

# Unveiling Chinese Approaches to British Case Study Group Discussions: Insights for Global Business Education

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## Abstract

In the context of globalization in business education, students from all over the world participate in mixed case study group discussions to enhance their skills in risk forecasting and intercultural communication through collaborative exploration. Learners who possess effective case-based discussion techniques and strategies for success in one cultural context may find them either impactful or ineffective when applied in another learning culture. This study scrutinized the case study group discussion process involving a group of Chinese undergraduate students enrolled in a split-site degree program and their English-speaking partners. Three group discussion approaches—spiral, individual, and cumulative—were identified by analyzing the Chinese students' strategies for manipulating topics and reacting to others' opinions. These Chinese approaches illustrate unique autonomous learning strategies of self-reflection and inner dialogue within the study groups. The findings hold implications for the course design of English for Business Purposes (EBP) in business partnership degree programs.

**Keywords:** case-based group discussion, Chinese students, culture of learning, EBP course design

## 1. Introduction

In internationalized business education, both Chinese and British universities employ group discussion as one of the teaching techniques. A group discussion on business usually focuses on a case study (Nesi & Gardner, 2012); in this context, students are required to make well-informed strategic decisions by applying relevant concepts, frameworks, and theories to analyze a given situation to obtain systematic understanding of the case situation (Lundberg, 1993). Although Chinese and British cultures of learning share understandings and norms (Heather & Barnett, 2012) of group discussion, there are complex and varied approaches to group discussions, encompassing aspects such as reflection, critical thinking, and autonomous learning, that contribute to misunderstandings and confusion between the two learning cultures. Additionally, divergent perceptions regarding the purposes and functions of group discussions further contribute to this dynamic.

Chinese cultural norms, notably influenced by Confucianism and collectivism, emphasize core values such as harmony, hierarchical order, and a proclivity for minimizing uncertainty (Bordia et al., 2015). This cultural perspective aligns with 'high-context' communication patterns, as elucidated by Hall (1976). Communication within China is commonly perceived to convey implicit meanings discernible only within the context of the physical environment and the shared knowledge and values of the community. In contrast, Anglophone Western societies are characterized by an emphasis on individual, self-directed learning accompanied by a communication style inclined towards explicitness and directness. Tran (2013), for example, referenced a prevalent Western perception that portrays Chinese students as "typically passive, unwilling to ask questions, or speak up in class" (ibid: 57). Remedios et al. (2008) categorized Asian undergraduates in mixed classes in Australia as silent participants during group discussions. Holmes (2006) delved into the distinct communication approaches of Chinese and New Zealand students, highlighting that Chinese students often anticipate guidance from the lecturer. This stance is perceived as incongruent with the Western dialogic mode of learning, which encourages students to collaboratively construct meaning through questioning and critical thinking.

In the realm of global education, exemplified by the collaborative business and management degree program jointly facilitated by a Chinese and British university in the present study, intricacies stemming from the persistence of values and behaviors ingrained in diverse educational cultures can engender misinterpretations

among Chinese students and their non-Chinese counterparts. These complexities manifest during collaborative discussions, thereby exerting an impact on the academic adaptation of Chinese students within British seminar group discussions. The study aims to scrutinize the strategies employed by Chinese students in case study group discussions within a British university context. The findings hold implications for the design of business English courses offered by both Chinese and British programs because the strategies adopted by Chinese students are shaped by their prior learning experiences in China and their comprehension of the expectations embedded in the British learning culture.

## 2. Literature Review

In an increasingly interconnected world, the demand for graduates with a global mindset has risen. However, limited understanding exists about how students from diverse cultural backgrounds, particularly Chinese and British learning cultures, engage in case study group discussions—a crucial skill in global business education. Although literature, such as Wang (2012) and Bordia et al. (2015), has indicated increased vocalization and approval of group discussions among Chinese students in Britain, it remains unclear whether they employ strategies familiar from China or adopt new ones. This literature review aims to bridge this gap by exploring British and Chinese approaches to case study group discussions and Chinese students' attitudes in Western learning contexts. The identified gaps and inconsistencies in the literature lead to two research questions.

