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A Concept Paper: The Effectiveness of Project Based Learning on Speaking Skill among Non-Native Mandarin Learners in Vocational College Malaysia

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Abstract

Mandarin is an important global language after English due to the rapid growth of China's economy. To fulfill the current needs, Mandarin language has been offered as an elective subject at vocational colleges to nurture non-native Mandarin learners to communicate in Mandarin. Speaking is the basic for communication. However, learners are not able to speak in Mandarin after learning Mandarin due to some aspect. Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct this study to improve the non-native Mandarin learners' speaking skill. This study will use Pre and Post Quasi-Experimental research design. The convenience sampling technique will be used and 41 non-native Mandarin learners will be involved in this study. The instrument that will be used is Project Based-Learning instruction adapted from Stoller Model (1997) and speaking pretest and posttest. The data will be analyzed using T-test by SPSS. The expected result for this study is the non-native Mandarin learner's speaking skill in the experimental group will increase compared to the controlled group and there is improvement of speaking skill after treatment. The implication of this study is it helps non-native Mandarin learners in improving speaking skill and this study also provides an alternative teaching approach to the non-native Mandarin learners instead of the traditional teaching approach.

Keywords: Speaking Skill, Project Based Learning, Non-Native Mandarin Learners, Vocational College, Stoller Model.

Introduction

Mandarin is an important global language after English (Cheong et al., 2019). This is because China became a member of the World Trade Organisation in 2001 and successfully organized the Olympic Game in 2008 (Di, 2016). This situation has increased China's opportunity to interact with the outside world and has led to rapid economic growth.

Because of the increasing importance of the Mandarin language, the Ministry of Education (MOE) had emphasized the mastery of an additional language as one of the six aspirations of students in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

Mandarin is one of the most influential languages globally, thus Mandarin language has been offered as an elective subject at vocational college since 2014 only for second year of diploma students. The main purpose of offering Mandarin subjects is to nurture students, especially non-native students, to master basic Mandarin language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing to meet the current needs (vocational college Mandarin Course Outline, 2018). Learning Mandarin also aims to increase job opportunities due to the increasing importance of Mandarin in the global context and to communicate in Mandarin with the Chinese community in daily life (Chiong & Fan, 2016).

Speaking is the basic for communication (Caroline, 2005). According to Mandarin learning situation research in vocational college done by researcher, some students said they were not confident and not able to speak in Mandarin as expected after learning Mandarin. This situation same as Naimah (2005) that most of the student can't communicate in the language they had learned (Tan et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the research also shown that 69.2% students did not have Chinese friends and 52.2% student did not speak in Mandarin with Chinese outside the classroom although they had learn Mandarin. This situation same as Chuen (2006); Jeon (2005) which stated that non-native learners lack of opportunities to speak in the target language in their daily life (cited from Chua et al., 2018). There are also other factor that affect student communicate in Mandarin. Chuen (2006) claim that lacking of learning time affect the mastery of Mandarin communication. The traditional teaching approach practice by teacher also affect student's Mandarin speaking skill (Chiong & Fan, 2016). Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is a teacher-centered teaching approach which also a traditional teaching approach practice by Mandarin teacher does not lead to speaking situation in the class. GTM only focus on grammar translation with the procedure reading the texts, translate the texts and memories the vocabulary (Omar, 2019). Students are passive in this learning environment.

Teaching approach that can optimize language use play an important role in developing students' speaking skill. Project based learning (PBL) is a student-center teaching approach which suitable with non-native Mandarin learners. This is because students need learn in a group cooperatively to complete the project. Teacher as a facilitator and guide the students to complete the project. During the project task, students are given the autonomy to decide the final project outcome. Through the project, students are encourage to use Mandarin to discuss, share opinion and doing practice. Therefore, PBL provides a learning environment that promotes the use of a wide range of target language through real-world projects.

Non-native Mandarin learners often face time and environmental constraints when learning Mandarin so they cannot achieve what they aspect, such as speak in Mandarin. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to help improve Non-native Mandarin learners' speaking skill by applying PBL teaching approach in the learning process.

Speaking Skill in Second Language

Speaking is a very important skill. According Nunan (1999), speaking skill refer to the ability to use the language in oral communication. It means the ability to speak the language. One must know to

use the learned language through speaking. When a person speaks, he or she will pay more attention to the grammar management that should be used than someone who just listens to (Swain, 1985).

Speaking is a basic skill needed in communication. Mandarin in vocational college, mastering the speaking skill is important to convey the information orally in a variety of situations and engaging in daily speaking (Mandarin KSKV, MOE, 2018).

