

LANGUAGE+1: A CURRICULUM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION FOR BUSINESS CHINESE

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Abstract: *Recently, more and more Chinese language learners not only learn the language but also use the language to learn an additional subject (language+1) and therefore a curriculum of Chinese for Specific Purposes is needed. This study explores the theory and practice for such a curriculum starting with Business Chinese (BC). The research methods include a Needs Analyses survey at the beginning of the study, thirty-six hours of class observations during the study, and a National Student Survey (NSS) at the end of the study. To triangulate the quantitative data, a focus-group interview is conducted for a deeper understanding of students' attitudes towards and insights on the curriculum. The study is carried out at University of Manchester, UK with 72 Chinese-majored degree students. A curriculum design committee consisting of professionals, graduate entrepreneurs, subject lecturers, language tutors and current student representatives is set up for designing, implementing and monitoring the curriculum. The Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach is employed for students to learn the subject knowledge while practising the language. The subject knowledge is introduced via lectures and discussed at seminars; business content is practised by students setting up and running their own companies, virtual or real; and language skills are trained via presenting their companies to potential clients and customers, negotiating with counterparts and by writing business reports etc. The NSS results with 100% satisfaction rate show students' positive attitudes towards the curriculum, and students welcome the curriculum in that they are learning BC by running their own business and that during the process, they apply the subject knowledge into their own companies and the target language is used throughout the process. By managing their own companies, they go through business procedures, develop related knowledge and skills, share ideas with peers and obtain practical advice from professionals. Students appreciate the engagement and empowerment by running their own companies. This curriculum model can be suggested as a framework for those who are to design and develop curriculum for language for specific purposes.*

Keywords: needs analysis; Business Chinese; Chinese for specific purposes, CLIL, Language +1

1. Introduction

The Chinese language, as one of the fastest growing languages in the world, continues to gain popularity among language learners. In 2020, there were more than 100 million language learners learning Chinese globally (Global Exam, 2021). In China alone, the number of overseas students coming to China for a Chinese language degree reached 184,799 in 2019 (Shangdong Education, 2020), among whom many regard learning language+1 as an opportunity to further their personal and professional growth (Lead with languages, 2021). Language+1 refers to an aspect of a subject such as business. In the context of this research, 1 refers to business related to China. Many Chinese language learners believe it is an advantage to learn the Chinese language and to be familiar with an aspect of a subject area (Wisiniewska, 2021). The trend of language+1 also has an impact on the UK with more than 20 universities running Business Chinese (BC) programs, as well as Medical Chinese, Law Chinese and Tourism Chinese (Song, 2021). However, the research on language+1 curriculum design does not keep abreast with the growing demand. No research papers appear in Google Scholar with the key words of 'Business Chinese curriculum' between 2010 and 2020. This research is an attempt to fill this gap by developing and implementing such a curriculum starting with BC.

2 Literature review

BC curriculum design in this study refers to an overall plan for a BC course and how the content is transformed into teaching and learning which enables the desired learning outcomes (Richards, 2013). It is a map of maximizing students' performance with appropriate learning activities and assessments (Wiggins and McTighe, 2010) to make learning a dynamic and interactive process.

2.1 Needs analysis (NA)

An essential part of curriculum design is NA, as it can accurately inform designers what should be included in the curriculum (Du and Guan, 2016). Specifically, "target situation analysis, learner factor analysis and teaching context analysis" are fundamental (Basturkmen, 2010).

Target situation analysis identifies learners' needs for their future workplace, and concerns learners' knowledge/skills needed to perform in their future career (Kardijan, Emzir and Rafli, 2018). In the business field for example, the knowledge required for market survey, advertisement, sale and service will be the knowledge that should be provided to the students via the curriculum, in addition to the language skills to perform these tasks. In real business workplaces, informal oral communication skills across cultures are also used outside of formal presentations, as recommended by the business graduate employees of Monash University (Crosling and Ward, 2002).