### 2.1 Similarities and Differences between British and Chinese Group Discussion Behavior

Empirical studies on group discussions in Chinese and Western universities highlight some commonalities, such as the practice of taking turns in speaking, especially using extensive turns of Response as Initiation (*R/I*) and Follow-up as Initiation (*F/I*). These turns play vital roles in improving mutual understanding and introducing new sub-topics (Basturkmen, 2002). However, a significant gap exists in understanding how positively students engage in discussions universally because British and Chinese students use their language skills differently to build “new knowledge” (Barron, 2002: 305). The different strategies used by British and Chinese students in responding to previous statements (Waring, 2002; Yueting & Xuyan, 2020) indicate distinct discussion styles, requiring a closer look at the factors influencing these differences.

Despite frequent extended dialogue, a notable gap emerges in explaining how Chinese students specifically adapt their behavior over time in Western academic settings. While Auken et al. (2009) and Rodrigues (2005) have suggested changes in attitudes, the literature lacks details about the specific methods Chinese students use in group discussions, hindering a complete understanding of their evolving participation patterns.

Exploring British literature on language for teaching and learning reveals three discussion styles—disputational talk, cumulative talk, and exploratory talk. However, there is inconsistency in how well these styles apply to higher education. Although these styles offer insights into “social models of thinking” (Mercer, 1995: 104), their relevance to higher education, as seen in Li and Nesi's (2004) experiment, needs further exploration. Moreover, there is potential for gaps in understanding how these styles intersect with cultural differences, especially in the context of Chinese students' group discussion behavior.

An inconsistency arises in describing Chinese students' behavior in discussions, with Li and Nesi (2004) noting implicit and less participatory tendencies. Wang's (2012) and Gram et al.'s (2013) studies have highlighted concerns about direct communication, suggesting a potential gap in understanding the nuanced reasons behind the observed communication styles. Additionally, the delicate balance in Chinese students' approach to discussions, respecting diverse perspectives while asserting opinions, lacks detailed exploration, and further inquiry is needed to understand the factors shaping this balance.

Furthermore, the literature indicates a potential issue with information sharing because Chinese students may be reluctant to share information (Frambach et al., 2013; Li & Nesi, 2004). This contrasts with a gathering of students from the United States expressing “maximal understanding” to foster new topics (Waring, 2002: 1727). The reasons behind such disparities, the cultural influences shaping information sharing, and the implications for effective seminar group discussions warrant deeper investigation.

In summary, the literature on British and Chinese group discussion behavior reveals gaps in understanding the universality of positive engagement, inconsistencies in the applicability of discussion styles to higher education, potential issues with information sharing, and a lack of granularity in exploring the nuanced reasons behind observed communication styles. Addressing these gaps is crucial for a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural dynamics in group discussions within educational contexts.

## *2.2 Chinese Students' Perception of Group Discussion in the Western Learning Context*

The assimilation of Chinese students into British seminar group discussions has been scrutinized in studies including those by Wang (2012) and Gram et al. (2013). These inquiries collectively reveal a gradual recognition among Chinese students of the educational value embedded in group discussions (Gram et al., 2013). Liu's (2008) investigation, specifically exploring the perspectives of Chinese postgraduates in a British business education context, highlighted a significant endorsement of case-study group discussions. The data, obtained from a questionnaire survey and focus group discussions, indicate elevated ratings for the effectiveness of this instructional method, with students attributing its value to its ability to illuminate core aspects of the module, connect theoretical concepts with practical scenarios, and foster precision in thought processes.

However, amid positive sentiments, a subset of Chinese students expresses reservations, particularly related to challenges in linguistic proficiency and fears of potential errors in discourse. Importantly, Esteban and Cañado (2004) noted that case studies typically assume a linguistic proficiency at an upper-intermediate level, validating the hesitancy observed among certain Chinese students.

Contradictory viewpoints within the literature emerge, as evidenced by studies such as Sham (2001) and Cathcart et al. (2006). Chinese students, as illuminated by Cathcart et al.'s (2006) investigation, have expressed an appreciation for group discussions based on the anticipation of forging social connections and garnering assistance from Western peers. However, incongruities in learning expectations arise, with Chinese students emphasizing the significance of a group leader, ideally a British student, for guidance (Cathcart et al., 2006). This deviation from the collaborative learning ethos expected by British lecturers, as elucidated by Mercer (1995), underscores cross-cultural disparities in educational paradigms.