To produce successful oral communication in a second language, Brown (2001) concludes that 3 components of speaking skill should be mastered, that is accuracy, fluency and pronunciation. Gower, Philips dan Walters (1995) claim that, accuracy includes the correct use of vocabulary and grammar. Accuracy is the focus during oral activity, it is important to make sure that the feedback is clear. Gower et al. (1995) explain that fluency is the ability to speak spontaneously all the time. According to Hills (1958); Fries (1962), pronunciation is the basic in learning a language (Chuen, 2006). An effectiveness of communication is through pronunciation (Chuen, 2006). Pronunciation in Mandarin is unique with the four tones. Non-native Mandarin learners always face the pronunciation problem when learning Mandarin (Chua, 2019; Chuen, 2006). This is because English and Malay does not have tone. Therefore, the teacher needs to make sure students' pronunciation is at a level that does not affect the communication comprehension during the speaking activity. By paying attention to these three components of speaking skill will ensure an effective communication.

Ur (1996) conclude that the effective speaking skill activities consists of four characteristic. First, students need to speak more in the speaking class. Teacher have to provide activities that encourage students to speak. Second, all participant have the same chances to speak. It refer to class activities that involve not only active students. Third, student's motivation. It means that class activities that can raise student's interest to speak in the target language. Fourth, the language level is acceptable by the students. It mean that students can express their opinion using the learned vocabulary and grammar which relate to the discuss topic between classmate during class activities.

Project Based Learning

Project based learning is the idea from John Dewey which believe ones learn by doing is better than only listening to the information given by teacher (Collier, 2017). Project-based learning (PBL) seen as a student-centered learning principle had introduced in the field of foreign language education in the 1980s (Hedge, 1993). After that, project-based learning has become a popular activity in teaching languages at various levels and contexts (Beckett, 1999; Yahya & Suzanawaty, 2014; Esmail & Tayebe, 2017; Noor et al, 2019).

PBL in a foreign language class is an approach that requires students to work in small groups to produce works over a long period using target language. The work that needs to be produced through the task will create a continuous communication need that can be met through the use of target language which is authentic, meaningful, contextual and self-centered (Moritoshi, 2017). This situation will optimizes students to speak the target language, while the group work as well as authentic language use can motivate student learning which match the characteristics of the speaking activity described by Ur (1996).

According to Moritoshi (2017), there are four phase in built up the PBL project. Phase one is planning, which is design the project. Phase two is implementation, which is use the target language throughout the task in production of final product. Phase three is present the final product, which the students present their final product. Phase four is project evaluation, which the students reflect on the learning outcomes gained from the project and propose improvement idea for the project.

There are 10 step in Stoller (1997) model to built up the project.

Step 1: Students and instructor agree on a theme for the project through the driving question.

Step 2: Students and instructor determine the final outcome of the project.

Step 3: Students and instructor structure the project.

Step 4: Instructor prepares students for the demands of information gathering.

Step 5: Students gather information.

Step 6: Instructor prepares students to compile and analyze data.

Step 7: Students compile and analyze information.

Step 8: Instructor prepares students for the language demands of the final activity.

Step 9: Students present the final product.

Step10: Students evaluate the project.

In Stoller (1997) model, phase planning occur in step 1-3, phase implementation occur in step 4-8, the final product presentation occur in step 9 and product evaluation occur in step 10.

The Stoller Model provides organized guidance for managing project work as well as guiding teachers and students in developing meaningful projects that facilitate content learning in the classroom. In addition, this model also provides the opportunity for language learning needed for implementing a project (Stoller, 1997). Learning this language is essential for the students especially for the beginner when doing the project. Through this language learning, student can involve in the speaking activities that can practice their accuracy, fluency and pronunciation guidance by teacher. Stoller model is flexible. A teacher can exclude some steps depend on the suitability or project requirement according to the students ability. Previous studies have shown that Stoller Model (1997) is effective in learning English as a foreign language such as Pham (2018), Moritoshi (2017) and Di (2016). The PBL teaching approach by applying the Stoller (1997) model in Di (2016) study has shown that it enhances students' speaking skill. At the same time, past studies have also shown that PBL can motivate language learning (Siti, 2019; Myeong, 2018).

However, there are lacking PBL study in Mandarin context, especially for the beginner learners. The Stoller model (1997) can be a guide in the teaching of Mandarin speaking skill.

Objective

There are two objectives in this paper:

To determine the difference in non-native Mandarin learners speaking skill between experimental group (PBL) and control group (GTM).

