

LET'S LEARN MANDARIN GRAMMAR

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ABSTRACT

Mandarin courses for non-native speakers are offered widely in Malaysia's higher institutions. In order to help Mandarin learners to master the language, the aspect of Mandarin grammar should play an important role in the process of learning. Unfortunately, Mandarin textbooks produced by local authors have not given emphasis on grammatical teaching. The "Introductory Mandarin Level 1" used by a vast number of learners in Malaysia has provided explanations only for 2 grammatical points in the entire Mandarin textbook. To overcome the insufficient Mandarin grammar learning among Malaysian Mandarin learners, we proposed that Mandarin grammatical point videos should be developed to meet Mandarin learners' language needs. Four Mandarin grammatical point videos created by Powtoon animation were released to students for evaluation purposes. Very encouraging feedback was given by 60 Mandarin learners. Majority of the respondents (91.6%) admitted that a Mandarin textbook for non-native speakers should include sufficient grammatical points to help learners understand the rules of Mandarin. Furthermore, 90% of the respondents 'agreed' (45%) & 'strongly agreed' (45%) that the videos are effective, while 96.7% of respondents deemed that the innovation is "useful" (46.7%) and "very useful" (50%) to guide elementary Mandarin learners. The development of the Mandarin grammatical point video is a novelty in the field of teaching and learning Mandarin as a foreign language in Malaysia. The efficacy is evidenced by respondents' claims where 86.7% of respondents "agreed" (51.7%) and "strongly agreed" (35%) that they will master Mandarin grammatical points better through audio-visual methods. With all positive feedback given by the respondents including 25% of them have committed ("definitely yes") to purchase the proposed e-module of 50 grammatical points at RM10, we can generalise that about 25% of Mandarin learners in Malaysia will be keen to purchase the product, and therefore, the innovation has projected great commercial potential.

Keywords: Mandarin grammar, Mandarin for non-native speakers, Mandarin textbook, Powtoon animation, grammatical point

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, China has rapidly become one of the largest economic giants in the whole world. This has increased the necessity and demand of learning Mandarin over the years around the globe. Many universities in the world have opened courses on learning Mandarin as a foreign language for non-native speakers. This does not exclude Malaysia.

Malaysia has opened various Mandarin courses for non-native speakers throughout its public universities in the whole country which gathers many students every semester. As an example, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) has gathered more than 10,000 students per semester in doing different levels of Mandarin courses (Zhou & Low, 2021).

Mandarin has been known as one of the hardest languages to learn in the world. Since many non-native speakers still choose this course despite its level of certain difficulty, then how can one be sure that they have mastered the correct way of using Mandarin phrases in a conversation or a sentence? One of the keys is to understand the Mandarin grammar.

However, it is shown that many locally published Mandarin textbooks for non-native speakers do not focus on grammatical points which are crucial for understanding how a Mandarin sentence works and its correct arrangement. Reviewing a few local published Mandarin textbooks, most textbooks have included 1-2 grammatical points at the end of each chapter (Chin et al., 2021; Mok et al., 2021). However, the “Introductory Mandarin Level 1” (Ho et al., 2020), only included two grammatical points in the entire textbook.

The above phenomenon reflects that Mandarin grammar is not prioritized by the textbook authors. This leads to the objective of our innovation of how to improve students’ understanding of Mandarin grammar in their Mandarin learning? To overcome the insufficient Mandarin grammar learning among Malaysian Mandarin learners, we innovated Mandarin grammatical point videos to meet Mandarin learners’ language needs.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the next step, we made the decision to present the grammar teaching materials through video using the animation software such as Powtoon. In terms of content selection. We referred to the grammatical syllabus of global Chinese Proficiency Examination (HSK or Hanyu Shuiping kaoshi) (AllSet Learning, 2020; Yao, 2021 & Zhai, 2021) published by the Chinese government.

To create Powtoon videos, we followed simple steps below:

Step 1 & 2: decide character style & set background

Step 3 & 4: include information (by sequence) & decide font type & font size

Step 5 & 6: choose characters & voice over

Step 7 & 8: set duration of time for each slide & view the video

After creating and publishing 4 Mandarin grammatical point videos, we set up a detailed evaluation questionnaire and invited 3 classes of UiTM Mandarin students to evaluate the videos. A total of 60 students gave their opinions via Google Form.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1: Importance of learning Mandarin grammatical points

A total of 91.6% of respondents “agreed” (53.3%) and “Strongly agreed” (38.3%) that Mandarin textbooks for non-native speakers should include sufficient grammatical points to help learners understand the rules of Mandarin.

Do you agree that an elementary Mandarin textbook for non-native speakers should include grammatical points to help learners understand the rules of Mandarin?
60 responses

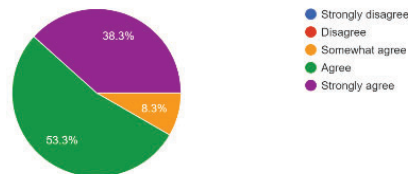


Figure 1. Importance of grammatical point inclusion in Mandarin textbooks

3.2: Effectiveness and overall quality of the Mandarin grammatical point videos

Among all respondents, 90% of them also “agreed” (45%) and “strongly agreed” (45%) that the grammatical point videos are effective to guide elementary Mandarin learners. Most respondents (93.3%) commented that the videos are well designed in terms of content (55% “Agreed” and 38.3% “Strongly agreed”) while for graphic, 88.3% of respondents “agreed” (53.3%) and “strongly agreed” (35%) about the good quality of the graphics of the videos.