Furthermore, Chinese students' receptivity to group discussions appears to evolve over time, with longitudinal exposure to Western university seminars diminishing the perceived importance of classroom discussion techniques (Auken et al., 2009; Rodrigues, 2005). Auken et al.'s (2009) study, conducted on Chinese students following an American curriculum, delineated a prioritization of fundamental business skills over group discussion. Rodrigues (2005) corroborated these findings, indicating a diminished emphasis on classroom discussions among Chinese students compared to their American counterparts.

The multifaceted nature of Chinese students' attitudes toward group discussions in Western educational contexts is underscored by incongruent findings in existing literature. The diverse origins of these attitudes, including prior educational experiences in China, perceptions of the instructor's role, and conceptualizations of business and management as academic disciplines, highlight the intricate interplay of factors shaping Chinese students' participatory dynamics within Western university seminar group discussions.

## *2.3 Discussion and Research Questions*

Capitalizing on the identified gap in the literature regarding the inconsistent applicability of discussion styles and the multifaceted nature of Chinese students' attitudes toward group discussions in the British academic context, this study aims to probe into the dynamics surrounding the adaptation of Chinese students to British seminar group discussions within Western academic environments. At the core of this investigation lie two interconnected research questions. Research Question 1: In the context of Chinese students' adaptation to British seminar group discussions, how do they modify their discussion approaches? Research Question 2: What distinctions exist in the intentions between Chinese and British students concerning their participation in seminar group discussions? The inquiry aims to scrutinize how these students modify their familiar discussion styles in the new academic setting, delving into potential disparities in the objectives or motivations guiding engagement in collaborative learning activities between these two student groups.

Addressing these two research questions not only serves to deepen our understanding of the nuanced nature of cross-cultural learning dynamics but also bridges potential gaps and rectifies inconsistencies in the current understanding of how Chinese students navigate and participate in British seminar group discussions within diverse academic settings. This, in turn, underscores the necessity for further exploration and the development of targeted pedagogical strategies that can enhance meaningful and inclusive discussions in such multicultural educational environments.

## **3. The Study**

### *3.1 Context*

Conducting research within a collaborative degree program jointly hosted by Chinese and British institutions, this study engaged a cohort of students. Their academic journey unfolded with a two-year phase at a Chinese university, followed by integration into a British university alongside peers enrolled in the standard three-year

British degree program. Part I of the program was designed to impart essential subject knowledge, cultivate proficiency in the English language, and instill foundational study skills. The progression to Part II in the British academic setting hinged on the successful completion of Part I and the attainment of an English language proficiency score equivalent to IELTS 6.5. The British curriculum prescribed three core modules—International Business, Business Strategy, and Advanced English for Business—augmented by optional modules. The structural framework for lectures and seminars, excluding the English module, adhered to one-hour sessions. Notably, the Business Strategy module exhibited a diverse composition, with 45% of participants originating from countries beyond Europe. Culminating in the successful completion of their third year, students were awarded a bachelor's degree in international business. The study placed specific emphasis on evaluating their performance in British seminars vis-à-vis their participation in Chinese seminars.

### 3.2 Sample and Data Collection

The research employed a comprehensive methodology, including classroom observation, audio recording, and follow-up interviews (see Table 1). Over a span of 15 weeks, six mandatory business seminar classes were consistently observed, resulting in a total of 30 seminar classes, each featuring small group discussions. To gain insights into expected discussion behaviors, the researcher interviewed six British lecturers. As both students and lecturers became accustomed to the researcher's presence, the last 10 seminars saw the audio recording of 10 groups, comprising seven mixed group discussions (Groups 1–7) and three homogeneous Chinese group discussions (Groups 8–10). The selection of the seven groups ensured a balanced representation of Chinese and non-Chinese students. The three Chinese groups, conducted in their native language with the same lecturer, were included. Notably, the recording quality of Group 7 was insufficient due to unclear audio. Consequently, this recording was omitted from the analysis. Table 2 provides a summary of each group discussion outlining details of questions and group composition.

