

**THE PERCEPTION OF NON-NATIVE LEARNERS OF CHINESE ON THE USE OF
SMART MALAY-CHINESE ONLINE TALKING DICTIONARY TO SUPPORT THEIR
VOCABULARY ACQUISITION FOR ORAL EXPRESSION**

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Abstract

Online talking dictionary is often used to support vocabulary expansion. Vocabulary expansion is vital for oral expression. By simply providing an online talking dictionary for users, the typical problem encountered is to get proper pronunciation. Hence the online talking dictionary used for this study is Smart Malay-Mandarin dictionary system with audio support. Learners will be provided with audio output. The online system is used for level 1 and level 2 students for 10 weeks. Students are required to use this system in completing their oral project. After completing the project, the perceptions of students are gathered. The results of this study shown positive perceptions. There isn't any significant different between level 1 and level 2 users. It indicates that learners would like to use the features of audio output when they are uncertain of the pronunciation of the search out as well as to ensure the correctness of their pronunciations.

Keywords: online talking dictionary, audio output, Malay, teaching Chinese as a foreign language, oral

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Online talking dictionary is often used to support vocabulary expansion. Vocabulary expansion is vital for oral expression. By simply providing an online dictionary for users, the typical problem encountered is to get proper pronunciation. Hence a talking dictionary is needed with pronunciations of words are provided to the users. Users may choose to download or listen to the pronunciation online. The online talking dictionary used for this study is Smart Malay-Mandarin dictionary system with audio support. Learners will be provided with audio output.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Dictionary is always an important tool for the language learners. The receptive use of a dictionary shows how the dictionary is used to get the meaning of the words (Xia, 2013). However the productive use is the aspects on how the words are used correctly for writing express (Goh, 2011) as well as oral expressions. The usefulness of dictionary is mainly for vocabulary acquisition and expansion (Goh & Saiful Nizam, 2013; Goh, Saiful, Hasiah, Norlina, & Yee, 2013).

In order to make sure that learners are clear with the meaning of the words, pictures are used to strengthen the understanding (Chen, 2015; Zeng, 2016). The functions of the illustrations are to ensure proper understanding of the words (Liu & Wang, 2014; Chu, 2010). Words that are strongly related to culture such as building, clothing and etc., illustrations are very important to assist comprehensions of those words. However, there is another aspect that learners want to know and should not be neglected. It is pertaining to the pronunciation of the words. This is essential when students are uncertain of the pronunciation even though pinyin is provided which include difficult sound, e.g. qù, xué, and etc., as well as tone differentiation, e.g. qù and qū.

Word collocation is another aspect that needs to pay attention to (Wang, 2014). Learners have to understand the word collocation to make sure that the words are used accurately. Hence a viable online talking dictionary has to take into account in giving search results that are in phrases as well as displaying words that related to phraseology. This is typically vital as well for prepositional phrases (Wu, 2015).

In sum, dictionary for the learners of Chinese as a foreign language has to play to role of vocabulary expansion for oral production. It is useful when audio productions are provided to assist the learners not just to be able to understand the meaning, but also able to pronounce correctly.

3.0 METHOD

3.1 Participants

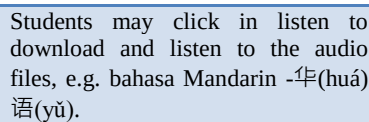
The participants of the study were 81 diploma students. They were all non-native speakers of Chinese and were taking preliminary (level 1) and intermediate (level 2) Chinese courses at UiTM Terengganu in Malaysia. The samples involved are shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Number of samples

Class		Number of students
1	Level 1	18
2	Level 2	17
Subtotal		35
3	Level 2	36
4	Level 2	10
Subtotal		46
Total		81

3.2 Instrumentation

Two instruments were used in this study. The first instrument was SMART Malay-Chinese dictionary which can be accessed at <http://terengganu1.uitm.edu.my/mandmalay/>. This is shown in figure 2 below.



The face to face guidance by the instructors is given during the Chinese teaching time. It is an ongoing process until the students are able to use this tool independently. Technical support is given upon the need of individual learners.

