

Evaluation of Special Purpose Mandarin Teaching Materials for Non-native Learners

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Abstract

At Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), two types of teaching materials are used to teach Mandarin as a foreign language to the tourism management programme students – the first for general purposes and the second for special purposes. In the tourism management programme, students learn Mandarin as a foreign language for four consecutive semesters i.e., from the first semester to the fourth semester. The students use general teaching materials in the first and second semesters. They learned more customized topics in the third semester using special-purpose teaching materials. The teaching material used in the third semester is a textbook entitled Foundation of Mandarin for Tourism Level 1, which comes with a CD ROM. Although the materials have been used for some time, the author thinks it is necessary to evaluate their use so that the findings can be used as inputs in future vetting, thus making the textbook and CD ROM more practical and accessible. There are six chapters in the textbook. However, to limit the scope of the study, the author evaluates only the second and third chapters. The study sample was a class of non-native students from the tourism management programme at the Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang (UiTMPP). The author has adopted a quantitative method to carry out this study. A set of four-scale questionnaires was used to collect data. Data analysis shows that the textbook helps the students to speak simple Mandarin. However, some details can be added to some sections of the textbook to make them more comprehensive and accessible to use. The limitation of this study is that only 30 respondents participated in it, and all of them were from UiTMPP, thus, the result may not represent the perspectives of other learners with identical backgrounds from other branch campuses. Hence, there is still much space for discussion on this topic.

Keywords: Evaluation, Mandarin, Teaching Materials, Non-native, Learner

Introduction

China's economy has developed rapidly in recent years. As a result, the Chinese market has become more important, and the Malaysia tourism market has also realized this. According to Asian Development Bank, the number of outbound tourists from China on average spends RM4375 on their journey ("China Tourism Statistic: Facts and Figures of Inbound and

Outbond",2020) and in 2019 alone, Malaysia has welcome 1.55 million Chinese tourists to the country ("Tourism Malaysia and MICA Promotes VM2020 in China", 2019). Thus, the income brought by the Chinese tourists to the local tourism industry is enormous. Although tourism growth slowed in 2020 due to the pandemic outbreak, the number of students enrolled in the tourism management programme at UiTM did not drop much compared to the same period in 2019. This shows that students still have confidence in the tourism market. In addition, by the time the students graduate, the outbreak should have slowed down or passed. So, when many Chinese tourists return, they will again bring the income to the locals. Hence for tourism market players to communicate with Chinese tourists and increase self-competitiveness, they continue to learn Mandarin, and understand Chinese culture, and this has undoubtedly become the best key to opening up for the Chinese tourist market.

Problem Statement

Against the background mentioned above, UiTM has never been left behind in training students to be competitive in the market and have rich knowledge of Chinese culture. UiTM students, especially from the tourism management programme, are given the opportunity to spend a few semesters studying Mandarin during their three years of study at the university. Meanwhile, Mandarin lecturers in UiTM have also prepared customized general-purpose and special-purpose teaching materials for their students. The special-purpose Mandarin teaching materials are a textbook, and a CD ROM entitled *Foundation of Mandarin for Tourism Level 1* and is used by students in their third semester. Despite having been in use for some time, the contents of the textbook and CD-ROM have not been revised and the author thinks it is necessary to evaluate them now so that the findings can be used as inputs for future revisions, thus making the materials more practical and accessible.

Research Objective

This study examines the usefulness of the *Foundation of Mandarin for Tourism Level 1*, the special-purpose Mandarin teaching materials used for tourism management programme students in UiTM.

The Scope of the Study

To ensure this study is achievable, the author evaluates only the second and third chapters of *Foundation of Mandarin for Tourism Level 1*.

Literature Review

This section first explains the definition of terms in this study, followed by a discussion on the current development of Mandarin teaching materials for tourism in China, Taiwan and Malaysia, and it ends with some elaboration on the general structure of a special purpose Mandarin textbook for tourism. Below is the definition of terms in this study:

Evaluation

According to Rea-Dickens and Germaine (1992), evaluation is a dynamic process which investigates the suitability and appropriateness of existing practice. Patton (1987) defined evaluation as a process that critically examines a programme and one that involves collecting and analysing information about a programme's activities, characteristics, and outcomes with the purpose of making a judgement and improving its effectiveness. Patton mentioned that evaluation is a judging process, whereas Rea-Dickens and Germaine see it as investigating

suitability. The target of judging in the definition given by Patton can be a programme's activities, characteristics, and outcomes. In contrast, the target of investigating in Rea-Dickens and Germaine's definition is existing practice. In addition, Patton also mentioned that the purpose of judgment is to improve the programme's effectiveness. Nevertheless, since the target of judging in this study could not be considered a programme, it should be categorized as that of the existing practice as postulated by Rea-Dickens and Germaine. Therefore, the evaluation in this study can be summarized as judging an existing practice (the use of a special-purpose Mandarin textbook for tourism) to improve its effectiveness.