Learner factor analysis includes students' immediate needs and long-term needs

(Chostelidou, 2010). University students' immediate needs are to pass exams for credits and long-term needs are to be prepared with the knowledge and skills for workplace requirements (Akyel and Ozek's, 2010). Therefore, students' both immediate and long-term needs should be taken into consideration when designing a curriculum.

Teaching context can be established through a presented 'situation', social practice and real-life situation scenarios (Yu, 2014). Active learning and peer-supported learning are helpful for building a bridge between students' needs and their academic specializations and career expectations (Cheng, 2011).

As demonstrated above, NA should be conducted from the perspectives of target situations, learner factors and teaching context analysis. Furthermore, in order to make the analysis reliable and valid, insider and outsider views, triangulation of information and mixed methods are suggested to be included after a longitudinal study over the past 30 years by Serafini, Lake, and Long (2015).

2.2 Content and language integrated learning (CLIL)

CLIL is a dual-focused educational approach in which a target language is used for the learning/teaching of both content and language (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010). The purpose is to improve students' foreign language competence whilst facilitating their learning of a subject matter. It recognizes the educational achievements in the simultaneous learning process and seeks to develop students' expertise in particular disciplinary areas of a foreign culture.

To ensure that the content is understood by students through the medium of a foreign language, Colyle (1999) proposed a holistic conceptual framework of 4C model-- Content (subject matter), Communication (language to learn and use), Cognition (learning and thinking) and Culture (social awareness of self and others). Inspired by this model, an integrated approach of experiential learning and work-based learning is advocated (Bovill & Morss, 2011), where students apply concepts and skills to real-world situations, and the use of the target language can be achieved by its use as a functional medium of communication, not by making it the object of analysis in class (Graaff, Koopman, Anikina and Westhoff, 2007).

Although it is encouraging to see that CLIL develops language proficiency alongside a subject, there are also criticisms of the method. Bruton (2011) challenges that the initiatives of CLIL may not necessarily produce better results than learning a foreign language and content separately, in that making academic content the goal of the learning in the foreign language may increase motivation, but it may have negative effects on self-esteem when the content is too challenging to understand in a foreign language. It may cause drop in interest in CLIL (Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2009). In addition, academic content may not stimulate more oral interaction on the part of the students (Dalton-Puffer, 2007). When the content becomes too difficult, students resort to their first language (Coonan, 2007). Bruton (2011) also challenges that the positive attitudes towards CLIL may diminish as the students go up in the educational ladder. Thus, more empirical research on CLIL, especially on students' attitudes towards CLIL is needed, and

this need is called by distinguished scholars including Lasagabaster (2011), and Navés and Victori (2010).

In answer to this research call and based on the literature above, this study aims to answer the following research questions (RQ): 1) what are students' needs for learning BC in the UK university context? 2) What activities should be included in a language+1 curriculum to meet students' needs? 3) What are students' attitudes towards the BC curriculum?

3 Data collection

The data for this study comes from a NA survey at the beginning of the study, thirty-six hours of class observations (3 hrs per week x 12 weeks) during the study, and a National Student Survey (NSS) at the end of the study. NSS is run annually by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which includes teaching on the course, assessment and feedback, academic support, structure of the course, learning resources, learning community, and overall satisfaction. As this research focuses on curriculum, the two most relevant aspects of structure and overall satisfaction were selected. To triangulate the quantitative data, a focus-group interview is conducted for a deeper understanding of students' attitudes towards and their insights on the curriculum.