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3.3 Procedure

The online system is used for level 1 and level 2 students for 10 weeks. Students are required to use this system in completing their oral project. After completing the project, the perceptions of students are gathered. They were asked to participate in answering the online questionnaire. The descriptions of the procedure are shown in figure 3 below.

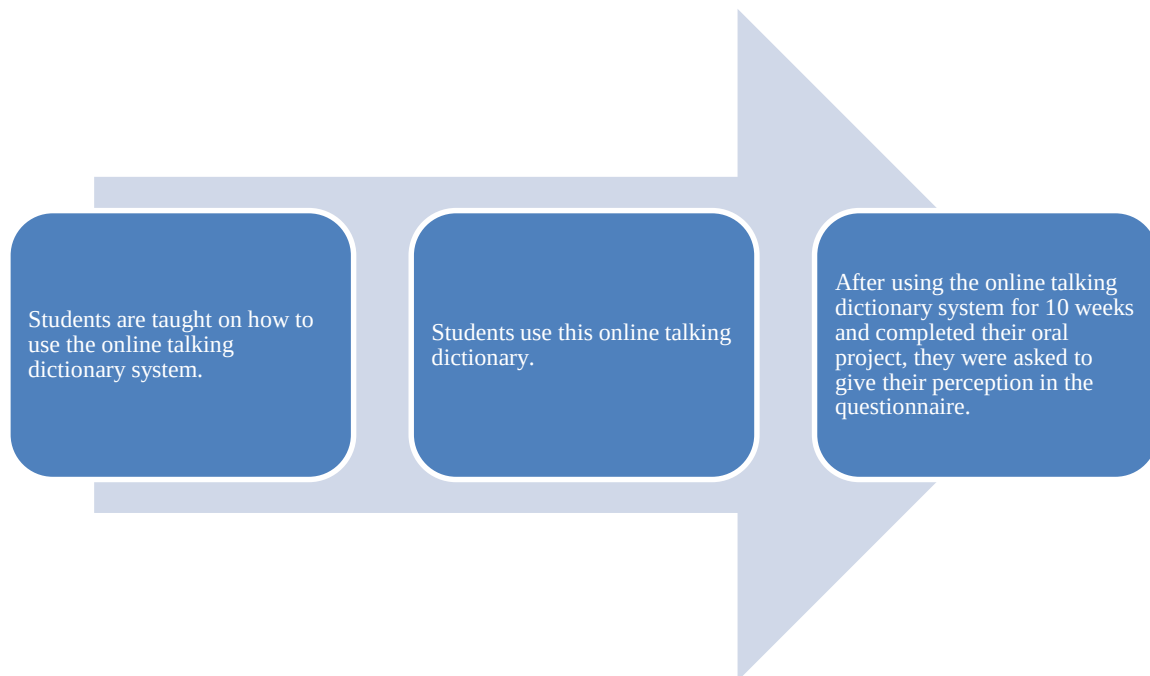


Figure 3: Procedure of the study

4.0 RESULTS

The students' perceptions on the use of the Smart Malay-Mandarin online talking dictionary to support their Chinese vocabulary acquisition for oral expression with audio production were positive (overall mean = 4.5291). It showed that students agreed that this activity can assist them in their Chinese character learning (refer table 2 below).

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Smart Malay-Mandarin online talking dictionary is suitable for me to get more vocabulary.	81	3	5	4.426	.623
This online talking dictionary system can motivate me to learn more Chinese vocabulary enthusiastically.	81	3	5	4.414	.729
I am able to use this online talking dictionary to improve my pronunciation.	81	3	5	4.610	.724

I feel comfortable to learn Chinese vocabulary without depending on my instructor.	81	3	5	4.515	.548
I can learn Chinese characters at any time I want.	81	3	5	4.590	.694
I can learn not just the word but also can download and hear the pronunciation.	81	3	5	4.693	.670
Instructor should encourage the use of this online talking dictionary in the Chinese classroom.	81	3	5	4.392	.620
I am interested to use this online talking dictionary very frequently for self- learning.	81	3	5	4.472	.627
Using this online talking dictionary allow me to learn Chinese words better.	81	3	5	4.438	.637
This online talking dictionary is suitable for Chinese vocabulary acquisition.	81	4	5	4.741	.598
mean	81			4.5291	.
Valid N (listwise)	81				