Mandarin

Mandarin is the official verbal Chinese language in China and Taiwan. Therefore, Mandarin in this study also refers to the official verbal Chinese language as spoken by the Malay students in this study.

Special-purpose Mandarin Teaching Materials for Tourism

Special-purpose Mandarin teaching materials for tourism are customized learning materials that are tourism-related including sightseeing, hospitality, transportation, etc. In addition, they usually contain elements of history, culture, geography, and other general knowledge. It is created for tourism management students to learn the practical application of Mandarin communication in the tourism industry.

Non-native Learners

Non-native learners in this study refer to UiTM students, most of whom are Malays.

The development of Mandarin Teaching Materials for tourism in China, Taiwan, and Malaysia

Mandarin is the official verbal language in China and Taiwan. Therefore, most of the Mandarin teaching/learning materials for sightseeing come from these two regions. Other countries, such as Thailand and Malaysia, are also involved in the publication of similar teaching materials. However, according to Ou Yanghui (2017), the number of publication of materials in teaching Mandarin for tourism is small. Among the publications, *Travel in China* is a more popular tourism teaching material for Mandarin in China. The popular publications Taiwan, which has more complete teaching materials, are *Learn Mandarin on Pingdong's Trip* and *Travel in Zhanghua*. In Malaysia, a more significant publication is the *Foundation of Mandarin for Tourism* written by UiTM lecturers.

Travel in China

Travel in China is a Mandarin language teaching program produced by the Central Television of China. It is also published in the textbook and CD-ROM form. This program aims to meet the needs of foreigners who visit China to learn Mandarin and understand Chinese culture. This program is about a family's life in China and emphasizes on culture, daily life, food and clothing, customs, tourism, common sense, and scenic introduction. The clever use of language by the program host, Dashan (a Canadian comedian and television personality), also added many entertaining moments to the program. There are sixteen lessons in this set of teaching materials. The body of each lesson is divided into six main sections: dialogue and English translation, new vocabulary, cultural background, language points, sentence patterns and exercises. With all the sections, the curriculum seems complete, but one shortcoming is

that it is more suitable for tourists and not the players in the tourism industry. The contents of Mandarin for tourism industry players should be more affluent than that for tourists.

Learn Mandarin on Pingdong's Trip and Travel to Zhanghua

Zhiliang (2011); Li Xinfang (2014) have written some Chinese language teaching materials for sightseeing in Zhanghua and Pingdong regions in Taiwan. Li Xinfang wrote the textbook, *Learn Mandarin on Pingdong's Trip* based on a learner's needs and has six major topics. This textbook is quite systematic. Besides providing learners to the language apt for sightseeing, it also exposes them to the local culture. On the other hand, Jiang Zhiliang's textbook, *Travel to Zhanghua*, contains ten lessons. This textbook introduces food, names of places, and local culture and is rich in graphics. The above two sets of teaching materials are worthy of being referred to, but they lack drilling exercises which are effective for language learning.

Foundation of Mandarin for Tourism

A group of Mandarin as foreign language lecturers in UiTM Malaysia have taken the initiative to develop two textbooks for their tourism management programme students in 2016. Each textbook has six chapters with topics related to tourism. In addition, each chapter has dialogue, vocabulary, translation, sentence patterns, exercises, and an introduction to some Chinese characters. These textbooks are well designed. They have most of the required features for tourism students who are learning Mandarin.

Based on the review above, it can be concluded that a more complete and worthy special-purpose Mandarin textbook for tourism management programme shall have these features: A) situational dialogue, B) vocabulary, C) translation, D) sentence pattern, E) exercise, and F) cultural knowledge. Moreover, it must be appropriate for the players in the tourism industry and not the tourists.

