

Research Proposal

1. Title

A Research on Chinese College Students' preferences on L1 use and L2 learning materials in L2 class

2. Research questions and aims

2.1 What role does L1 play in L2 class and how much L1 should teacher use in teaching?

-To rediscuss the necessity and amount of L1 use in L2 class and in Chinese college L2 class.

2.2 What do Chinese college students think about teachers' L1 use in class?

-To examine Chinese college students' attitude towards L1 use in L2 class.

2.3 What do Chinese college students prefer learning and contacting in L2 class?

-To find out what content do Chinese college students prefer in L2 class.

2.4 Do Chinese students preferred learning materials really improve their L2 proficiency?

-To testify whether these preferred materials can actually improve L2 learning proficiency.

3. The rationale and main conceptual themes for the investigation

3.1 Why I choose Chinese college students as the research object

Previous research has discovered many ideas concerning students' attitudes towards L1 use in L2 classes which range from primary EFL class to university bilingual education. In fact, L1 use in L2 class is a quite controversial topic. This research uses Chinese college students as participants to test several questions concerning L1 use in L2 class for several reasons. First, Chinese students learn English (L2) more from a test-based purpose out of interests or personal pursuits, resulting in different correlations in L2 figures (eg. L2 MSS and L2 WTC) than other parts of the world (Öz & Bursali, 2018). Second, English often appears as a compulsory course in either comprehensive universities or occupation-oriented colleges. It has been ranked in a relatively lower position than it is in high school where it is treated as a compulsory main course for every student and takes 20% of the whole evaluation score. Third, unlike children, college students are adults who have learned English for at least 10 years (4 years in primary school, 3 years in middle school, 3 years in high school) and have developed their own systems and habits in learning English, learner preferences would hugely impact their English learning outcomes. Fourth, college students are occupation-oriented compared with students from comprehensive universities, so their whole courses are less academic. As English is also a compulsory course for them, what kind of materials do college students prefer to acquire still needs discussing. Fifth, college students are adults who have clear minds and logic, compared with children and teenagers, their opinions would be more authentic in research.

3.2 Previous studies on L1 use in L2 class and the necessity to rediscuss this issue

Krashen (1981) notes that too much use of L1 and insufficient L2 exposure would result in a failure in L2 acquisition. Teachers who firmly believe in this notion use and promote L2 as much as possible in L2 class. On the contrary, various research have proved the benefits of using L1 in the L2 class. From teachers' perspectives, L1 use has been proved very necessary in

L2 class for class management and explanation in primary EFL class(Wilden & Porsch, 2020). Dujmovic (2014) provides a specific argument that in L2 class especially with students of lower L2 proficiency, moderate L1 use is indispensable. He argues that when giving instructions and explaining complex L2 phenomena, using L1 would be more time-saving and efficient as using L2 for these tasks would arouse uncertainties and consume precious time which should be allocated for practice and discussion. Under this circumstance, a tenacious L2 use may demotivate students and hinder their L2 learning processes. Norman (2008) emphasizes the importance of L1 use in L2 class. His research shows that students would not be fully engaged in class discussions and enjoy the lecture if the class atmosphere is not light or cosy due to too much L2 use. From students' perspectives, they also feel that a certain amount of L1 use could be beneficial to obtain emotional empathy, a sense of security and comfort, thus increasing their confidence to express in L2 (Iswati & Hadimulyono, 2018). Adult students (university students and college students) feel that too much L1 use in class is unnecessary and recommend an average of 40% L1 use in L2 class. Meanwhile, this desirable L1 proportion in L2 class gradually declines with students' increasing L2 proficiency. Advanced L2 students show less L1 requirement than L2 beginners, but surprisingly need more L1 supports in task descriptions due to their anxieties in not completing the task accurately and smoothly. However, they all admit that L1 use cannot absent in L2 class (Carson & Kashikara, 2012). Some students feel very stressed when teacher raising questions in L2 due to their fears of not capable of fully understanding the question and giving correct answers. In this case, they hope the teacher will use L1 to ask questions to avoid being embarrassed among classmates (Li, 2014). Also, university students are These previous research indicate the fact that certain L1 use is helpful in L2 class to promote learning efficiency, so the first aim of this research is to retest the importance of L1 use in L2 class among Chinese college students.