As an overall, the respondents had a great experience with the innovation. More than 90% of the respondents admitted the need for grammatical points in Mandarin textbooks implying local textbook writers should take learners’ concern into serious consideration to improve their Mandarin textbooks. Based on the encouraging feedback from respondents on a) the effectiveness of learning Mandarin grammars through audio-visual material, and b) the quality of Mandarin grammatical point videos, the development of Mandarin grammatical point videos is indeed a successful effort and a meaningful task to be continually conducted to benefit learners of Mandarin as a foreign language in Malaysia.

4. CONTRIBUTION AND USEFULNESS/ COMMERCIALISATION

4.1: Contribution of Novelty

The development of the Mandarin grammatical point video is a novelty in the field of teaching and learning Mandarin as a foreign language in Malaysia. The efficacy is evidenced by respondents’ claims where 86.7% of respondents “agreed” (51.7%) and “strongly agreed” (35%) that they will master Mandarin grammatical points better through audio-visual methods.

4.2: Usefulness

Majority (96.7%) of the respondents deemed that the content of the innovation, that is, Mandarin grammatical point video is “useful” (46.7%) and “very useful” (50%).

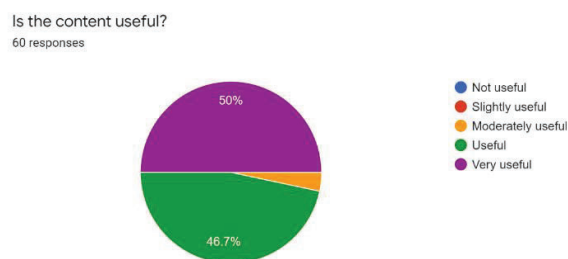


Figure 2. Content usefulness

4.3: Commercialisation

According to the Google form survey findings, 25% of respondents informed that they will definitely purchase an e-module on 50 grammatical points for elementary Mandarin at RM10 for half a year online access. Based on this commitment, we can generalise that about 25% of Mandarin learners will be keen to purchase the product, and therefore, the innovation has projected great commercial potential.

If there is a ready made e-module on 50 grammatical points for elementary Mandarin learners at RM10 for half a year access, will you purchase the e module?
60 responses

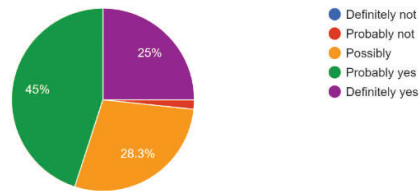


Figure 3. Commercial potential

The calculation of the potential profit for 3 years is shown below: It is calculated based on 10,000 Mandarin learners of UiTM and non-UiTM for 3 levels (each level represents one semester or half a year), respectively for the whole Malaysia:

Calculation 1 Potential income for first half of the year: RM50,000

$25\% \times 10,000 \times 2 = 5000$ potential buyers

5000 potential buyers \times RM10 = RM50,000 for first half of the year

Calculation 2 Total cost for first half of the year: RM20,828

50 grammatical videos \times 2 hours = 100 hours

Cost to pay 1 Mandarin expert: 100 hours \times RM100 = RM10,000

Cost to pay 2 technicians: 100 hours \times RM50 \times 2 = RM10,000

Cost to pay Powtoon subscription for a month: $197\text{USD} \times 4.2 = \text{RM}828$

Calculation 3 Potential income for second half of the year: RM16,500

(Target group will be 1/3 of the 20,000 learners only as 2/3 of 20,000 learners are old students)

$25\% \times 33\% \times 10,000 \times 2 = 0.25 \times 6600 = 1650$ potential buyers

$1650 \times \text{RM}10 = \text{RM}16,500$ for second half of the year

Calculation 4 Total cost for second half of the year: RM8000

Maintenance for 50 grammatical videos

Cost to pay 1 Mandarin expert: 100 hours \times RM30 = RM3,000

Cost to pay 2 technicians: 100 hours \times RM25 \times 2 = RM5,000

Cost to pay Powtoon subscription for a month: none

Calculation 5 Potential profit for first year: RM37,672

Calculation 1 Potential income for first half of the year: RM50,000

Calculation 2 Total cost for first half of the year: RM20,828

Calculation 3 Potential income for second half of the year: RM16,500

Calculation 4 Total cost for second half of the year: RM8000

Calculation 3 & 4 will be repeating for the next 2 years:

Calculation 6 Potential profit for second year: $(\text{RM}16,500 - \text{RM}8000) \times 2 = \text{RM}17,000$

Calculation 7 Potential profit for third year: $(\text{RM}16,500 - \text{RM}8000) \times 2 = \text{RM}17,000$

Final calculation: Projected potential profit for 3 years is RM71,672

$\text{RM}37,672$ (Calculation 5) + $\text{RM}17,000$ (Calculation 6) + $\text{RM}17,000$ (Calculation 7)

5. CONCLUSION

Majority of the respondents (91.6%) admitted that a Mandarin textbook for non-native speakers should include sufficient grammatical points to help learners understand the rules of Mandarin. From various feedback provided by respondents, the quality of the innovation, that is, the Mandarin grammatical point video has been recognised as a quality self-directed learning material. More than 90% of the respondents recognised that the videos are effective (90%), “useful” (46.7%) and “very useful” (50%) to guide elementary Mandarin learners. With all positive feedback given by the respondents including 25% of them have committed (“definitely yes”) to purchase the proposed e-module of 50 grammatical points at RM10, we can generalise that about 25% of all learners of Mandarin as a foreign language in Malaysia will be keen to purchase the product, and therefore, in conclusion, the innovation of Mandarin grammatical point video has projected great commercial potential.

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