Methodology

This section elaborates on the participants, the instrument, and the research procedure for this study.

Participants

The participants of this study are lecturers and students from UiTM. Five lecturers with at least five years of experience teaching Mandarin as a foreign language from UiTM Melaka, Terengganu, Sarawak, and Penang participated in this study as validators of the questionnaire. In addition, a sample of 30 students that learn Mandarin as a foreign language from the tourism management programme in UiTM Cawangan Pulau Pinang was invited to answer the questionnaire. These samples are users of *Foundation of Mandarin for Tourism Level 1*, and all of them are Malay speakers. They have some basics in Mandarin and have received listening and speaking lessons in Mandarin for two semesters. Their age ranged from 17 to 22.

Instruments and Procedure

Ten questions were drafted to ask about the usefulness of the contents of Chapters 2 and 3 of *Foundation of Mandarin for Tourism Level 1*, which include dialogues, vocabulary, translation, sentence patterns, exercise, and Chinese characters. Five lecturers with at least five years of teaching experience in teaching special-purpose Mandarin for tourism validated the initial draft of the questions to ensure the validity. To further ensure the validation quality, the lecturers were only selected from the UiTM branches in Malaysia that currently offer

special-purpose Mandarin for tourism. These campuses include UiTM Cawangan Pulau Pinang, UiTM Cawangan Melaka, UiTM Cawangan Terengganu, and UiTM Cawangan Sarawak. After the validation, some amendments were made to the questionnaire according to the opinions given by the selected lecturers. Finally, the amended questionnaire was distributed to all the participants to collect the data for this study.

Data Analysis

The feedback of the participants was analyzed and presented in the table below.

Figure 1 The usefulness of the contents of chapters 2 and 3 of Foundation of Mandarin for Tourism Level 1

No	Questions	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Dissagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
1	Chapters 2 and 3 help me speak simple Mandarin with the customer.	36.7	63.3	0	0
2	The number of vocabulary introduced in chapters 2 and 3 is sufficient.	20	80	0	0
3	The length of the dialogues in chapters 2 and 3 is suitable.	43.3	53.3	3.3	0
4	The length of the sentences in chapters 2 and 3 is suitable.	43.3	56.7	0	0
5	The translation of vocabulary in chapters 2 and 3 helps me to understand the contents better.	36.7	63.3	0	0
6	The audio in the CD in the textbook helps me to pronounce better.	30	70	0	0
7	The sentence patterns in chapters 2 and 3 help me to construct correct sentences.	33.3	66.7	0	0
8	The size of the font and spacing in chapters 2 and 3 are suitable.	46.7	53.3	0	0
9	The exercises in chapters 2 and 3 help me understand the contents better.	33.3	67.7	0	0
10	The instructions of the exercises in chapters 2 and 3 are clear.	43.3	56.7	0	0

In order to enhance comprehension of the presented findings in above table, a graph was devised below.

Figure 2 The usefulness of chapters 2 and 3 of Foundation of Mandarin for Tourism Level 1