Table 1. Data collection procedure

Procedure	Data collection	Participants
Step 1	Classroom observation	30 seminars (last for 15 weeks)
Step 2	Interview with British lecturers	6 British lecturers
Step 3	Audio-recording	10 group discussion from 10 seminars
Step 4	Follow-up interview	20 Chinese participants of the recordings

Table 2. Basic information of group discussion

Group	Questions/Tasks under discussion	Group composition
1	Analyzing Strategic Groups in Dutch Polytechnics	Chinese, British, French, and Nigerian
2	Strategic Group Analysis in the Console Game Industry	Chinese, French, and Polish
3	PESTEL Analysis of Shanghai Futures Company	Chinese, French, and Indian
4	Evaluating Google's Resources and Competence Through the VRIO Model	Chinese and French
5	Examining the Role of Government as the Sixth Force in Porter's Five Forces Model	Chinese and Greek Cypriot
6	Critical Evaluation of Competition in the Fixed Line Telecom Industry Using Porter's Five Forces Model	Chinese and French
8,9,10	Impact of Chinese Business Culture on Foreign Investment Ventures	Chinese

The study has been ethnically approved by the ethnics office of the British university. All the students and lecturers who participated in the study have approved the informed consent and agreed to be observed or audio-recorded for the use of this study.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Gaining insights into varied discussion approaches hinges on comprehending speakers' intentions. Therefore, this study employed functional encoding of utterances alongside introspection by speakers. The Initiation, Response, Follow-up (IRF) model encompasses six turn types: Initiation (I), Response (R), Follow-up (F), Response as Initiation (R/I), Follow-up as Initiation (F/I), and Failed Initiation (Ix). The researcher included Ix in the model for the purposes of this study. Whereas I and R elements are obligatory in an exchange, Ix, F, R/I, and F/I turns are considered optional. Following Coulthard's principles (1985) and Coulthard and Brazil's insights (1992), responding turns are required to follow initiating turns. The minimal pair of an exchange is represented by I-R.

Initiating turns typically draw out others' comments or guide actions. Ix represents a failed initiating turn, resulting in an incomplete exchange. It is unforeseen, optional, and an initiating turn without extracting a response. In this investigation, Chinese students tended to employ it to impart facts or express opinions to others. Responding turns (R and R/I) serve the purposes of validating the previous speaker, providing a response, or expressing a reaction. The R turn is expected but does not anticipate a subsequent turn. Conversely, the R/I turn is both expected and anticipates a response. Follow-up turns (F and F/I) aim to validate, assess, challenge, or elaborate on the preceding speaker's input. The F turn indicates reception of information and acknowledgement but is neither predicted nor predictive of a subsequent turn. In contrast, F/I is an optional turn following an R turn, initiating the next utterance by introducing new information and extracting further validation. It is not predicted but predicts a response. A synthesis of predictability and interactive functions is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. The predictability and interactive functions of six types of turns

Turn	Code	Predictability	Interactive functions
Initiation	I	Not predicted	state, extract, direct
Failed initiation	Ix	Not predicted	state, command
Response	R	Predicted	validate, respond, dismiss
Follow-up	F	Not predicted	validate
Response initiation	as R/I	Predicted	validate, rephrase, evaluate, challenge, affirmative challenge, or expand the preceding speaker's contribution
Follow-up initiation	as F/I	Not predicted	validate, rephrase, evaluate, challenge, affirmative challenge, or expand the preceding speaker's contribution

Using the IRF exchange structure, this study initially aimed to examine Chinese students' group discussion approaches and their understanding of the seminar's purpose in British settings. However, challenges in interpreting some turns led to the integration of follow-up interviews within 3 days of recording. In contrast, conversation analysis and speech act theory, although offering data-specific descriptive categories, lacked a comprehensive framework.

The research employed a methodological framework to discern and categorize distinct approaches within group discussions, namely, the spiral, individual, and cumulative approach reported in Section 4. The identification process involved meticulous analysis of sequential expectations (predictability) of speakers (Basturkmen, 2002) and how the interactions and topics (interactive functions) are navigated (Coulthard, 1985). The provided discussion examples exemplify the three identified approaches albeit with the limitation that the surrounding discourse is omitted, and the interview data is not explicitly referenced. A comprehensive analysis of this interaction and its counterparts can be found in Section 4. For instance, the spiral approach became evident when participants consistently navigated around the initial question without addressing the viewpoints of the preceding speaker. Illustrated in Table 4, an exploration of the PESTEL analysis of Shanghai Futures Company reveals a notable incident. Here, a Chinese student, C1, skillfully introduces an unexpected economic subtopic, tactfully steering the conversation back to the initial topic set by the lecturer.

Table 4.

