded the highest mean score (4.1). The data indicated that often the team leader tries to keep order and contributes to the task at hand during discussion. On the other hand, the item with the lowest mean score (2.6) was found to be both items “During discussions, we argued a lot even though we agreed on the real issues” and “During discussions, the goals we have established seem unrealistic”. The respondents sometimes argued a lot even though they agreed on the real issues. Besides, the goals they have established seem unrealistic during discussion.

Findings for Norming

This section presents data to answer research question 3- How do learners perceive norming in group interaction for language classrooms?

Norming Stage

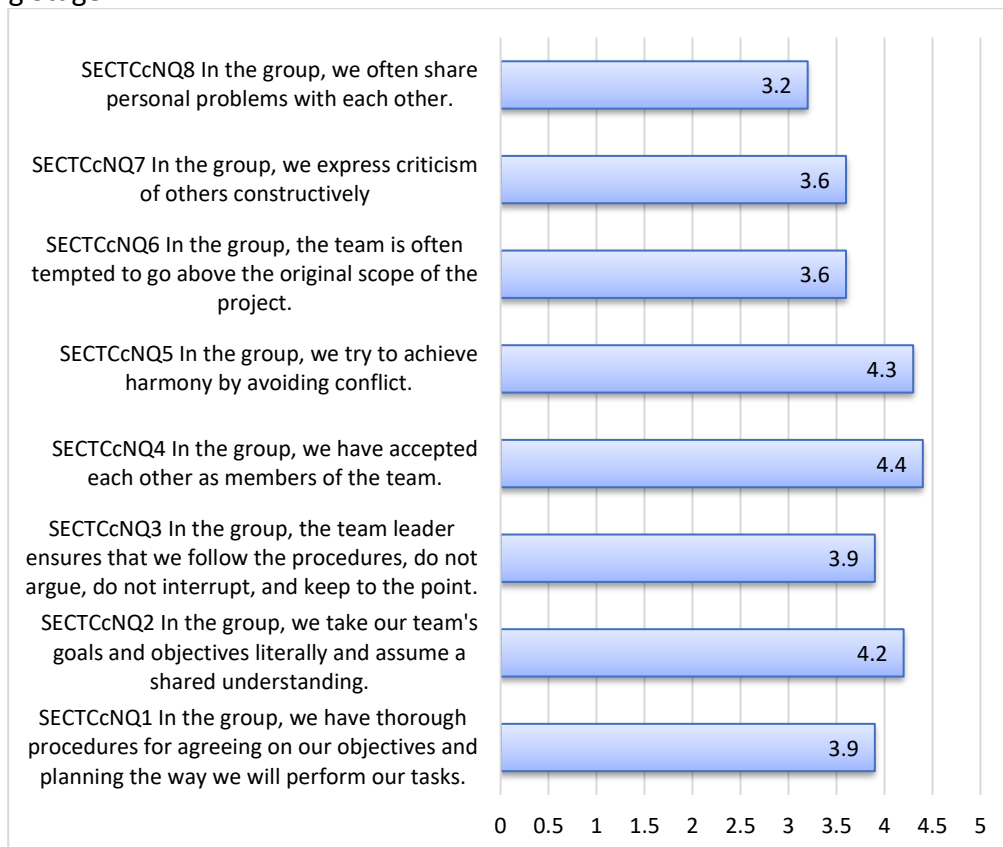


Figure 7- Mean for Norming Stage

In Figure 7, the three highest mean scores (4.4) are “In the group, we have accepted each other as members of the team” followed by “In the group, we try to achieve harmony by avoiding conflict” (4.3) and “In the group, we take our team’s goals and objective literally and assume a shared understanding (4.2)”. This shows that learners are highly valued on harmonious and good social relationships in group interaction for language classrooms. On the other hand, the lowest mean score goes to “In the group, we often share personal problems with each other” (3.2).

Findings for Performing

This section presents data to answer research question 4- How do learners perceive performing in the group interaction for the language classroom?