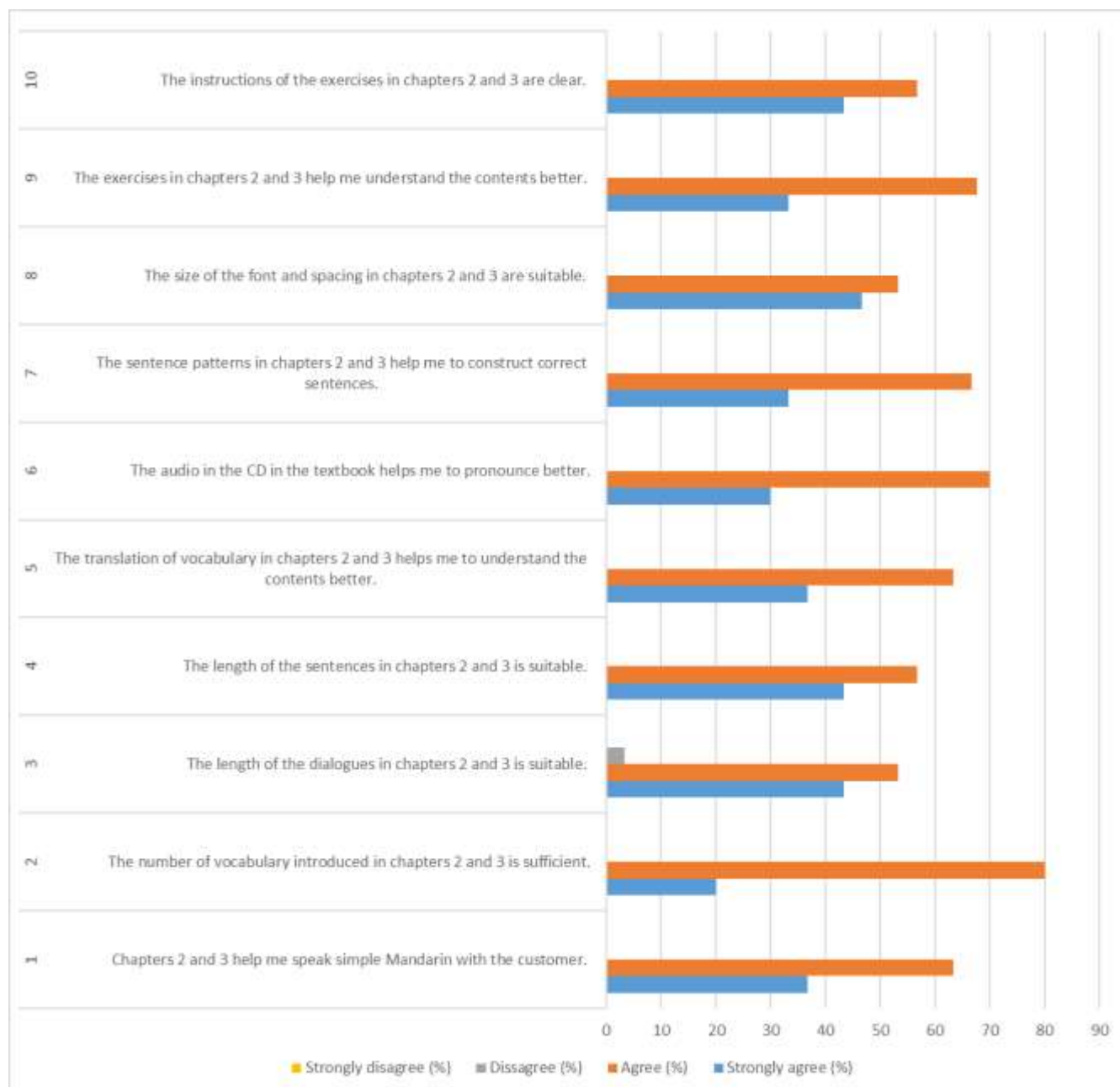


Figure 1 and 2 reveal that, in response to the first question, a proportion of 36.7% of the respondents strongly agree that the contents of chapters 2 and 3 help prepare them to speak simple Mandarin with the customer. Furthermore, 63.3% of the respondents agree that chapters 2 and 3 assist in speaking simple Mandarin. In contrast, none of the samples disagree or strongly disagree with the proposition. Therefore, the contents of chapters 2 and 3 can be categorized as suitable for assisting students in learning simple Mandarin to be used in a hotel working environment.

In answer to the second question, 20% of the respondents strongly agree that the vocabulary introduced in chapters 2 and 3 is sufficient. In comparison, 80% of the respondents agree that the number of the vocabulary is adequate. None of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree that the quantity of the vocabulary is not enough. These responses show that the respondents are satisfied with the number of new words they have to learn.

Pertaining to question 3, 43.3% of the respondents strongly agree that the length of the dialogues in chapters 2 and 3 is suitable. 53.3% of the respondents agree that the length of the dialogues is acceptable, while 3% disagree with this statement. Nevertheless, none of the respondents strongly disagree that the length is unsuitable. Since 3% of the respondents feel that the dialogues are lengthy, there may be a need to further investigate whether there is a need to reduce the number of dialogues in the textbook.

With regard to the fourth question, 43.3% of the respondents feel that the length of the sentences in chapter 2 and chapter 3 is suitable. 56.7% agree that the length of the sentences is appropriate. None of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree that the length of the sentences is not favourable. Thus, it can be concluded that the length of sentences in chapters 2 and 3 of *Foundation of Mandarin for Tourism Level 1* is acceptable to the respondents.

