



Chinese Grammar Learning through Small Group Discussion: A Study on Comprehensive Chinese Courses at UNNES

Dian Yuni Pamuji^{1✉}, Clarosa Amanda Hasel², Ruth Kiana Nuratri³

¹ Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

^{2,3} Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

Keywords

Small Group Discussion Method, Chinese Grammar, Comprehensive Chinese Courses, Active Learning

Abstract

This study aims to describe the implementation of the Small Group Discussion method in grammar learning within comprehensive courses, namely Gaoji Hanyu Zonghe (Advanced Comprehensive Chinese) for the Class of 2022 and Zhongji Hanyu Zonghe Shang (Intermediate Comprehensive Chinese I) for the Class of 2023 in the Chinese Language Education Study Program. The study employed a qualitative descriptive method, with data collection comprising observation, interviews, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with students to elicit their responses and to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the group discussion method in Chinese grammar learning. The results showed that the discussion method was successfully implemented in Gaoji Hanyu Zonghe (Advanced Comprehensive Chinese) for the Class of 2022, as students were active and responsive throughout the learning process. Small Group Discussion helped students study grammar before class, improved their critical thinking and public speaking skills, and created a more interactive learning environment. In addition, peer tutoring enabled students to understand the material more easily. In contrast, in Zhongji Hanyu Zonghe Shang (Intermediate Comprehensive Chinese I) for the Class of 2023, the Small Group Discussion method did not show significant results because students tended to be passive and lacked a strong grammar foundation. The identified obstacles included limited contributions from group members, misunderstandings of grammar, and reliance on AI to understand the material. This study concludes that the success of the discussion method is influenced by students' activity, readiness in basic grammar, and the lecturer's guidance during the learning process.

✉ Corresponding Author:
E-mail: dianpamuji25@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Chinese language learning in higher education requires students not only to master speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills but also to understand grammar as the foundation for accurate language use. Chinese grammar differs from Indonesian grammar, often causing students to struggle to understand sentence patterns, particle use, and other grammatical structures. Therefore, an appropriate learning strategy is needed to improve students' understanding of Chinese grammar. (Apriza et al., 2024)

One learning method that can increase student engagement is the Small Group Discussion method. The discussion method is a learning approach that provides students with opportunities to exchange ideas, solve problems, and present their thoughts collaboratively. In language learning, discussions can help students understand the material through social interaction and two-way communication. (FATMALA & FANANI, 2019)

In comprehensive courses, grammar learning is an important component because students are required not only to understand grammatical patterns but also to apply them in communication contexts. In the learning process, the Small Group Discussion method is implemented by dividing grammar materials among student groups to be studied, discussed, and presented in class. Through this method, students are expected to become more active in seeking information and independently understanding the use of grammar. (Pratama et al., 2025)

The group discussion method aligns with the concept of active learning, which places students at the center of the learning process. Students do not merely receive explanations from lecturers; they are also directly involved in finding, understanding, and explaining the material to other students. (Nurqadriani, 2025) In today's digital learning environment, students also increasingly utilize AI-based tools to support Mandarin language learning, including grammar and writing activities. (Pamuji et al., 2025) Previous studies have shown that active learning can improve students' participation and critical thinking skills in Chinese language learning. (Ina et al., 2022)

However, the success of the Small Group Discussion method varies across classes. Factors such as student activeness, readiness in basic grammar knowledge, confidence in expressing opinions, and classroom conditions greatly influence the effectiveness of the learning process. In some situations, discussions can be active and interactive, while in others, students tend to be passive, resulting in suboptimal achievement of the learning objectives.

Based on observations conducted in Gaoji Hanyu Zonghe (Advanced Comprehensive Chinese) for the Class of 2022 and Zhongji Hanyu Zonghe Shang (Intermediate Comprehensive Chinese I) for the Class of 2023 in the Chinese Language Education Study Program, differences emerged in the outcomes of implementing the group discussion method. In Gaoji Hanyu Zonghe (Advanced Comprehensive Chinese) for the Class of 2022, the discussion method was highly effective, as students

were active and responsive in their discussions of grammar. In contrast, in *Zhongji Hanyu Zonghe Shang* (Intermediate Comprehensive Chinese I) for the Class of 2023, the implementation of discussion activities did not yield significant results because students tended to be passive and less engaged in discussion. Therefore, this study aims to describe the implementation of the Small Group Discussion method in grammar instruction within comprehensive courses and to identify its advantages and disadvantages based on students' experiences.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method. The research was conducted on students of the Chinese Language Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) who were enrolled in *Gaoji Hanyu Zonghe* (Advanced Comprehensive Chinese) for the Class of 2022 and *Zhongji Hanyu Zonghe Shang* (Intermediate Comprehensive Chinese I) for the Class of 2023.

Data collection techniques consisted of observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted during the learning process to identify students' activities in Chinese grammar discussions. Interviews were conducted with students to gather data on their experiences, opinions, and responses to the implementation of the Small Group Discussion method. Documentation in the form of learning notes and students' presentation results was used as supporting data.