No.	Transcripts	Turn	Functions
50	F1: the political landscape holds significant importance because	I	Extract
51	C1: =yeah I believe it's the primary driver for this firm, and also, I think the economy is...a fundamental aspect of this company because...	R/I	Validate State

Note. C1: a Chinese student F1: a French student

=: interruption; - -: pause equals more than 3 seconds; erm:long filler noise; er: short filler noise; ↗: rising tone

In contrast, the individual approach was identified when the individual who initiated the topic explained their perspective without subsequent contributions from others. Table 5 showcases students making individual contributions to the examination of the government's role as the sixth force in Porter's five forces model. The initiators take on the responsibility of offering explanations.

Table 5.

No.	Transcripts	Turn	Functions
25	C1: currently we're compiling reasons for the affirmative - - er what's your rationale ...	I	Extract
28	C3: resource industry ...	R	Respond
30	C3: for instance tobacco industry	R	Respond
31	C1: tobacco yes ...	F	Validate
34	C2: stock ↗	R/I	Extract

Note. C1,C2 and C3: Chinese students

The cumulative approach was characterized by instances where students not only acknowledged but also expanded upon preceding opinions within the group discussion. In Table 6, the participants focused on one topic and engaged in further discussion by expressing agreement and raising concerns. This collaborative effort would ultimately result in the emergence of a new subtopic.

Table 6.

No.	Transcripts	Turn	Functions
45	B1: the obstacles ↗ for us to expand nationally↗ it will only be competitive if ...	I	Extract
46	N1: yeah	R	Validate
47	C2: but I reckon there are two different kinds of school and er poly- and polytechnics are er more erm - -	I	Repeat Dismiss

Note. C2: a Chinese student B1: a British student N1: a Nigerian student

#### 4. Results

The Chinese students discuss in a spiral fashion, repeatedly circling back to the initial point instead of using the lecturer's question as a starting point. They adopt three approaches: spiral, individual, and cumulative. Sections 4.1 and 4.2 explore these approaches and diverse perspectives on group discussion.

##### 4.1 Three Discussion Approaches

###### 4.1.1 The Spiral Approach

The spiral method of discussion is a recurring pattern in the six mixed group discussions, where students frequently introduce new topics abruptly, often before the current topic is thoroughly explored. According to the interviews, the students indicated that they did not consider statements containing opinions as effectively

extracting comments from others, and they were reluctant to provide feedback or elaborate on others' viewpoints.

In Table 7, a Chinese participant, along with French and Italian peers, engages in a macro-environmental analysis of the Shanghai Futures Company. The conversation covers political, economic, and social aspects, cyclically returning to politics three times within 14 turns. Notably, F1 adeptly links C1's idea to a professional perspective on politics, seeking concurrence and amplifying C1's input. However, in line 50, F1 introduces a novel subtopic on the political environment, leading C1 to introduce an unexpected economic subtopic in line 51. I1 signals a desire to delve into politics in line 60. C1's spiral approach in line 51 perplexes European participants, and in the interview, C1 interprets F1's line 50 as information sharing. C1's perspective on 'the economy' in line 51 is seen as sharing opinion, revealing a nuanced understanding that frames the discussion as information exchange rather than opinion elicitation. This perception may unintentionally limit exploration of their chosen topic.

Table 7.

No.	Transcripts	Turn	Functions
47	C1: ...administration...	I	State
48	F1: thus they receive political safeguard ↗	R/I	Expand Extract
49	I1: yeah	R	Validate
50	F1: the political landscape holds significant importance because	I	Extract
51	C1: =yeah I believe it's the primary driver for this firm, and also, I think the economy is...a fundamental aspect of this company because...	R/I	Validate State
52	I1: absolutely	R	Validate
53	F1: alright, and the societal surroundings	I	Extract
54	C1: I'm uncertain how to characterize the social aspect	R	Respond
55	I1: it's like establishing a platform for everyone to exchange their products	I	Extract
56	C1: yes	R	Validate
57	F1: and many individuals engage in that ↗	Ix	Extract
58	I1: socially, you can elucidate it like this	I	Extract
59	C1: yes exactly	R	Validate
60	I1: politically intervention is essentially a ... institution so they will be politically er er influenced...	I	Extract
61	F1: right	R	Validate

Note. C1: a Chinese student F1: a French student I1: an Italian student

Table 8 illustrates the spiral dynamic with a clear extract-state sequence. C1 leads the discussion by posing questions to C2, C3, and C4, eliciting their answers. Although there is a semblance of coherence as C2 and C3 express (dis)agreement, a closer look reveals a lack of engagement in reformulating or evaluating each other's rationales. In the interview, C2 revealed their inclination to share personal opinions, influenced by guidance from British lecturers on creativity and critical thinking. Interestingly, C2 considered commenting on others' opinions impolite, inadvertently steering the discussion back to the initial question.