Performing Stage

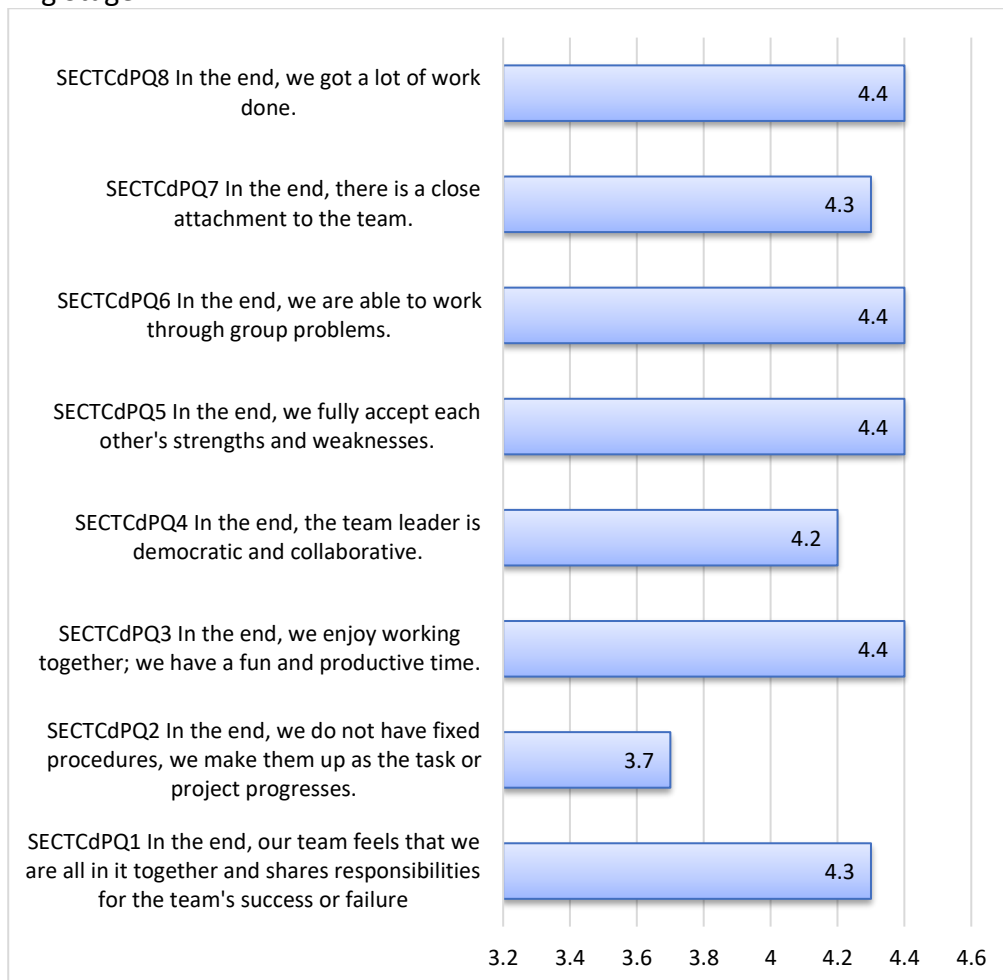


Figure 8- Mean for Performing Stage

Figure 8 above shows that four questions have the highest mean score of 4.4. They are “In the end, we enjoy working together; we have fun and productive time”, “In the end, we fully accept each other's strengths and weakness”, “In the end, there is a close attachment to the team”, and “In the end, we get a lot of work done.” Meanwhile, the lowest mean score (3.7) is for the question “In the end, we do not have fixed procedures, we make them up as the task or project progresses.”

Findings for Relationship between Stages in Group Work in the Language Classroom

This section presents data to answer research question 5: Is there a relationship between stages in group work in the language classroom?

To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between forming, storming, norming, and performing stages. 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 Conflicts***Correlations**

		FORMING	CONFLICTS
FORMING	Pearson Correlation	1	.569**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	112	112
CONFLICTS	Pearson Correlation	.569**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	112	112

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows there is an association between forming and conflicts. Correlation analysis shows that there is a highly significant association between forming and conflicts. ($r=.569^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), a coefficient is significant at the .05 level and a 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 a strong positive relationship between forming and conflicts.

Table 4

*Correlation Between Conflicts and Norming***Correlations**

		CONFLICTS	NORMING
CONFLICTS	Pearson Correlation	1	.193*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.041
	N	112	112
NORMING	Pearson Correlation	.193*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.041	
	N	112	112

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows there is an association between the conflicts and the norming stage. Correlation analysis shows that there is a low significant association between conflicts and norming. ($r=.193^*$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), a coefficient is significant at the .05 level and a 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 weak positive relationship between conflicts and norming.

Table 5

Correlation Between Norming and Performing

		NORMING	PERFORMING
NORMING	Pearson Correlation	1	.749**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	112	112
PERFORMING	Pearson Correlation	.749**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	112	112

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows there is an association between norming and performing stages. Correlation analysis shows that there is a highly significant association between norming and performing stages. ($r=.749^{**}$) 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 stages.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussions

This study has shown significant associations and relationships among the different stages of group work. This finding is in accordance with the findings by Samad et al. (2023) and Zakaria et al. (2023) indicating that all stages positively influence students' group work experience. In response to our research questions, the study looks into the conflicts of group work, uncovering essential findings that help us understand the progression and success of group work.