3.1 Needs analysis (NA)

The NA questionnaire was derived from Xie (2016), which consisted of the students' basic characteristics including age, gender and language level. It also asked six open-ended questions, including the target language skills they feel most need improvement, the business documents they most often read, their job application experiences, the industries they wish to work in, and their perceptions of the course content and teaching approach. Language level is not included in this research because all the students in this study passed HSK5 (an international Chinese language test). Two questions (the business documents they most often read, their job application experiences) were not included because each student's experience varied from one to another. Two changes were made to fit in the context of this study: one was from Business English to BC; the other was that market survey, advertising, sale and after-sale service were added for the content subjects, which were suggested by the professionals to make it more relevant to BC. The questionnaire was checked by the school research committee and its reliability and validity were approved. The questionnaire was distributed and collected in class at the end of the first semester to ensure that the return rate was 100%. NA survey results were analysed by frequency calculations, to identify the most common features of participants' BC learning needs. Responses to the open-ended questions were analysed using a thematic approach (Flick, 2011) to identify their major concerns and preferences. Typical quotes are used to show the main factors in their perceptions. By using the same thematic approach, the recorded classroom observations were analysed.

3.2 Participants

The participants were full-time final-year students at the University of Manchester in the UK (n=22 in 2018 with 14 F and 8 M; n=29 in 2019 with 18 F and 11 M; n=21 in 2020 with 15 F and 6 M), with an age range of 20-25. All the participants had completed their year-abroad study in China before they came back to the UK for their final-year study. Prior to their year abroad study, they had learnt business subject as an elective course entitled Chinese Business taught in English at the Business School of the University of Manchester.

3.3 Class observations

The BC classes were automatically video-recorded (3 hrs per week x 12 weeks=36 hrs) by the university as podcasts for students who happened to have missed classes. Permission was obtained from the university to use these recordings as class observation for research purposes. The language tutor who delivered the course (one of the authors of this paper) and a senior researcher analysed the recordings with a thematic approach and the information was used in data analysis.

3.4 Focus-group interview

A focus-group interview was conducted at the end of the study with a two-fold purpose: to help answer the research questions; and to dig students' perceptions and insights on the curriculum. Interview questions and answers were in English centring round students' needs and perceptions of the course, and the frequency of key words were used for analysis. Six voluntary participants were chosen (2 high-level, 2 low-level, 2 middle-level) according to their language scores so that different voices could be heard. Two male and four female students were selected because there were more female than male students in the class.

In addition, NSS results were used to triangulate the data.

4 Implementation

Based on the NA results, a curriculum design committee was formed, consisting of two professionals (experienced in doing business with Chinese companies), two successful graduate entrepreneurs, one content lecturer, one language tutor and three current student representatives. Centring round students' needs, the committee selected ten topics from the available BC textbooks, e-resources and professionals' real-life experience. Learning materials for each week were selected and edited, and detailed lesson plans were formulated, including before-class assignments, in-class activities, and after-class summaries. Learning materials were made available on the Blackboard e-learning platform. Formative and summative assessments were specified to match the learning aims and objectives. The CLIL approach was employed for content knowledge and language practice, and content and language are taught in parallel. According to the content for each week, the core vocabulary, grammar and sentence structures were introduced and practised. Centring round the core linguistic features, students added more

vocabulary for their own companies which served as a snowball for other students to enlarge their vocabulary and enhance their language level. The curriculum was implemented in a BC course at University of Manchester, UK for an elective degree course of 20 credits. With 3 hours per week, the content and language were taught in parallel. The thread that went through all the learning activities is that each student set up a company of their own where they could apply what they learnt to practise. Professionals and graduate entrepreneurs were invited as guest speakers to share live experience and to answer students' questions. Students introduced their business-running progress via oral presentations and summarized their companies in written reports.

5 Findings

Finding 1. Shift from needing language skills to needing intercultural communication skills:

The target situation analysis identifies learners' needs for their future workplaces and the knowledge and skills they need in their future career. Regarding language skills, when asked 'Which of the areas do you most need to improve?' students put the order as vocabulary, listening, speaking, writing, reading and grammar, but above all they put intercultural communication skills as the most needed.