Table 8.

No.	Transcripts	Turn	Functions
12	C1: what's your perspective ↗	I	Extract
13	C2: I concur with you we should include government as the sixth force because ...	R	Respond
14	Cy1: erm	F	Validate
15	C1: and your thoughts ↗	I	Extract
16	C3: I'm probably the only one who disagrees I think cos ...	R	Respond
17	C1: how about you ↗	I	Extract
18	C4: erm I believe this model should be expanded because ...	R	Respond
19	C1: so how should we structure it with different opinions ↗ yes and no ↗	I	Extract
20	Cy1: just say yes	R	Respond
21	C1: part part part yes part no	F/I	State
22	Cy1: yeah	R	Validate
23	C1: first of all	Ix	State
24	C3: I find it challenging to say a clear yes or no	Ix	State
25	C1: now let's gather reasons for yes - - er what's your reason ↗	I	Extract
26	C2: erm all these main entry and exit barriers	R	Respond

Note. C1, C2 and C3: Chinese students Cy1: a Greek Cypriot student

In an interview, C1 explained their view of the discussion question as divergent and lacking a definitive answer, advocating for an agonistic approach. They described simulating one aspect of the answer to encourage group members to present opposing viewpoints, fostering an agonistic discussion. This tactic, similar to the cumulative method, has the potential to prolong discussions through simulated agreement and disagreement, challenging clear topic development. Interestingly, Cy1 appears unaware of the agonistic method employed by the Chinese students, as evidenced when C1 seeks an answer and Cy1 aligns with the majority by endorsing 'yes' in response.

#### 4.1.2 The Individual Approach

After predicting the answer in Table 8, the four Chinese participants adopt an individual discussion method to gather supportive evidence. In Table 9, C3 introduces the topic of the resource industry (line 28) and explains it in lines 30 and 32. Although it appears C1 aims to develop C3's topic by asking for an example in line 29. From lines 33 to 38, C2 introduces two topics (stock and government procurement), and C1 introduces one topic (fund). However, these topics are not explored further regarding the government's role. The students aim to construct a complete answer swiftly, but Cy1, not accustomed to this discussion approach, does not contribute to this part of the discussion. This method results in many incomplete exchanges with Ix turns lacking proper responses.



Table 9.

No.	Transcripts	Turn	Functions
25	C1: currently we're compiling reasons for the affirmative - - er what's your rationale	I	Extract
26	C2: erm all these main entry and exit barrier	R	Respond
27	C1: for instance in what industry can the government act as the main entry and exit Barriers	F/I	Extract
28	C3: resource industry	R	Respond
29	C1: you should specify an industry give us an example	F/I	Command
30	C3: for instance tobacco industry	R	Respond
31	C1: tobacco yes	F	Validate
32	C3: so the government imposes significant barrier in this industry - - erm the government serves as both a customer and supplier	Ix	State
33	C1: er which industry ↗ for instance where the customer is also a supplier ↗	I	Extract
34	C2: stock ↗	R/I	Extract
35	C1: could stock be considered an industry ↗	Ix	Extract
36	C2: zheng fu cai gou [government procurement]	Ix	State
37	C1: how to say jijin	I	Extract
38	C4: fund	R	Respond

Note. C1, C2, C3, C4: Chinese students

The individual discussion approach is evident in three Chinese group discussion recordings, shorter than mixed group discussions, suggesting a lack of appreciation for the value of group discussion in subject learning. In Table 10, C1 introduces the subtopic of relationship marketing (line 13) and explains their opinion (lines 15 and 17). C3 mentions 'family enterprise' in line 14, seemingly supporting C1's subtopic, but clarifies in the interview that they presented their own answer. C1 ignores C2's attempt to change the topic in line 17, and C2, in the interview, expressed dissatisfaction, similar to findings by Li and Nesi (2004). In line 18, C3 responds to C1's opinion, stating the word was what they were looking for. However, they explained in the interview that they intended to demonstrate their independent ability to make the point and contribute collaboratively to the group's understanding of English vocabulary.

