

An Exploratory Study of Non-Chinese Speaking Students' Perception on the Teaching of Mandarin

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study intends to study the relationship between the teaching methods of the subject Mandarin with student's perception on the subject at Universiti Kuala Lumpur Malaysian Institute of Industrial Technology (UNIKL MITEC). The study employed quantitative research methods which used questionnaires and systematic sampling techniques as the methods of collecting data. The sample of the study involved 300 students from UNIKL MITEC who have enrolled in Mandarin 1 and Mandarin 2. The purpose of the study is to investigate the influence of subject delivery on students' perception in Mandarin and its effects on the mastery level. This study contributes to the pedagogy of Mandarin teaching and learning.

KEYWORDS: Perception on Mandarin Subject, Effectiveness of Delivery in Mandarin, Relationship Between Teaching and Learning of Mandarin.

INTRODUCTION

Language is one method of communication between people who use their voice as a medium for exchanging information [4]. Mandarin is the official language in three countries such as China, Taiwan and Singapore. Now, Mandarin has become the second language that is widely used around the world [5]. Mandarin has been used extensively nowadays. As much as the growing concern about the use of English, Mandarin has taken a place concerning the field of business as China has dominated the major industries globally outperforming USA even in import and export sector. Hence, there is a need to offer the subject in Universiti Kuala Lumpur Malaysian Institute of Industrial Technology (UNIKL MITEC) since the campus's niche is also on industrial technology.

By offering the subject to the students of UNIKL MITEC, the campus provides a platform for the students to build a good foundation in the language. The main concern is however whether or not the subject is able to attract non-Chinese students to learn the language and later apply the language in their future workplace. Moreover, it is also helpful to examine the subject in the context of learning experience.

Mandarin subject has become a compulsory subject that should be taken by students who studied in UNIKL MITEC. UNIKL MITEC has been offering Mandarin as a subject of general subjects to both diploma and degree students of semester one and two. Teaching and learning activities for Mandarin classes were taught at an early stage for students who do not have basic in Mandarin.

This study intends to examine the perception of non-Chinese students' on the Mandarin subject at UNIKL MITEC. In addition, the importance of this study is to analyze whether the delivery of the subject Mandarin in the style of teaching and learning is effective. With this awareness, researchers take the initiative to conduct a study on a third language subject by outlining some of its importance to convince students of UNIKL MITEC on the significance of the subject. It is also vital that teachers approach students of third language accordingly in order to motivate learning and good performance based on the students' perception and level of proficiency. On a side note, this study is important to help third language teachers to improve their teaching methods to non-Chinese speaking students. Based on the problems outlined in this research, two objectives of this study were identified.

The objectives of this research are:

1. To examine the students' perception on the level of difficulty of the Mandarin subject in UNIKL MITEC.
2. To study the relationship between the effectiveness in the delivery of Mandarin subject with students' perception.

In this study, the research will be conducted on the students who have taken the subject Mandarin 1 and 2 to be used as a study at UNIKL MITEC. The respondents used in this study are January 2015 intake. Questionnaires are distributed to collect the data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Growth and demand in various fields at present urged individuals to increase their self-potential and abilities in an effort to keep pace with the competition that exists in the arena. This includes the ability to speak in a foreign language and understand the culture and people of other nations.

The Mandarin may appear to be a difficult language to be understood, especially for novice learners of the language because of unfamiliarity with the property and the system of the language. These are mostly caused by their lack of skills in Mandarin such as writing, reading, listening and speaking skills [1]. Lack of these skills can cause a variety of difficulties in the course of their next learning process.

The need of learning more than one language is particularly important in Malaysia as “Peninsular Malaysia is made up of Malay, Chinese, Indian and other races” [2]. Additionally, the business sector in Malaysia is mainly operated by Chinese, hence, the ability to speak in Mandarin is a privilege. The study stands on the basis of the theoretical model as shown below:

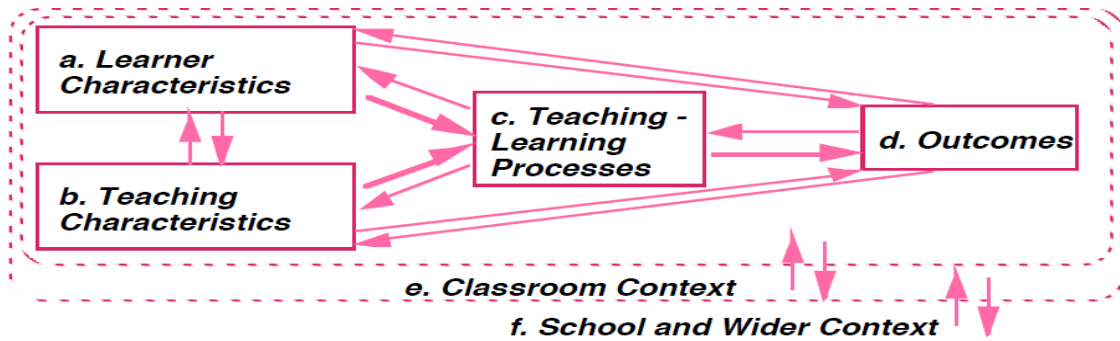


Figure 1: A contextual model for school learning [3]

