

# Revealing Different Mandarin Teaching Methods: A Case Study on the Process of Suggesting Teacher to Modify Teaching Approach

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**Abstract**—As we embrace the 21st century, the global trend of Mandarin learning is getting popular. However, language teaching methods often pose a great impact on students' interest and attitude toward the learning of the language. Examining the effect way of what teachers applied in the classrooms has always been considered important. This study investigated the effect of an immersion approach and a communicative approach to teaching Mandarin to students learning the language as a foreign language. The results of the study indicated that the immersion approach was not viewed helpful and the communicative approach was more suitable for the case study participant and the class wide learners. Implications of the study were significant to language educators and learners to find a better way to learn Mandarin.

**Keywords**— Mandarin learning, Mandarin teaching methods, communicative approach.

## I. BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Due to the global trend in the 21st century the survey done by the College Board of United States, the result shows that there are over 2,400 high schools are interested in opening Mandarin in their Advanced Placement program [1]. At the same time, as the Time Magazine put the heading as "Get ahead, learn Mandarin!" [2] on the cover, we realized learning Mandarin is a hit and there is a significant number of people plan to learn Mandarin as their second or foreign language.

From statistics, in China there are 397,635 foreign exchange students and there are 184,799 students taking degrees (46%) rather than exchange, and the student number of master and doctoral degree is 53,572 (29% out of degree seekers) on top of that there are 66 university Mandarin learning centers in 2015 [3] and it still expanding. Moreover, there are various Mandarin learning platforms: online (apps, websites), schools, private institutes, clubs, language exchange...etc.

According to Lu (1993), there are many different Mandarin teaching methods e.g. communicative approach, direct translation, listening-speaking, immersion approach, lecture-practice approach and so on [4]. Although each

teaching method has the different supporting theory and proof evidence, we always try to look for better learning method for students as the generation changing day by day.

As English, Mandarin learner and a teacher, try to find an effective learning method and improve the language ability for my student is always a goal for me. By accomplishing this research could help the Mandarin learners and language instructor to have a better understanding of Mandarin learning and teaching strategy.

### A. Research Purpose

In Beijing T University (T University) there are a lot of foreign students come to China for exchange or for degree-seeking. In order to carry forward the Chinese culture and a platform for foreign students to exchange their culture with local Chinese students, T University was the first university opened Mandarin classes national wide traced back in the 1970s. The courses were designed for foreign students learning survival Mandarin, cultural experiences and later on the courses were distributed into different levels aim for passing Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK). As the courses getting completed, the university tries to form a module into four skills classroom setting. They encourage students to take 1 year Mandarin course then go for their desired majors. Base on the micro-observation at T University the researcher found out there are some drawbacks of the teaching method e.g. difficult in getting involved, lack of interests, misbehaviors, skipping classes, learning attitude issues etc. In the research of Brown, H. Douglas (1994) discovered that the students' learning performance factors are based on their learning interests, attitude, educational background, and the most importantly the teaching method that the instructor applied which shows a significant effect on learning performance [5]. In his research also shows that if the students couldn't understand what teacher taught, they would just memorize it until they finished the exam. It just keeps the language for short term which caused the problem for those who intended to stay for further study, or work in China and it also disobeys the true value of education. This is the main reason why the researcher would like to focus on this topic try to figure out the current situation and conduct a better learning way for foreign students.

### *B. Figures*

According to the research purpose, there are correspondent questions:

1. What's the current situation of Mandarin learners' learning performance at T University?
2. After revealing different learning phenomenon from the different level of Mandarin classes. What will be the better teaching method for T University?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *A. Language Learning*

Learning languages is for everyone in the global. Language is a common function in this society. Ferdinand de Saussure (1985) stated that "Language is a city to the building of which every human being brought a stone" [6] Emerson, R. W., Emerson, E. W., & Forbes, W. E. (1909) also indicated how important of learning languages [7]. In order to communicate and get to know cultures in a new country, learning new language shall not just aim for survival but try to understand each other. Although there might be many different dialects in a country, we could understand by communicating, referring to its logical order when it comes to a new language. Sometimes we can understand each by showing gestures, voice, signals, and words to understand the thoughts, spirits, and concepts in order to reach the goal of communication. Moreover, David Nunan (2003) pointed out the second language is the other languages that a person can speak other than their mother tongue [8]. It always sees as a supporting language, the learning process may affect by the social changes, political purposes, and learning environments.

### *B. Mandarin Teaching*

The definition of Mandarin teaching is so-called teaching the language which Chinese people use. The Chinese have various kinds of Mandarin including 'Wu', 'Kan', 'Han', 'Min', 'official Han' and other ethnic minorities' dialects. Official Han is the most popular and generally used in modern society. When it comes to "Mandarin teaching" it means teaching official Han, and mostly teaching to foreigners [9].