Table 10.

No.	Transcripts (translated)	Turn	Functions
13	C1: A facet of Chinese corporate culture involves...?	Ix	State
14	C3: Family ...?	Ix	State
15	C1: One is about.... And the other one is about family enterprises ...	Ix	State
16	C2: And another one is.	Ix	State
17	C1: = Chinese enterprises ...	I	State
18	C3: Yes, yes. This is exactly what I was going to confirm in English	R	Validate State
19	C2: ... (propose the English expression)	Ix	State

Note. C1, C2, C3: Chinese students

#### 4.1.3 The Cumulative Approach

In the 161 extended turns (R/I and F/I) analyzed from the nine recordings, 30 turns (18.63%) by Chinese students involved acknowledging, reformulating, challenging, or adding supportive evidence to the preceding speaker's point. Despite these cumulative efforts, they appeared to contribute to a spiral topic development. In Table 11, discussing Dutch Polytechnic's strategic development and obstacles, a British student (B1) introduces a possible barrier in line 45, acknowledged by a Nigerian student (N1). In line 46, a Chinese student (C2) repeats factual information from a previous turn and tries to reinitiate the topic, according to their follow-up interview. However, B1 does not seem to recognize her intention as B1 develops their contribution to employers, a key factor in the case industry's strategic development.

Table 11.

No.	Transcripts	Turn	Functions
44	N1: erm so how can we navigate through that ↗	Ix	Extract
45	B1: the obstacles ↗ for us to expand nationally ↗ it will only be competitive if ...	I	Extract
46	N1: yeah	R	Validate
47	C2: but I reckon there are two different kinds of school and er poly- and polytechnics are er more erm - -	I	Repeat Dismiss
48	B1: practical ↗	R/I	Extract
49	C2: no profession	R	Respond
50	N1: professional ↗	F/I	Extract
51	C2: yeah professional er they delve into the er technique (B1: =new practice) technology yeah	R	Validate Respond Validate
52	B1: yeah the question is er what do employers want to do ... ↗	F/I	Expand Extract
53	N1: depends	R/I	Expand

Note. C2: a Chinese student B1: a British student N1: a Nigerian student

#### 4.1.4 Intercultural Communication Disparities

Consensus typically prevailed among Chinese and non-Chinese students by the end of discussions, but subtle misunderstandings rooted in diverse learning cultures (Crawford & Wang, 2015) persisted. The Chinese students' attempts to steer discussions in a spiral manner often led to misinterpretations by non-Chinese peers, who saw it as supporting their own views. When Chinese students realized this misconception, new sub-topics emerged, hindering reflective learning in collaborative groups. This recurring pattern of incongruent viewpoints, despite apparent agreement, is unveiled in Table 12, where an interview with C1 exposes disagreement with the French students' perspectives. These instances highlight the complexity of cross-cultural communication within collaborative settings, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and addressing subtle misunderstandings rooted in diverse learning cultures for effective collaborative learning outcomes.

Table 12.

No.	Transcripts	Turn	Functions
61	P1: is this our sole focus or is there anything else ↗ do you have any additional thoughts ↗ no ↗	I	Extract
62	F2: consider for instance whether these brands have a global presence existing in every country you can find them ubiquitously	R/I	Respond
63	F1: indeed they are globally recognized em	R/I	Expand Extract
64	F2: so that there are overarching strategies er encompassing a global reach	R/I	Expand Extract
65	F1: well it varies for instance Microsoft [Xbox] dominates in the US while Nintendo leads globally	R/I	Expand Extract
66	C1: however I think PS3 is the er ... Japanese invented the PS3 and ... Xbox is not popular in this country and ... Europe people prefer Xbox over PS3	R/I	Dismiss
67	F2: em do you know why ↗ is it due to technical aspects or something else	R/I	Expand Extract
68	C1: erm I think it is a matter of player the habit is discernible difference er the PS3 does not align with the gaming preferences of Europe people to play	R/I	Respond Expand
69	F1: I possess comprehensive global data on console sales we are the top selling customers followed by Xbox and then PS3 all with a global presence	R/I	Expand Extract
70	C1: but our [Nintendo] ? users are the younger or primarily children beyond this age people tend to er play PS3 so the customer demographics differ greatly and they are not the same market and the gaming styles are different between PS3 and Xbox	R/I	Repeat Dismiss
71	F1: when you say a different market what exactly do you mean ↗	R/I	Expand Extract
72	C1: er the the I think the greatest three cater to different markets	R/I	Respond
73	F1: yeah yeah not precisely the same	R	Validate Rephrase
74	C1: exactly	F	Validate

Note. C1: a Chinese student F1 and F2: two French students P1: a Polish student

The word in square brackets is explanation I added.

