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The Usefulness Using Chinese Karaoke to Support Chinese Learning

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Abstract

This paper aims to shed some light on the use of Chinese Karaoke to support Mandarin learning among the non-native Chinese learners. Song can be a very useful tool to enhance learning Mandarin motivation among learners. This study was carried out during a Chinese Karaoke competition held at UiTM (Kedah). A self-developed questionnaire was distributed to gain understanding on the view of the participants on the usefulness in using Chinese Karaoke to support Chinese learning among these non-native Chinese learners. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the gathered data. It was found that students agreed that Chinese Karaoke is useful to enhance their learning motivation. Thus, activity such as Chinese Karaoke can be used as creative practice in teaching Mandarin as a foreign language in specific and also for other foreign languages.
Keywords: Teaching Chinese, Foreign Language, Singing, Learning Motivation, Karaoke

Introduction

Singing can be an effective tool for teaching Chinese as a foreign language and music can actually facilitate language acquisition (Langus et al., 2017; Ludke et al., 2014; Xie & Lu, 2005). Popular songs are claimed to have magic on language learning (Wang, 2013). Singing competition such as Chinese Karaoke can be used to support Mandarin teaching outside the classroom environment.

Karaoke is a popular tool for language teaching. Karaoke with subtitles enables students to learn language in an interesting manner (McCall, 2008). The musical rhythms can enhance the language learning (Roncaglia-Denissen et al., 2016). Hence, Mandarin Karaoke singing competition is used as an innovative method for teaching Chinese to the non-native Chinese learners. Chinese Karaoke singing is introduced to the non-native Chinese learners in order to enhance their Mandarin learning motivation. Hence, the objective of this study is to validate its usefulness to support Chinese learning.

Literature Review
There are many literatures review supporting that singing can be used as an effective tool to enhance language learning. These set as backbones to support the use of singing activity in and outside Mandarin teaching classrooms.

Chinese pronunciation is considered as quite difficult to be mastered by non-native Chinese learners. Music and singing are introduced to the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language to assist the non-native learners to master the Chinese pronunciation through accent, tone and speech imitation (Christiner & Reiterer, 2013, 2015; Jiang, 1999; Lieve et al., 2015; Susanne, 2013). With the use of music, the lexical tones can be learned in an easier manner (Chen et al., 2017).

The notion of left brain and right brain tendency for foreign language memory strategy has been widely studied (Bidelman et al., 2013; Chobert & Besson, 2013; Jia, 2003; Martínez-Montes et al., 2013; Sabrina et al., 2017).The purpose is to use various methods which include singing to enhance the effectiveness of foreign language learning such as Mandarin. Students are able to use Mandarin songs to memorise vocabulary (Swaminathan & Gopinath, 2013), sentences, and etc. through the use of their right brain in singing.

In order to enhance the effectiveness of foreign language instruction, multiple intelligences are believed to have played a vital role (Burnham et al., 2015; Cui, 2004). Singing which is strongly related to musical intelligence hence should be utilized to formulate a more effective Chinese teaching approach. Karaoke approach is used for language learning which is related to phonological memory (Grey et al., 2015; Hoonchamlong, 2004). Research finding has approved its effectiveness in supporting language learning. Hence, it should be encouraged in use for the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language.

Research findings have also approved that there was a positive relationship between music intelligence and listening as well as speaking skill with shared cognitive processing (Pei, 2005; Perrachione et al., 2013). Learners with higher musical intelligence performed better than learners with lower musical intelligence. With the use of musical based activity such as singing, it is beneficial to non-native learners of Chinese.