### *C. Mandarin teaching methods*

Majorly, the Mandarin teaching methods are similar to English teaching methods. There are common approaches, for example, communicative approach, direct translation, listening-speaking, immersion approach, lecture-practice approach and so on. Among them, the immersion approach and the communicative language teaching approach (CLT) are popular and most common use but at the same time the most controversial methods in teaching sites. According to a Chinese Magazine "Can Kao Xiao Xi" (2014) mentioned the trend of Mandarin learning, the journalists immersed at the elementary school in the United States for 50 days. They discovered that the school they observed offer immersion approach for half of a day in Mandarin; in other words, they were provided with not only learning contents but also

learning tools [10]. The school authority thinks the immersion approach is the best way to construct the fundamental of Mandarin pronunciation, the phonemes and phonetic segments directly in Mandarin. They also refer to a research result shows that the immersion approach could have better results than traditional learning methods. By doing this way could help learners to master their second language as their mother tongue. The learners could pick up the Mandarin as intermediate level [11].

On the other hand, the CLT approach has a different way of teaching Mandarin. It has become popular since the 1970s. The CLT approach aims to cultivate students' ability to interpret, express and negotiate by engaging students in life phenomenon such as role-playing, task-based activity, problem-solving and etc. Larsen-Freeman (1986) indicated that by using CLT approach the teacher may use learner's mother tongue while teaching target language [12].

Communicative language teaching approach is a concept; it encourages teaching for communicative competence, which consists of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence [13]. Sano, Takahashi & Yoneyama (1984) pointed out that the communicative approach is a teaching method focus on personal value, creativity, self-expression, and social communication it's suitable for ESL/EFL learners [14].

## III. RESEARCH MODEL

### *A. Research Method*

The aim of this study is to know the current situation of Mandarin learners' learning performance at T University, and exam how the communicative approach effect on a certain language skill. The researcher applied random sampling method in order to select an Australian case for study. The qualitative research method was applied to this case study consists of interview, observation, document and records.

### *B. Case Study Participant*

The case study participant was an intermediate level of Mandarin learner he studies by himself on YouTube videos, and textbooks at the beginning for 1.5 years, and then he worked 1 year in Taiwan where he picked up his Mandarin up to around HSK 3 level and through social gathering and working experience. Later on, the participant move to China for full time intensive language course with national scholarship he tries to improve himself up to HSK 5 and would like to work in China for further Mandarin language immersion. He can communicate with medium level of Mandarin. The level when we start the study was about HSK 4 which means he could master about 1,200 vocabulary, chat at normal speed with common topic. Aside from the classes he pick up the expression and words from TV series, sometimes he might not understand the word exactly but he could tell from the facial expression, gesture, tones to see whether the emotion is in anger or happy. He thinks that learning Mandarin could lead him a better future in him career path. He can seize this chance for knowing more culture, expanding his vision.

C. Research Instruments

1) Interview

The research was adopted through semi-structured interviews; parts of questions were organized in order, according what participant answer and dig more deeply into what he thought and reflect what may apply to his answer. In this study, the researcher applies interview aim for not giving the participant stress or nervous they were chat in the way of daily conversation then coding in categories.

2) Observation

Based on natural classroom setting the researcher just sees himself as an observer focus on participants didn't change any factors in the classroom. According to Hawthorne Effect theory, the participants may aware they had been observed [15].

3) Documents and portfolio

HSK standardized test may test out the participant's Mandarin level in a very short time. Other than that there are many ways to evaluate subject's Mandarin capability e.g. task assignment, interview, portfolio, photos, and homework etc.

IV. RESULTS

A. Interview

According to the interview with the case study participant the researcher could conclude that he had high demand on himself. He was assigned to HSK 4 but he promoted himself to HSK 5 although he was suffering at the first two weeks. Some of the content that he couldn't understand and at the same time he also need to aware the methods teachers applied during the classes. He could tell the differences between teachers, teaching strategies, and he realized the writing and listening were his weakness. Writing was suffering because it was the last session of the day and the teaching method was in immersion. The most interesting lessons were listening and speaking although speaking was not participant's favorite he still can tell the teacher was applying different tricks e.g. video clips, using English, body language, discussion and other strategies to get students involve in practice. The classroom setting was fun, interactive less stress and he discovered that sometimes the students would come up with something out of the text books, he felt amazed by the teacher. The research discovered that both listening and speaking classes were conducted in communicative approach others were in immersion. The participant found out he could self-regulated himself in learning on those skills taught by communicative approach with higher performance on either homework or tests.

There are few argumentative questions after reflection:

1. The participant is suffering from writing skill, it that just for him or in general?
2. What is the validity of the interviewee's context?
3. How to evaluate the participant's sense of the teachers?
4. How would learners adjust themselves when they face the problem of teachers' teaching methods?
5. How did the participant get rid of the learning difficulties?