Findings revealed that when students start working together, their main focus is on setting up clear rules and ways of doing things to make the group work well. Aligned with Tuckman's theory (1965), right at the beginning, each person gets assigned a specific job, which helps everyone know what to do. At the same time, they work together to decide on clear goals and tasks they want to complete as a group. This first part is important because it creates a structured environment where everyone understands their roles and responsibilities. Therefore, the starting stage is crucial for language learners working together. It affects how the group works together later on and shapes how the language class as a whole works (Tuckman, 1965).

As per Rahmat (2020), during group discussions, conflict situations prompt members to acquire negotiation and compromising skills. Despite occasional disagreements within the group, the absence of substantial argumentation on substantive issues suggests a level of maturity and collaborative problem-solving among the members. Thinking that the goals the group set are doable is important for avoiding conflicts and making everyone get along during group talks. Findings also show how good leadership, talking nicely, and everyone agreeing on goals help when there are disagreements or conflicts in the group. In doing so, the group not only addresses potential conflicts but also establishes a foundation for cohesive and

synergistic collaboration, setting the stage for the subsequent stages of norming and performing in the group interaction process.

At the Norming stage, there is a notable acceptance among individuals, recognising each other as integral team members. This acceptance fosters a sense of cohesion, unity, and mutual respect within the group, laying the groundwork for effective collaboration. Moreover, a proactive pursuit of harmony characterises this stage, with members actively seeking to avoid conflicts (Samad et al., 2023). This focus on getting along highlights that everyone in the group is committed to the team's goals and understands how important it is to work together well. The norming stage, therefore, represents a crucial phase where the group consolidates its identity, reinforces positive interpersonal dynamics, and aligns itself for the subsequent performing stage, where collaborative efforts are ready to reach the goals of the group.

Al-azzawi & Al-Khazali (2019) found that most learners think that group work is helpful and a good method for language learning. Similarly, this study discovered that, in the final stage when the group is doing their best work together, there's a clear feeling of success and teamwork as students share their experiences. As the collaborative efforts progress, there is a shared sentiment of enjoyment in working together, with students characterizing their time as simultaneously enjoyable and productive. When everyone in the team fully accepts each other's strengths and weaknesses, it shows they're becoming closer. At this stage, students really have a positive attitude, focus on finishing tasks well, and work together effectively. Again, the results indicate that the team leader took on a democratic and collaborative role. This stage, called "performing," is like the peak of working together (Tuckman, 1965).

Samad et al.'s (2023) study also reveals consistently high satisfaction levels across all group work stages, particularly emphasising the performing stage.

In summary, the findings reveal significant associations and relationships among the different stages of group work. In the group development process, the forming stage exhibits a strong positive correlation with the stage of the conflict, as indicated by a highly significant association, signifying the likelihood of conflicts emerging as the group takes shape. Meanwhile, the conflicts stage shows a low significant association with the norming stage, implying a weak positive relationship that allows the group to navigate conflicts without substantially hindering the establishment of norms. Furthermore, the norming stage demonstrates a highly significant association with the performing stage, emphasizing a strong positive relationship. Successful navigation through the norming stage significantly contributes to the group reaching a high-performing stage, highlighting the crucial role of establishing norms for enhanced overall group performance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research shows the complex relationships and dependencies within group work, particularly during the forming, conflicts, norming, and performing stages. It reveals that conflicts often arise during group formation, but these conflicts have a minimal impact on the subsequent norming stage. This suggests that groups can effectively manage conflicts without hindering their ability to establish norms. Importantly, successful progression through the norming stage plays a crucial role in the group's achievement of a high-performing stage, underscoring the significance of establishing norms for improved group performance.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The pedagogical implications drawn from these findings tell teachers about the importance of understanding and dealing with the complicated aspects of group work. This insight suggests the need for pedagogical strategies that equip students with conflict resolution skills and foster a positive group environment. Additionally, educators should prioritize guiding students through the norming stage, as successful progression in this phase significantly contributes to achieving a high-performing stage.

The study reveals that conflicts often happen when a group is starting, but these conflicts only have a minimal impact on the subsequent norming stage. According to Tuckman (1965), the four stages of forming, conflicts, norming, and performing are essential and unavoidable for a team to mature, confront vice solutions, organize work, and achieve outcomes. Further research is needed to explore specific conflicts that commonly arise during group formation and develop effective resolution strategies.

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