The reason that students put intercultural communication skills above language skills is found out from the interview that nowadays with the convenience of technology, students can easily find the vocabulary they need from electronic dictionaries, and in the same way they can practise their listening, reading and writing with programs in YouTube and with language partners online. What they cannot manage on their own is intercultural communication skills. As the extracts from the interview explains: "My Dad works in a big company in Shanghai, and I am there for summer holidays, Easter breaks and Christmas etc. What puzzles me is the gap between Chinese and western people's ways in communication, e.g. when I want to play ball with Chinese friends who work for my Dad, they won't leave the office though it is after 5pm already. They think it is impolite to leave before the boss makes a move. You see, it is the value, belief, and their ideology that makes the gap". "Our class is like a small UN, because classmates are from different countries. It is more useful to understand each other at a deeper level than a single language skill such as listening or reading, because I can practise that on my own".

The students in this study had learnt Chinese for three years before they took the BC course and indeed they could practise a specific skill by using flash cards, apps etc., but intercultural communication skills needed to interact with other people, particularly people from different cultural backgrounds or in other cultural contexts, and more importantly, it is the skill they could use in real-life situations and in real business context.

Regarding the subject aspect, students listed from most needed to least needed: CV/cover letter, market survey, advertisement, sale, service, company

management and, above all, real-life communications in the business field. Students consider real-life communication skills as the most needed, and reckon that they need to use it in the real world after they graduate from university.

Finding 2. Shift from needing a job to developing a career:

Learner factor analysis includes students' immediate needs and long-term needs. The NA results show that students' immediate needs are to meet the university requirements for a degree; their long-term needs are to master the business knowledge and language skills required for the future. When asked "What industry you would like to work in? What job you would like to do in the future?" students changed 'job' into 'career' in their answers, e.g. "The career I am going to take is high-speed transport in China" (a student from Poland) or "My career will be in the import-export business between Russia and China" (a student from Russia). More comments from the students:

"Unlike the part-time I am doing now, after graduation, I will start my career. I will be either the boss of my own company or a key figure in a big company. That is why I appreciate the professionals' talks so much because they have been there, and the experience I learn from them will save my own mistakes".

"At the moment, I want to learn well with high grades for my degree. I am ambitious for my future. I want to be a senior manager in a big company, rather than just to have a job to make ends meet".

Students' immediate needs are their degrees, and they are aware that they need to perform well in the learning activities. Their long-term needs are to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills needed for their future workplace. Since students connect their current course with their future workplace, it is important for curriculum designers to create a link to connect the two to meet students' immediate and future professional needs.

Finding 3. Shift from using a single to using multiple resources:

Before designing this curriculum, only handouts were printed out for lectures, but during the designing process, the professionals and graduate entrepreneurs suggested that these may not be sufficient, and thus some video clips for real negotiations and websites for successful business stories were embedded. Indeed, these resources greatly aroused students' interests and triggered their imagination and creativity as can be seen in their own companies. Having been born in the digital age, students are no longer satisfied with the pen/paper in the four-wall classroom context; instead, they turn to e-resources more and more. One positive effect of doing this is that students can discover a greater variety of learning resources. It is good to see that students not only use the resources by themselves but that they also list the advantages of some apps compared with other apps and point out what they can get out of the chosen resources. They share and update their discoveries with classmates, e.g. "When doing my residence abroad study in China, I learnt that many students from other countries are using the Chinese learning resource called Chairman's Bao. After coming back to the UK, I realized

that this is created by the graduates from our department. I feel so proud of them, and I use it every day”.

“What is really convenient is that I can listen to the audio, watch the video clips, or read the articles which are updated frequently, and all the materials are arranged according to the topics labelled 1 to 6 levels. I always read the business column, full of fun and interesting ideas”.