The data were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of techniques by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Implementation of Small Group Discussion in *Gaoji Hanyu Zonghe* (Advanced Comprehensive Chinese) for the Class of 2022

Based on classroom observations and interviews with students, the implementation of the Small Group Discussion method in *Gaoji Hanyu Zonghe* (Advanced Comprehensive Chinese) for the Class of 2022 showed positive results. Students demonstrated high participation during the learning process. The classroom atmosphere was highly interactive, with lively question-and-answer sessions occurring throughout grammar discussions. Students actively exchanged opinions, responded to their classmates' explanations, and collaboratively analyzed Chinese grammatical structures.

Students in the class of 2022 were very active and enthusiastic during discussions. Students were willing to ask questions whenever they encountered difficulties and often initiated discussions independently without waiting for direct instruction from the lecturer. This active participation created a dynamic

learning environment and encouraged students to engage more deeply with grammar materials.

Interview findings revealed that students felt more motivated to prepare the material before class because they were responsible for explaining grammar concepts within their groups. One student stated:

“Karena grammar harus dijelaskan, jadi saya mau tidak mau harus membuka buku untuk belajar. Karena saya sudah belajar duluan, pas laoshi menjelaskan grammar di kelas jadi lebih mudah nyambung.” (Respondent 6)

“Because the grammar had to be explained, I had no choice but to open the textbook and study. Since I had already learned the material beforehand, it was easier for me to follow the lecturer’s explanation in class.” (Respondent 6)

This finding indicates that the discussion method encouraged students to prepare independently before class and facilitated their understanding of grammar materials.

Students also reported that discussion activities improved their critical thinking skills. One respondent explained:

“Kalo menurut saya itu bisa bikin kita buat berpikir kritis laoshi karena buat presentasiin grammar nya kan kita disuruh mikir dulu.” (Respondent 2)

“I think this method helps us develop critical thinking because before presenting the grammar, we have to think about and understand it first.” (Respondent 2)

In addition, students perceived peer explanations as easier to understand than traditional lectures.

“Kalau menurut saya malah lebih enak dipahaminya karena yang jelasin temennya, jadi kalau tanya terus ga sungkan.” (Respondent 9)

“For me, it is actually easier to understand when classmates explain the material because I do not feel embarrassed to ask questions.” (Respondent 9)

Another benefit identified by students was the development of communication and presentation skills.

“Mahasiswa public speaking, mahasiswa bisa inget tentang materi lebih lama, brainstorming antar mahasiswa.” (Respondent 4)

“This method improves students’ public speaking skills, helps them remember the material longer, and encourages brainstorming among classmates.” (Respondent 4)

These findings suggest that Small Group Discussion not only supports grammar comprehension but also promotes active learning, communication skills, and student confidence.

In addition, group discussions encouraged collaboration among students and strengthened their

confidence in presenting ideas publicly. Students became more accustomed to participating in two-way communication and developed greater independence in learning Chinese grammar.

Implementation of Small Group Discussion in Zhongji Hanyu Zonghe Shang (Intermediate Comprehensive Chinese I) for the Class of 2023

In contrast, the implementation of the Small Group Discussion method in Zhongji Hanyu Zonghe Shang (Intermediate Comprehensive Chinese I) for the Class of 2023 did not run as effectively as in the 2022 class. Based on classroom observations, many students tended to be passive and quiet during discussions. Student interaction was limited, and only a small number actively asked or answered questions.

Students in the class of 2023 were generally less confident and more dependent on the lecturer's explanations. During discussions, students often waited for guidance rather than initiating conversations on their own. As a result, classroom discussions were less interactive and sometimes became silent.

Interview results indicated that many students still had difficulty understanding Chinese grammar independently because their basic grammar knowledge was insufficient. One respondent stated:

“Kalau dasar grammar mahasiswa belum kuat, diskusi malah bisa berubah jadi saling menebak jadi pemahaman yang didapat kurang tepat.” (Respondent 3)

“If students do not have a strong grammar foundation, discussions may turn into guessing sessions, resulting in inaccurate understanding.” (Respondent 3)

Several students also expressed a preference for lecturer explanations before discussions.

“Saya lebih suka kalo laoshi jelasin dulu baru kita cari contohnya. Apalagi buat grammar Mandarin yang cukup kompleks.” (Respondent 3)

“I prefer the lecturer to explain the grammar first before we look for examples, especially because Chinese grammar can be quite complex.” (Respondent 3)

Another challenge concerned unequal participation among group members.

“Karena kelompokan jadi ada yang gak kerja, dan jadi si anak ini sebenarnya kurang paham sama materinya sendiri.” (Respondent 1)

“Because the work is done in groups, some members do not contribute, and as a result, they do not really understand the material themselves.” (Respondent 1)

A similar issue was mentioned by another student:

“Kalau pas dapat banyak yang pasif itu bikin jengkel saja, dan jadinya malah seperti kerja individu

bukan kelompok.” (Respondent 7)

“When many group members are passive, it becomes frustrating, and the task ends up feeling more like individual work than group work.” (Respondent 7)

Some students also reported relying on artificial intelligence tools to understand grammar, although the explanations were not always helpful.

