The Effects of Blended Learning Approach through an Interactive Multimedia E-Book on Students’ Achievement in Learning Chinese as a Second Language at Tertiary Level

Siew Pei Hwa, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia
Pang Set Weei, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia
Lew Hoi Len, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Almost all higher institutions in Malaysia offer Chinese as a second language (some may consider as a third language) course. Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman offers an elective subject called ‘Introduction to Chinese Language I’ to teach the basis of Chinese to non-Chinese educated students. In general, the majority of foreign language is taught face-to-face in classrooms. There are three crucial challenges in learning Chinese as a second language: pronunciation, Chinese writing, and verbal communication skills. Hence, Chinese language is recognized as one of the most challenging and difficult languages to master. Teaching a language in the classroom improves significantly when technology complements and extends the functionality of the traditional methods. In view of the limitations of traditional instruction and e-learning approaches, this paper explores the possibilities of introducing a blended learning approach in TCSL (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language) classrooms at a tertiary level. The focus of this study is to determine the efficiency of the blended learning environment in which instructions are imparted through the blend of existing instructional methods and an interactive multimedia e-book. It also studies the impact on students’ achievement in Chinese language proficiency.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Chinese Language, E-Book, Interactive Multimedia, Second Language Learning

DOI: 10.4018/ijcallt.2012010104
INTRODUCTION

The rising importance of Chinese language in the era of globalisation is undeniable. In recent years, the interest in the teaching and learning of Chinese as a second language has grown together with the international status of China. There is a huge global demand for Chinese as a second language. Statistics from the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOCFL) of China showed that there are more than 40 million people taking Chinese as a second language. Statistics from NOCFL also revealed that approximately 2,500 universities or colleges in more than 100 countries and regions offer Chinese courses (Gong, 2006).

As the number of learners grows, instructors should use effective teaching methods to create a more conducive environment for their students. The ex-Education Minister of China, Zhou Ji noted, with an increasing number of foreigners studying Chinese in their own country, traditional classroom instructions alone cannot cope with the huge demand. He added modern information technology and multimedia online instructions are required to be used more extensively to meet the learning demand (“China launches website...,” 2006).

This paper reports on the development and use of a blended learning environment for the basis of Chinese learning at tertiary level. It analyzes the ways in which instructors can adopt a “blended learning” approach that incorporates both face-to-face and computer-mediated instruction into the TCSL (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language) classrooms. A combination of classroom teaching and multimedia materials, either in optical disks or online is believed to be an ideal combination for TCSL practices.

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Communication is an essential element in human interaction. Effective communication enhances many aspects of human life. According to Tonkin (2003, p. 2), David Crystal has defined language as “the systematic, conventional use of sounds, signs, or written symbols in a human society for communication and self-expression”. This means that language is obviously a vital tool for social communication between human beings, and in a society. Throughout history, different people in the world have developed different languages as their specific means of communication. Consequently, there are thousands of different languages and dialects in the world. Languages differ in many ways such as their structures, writing systems, vocabularies, and so forth. Every language has its own specific features.

Language is generally ignored by its native speakers. The native language or first language is the language that a person first acquires naturally during their early childhood in the rich native language environment. The first language comes natural to native speakers as does breathing and is an automatic behaviour. In this age of globalization, learning a foreign language as a second language (or sometimes as a third language) has become a necessary tool to broaden the horizons and gain a better understanding of foreign people and their cultures. El Bahr (2007) noted that second language is any language a child learns after the first language or mother tongue. He added second language becomes umbrella terms for second and foreign languages. Ranjini (2009) asserted that foreign language plays a magnificent role in the domain of science, foreign affairs, publicity, tourism and communication.

Chinese is one of the popular foreign languages that people opt to learn. Learning Chinese as a foreign language is different from learning Chinese as a mother tongue. People with Chinese as their mother tongue have grown up in a rich Chinese language environment. They can naturally absorb the Chinese language and are familiar with the pronunciation through daily listening and speaking. In contrast, when learning Chinese as a foreign language, learners may be influenced by their own mother tongue, especially the language learners from the alphabetical languages background. In most cases, they may encounter difficulty in
Teaching French Phonetics in a Digital Language Lab
www.igi-global.com/chapter/teaching-french-phonetics-digital-language/58770?camid=4v1a