There were many positive gains in the use of song for Mandarin teaching which involved the processing of both music and language learning (Kunert & Slevc, 2015; Peretz et al., 2015; Tillmann & Bigand, 2015; Xie & Lu, 2005). By participating in singing activity, students were able to improve their pronunciation, appreciate the song lyrics, etc. Goh et al. (2006) reported that language activities are very relevant for second and foreign language learning. Various aspects of language learning are enhanced such as the learning of tones, vocabulary, syntax (Kunert et al., 2015; Kunert et al., 2016), developing listening skill (Asaridou & McQueen, 2013), improve speech production (Francois et al., 2013), etc. The challenges are placed on the approaches and methods used by the instructors in making these language activities effective for foreign language learning. This is especially true for the use of singing in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language.

Interest and motivation is the key to the success of foreign language learning (Duan, 2008). Various research findings have approved the motivational aspect of foreign language learning. The use of singing is definitely able to heighten learning motivation and interest among the learners (Goh, 2004). Learners with higher learning motivation are able to perform better compared to learners with lower motivation (Goh & Ng, 2004).
At the same time, there are many factors that will affect the effectiveness of the use of language activities such as singing on language learning (Goh et al., 2006). Among them, the

level of students' attainment of language, the preparedness of students, the winning factors, gender, and etc, would have affected students' perceptions.

However, there are also studies showing negative findings on the use of singing for language learning. The results of Racette & Peretz (2007); Lee & Lin (2015), indicated that the text and the melody of a song have separate representations in memory, making singing a dual task to perform, at least in the first steps of learning. Fewer words were recalled when singing than when speaking. Furthermore, the mode of presentation, whether sung or spoken, had no influence on lyric recall, in either short- or long-term recall. Thus, vigilant use of singing in the classroom is called for. Relatedly, the choice of suitable songs is also vitally important. This may negate the positive aspect of the use of singing to support Mandarin learning.

In sum, instructors are called to use singing as a popular tool to boost up the learning motivation in the language learning classroom. As Karaoke supports language learning in an informal manner, it could be utilized in a good way in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language.

Methodology

This study was carried out during a Chinese Karaoke singing competition held at UiTM (Kedah). The research procedure was summarised in Table 1.

Table 1
Research Procedure

Stage	Research Procedure
1	Students prepared for the Chinese Karaoke competition
2	Singing competition was held
3	All participants were given a self-developed questionnaire (see appendix 1, derived from Xie & Lu, 2005) as to gather their perceptions on the usefulness of the use of Chinese Karaoke for Mandarin learning

All the participants of this Chinese Karaoke singing competitions were samples for this study. There were two categories in this competition which were solo and group singing. The distributions of the samples were shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Samples of Study

Sample	N
Solo	29
Duet	<u>24</u>
Total Singers	53
Less: Samples who participate both as Solo & Duet	8
Final samples	45

There were altogether 45 participants participating in this competition coming from various UiTM campuses, UniKL-MIMET and UniKL-MSI in which 29 students involved in solo, 24 students involved in duet, and 8 students involved in both. All the participants filled up the questionnaires. The data was analyzed by using SPSS package to get the information on the descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings were shown in the next section.

There were several hypotheses made for this study. They were shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Hypotheses of this study

Hypotheses	
H₁	Students were positive on the use of Chinese Karaoke for Mandarin learning.
H₂	There wasn't any significant difference between the solo and duet groups of participants on the use of Chinese Karaoke for Mandarin learning.
H₃	The perception of the students with higher level of Mandarin learning was more positive than students with lower level of Mandarin learning.
H₄	The perception of the students from the winning teams was more positive than students from the non-winning teams.

The Findings
The questionnaire consisted of ten questions. A 5-point likert scale was utilized, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly agree. Table 4 displays the students' perceptions according to group.

Table 4
Perceptions of students according to groups

Group	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Overall view
1 (solo)	4.44	4.46	4.54	4.46	4.23	4.3	4.51	4.61	4.5	4.4	4.45
2 (duet)	4.64	4.64	4.53	4.64	4.36	4.42	4.53	4.64	4.53	4.39	4.53
Overall	4.31	4.33	4.31	4.33	4.18	4.24	4.31	4.47	4.42	4.2	4.31

For all the items, students have shown a positive perception (with overall mean=4.31 > 4.0). It showed that the students were affirmative that Chinese Karaoke was useful for their Mandarin learning. Thus, H₁ was accepted. However, there seems to be some differences in perceptions between the solo and duet groups. The mean of duet group (4.53) is higher than the mean of solo group (4.45). T-test was used to validate its significance. The result is shown in Table 5.