“Saya memang sering tanya AI terkait grammar, tetapi kadang tetap saja tidak paham.” (Respondent 5)

“I often ask AI about grammar, but sometimes I still do not understand the explanation.” (Respondent 5)

These findings indicate that students at the intermediate level still require substantial lecturer support to ensure accurate understanding of grammar concepts and effective participation in group discussions.

Another finding showed that group discussions were not always balanced, as several students remained passive while only a few dominated the discussion. This condition caused unequal participation among group members. Some students also stated that they relied on AI tools to understand grammar materials; however, the explanations provided by AI were sometimes confusing and did not fully help them understand the concepts being discussed.

In addition, the discussion process was considered time-consuming because students still needed extensive guidance from the lecturer. Limited confidence and lack of active participation reduced the effectiveness of the Small Group Discussion method in this class.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the effectiveness of the Small Group Discussion method in Chinese grammar learning is strongly influenced by students' learning readiness, confidence, and level of participation. In Gaoji Hanyu Zonghe (Advanced Comprehensive Chinese) for the Class of 2022, students' active participation contributed significantly to the success of the discussion method. The lively interaction and continuous exchange of ideas enabled students to understand grammar materials more deeply and encouraged collaborative learning.

The active classroom atmosphere in the 2022 class also reflects the characteristics of student-centered learning, where students play an important role in constructing knowledge through interaction and communication. Through discussion activities, students not only improved their understanding of Chinese grammar but also developed critical thinking, communication skills, and self-confidence. Peer explanations and collaborative problem-solving helped students process grammar concepts in a more meaningful and less intimidating way.

The interview findings support the observation results. Students in the 2022 class reported that the discussion activities encouraged them to prepare the material before class, think critically about

grammar concepts, and improve their confidence in presenting ideas. Peer explanations were also perceived as easier to understand because students could communicate using more familiar language. These findings indicate that Small Group Discussion promotes both cognitive engagement and collaborative learning.

On the other hand, the findings from *Zhongji Hanyu Zonghe Shang* (Intermediate Comprehensive Chinese I) for the Class of 2023 indicate that the discussion method may not function optimally when students still lack sufficient grammar foundations and confidence. Students' passive attitudes and reliance on the lecturer's explanations reduced the effectiveness of group interaction. Discussions became less dynamic because students were hesitant to express opinions or ask questions.

Interview data further revealed that students at the intermediate level preferred lecturer explanations before engaging in discussions. This preference suggests that students still required instructional scaffolding to build sufficient grammatical understanding. Without adequate prior knowledge, discussions sometimes resulted in misconceptions and unequal participation among group members.

These findings suggest that Small Group Discussion requires adequate student preparedness before implementation. For students at the intermediate level who still struggle with fundamental grammar concepts, lecturer guidance remains highly important. In such situations, the lecturer may need to provide preliminary explanations or scaffolding before students engage in group discussions. This approach can help students build confidence and reduce misunderstandings during discussions.

Furthermore, unequal participation among group members became another challenge in the 2023 class. When only a few students dominate discussions, the collaborative learning process cannot run effectively. Therefore, lecturers need to monitor group dynamics carefully and encourage equal participation among students.

Overall, this study indicates that the Small Group Discussion method can be highly effective in Chinese grammar learning when students possess adequate grammar competence, confidence, and active learning attitudes. However, for students with limited foundational knowledge and lower participation levels, the method requires additional lecturer support and structured guidance to achieve optimal learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the group discussion method in comprehensive courses yielded different results across classes. In *Gaoji Hanyu Zonghe* (Advanced Comprehensive Chinese) for the Class of 2022, the discussion method was implemented successfully because students were active, responsive, and able to collaborate in discussing Chinese grammar. Discussions encouraged students to study the material before class, improved their critical thinking and public speaking skills, and helped them understand grammar through independent research and explanation.

In addition, the learning process became more interactive because of two-way communication and peer tutoring among students. Students also felt more comfortable asking their classmates for help when they had difficulty understanding grammar. Therefore, the group discussion method created an active, collaborative learning environment when supported by favorable classroom conditions.

However, in Zhongji Hanyu Zonghe Shang (Intermediate Comprehensive Chinese I) for the Class of 2023, the discussion method did not yield significant results because students remained passive and lacked a strong grammar foundation. Some students had difficulty understanding the material independently, which sometimes led to discussions generating misconceptions about grammar. In addition, the lack of contribution from several group members, the less effective use of AI, and limited discussion time also became obstacles in the learning process.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the success of the Small Group Discussion method is strongly influenced by students' readiness, classroom participation levels, basic grammar skills, and the lecturer's guidance throughout the learning process. Therefore, lecturers are advised to adjust their teaching methods to students' conditions. In classes where students' basic abilities are still low, lecturers may provide preliminary explanations of grammar before discussions to help students build a stronger foundation. Thus, the Small Group Discussion method can still be effectively applied in Chinese grammar learning.

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