In this study, it depicts that the contextual model study results affect the characteristics of teaching that certain results for learning will highlight the characteristics of certain students and that quality classes and school context affects the learning process. The conceptual framework created by the researcher will determine the effectiveness of the various teaching and learning styles in learning Mandarin.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs the quantitative research method i.e questionnaires are used to collect data. The questionnaire will be distributed to students of UniKL MITEC who have taken both Mandarin 1 and Mandarin 2.

In a survey of students from UNIKL MITEC, the researcher first selects a sample of students taking the subject Mandarin, then researcher selected a sample of students in the Mandarin 1 and Mandarin 2 class.

The researcher has distributed the questionnaire to the 300 students UNIKL MITEC that are the total of sample frame to taking the subject Mandarin is 700 students with the margin error of 10%. The margin of error is the most appropriate margin error for this research.

Statistical tools of Microsoft excel and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) are used as keys in all the data input. The data are then analyzed and the hypothesis are tested using chi-square and Spearman’ rho correlation. Two hypotheses were generated based on literature review and the review of theoretical framework:

H₁: There is a relationship between students’ perception on the level of difficulty of Mandarin subject and learning process.

H₂: There is a relationship between the effectiveness of delivery method and students’ perception of the Mandarin subject.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the result, the biggest residual value of neutral responses (92.0) indicates that students are indifferent to the aspect of the level of mastery. The smallest residual value of ‘strongly disagree’ responses (59.0) indicates that the number of students who strongly disagree with the level of mastery is relatively low. This illustrates that most of the respondents believed that the level of proficiency in Mandarin is average.

As the variables are measured on five Likert-scales, the average level of difficulties of language skills is considered as neutral. The average mean on DLS 1 (difficulty to write characters=3.43), DLS 2 (difficulty to

speak Hanyu Pinyin pronunciation =3.35), DLS 3 (difficulty to read aboutsentences construction = 3.43) and DLS 4 (difficulty to listen =3.40) which is close to the neutral score. The respondents are neutral, where they neither agree nor disagree with the implementation of Mandarin in UNIKL MITEC. Respondents were also by the perception that level of difficulties of Mandarin in UNIKL MITEC is intermediate, since the teachings of Mandarin in UNIKL MITEC is divided into phases or stages which are Mandarin 1 and Mandarin 2. Hence, students were taught in accordance with their level and skills.

As the variables are measured on five Likert-scales, the average context teaching and learning as neutral. The average mean on context 1 (time =3.48), context 2 (syllabus can completed=3.63), context 3 (context of teaching and learning =3.70), context 4(context use method teaching and learning = 3.62), context 5 (textbook is user friendly=3.73) and context 6 (to easily interact with teachers = 3.70) which is close to the neutral score. The respondents are neutral in the aspect of teaching and learning Mandarin in context at UNIKL MITEC. The relationship between the effectiveness of delivery method is indicated by the methods used and students' mastery level.

The teaching of a third language is deemed to be effective when materials and teaching aids used are in context. Based on the findings, however, students were not entirely in the opinion that the teaching of Mandarin in UNIKL MITEC is indeed in context. Contrarily, since the level of difficulty was perceived as intermediate, the level of mastery in the language is not entirely unsuccessful. Ergo, this study has revealed the significance of delivery method with the students' perception of the subject. There is a relationship between the teachings of Mandarin with students' perception on the difficulty level of Mandarin and the students' perception affects the learning of Mandarin.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In brief, this research represents the non-Chinese speaking students' perception on the teaching and learning of Mandarin in college as a third language. This exploratory research involves students of UniKL MITEC who has enrolled in Mandarin 1 and Mandarin 2. The hypothesis was proven by the use of Spearman's rho correlation method.

One of the purposes of enforcing Mandarin as the mandatory subject in UniKL MITEC is to produce multilingual students by offering the students the opportunity to learn different language which in this context, Mandarin as the third language. Better learning process is achieved with the use of appropriate material in class that could encourage students' interest.

The insight of this study enablescontributes to the improvement in the pedagogy of teaching Mandarin to non-Chinese speaking students. In brief, this research represents the non-Chinese speaking students' perception on the teaching and learning of Mandarin in college as a third language. The limitation of this study, however, invites future researcher to further address issues in the teaching of third language in college such as number of students in class, classroom equipment, and the application of technology in class.

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