Students of various levels hold different attitudes towards teachers' L1 use in L2. Primary school kids are more friendly towards L1 use in L2 class. In their minds, teachers use L1 to make explanations and communicate with them, and that makes them feel closer and less stressed in an unfamiliar language environment. Meanwhile, it is suggested that in primary school that L1 is used for solving problems and arranging interactions, while L2 is used for instruction and lecture, which sends the signals to primary students that L1 and L2 mean relaxing time and study time respectively (Li, 2014). For students from middle school and high school, their attitudes towards L1 use in L2 class is basically negative. They prefer less L1 in class for they want to absorb as much L2 input as possible. At the same time, due to their competitiveness, students who have higher L2 proficiency wish to see diversities in their L2 performances. Some students even have specific language goals to reach before they enrol in universities. For these reasons, L1 use is considered to be a drag or redundancy by certain students (Li, 2014). Surprisingly, this view is shared by students with lower L2 proficiency because the majority of them believe that the L2 grammar rule which is supposed to be analyzed in L1 has all been demonstrated many times and they need more L2 stimulations such as simulant dialogues and literature reading (Ma, 2015). Adult students have a very complex attitude towards this issue. College and university students who are fully engaged in L2 class usually have clear purposes in L2 learning either for major request or career opportunities. Some students especially those who majored in language learning consider that the amount of L1 use in L2 class represents the teacher's L2 proficiency and the overuse of L1 is a negative force in L2 class. While there are others who believe that sufficient L1 that could be linked to L2 can enhance the L2 learning process (Carson & Kashikara, 2012). Adult

students who are out of campus admire organised L1 use in L2 class for they need to construct their L2 learning within a limited time and an organised L1 would be useful for them to get obtain L2 knowledge as soon as possible (Ma, 2015). Therefore, this research's second aim is to examine college students' attitude towards L1 use in L2 class. Do they share the same idea as any age group that is still on campus or do their views close to adults out of campus because their courses focus more on job positions rather than academic skills?

3.3 Learner preferences and the comprehensible input hypothesis in this research

Krashen (1983) also proposes that L2 acquisition is achieved by constant comprehensible input. He further suggests that the input better be comprehensible and interesting at the same time. His research had proved that students who were not devoted to language learning could make impressive improvements after reading materials that they were interested in (Krashen, 2011). In China, many students indicate that they lose their concentration in class due to the boredom of the class contents and teachers' mechanized lectures. From my teaching experience, I discover that students are more interested in real-life conversations and L2 media materials. Students' vocabulary is enlarged and their abilities to launch smooth conversations have been improved. By watching videos or listening to music, students' listening and speaking can be promoted. Also, motivation is one of the key factors that affect L2 learning. Motivation can be developed through various methods. If students' motivations are aroused by their interests, which in turn come back to their input, the L2 input that the teacher provides in class is of great significance. Most language class in China are big classes with up to 60 students, students rarely have the opportunity to practice or offer feedback, making the whole L2 learning a passive model. Usually, a textbook is given to all students and explained by the teacher. An exam based on the textbook is given for the evaluation of the course. This old-fashioned L2 learning system actually set a higher bar for input sources rather than teachers' teaching methods because students are constantly receiving L2 information from either the textbook or the teacher. This research thoroughly follows Krashen's theories in both L2 acquisition and input hypothesis and comes up with the following two research questions: Which contents do Chinese college students prefer in L2 learning? Do these preferred contents actually benefit their L2 learning? The research aims are to discover the quality input that Chinese college students prefer and test the correlation between L2 input and L2 outcomes. This study is chosen because English as a compulsory course has not received enough attention for a long time and students' learning enthusiasm is not high. Under this traditional education system, how can teachers innovate to improve the teaching efficiency of English as L2 or how to improve the learning efficiency of students within the limited time in L2 class is an important task that needs to be solved urgently. In China, college students and university students have different learning orientations. However, the assigned English textbooks have not been distinguished between academic and practical. Besides, college student and university students are complex identities of both adults and students. For many years, foreign language classes in higher education or vocational education in China have been in a one-way mode in which students passively study and passively participate in examinations and evaluations. With the exception of language-related majors, English as a compulsory course or compulsory course has not achieved significant teaching results. This research aims to collect data, critically look at the L2 textbooks used by Chinese college students nowadays, and analyze the preference of Chinese college students for teachers' use of L1 and L2 textbooks in

the L2 classroom, so as to better serve foreign language teaching in Chinese colleges in the future and provide instructive suggestions to improve English as an L2 teaching model.