Table 5
T test – comparing perceptions of students according to solo and duet groups

	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	T	Sig.
T groups	2	.71	.77	.55	0.73

There was no statistically significant difference between the solo and duet groups (T (2 groups) = 0.55, p=0.73 >.05). It demonstrates that this study did not confirm that students differed in their perceptions of the usefulness of Chinese Karaoke to help their Mandarin learning between the solo and duet groups. As a result, H2 was rejected. The finding indicates that participating in solo or duet groups had no effect on the students' perceptions of the usefulness of using karaoke to enhance their Mandarin learning.

There were two extraneous factors being studied in this study. The first factor validated in the study was on the level of Mandarin taken. There were 45 students participated in this study. Table 6 showed that the level of Mandarin taken by the participants and the means of perceptions. It showed that students from higher level of Mandarin learning were having fewer positive perceptions on the usefulness of Chinese Karaoke to support their Mandarin learning. As shown in Table 7, F-test was used to test if this was significantly different.

Table 6
Comparing perceptions of students according to levels of Mandarin taken

Level of Mandarin Taken	Number of Samples	Means of Perception
1	14	4.54
2	14	4.20
3	17	4.20
Total	45	4.31

Table 7
F test – comparing perceptions of students according to levels of Mandarin taken

	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	T	Sig.
3 levels	45	.11	.75	4.11	0.00

In Table 7 the result showed that there was a significant difference among the participating groups according to the level of Mandarin taken (F (3 levels) = 4.11, p=0.00 < .05). It showed that the participating students differed on the perceptions in the usefulness of Chinese Karaoke according to the level of Mandarin taken. Students with higher level of Mandarin were less positive in viewing that Chinese Karaoke supported their Mandarin learning. The finding supports H_3.

The second factor validated in the study was on the winning aspect. Table 8 showed that the means of perceptions of students from the winning teams and non-winning teams. It showed that students from the winning group were having more positive perceptions (mean = 4.55) on the use of Chinese Karaoke to support their Mandarin learning compared to the non-winning group (mean = 4.26). T- test was used to test if this was significantly different.

Table 8
Comparing perceptions of students according to winning aspect

Winning	Number of Samples	Means of Perception
1 - The students who won and got prizes	17	4.55
2 - The students who did not win and get any prizes	28	4.26
Total	45	

The result showed that there was a significant difference between the participating groups according to winning state (t (2 groups) = 2.277, p=0.0237 < .05). It showed that the winning participating students (mean = 4.55) were having slightly higher positive on the perceptions on the usefulness of Chinese Karaoke than the non-winning students (mean = 4.26). The winning students did have more positive perception than the non-winning teams

on the usefulness of Chinese Karaoke in supporting their Mandarin learning, hence, H_4 was accepted.

Table 9
T test – comparing perceptions of students according to winning aspect

	T	Df.	Sig.	Mean difference	Standard error difference.
Equal variances assumed	2.277	1	.0237	-.01	1.6021

Discussion and Implications

This study has shown that in the whole the students were positive on the usefulness of Chinese Karaoke to support their Mandarin learning. It implies that instructors are encouraged to use all kinds of language activities such as singing to engage students in active learning of Chinese as a foreign language as advocated by Israel (2013) that language learning can be enhanced by music and song and tackled problems in learning language in which students found it difficult to use the language out of some negative feelings on the use. But by using singing, the learners are often more keen to participate the singing activities without having negative thoughts or hindrances in using the language.