The sharing of new discoveries, the comments and discussions among the students make their learning exciting. Students enjoyed the learning materials which were interesting and informative in multimode and from multiple resources. Students also enjoyed the inclusion of serious weekly business articles from the Financial Times (财经时报), and Business Forum (经济论坛) for updated business information. They appreciated the use of multimedia and multimode to enrich the learning. “Business news and politics, trends of business culture and international business analysis are just what I want to know”. “Business stories and the channels for business development are most useful for me”. “I find the blog from the professionals are a great fun and you know what, the stories are real”. “Yeh, social media is convenient and the ones from entrepreneurs are also funny but useful”. Students perceived the use of multiple resources and simulated practice as an effective approach to achieve intercultural communicative competence development for the real business world.

Finding 4. Gains from learning activities and working experiences:

The class observations show that students seemed a little uneasy in the first couple of weeks: some were intimidated by the idea of setting up their own companies, some were not sure if they could manage, but most of them were excited. After they all decided what business they were going to run in week 3, they were on track to go through the procedures from designing business structure, making advertisements, preparing apps, creating websites, organizing social media groups, selling their products/services to providing after-sale service. Students worked together to brainstorm ideas and used their expertise to help each other, e.g. some were good at drawing/painting, some were good at wording, some at making and editing recordings, and some at using technologies to make apps and websites. They worked together to make advertisements for each company and updated their websites. They also enlarged their customer network by joining each other’s social media network.

Setting up and running their own companies was regarded as the big incentive for getting involved in the business practice. They appreciated that the work involved in running their own business trained them in real-life situations and with real activities. “To be the boss of my own company means responsibility. I learnt to have an overall plan and organize resources around my plan”, “By actually running my own business, I feel more comfortable working with people of different cultural backgrounds after getting the deals done”. By actually working with my Chinese clients, I got to know that ‘考虑考虑 think seriously about it, 研究研究 do some serious research on it, 讨论讨论 discuss about it, 请示请示 ask senior for approval’

all mean 'no' or more negotiation is needed. I can see the meaning beneath the surface level now.

Finding 5. Positive attitudes towards language+1:

Fig 1 illustrates that students regard the BC course as excellent, as the classes were clearly structured and well presented.

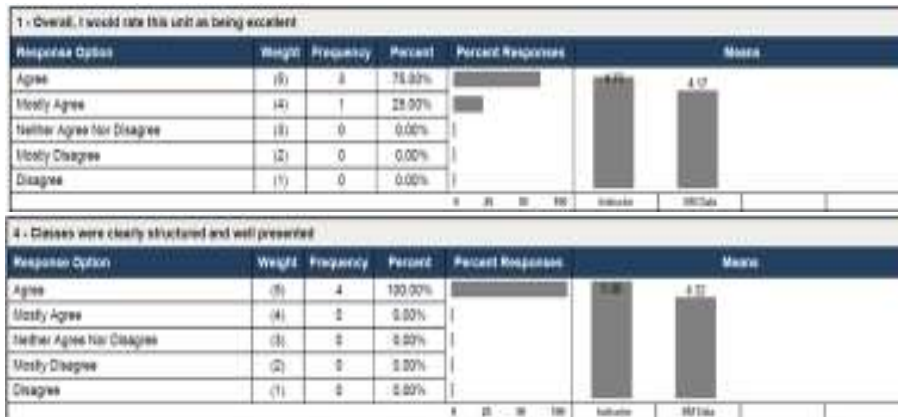


Figure 1: National Student Survey Source: (NSS)

When students were asked to 'provide details of what you valued about this course', their answers showed that they valued the practical skills gained from preparing and delivering presentations and coursework which stimulated entrepreneurial skills. Students also appreciated the tight link between the subject and the language, e.g. "I get two gains from one course, both Business and language". Students appreciated the approaches used in class for learning new business content and the Chinese language, as the integration make it entertaining and efficient. "Yeh, the diverse approaches e.g. different group activities with different students, are good in enhancing our learning and ability to develop our entrepreneur business skills". "To learn business and Chinese simultaneously is intellectually stimulating and it is an excellent innovative way of learning".