TABLE I.  
CODING FROM THE INTERVIEWS

Scripts	Tag	Generic	Attribute
Of course, the <i>teacher's effects on students are powerful. A good teacher can lead students to improve, also change their life.</i>	Importance of teacher	Effect T-S	Importance of teacher
	Changing life	Effect T-S	Character of teacher
<i>Comparison with teacher, the textbooks may not play an important role. But teacher need to choose suitable materials for students is the most important topic for teacher. I think the way that the teacher conduct a lesson is more important than the textbook itself.</i>	Importance of textbook	Effect T-S	Role of textbook
	Mission of teacher	Effect T-S	Role of teacher
<i>Yes, one of teaching method was boring, no interactions, conservative, inflexible, just like teachers' teaching method in school; the other one goes with interaction activities, outgoing, flexible we seem learned more by that teaching method.</i>	Guidance of teacher	Effect T-S	Importance of teacher
	Teaching styles	Awareness	Teaching styles
I asked the writing teacher how to say/write some other words related to family in Chinese, because there's only 'father', 'mother', 'teacher' shown in textbook. So I asked how to say 'nephew', 'uncle', 'cousins', 'grandfather', 'grandmother' ...etc. I also can remember the picture of the family tree. During the speaking classes we are not only use Chinese but also English to communicate with.	Distinguish different teaching methods	Awareness	Positive awareness
	Benefit of communicative approach	Awareness	Motivation
Of course! In fact I can feel I improved in those two teaching methods. But the Immersion Approaches makes me dizzy, and lazy to learn; the Communicative Language Teaching Approaches goes with different activities, makes me got more expectation of the class, also I got higher achievement and feel confident of CLT Approaches.	Benefit of communicative approach	Awareness	Length of memory
	Teaching styles	Awareness	Learning efficiency
Compare with normal teaching methods, the one with more interactions is easy for students, seems learn better, for me as an example I got higher scores on CLT Approaches than Immersion Approaches	Outcome of communicative approach	Positive learning outcome	Teaching styles
	Distinguish different teaching methods	Awareness	Outcome of CLT
	Enjoy learning	Positive learning outcome	Outcome of CLT
	Learning outcome	Positive learning outcome	Outcome of CLT
	Learning outcome	Positive learning outcome	Outcome of CLT
	Learning outcome	Positive learning outcome	Outcome of CLT

B. Observation and other documents

Summary of the observation classes:

1. Writing session is the toughest one for everyone in general, some students think is not a problem (29%), some think is a problem (44%), some others doesn't care (27%).
2. According to the triangulation examination [16] from teachers and classmates, at different time and different classroom settings, the interviewee's comment about the

classroom setting was matched.

3. From the observation, the interviewee's comment about teachers' teaching style was matched.

4. From the interaction with other students and teachers, during the Mandarin teaching there's no way to distribute evenly in each skill. Writing and reading skills need more output instead of interactive input so that learners may feel boring that's normal. But the teacher also mentioned they could try to design the lesson in a better way.

5. According to the interviewees': (1) try to catch up the disadvantage skill(s) even they are not that into it; (2) try to balance the disadvantage skill(s) from better one(s); (3) try to ask from classmates or social gatherings; (4) ask teachers for help as the least option

6. According to students' quiz performance, homework case participant's dairy. They had better performance on CLT approach classes.

#### V. CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Due to the limitation of single method this study applied case study method and integrated triangulation examination strategy. From the observation, interview with classmates and a case study we can refer at T University the Mandarin class setting should be applied more communicative approach than immersion approach. Although from the literature review both immersion and communicative approach pose a great impact on learners, we may refer immersion is better for younger kids and communicative is better for adults. In this study, there are two teachers applied the communicative approach in listening and speaking skills both skills shows better learning performance and results. On the other hands, the reading and writing skills were applied immersion approach at the first that caused some learners lost their interests. After the observation sessions, the researcher gave detail suggestion with student opinions and records to the teachers they revise their teaching plan try to integrate more interactive method and activities into the classes.

From this study, the researcher gave out the opinions from the different perspective that Merriam (1988) mentioned giving out detail and enrich descriptive could propose better solution [17].

The study offers: (1) the attention to the school on foreign students' learning needs and the teaching methods applied to the classes; (2) a case study for better Mandarin learning method; (3) a reference for future studies.

Suggestions: (1) assigned a local language partner (buddy) as the support for life or learning; (2) arrange teachers' office hour for students for counseling; (3) arrange workshop or seminar for students in order to exchange their thoughts and know their need; (4) the Mandarin learning center should have tertiary prevention plan as the foreign student number growth every year.

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About Author:



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