3.4 EFL theories in this research

The proposal of this research is mainly based on the following EFL theories. First, there are many factors that affect second language learning (Lightbrown & Spada, 2000). This research focuses on two factors, learner preferences and motivation, and aims to test the association of learner preferences and motivation, as well as their influences on L2 learning. In this research, there are two parts of learner preferences, students' preferred L1 use in L2 class and their preferred L2 learning materials. Graham Crookes and Richard Schmidt (1991) pointed out that to vary study materials is also a method to promote students' interest in the class. In the experimental group, the preferred L2 learning materials are considered to be the motivation that affects their L2 outcomes. Second, in English as second language pedagogy, teachers are encouraged to use their first languages and appropriate materials in class. If the research results turn to support that videos and situational dialogues can indeed improve L2 learning outcomes, it is also a support for the audiolingualism approach that has rarely been used in Chinese college L2 class. Third, teachers need to evaluate the curriculum and relevant materials used for teaching. Textbooks are based more on academic demands and grammar rules which has already been practised and examined in high school. College students need to emphasize more on their output skills like speaking and writing. It is uncertain whether the change of input material could bring a difference. However, in lesson planning, teachers also need to consider their teaching aims and methods and make corresponding changes in different stages. This research focuses on the specific stage with a clear aim to test whether certain alteration in methods can lead to different results.

3.5 Expected research outcomes

This research focuses on students' preferences on L2 class instead of teaching methods or factors that affect L2 learning. Therefore, two research conclusions are expected after the research. First, a specific and significant proportion of Chinese college students' preference on L1 use in L2 class, along with reasons that echo this index. Second, a series of strong evidence to support or oppose the idea that Chinese college students' preferred learning materials can benefit their L2 learning.

4. A description of the evidence you intend to collect

Evidence from group discussions will be used to answer research question 1 and 2. These shreds of evidence are qualitative data with details or critical objective answers that can be used directly and mainly come from students' responses. Notes will also be taken in the group discussions.

Evidence from self-reported questionnaires will be used to answer research question 3. They are mixed with qualitative and quantitative data. Assertive responses would be used to guide the analysis and categorisation of other evidence.

A test will be marked from 1 to 5 to answer research question 4. Evidence will be collected from students' test scores and their test durations.

5. The methods you plan to use to collect your evidence

5.1 Group discussions

In order to acquire data of students' attitude towards teachers' L1 use in L2 class, 200 students will be divided into 4 groups (pass/average/good/excellent) according to their previous results of English test to represent students of different English levels. Several questions will be asked within each group including a) What is your general feeling when teacher use L1 in L2 class and why? b) In which aspects do you think L1 should be used in the L2 class and how much L1 use of these do you think is appropriate? c) Do you think teachers' L1 use in L2 class can represent their L2 proficiency? d) What happens to your concentration when teachers use L1 and L2 respectively in class? e) What do you feel when your teacher asks questions in L2 and demand L2 feedback? Five questions will be asked in each group, notes and answers will be recorded for further analysis. Students can either answer these questions individually or offer group opinions after their own discussions.

5.2 Self-reported questionnaires

Questionnaires with both optional questions and open questions will be distributed to the four groups of 200 students. The self-reported questionnaires are aiming to test students' preferred contents in L2 learning, so several questions will be asked including a) What is your rating of your current textbook (bad/average/good) and why? b) In which aspect do you think your current textbook needs improving (delete or add certain materials)? c) Some teachers play sitcom clips in class and require students to take notes and reproduce the dialogues in groups, what is your opinion towards this teaching approach (Yes / No)? d) According to your own experience, what do you think is the most effective way of learning an L2? e) What do you expect to learn in college L2 class and which study material do you think would help you achieve this goal? Various comprehensive data can be collected from these questionnaires for further studies such as the correlation between students' learning experience and their learning preferences.

5.3 Test mark

At the final stage of the research, a test marked from 1-5 will be launched within two groups (with only one control group and one experimental group, 100 students for each group) of students to make comparisons and discussion. After collecting evidence from previous group discussions and questionnaires, corresponding approaches will be given to 100 students in the experimental group (using their preferred study materials). The other control group of 100 students will continue learning in previous methods (using textbooks). A test will be given after 10 sessions (about 2 months) to make the comparison between these two groups. The given test will have a vocabulary test (40%) and a listening test (40%) as well as a writing test (20%) for evaluation. All questions in the test will neither base on the textbook nor derive from the new materials given in the experimental group. Most questions in the test will be objective multiple-choice questions to avoid ambiguousness and will be selected from PETS (Public English Test System). The final marks of the test will be marked in 5 groups (every 20 scores per group from 0-100 scores) and used for analysis. Students' test durations will also be recorded to testify only one additional hypothesis – To reach the same L2 proficiency (similar test scores in this research), students who study with preferred L2 materials might use less time than students who study with traditional L2 materials.