#### 4.2 Intentions of Discussion Participants

Chinese students viewed seminar group discussions as a platform for exchanging opinions and were eager to identify the correct answer. A student expressed frustration, stating, “They finally accept my opinion. It’s easy. I told them this is the only way (referring to the case study). Why didn’t they just accept it? The teacher was sure to agree with this. No worry about it.” They complained that the answer to the discussion question was apparent, leading to time wastage. C1 perceived the case discussion question as the endpoint rather than a starting point.

Contrastingly, a cumulative discussion approach was evident, utilizing the method of extract-respond-validate/challenge/expand/extract to extend the discussion (Table 13). B1 consistently links N1’s opinions to new subtopics, eliciting and exploring N1’s perspective. A British lecturer noted in an interview that business discussion involves building on one person’s answer, either rejecting it or delving deeper in the next question. This approach indicates participants actively digesting and analyzing the information. These results highlight a notable divergence in the perception and approach to seminar group discussions between Chinese and non-Chinese students. The argument derived from these findings underscores the significance of cultural nuances and individual approaches to collaborative learning, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the dynamics within multicultural collaborative learning environments.

Table 13.

No.	Transcripts	Turn	Functions
15	B1: erm any thoughts on this ↗ what's your take	I	Extract
16	N1: well I think that ... we could explore partnerships with them to offer academic courses and	R	Respond
17	B1: can we really provide them ↗	F/I	Challenge Extract
18	N1: not directly but some technical institutes collaborate with UK universities to provide them... I believe it could enhance our academic focus	R/I	Respond Expand Extract
19	B1: so you are suggesting a more versatile approach ↗	R/I	Expand Extract
20	N1: yes because you know technical institutes usually offer a specific type of education	R/I	Validate Expand Extract
21	B1: true but I see technical institutes as catering to those with a practical focus rather than strong academic skills...however our customers	R/I	Affirmative challenge Expand Extract
22	N1: right I understand in our region since we weren't originally focusing on	R/I	Validate Expand Extract
23	B1: it seems like a specialized market fair point because...any objections ↗	R/I	Validate Expand Extract

Note. B1: a British student N1: a Nigerian student

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study reveals significant dynamics of spiral, individual, and cumulative approaches in seminar group discussions, highlighting intercultural communication disparities and varying intentions among participants. Subtle misunderstandings persist due to diverse learning cultures, affecting collaborative learning outcomes. Chinese students' attempts to guide discussions sometimes led to misinterpretations, hindering reflective learning, while differing intentions were evident, with some emphasizing correct answers and others adopting a cumulative approach. These nuanced findings emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability in multicultural collaborative learning environments for more effective outcomes.

The discussion behavior observed in both Chinese and non-Chinese students underscores the assertion that the learning styles of Chinese learners differ but are not inherently deficient (Jin & Cortazzi, 2012). Instead, the discussion approaches illustrate unique autonomous learning strategies of self-reflection and inner dialogue within the study groups. Despite transitioning from silence to active participation, Chinese students did not adhere to externally imposed sequences (Hyland, 2002), likely influenced by their diverse prior learning experiences. In business and management subject learning, the study highlights the importance of both goal-oriented and exploratory perspectives in case studies for a comprehensive analysis. This is because the analysis requires iterative examination of the facts of the situation (Lundberg, 1993) and ideas or models as "method sources" (Bizup, 2008: 76), along with the proposed actions and their potential consequences. This dual approach fosters a nuanced understanding of facts, features, and factors often undervalued.

Internationalizing higher education is crucial for participants to acquire lifelong learning skills and personal development through "cultural synergy" (Cortazzi & Jin, 2013:100-101). The recommendation is for British lecturers to leverage the multicultural nature of seminars, incorporating discussion preferences and strategies into the syllabus. This proactive approach can enhance students' intercultural awareness, offering dedicated discussions in both the business program and English language support classes. Encouraging reflection, articulation of discussion behavior, clarification of intentions, and discussion of purposes can further enrich the

educational experience.

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