There is no significant difference in perceptions between the solo and duet groups. It implies that instructor may use both solo and duet approaches for karaoke singing competition activity. Students with higher level of Mandarin were less positive in viewing that Chinese Karaoke supported their Mandarin learning. It implies that karaoke activity is more useful for students with lower level of Mandarin learning while students in higher level of Mandarin learning should be engaged in more challenging activity. As supported by Racette & Peretz (2007); Hugo & Horn (2013), singing might not be supportive to Mandarin learning for students in higher level of Mandarin learning as they need more authentic and communicative kinds of activity. Lastly, the winning students did have more positive perception than the non-winning teams on the usefulness of Chinese Karaoke in supporting their Mandarin learning. It implies that students who won might be more prepared for the competition. Hence, they might gain more through this karaoke activity.

Various methods can be used to make karaoke activity more meaningful to support language learning. For instance, Patton (2010) provides suggestions for pairing song selections to supplement lesson plans and activities in a variety of academic disciplines. Instructors may choose songs that are pertaining to the lessons that students have. In this manner, it helps to enrich to learning contents. For example, when students study about food in their Mandarin lessons, instructors may introduce songs that are related to food.

In helping students to do translation of Chinese Karaoke lyrics into either Malay or English texts, instructor may engage students in the use of dictionary, such as desktop dictionary (Goh, 2009), web-based dictionary (Goh, 2011), online Malay dictionary (Goh & Nizam, 2013), and etc. Students with hands-on experience in first edition of lyrics texts can then be edited by instructors to improve the accuracy of the translated texts. In order to strengthen the mastery of Chinese pronunciation as to prepare students in participating in singing competition such as Chinese Karaoke, instructors may use various educational technologies to assist them. One of the approaches suggested is the use of Pinyin text to speech system (Goh et al., 2013).

Case study has been carried out on how singing can actually mediate early language development (Dolman & Spring, 2014; Wang, 2013). Hence, the study on the use of singing such as karaoke has to be done diligently to validate its effectiveness to support Mandarin learning. Future studies can be done in qualitative manner to gauge the understanding in depth manner as to enhance the singing approach.

There are other aspects of singing related factors which do not cover in this study. For example, comparing students with high musical intelligence and low musical intelligence (Shabani & Torkeh, 2014), students who enjoy singing and students who do not like singing, and etc. This opens door for further studies in this area.

In summary, the usefulness of Chinese Karaoke to support Mandarin learning is definitely positive. The hitch is on how the process of preparing students in the involvement makes the whole process more meaningful and enriching. Therefore, the efficacy of singing in supporting foreign language learning should not be questionable (Good et al, 2015) and the recommendations in active use of singing in foreign language classroom are highly encouraged.

Conclusion

Using music to support the cognitive development that is relevant to language learning is worth studying (Aniruddh, 2017). The potential role of music in foreign language learning hence is required to be further explored (Zeromskaite, 2014). In consequence, Chinese Karaoke in fact offers a creative practice in supporting Mandarin learning. It is certainly encouraged to be used in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language with proper preparation.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix

Survey Instrument

Purpose

The purpose of this survey is to understand the usefulness of using Chinese Karaoke to support Chinese learning. Your sincere response may assist us in this matter.

Instruction

You may tick at the appropriate columns that can represent your views.

1 - strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree

No	Item	1	2	3	4	5
	By participating in Chinese Karaoke, I can					
1	Improve my Chinese pronunciation.					
2	Learn to appreciate more the rhyme of Chinese through song lyrics (words of song).					
3	Learn more Chinese vocabulary.					
4	Remember Chinese vocabulary faster and easier.					
5	Learn more of Chinese expression such as Chinese idiom, and etc.					
6	Learn about Chinese sentence.					
7	Learn to appreciate the beauty of Chinese sentence.					
8	Increase my interest in learning Chinese.					
9	Motivate me to learn Chinese more.					
10	Apply the song lyrics in my daily use for Chinese communication.					

Thank you for your sincere response.

Newspapers cutting reporting on this karaoke event