6. A description of the settings in which you plan to collect your evidence

This study will take place in a college school with 200 junior students from different majors. Half of them will be students who major in Chinese, which represent a group that has no academic pressure from English at all and English is only a compulsory course that needs to pass in order to get the diploma. Also, plenty of previous research have looked into students who major in L2 or related major like translation or cross-cultural communication, the setting of this group means to see the results from participants who majors in their L1, aiming to fill the research gap. The other half of the participants are students of the same grade who major in MBA or accountancy which request a certain English level for future career development. Moreover, students in these majors have great chances to come from different backgrounds in high school. Students who major in Chinese are more likely to have social science or art background, while those who major in MBA or accountancy mostly have science learning experience. All the participants are from the same college which sets occupation-oriented courses. Participants are chosen in this research as informed volunteers, no specific gender will be requested because the gender differences in participants can be complemented by that in these majors.

Four groups representing different English levels will be divided for further research. An average of the result of each student's English score from the high school entrance examination and the English exam score from last semester will be used as the discipline to divide groups. This approach is to set the groups according to students' long-term English results. In the last part of this research, 50 students who major in Chinese and 50 students who major in accountancy will stay in the control group. The rest of the participants will be in the experimental group that will use preferred materials to study for 10 sessions.

7. The ethical issues you need to consider

All research activities will strictly comply with the ethical guidelines for educational research from the British Educational Research Education as well as The Chinese Education Research Society. In addition, special attention must be paid to the following:

7.1 A consent form will be sent to each individual for they are all adults.

Also, previous exam results would be collected for group dividing and all the group discussions will be recorded. Considering this would also be seen as a violation of privacy, every participant in this study shall be informed and the whole research must be conducted under their permissions

7.2 The respect for participants' confidentiality.

Some students are not willing to express their own ideas or would deliberately give expected answers to protect themselves. It is crucial to inform every participant that both their answers in questionnaires and group discussions will remain anonymous, and all recordings will be wiped out after the research.

7.3 The avoidance of participants from lectured class.

If participants are from the class which the teacher already taught or is teaching, students may show their tendencies that incline to the teacher's existing teaching habit, resulting in inaccurate data. So the research host who operates the group discussion and distributing questionnaires should not be known by participants.

7.4 A respect for all answers and opinions.

Students may offer various opinions on their questionnaires. A researcher should select these data fairly and objectively to justify the research result. Meanwhile, students themselves may conflict in group discussions for different opinions. It is important to stay neutral in the group discussion and accept all answers for later analysis.

8. The methods you expect to use to analyse the evidence you collect.

8.1 Qualitative data

These data that will be collected from group discussions and self-reported questionnaires would be analysed by the following four steps: First, these qualitative data will be familiarized by reading and transcribing to obtain basic patterns and keywords. Next, relevant data will be selected out after revisiting research aims and questions. Later, a framework would be developed for structuring and labelling the data. Finally, corresponding data can be used to answer research questions or conducting further investigation. MAXQDA or Nvivo will be applied in processing these data.

8.2 Quantitative data

Obtained from self-reported questionnaires and test, these data will be analysed in three steps: At the beginning, all the data will be validated, whether research participants have all contribute to the final data will be checked and responses have been chosen for each research criteria. The following will be basic data check to avoid missing data and errors. Eventually, these data will be coded and analysed according to the research questions. SPSS will be applied in quantitative data analysis.

9 The timetable for the proposed project

The whole research will be conducted in four stages to answer research questions. The length of the research will be 18 weeks, which is exactly a whole semester in most Chinese colleges. Statutory holidays will be used for data analysis and will not hold up the whole research process.

9.1 Stage One: Week 1-3 (A retest L1 use in L2 class and students' opinions on this issue)

Week 1: Collecting two groups of data: a) students' English score from their university-entrance exams, and b) their English exam results from last semester. Calculating each individual's average score as the figure for group dividing. Four groups will be established according to their English levels.

Week 2-3: Group discussions will be launched with each group in the evening to avoid interrupting their usual study in the daytime. The discussion will be held in each group two times separately by a different host to avoid observation influences. Discussions with each group will be recorded.

9.2 Stage Two: Week 4-6 (A discovery of students' learning preferences)

Week 4: Analysis of the recording and distributing of all the self-reported questionnaires.

Week 5: Recycling the questionnaires and conducting data analysis from questionnaires

Week 6: Launching discussions with colleagues and other professionals on the results of the questionnaires to make out learning materials that will be used in the experimental group.

9.3 Stage Three: Week 7-17 (The implement of different learning materials in two groups)

Week 7 –Week 16: Preferred materials from Stage 1 on experimental groups for 10 sessions with nothing changing in the control group.

Week 17: Launching the test in two groups and compared result.

9.4 Stage Four: Week 18 (Discussion and summary)

Week 18: Discussion of the research results and draw research conclusions.

10.References

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