In relation to the fifth question, 36.7% of the respondents strongly agree that the translation of the vocabulary help them to understand the contents of chapters 2 and 3 better. 63.3% of the respondents agree that the translation is helpful. None of the respondents feel that the translation is unhelpful in their learning. The responses show that the vocabulary in chapters 2 and 3 helps students to comprehend the contents of the textbook.

Regarding the sixth question, 30% of the respondents strongly agree that the audio in the textbook's CD-ROM helps them pronounce better than before. Furthermore, 70% of the respondents agree that the audio makes their pronunciation more accurate and neither of the respondents disagree nor strongly disagree with the statement. Nevertheless, since CD-ROM is gradually being replaced by other newer technology, and the fact that newer laptops do not come with a CD drive anymore, there is a necessity to consider replacing CD-ROM with another storage technology that could be used for audio.

In response to the seventh question, 33.3% of the respondents strongly agree that the sentence patterns in chapters 2 and 3 help them construct correct sentences. 66.7% of the respondents agree that the sentence pattern assists them in making proper sentences. None of the respondents feel that the sentence patterns do not aid in constructing proper sentences. Therefore, it can be concluded that sentence patterns in chapters 2 and 3 are worth referring to for making correct sentences.

Regarding the eight question, 46.7% of the respondents strongly agree that the size of the font and spacing in chapters 2 and 3 are suitable. In addition, 53.3% of the respondents agree that the font and spacing are acceptable, and none feel that the font and spacing are unacceptable. This shows that respondents do not have issues with the textbook's readability.

In answer to the ninth question, 33.3% of the respondents strongly agree that the exercises in chapters 2 and 3 help them understand the textbook contents better. Furthermore, 66.7% of the respondents agree that the exercises improve their understanding of the textbook contents, and none find the exercises unhelpful. This shows that the exercises help in students' understanding of the contents of chapters 2 and 3.

Concerning the tenth question, 43.3% of the respondents strongly agree that the instructions for the exercises in chapters 2 and 3 are clear. 56.7% of the respondents agree that the instructions are comprehensible. None of the respondents disagree nor strongly disagree that the instructions are unclear. The responses show that instructions of the exercises in chapters 2 and 3 is explicit.

Conclusion

Since most of the responses are at the "strongly agree/agree" level, it can be concluded that chapters 2 and 3 have met most of the students' needs. However, the author feels that the

contents can still be improved to achieve excellence. Therefore, the following suggestions are presented to improve the textbook.

Regarding the section on dialogues, a title can be attached to each dialogue, just like each story has its title. This could give learners an idea of what each dialogue is about and prepare them for the situation.

In terms of vocabulary, some contemporary words could be added to the contents. For example, since many hotel bookings are now made via online websites, the names of some popular online booking sites could be added to keep the contents updated. For the explanation of contents, more explanation and contexts can be injected into the contents so that students can learn more about the usage and context of the vocabulary.

In terms of sentence patterns, an explanation on the usage of the sentence pattern could be given before its introduction. After the presentation of each sentence pattern, a brief note on the grammar could be included. This may help learners better understand each sentence pattern.

For the exercises, in addition to reading comprehension and listening activities, more interesting task-oriented activities can be added. For instance, students could be asked to design posters and flyers for hotels or hostels.

In terms of Chinese characters, the authors of the textbook could fully use Baidu's free web resources by linking the Chinese characters in the textbook to the Baidu Chinese character library via QR code. This will allow students to see how each Chinese character is written. At the same time, the lecturers could save time and effort in preparing materials, and the textbook could also be published at a lower cost.

In terms of cultural knowledge, a brief story of how the Chinese characters evolved from ancient times to the present day could be included in the textbook. When students are equipped with this knowledge, they would be able to remember Chinese characters better.

For the audio, the CD-ROM can be replaced with online Podcasts that students can access irrespective of the device they are using.

Regarding the design of the textbook, some sections of a page can be left blank to provide students with spaces for taking notes. However, the feasibility of carrying out this suggestion is usually based on the cost of printing.

Last but not least, only 30 respondents participated in this study, and all of them are from UiTM Cawangan Pulau Pinang. Thus, the result may not represent the perspectives of other learners from other branch campuses. Hence, similar studies to obtain feedback from a wider range of users should be conducted to get a better picture of the situation.

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