The samples were consisted of students taking two levels of Chinese courses. Table 3 and 4 below showed the perceptions of students of the two levels. It showed that students of level 1 (mean = 4.525) were having a slightly more positive perception than students of level 2 (mean = 4.533). By running T-test, the difference in perception is not significant ($t=3.251$, $df=80$, sig. value=.1407 > .05). It means that the perceptions of students of level 1 and level 2 were not different significantly on the use of this online talking dictionary for Chinese vocabulary acquisition for oral expression in this study.

Table 3 Group Statistics

	Course level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
mean	1	35	4.525	.57151	.20619
	2	46	4.533	.62796	.45899

Table 4: T-test – Comparing two groups of students of two levels of Chinese learning

t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
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3.251	80	.1407	.14598
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On top of that, the means of total frequencies of downloads of audio files in these ten weeks of the users are shown in table below. The mean of total frequencies of downloads of audio files in these ten weeks for level 1 students was 80 audio files while the mean of total frequencies of downloads of audio files in these ten weeks for level 2 students was 83 audio files. By running Pearson's Chi-squared test, X-squared = 37.6142, df = 1, p-value = 0.46545 > .05. The difference is not significant. It showed that there isn't any significant difference in the downloads of sound files of the two groups. Both groups of students were downloading the sound files to improve their listening in the betterment of their speaking.

Table 5: The means of total frequencies of downloads of audio files in these ten weeks of the users

	Course level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
mean	1	35	80	.111
	2	46	83	.641

Table 6: Pearson's Chi-squared test

X-squared	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
37.6142	1	. 0.46545

5.0 DISCUSSION

The results of this study showed positive perceptions. There isn't any significant different between level 1 and level 2 users. It indicates that learners would like to use the features of audio output when they are uncertain of the pronunciation of the search out as well as to ensure the correctness of their pronunciations.

The findings showed that the learners are very positive on the use of this online talking dictionary to support Chinese vocabulary acquisition for oral expression with audio production (overall mean = 4.5291). It showed that students agreed that this online talking dictionary is beneficial on the aspects of getting more vocabulary for expression (mean = 4.426), more motivated to learn (mean = 4.414), pronunciation improvement (mean = 4.610), independent learning (mean = 4.515), and improve listening of words (mean = 4.693). With all these strengths, this online talking dictionary is highly recommended for the learning of Chinese in terms of vocabulary expansion for oral expression.

It is noted that both levels of students were downloading sound files to improve their speaking (X-squared = 37.6142, df = 1, p-value = 0.46545 > .05). There isn't any significant different. It indicates

that learners do desire to use the feature of audio files availability to improve their speaking skill for oral enhancement.

Dictionary is always related to the enhancement of reading and writing skills (Korat, Levin, Atishkin, & Turgeman, 2014). However, by giving the availability of audio downloads, it should be able to enhance the speaking skill as well. Various ideas should be utilized to make language learning with technology really beneficial to the learners (Stanley & Thornbury, 2013). By having search results that cater along with audio files, it will certainly assist students to obtain the meanings as well as the support of pronunciation needs.

Learners in the process of using this online talking dictionary can improve their speaking and listening skills. Thus, it may lead to active and positive use of the words that they have searched for daily communication as they are more certain of the pronunciation of the words.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The finding of this study shows that the use of online talking dictionary can be beneficial for vocabulary expansion and useful for oral production with the availability of audio productions in the search results. Instructors have to comprehend the needs of the learners in order to make active use of dictionary for positive active learning among the learners of Chinese as a foreign language (Du, 2010). In conclusion, dictionary with audio productions should be engaged as a pedagogical tool in enhancing the effects of the teaching of Chinese for oral skill enhancement.

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