

Fostering a Cross-contextual Language Learning Practice through Social Media Creation and Social Interaction Processes

Wong Lung Hsiang, Aw Guat Poh, Chai Ching Sing and May Liu

KEY IMPLICATIONS

1. The seamless language learning practice can become a catalyst to help language teachers think about design, and practice pedagogy beyond the traditional presentation-practice-production model.
2. The study has proven the effectiveness of what contemporary language learning theorists advocate: authentic, contextualized learning and the communicative approach.
3. Social media creation and social networking could be leveraged to extend students' opportunities in language learning, application, and reflection.

BACKGROUND

Researchers (e.g., Liu, Goh, & Zhang, 2006; Tedick & Walker, 2009) have argued that the current K-12 language classroom typically falls short in a number of ways: (1) Unbalanced instructional emphases (e.g., language knowledge over language skills, language input over output activities); (2) Use of decontextualized learning materials; (3) Domination of the "presentation-practice-production" (PPP) model; (4) Lack of autonomous or self-directed learning and authentic social interactions. Mobile-assisted seamless language learning offers a promising solution with the foregrounding of cross-contextual (formal to informal learning, individual to social learning, learning in physical and digital realms) and therefore authentic and communicative learning.

FOCUS OF STUDY

This study aimed to design and evaluate a seamless Chinese language learning environment entitled MyCLOUD (My Chinese Language ubiquitous learning Days). MyCLOUD included a two-year curriculum package, covering Primary 3 and 4, and a cloud-based learning platform accessible via students' mobile devices. The intention was to overcome the above-stated limitations of formal language classes by connecting them to students' genuine day-to-day lives. The intervention consisted of cycles of the following activities: (1) in-class learning of new vocabulary; (2) students' creating posts using social media (photos and sentences/paragraphs in Chinese utilising the learned vocabulary) in their daily lives; (3) online peer reviews and social interactions in Chinese; (4) teacher-scaffolded in-class discussions and consolidation of the students' social media postings.

KEY FINDINGS

There were gradual improvements in student motivation, and the quantity and quality of students' social media postings and interactions. A mixed-ability class was used and the intervention period was divided into two stages. The amount of social media created was increased by 353% in Stage 2 compared to Stage 1. Each social media item was graded on a scale of 1 to 5. The mean scores of the social media in Stages 1 and 2 were 3.11 and 3.45 respectively. Further statistical tests showed that the improvement was statistically significant. The richness of online interactions also significantly improved in Stage 2 (Wong, Chai, Aw & King, 2015).

Furthermore, gradual transformations in teachers' classroom practice were observed. Lesson enactments were smoother and more student-centered. The teachers were more willing to let students attempt challenging tasks, rather than simplifying the activities because they assumed that "they are not at the right level of motivation or competency". The classroom pedagogy became more engaging and meaningful.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

The continual and progressive seamless language learning practice of MyCLOUD can become a catalyst to help language teachers think about design, and practice pedagogy beyond the traditional PPP model. In the study, they became more willing to let students 'apply' and "produce" first, and then leverage on the student work to carry out language-focused remedies. The efficacious level-wide scaling up of the practice at the participating school shows that the MyCLOUD intervention can be well-blended into the existing language classroom. Rather than diminish the national Chinese curriculum and textbook, they are being used and enhanced through teachers' conscious design and facilitation. MyCLOUD formed a bridge between classroom learning, out-of-school applications, online socially-stimulated reflections and back-to-the-classroom consolidation.

The research findings prove the effectiveness of what contemporary language learning theorists' advocate: authentic, contextualized learning (application of the language in genuine daily life), and the communicative approach (emphasizing not only language input or output activities, but social interactions). Social media creation and social networking is becoming part of the young students' daily activities; and such online communities can be leveraged to extend the

students' opportunities in language learning, application and reflection.

The MyCLOUD learning environment has undergone level-wide scaling up at Primary 3 at the experimental school since 2013 and has become part of their regular curriculum. By 2015, the intervention will be spread to four more schools.

POPULATION

Four teachers and 84 students from one school were involved in the pilot study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Mixed methods were used in this study. The students' social media and online interactions throughout the two-year intervention period were collected, analysed and graded for formative assessment. The lessons were also recorded, student and teacher interviews were conducted, and questionnaires were administered to the students. Different forms of qualitative and quantitative data were cross-examined to scrutinize the students' learning gains and teachers' growth.

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