To determine the difference in non-native Mandarin learners speaking skill between speaking pretest and speaking posttest in experiment group.

Hypothesis

There is significant difference in non-native Mandarin learners speaking skill between experimental group (PBL) and control group (GTM).

There is a significant difference in non-native Mandarin learners speaking skill between speaking pretest and speaking posttest in experiment group.

Methodology

This study will use non-equivalent pretest and posttest control group quasi-experimental study research design. In the experimental group is a group of non-native Mandarin learner with treatment while in controlled group is a group of non-native Mandarin learner without treatment. The treatment with PBL will be last for 9 weeks. The variables for this study are project-based learning teaching approach as an independent variable and dependent variable is speaking skill. The design is as follows:

Table 1. nonequivalent pretest and posttest control group quasi-experimental study research design

Group	Pretest	Variables	Posttest
Experiment (PBL)	Y_1	X	Y_2
Control (GTM)	Y_1	-	Y_2

(adapted from Creswell, 2018)

The selected sample will be the intact group of 41 non-native Mandarin learners from a vocational college in Kedah using convenient sampling technique. The learners are from two different classes with two difference courses. Although they are from different classes, but both of them share the same characteristic, that is the learners from none Chinese family background and does not learn Mandarin before.

The instruments that will be used for this study is the project instruction adapted from Stoller (1997) model develop by the researcher and speaking pretest and posttest adapted from vocational college Mandarin final exam to evaluate the learners' speaking skill. The learners will be test on monolog and dialogue. The speaking test rubric adapted from Ur (1996) speaking test rubric and vocational college Mandarin speaking test rubric.

The procedure of this study are firstly, the researcher will select the non-native Mandarin learners from two classes which teach by the same teacher, with one class as the experimental group (23) and the other group as the control group (18). Before the experiment begin, the learners have to sit for a speaking pretest with the researcher as the examiner and assist by the teacher. After that, the study will begin with the experimental group will be taught by project-based learning teaching approach. The duration of the treatment is for nine weeks. The researcher will give an explanation and guidance to the teacher regarding the project instruction by topic. Meanwhile, the controlled group will be

taught using Grammar Translation Method by the same teacher. Both of the groups will be taught on the same period of time. After nine weeks, the learners have to sit for speaking posttest to evaluate the improvement of speaking skill among non-native Mandarin learners.

For the data analysis, the researcher will analyze the data collected statistically after the experiment ended. Based on research question, the data will be analysed using T-test to study the differences of speaking skills between two group and also to study the differences speaking pretest and posttest before and after the treatment. The data will be presented in table form for better understanding. The software that will be used to analyses the data is Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) which is a well-known and established software among social science researcher. The expected results from the researcher will be explain below.

Expected Result

Based on research objective, two results can be expected from this study. Research objective one is to find the difference of speaking skill between two groups. The researcher expects the learners' speaking skill from experimental group increase more compare to controlled group. This is because the experimental group is taught with project-based learning teaching approach.

For the research objective two is finding the difference of speaking pretest and posttest before and after the implementation of project-based learning teaching approach. The researcher expects to have a difference before and after which the speaking posttest after the implementation will be higher than speaking pretest before the implementation.

Therefore, in order for this expected result to be achieve, researcher should conduct this study carefully and precisely in the future. In addition, the selection of teacher and sample will influence the outcome for this study.

Limitation and Recommendation of Study

This study is focused on non-native Mandarin learners from vocational college in improving their speaking skill not include other language skills. The speaking skill is only examined at three aspects, which are fluency, accuracy and pronunciation. In addition, this study has limited number of samples that are only 41 students. The small number of samples is due to the number of intake students of the college. The small number of sample will give an effect to the statistical result. Hence, the results of this study cannot be generalized to another college vocational Mandarin learner. It only can be generalized to the current study learners.

Therefore, for future researcher the scope of this study can be widen to another language skills, such as writing skill, reading skill and listening skill in Mandarin learning. The number of sample can be widely by include 2 or 3 college from other state, so that the result can be generalized to all college vocational non-native Mandarin learners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study will be conducted in concern speaking skill among non-native Mandarin learners. The researcher aims to improve the speaking skill among non-native Mandarin learners

because the aim of studying Mandarin language is to use the language to communicate well with Chinese community as mention before. The implication of this study is the researcher hope that the step of project instruction can give other teacher a clear view in applying the PBL teaching approach to improve non-native Mandarin learners speaking skill. This study also aim to give a clear mindset in shifting from traditional teaching approach to more efficient teaching approach like project based learning. So that the non-native Mandarin learners will have more opportunity to use the language they have learn.

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