Meanwhile, there are different opinions, e.g. "It is time-consuming to produce a high-quality piece of work such as ad because of the nature of the coursework. It is more challenging than is expected to produce a good oral presentation or a written report on my company in the target language". After having expressed the challenges, they enjoyed their learning outcome after the hard work, e.g. "At the end of the day, after I see my grades and hear the praises from my friends, it is all worthwhile". "After I put my ad in YouTube, I received many ticks, smiling icons and positive comments. I feel like a local celebrity. I am the model of my own products".

At first, students used everyday vocabulary in business, but at the end of the course, they can select the appropriate vocabulary, sentence structure and paragraph organization suitable for the business context. As they expressed "Getting involved in the language+1 is the best choice I have ever made". "I have learnt the business knowledge and have practised the language in the business". Students have learnt and practised communication skills, as they can communicate

with real businessmen more fluently and write formal business documents with few mistakes.

Students' positive attitude toward the language+1 curriculum is encouraging because from this course, they have gained improvements in both subject and language. They value the double gain and expect a tight link between the two.

6 Discussion

The findings in this study highlight students' needs for intercultural communication skills, practice in real-life situations, and the link between content and language which lead to positive attitudes toward language+1 in the BC curriculum.

In answer to RQ1 'what are students' needs for learning BC in the UK university context?' The study has discovered that students need intercultural communication skills apart from language skills such as listening/speaking and business content knowledge such as marketing/advertising. This is probably because students regard communication skills in the multicultural context as part of their future career. They target their career prospects at international business industries. To embed the training of intercultural communication skills in the curriculum is a necessity, which is in line with Kardijan, Emzir and Rafli's (2018) claims that students need to be equipped with the skills needed for their future professions. Curriculum designers need to keep students' immediate and future needs in mind to make content and activities move around this line throughout the course.

In answer to RQ2 'What activities should be included in a language+1 curriculum to meet students' needs?', the study has illustrated that students running their own companies can be a practical answer, as this major task serves as a platform where students can apply knowledge and skills in real-life situations. The active learning activities of running their own companies help students work together to gain a deeper understanding of the subject. A variety of e-resources should be provided for assisting their creativity and originality. To train students in real-life practice encourages the learners' intention to learn, which is echoed by Xie (2016) that the students hope that teaching could bring them opportunities for the real business world through approaches such as simulated practice. This approach is encouraged by New Media Consortium Horizon Report (2015) that group work and peer learning should be added in the curriculum design with emphasis on the social and contextual aspects of learning.

In answer to RQ3 'What are students' attitudes towards the BC curriculum?' the 100% satisfaction rate from NSS and the comments from interviews have demonstrated their positive attitudes. Students appreciate the dual-gain of language+1. They value the multiple resources to facilitate their practice in real-life situations and the tasks stimulate and consolidate their intellectual development. Students appreciate the simulated learning activities to try out their ideas, procedures, and the way to reach their goal. This result supports Boud's (2001) concept of experiential learning and work-based learning. In the learning process, they practise the knowledge learnt from class, from peers, from graduate

entrepreneurs, and from professionals. Equipped with subject knowledge and language skills, they feel they are ready to embark on their career after graduation.

7. Conclusion

This study has explored students' needs which can be used to inform theory and practice in curriculum design. The parallel development of subject and language worked well when carrying out real-life tasks. Running their own companies provided students with opportunities to use multiple resources, to work with people of other nationalities, to try out ideas with peer-support and to present their achievements in oral and written forms. After going through real-life scenarios and the procedures of a running business using their target language, students feel that they are well prepared for their future careers. The language+1 curriculum is welcomed by the students. However, one of the limitations of this study is that this curriculum is used with only one subject, which is business. It will be interesting to see how it works in other subjects such as medicine, as it may not be easy to find professionals who are good at both the target language and a subject. Another limitation is that the students in this study have learnt business knowledge in English at Business School, but what will happen if students haven't learnt the subject knowledge in other schools such as the School of Computer Science? Therefore, further research is needed for other subjects, such as medicine, science and technology and other areas. It is also worthwhile to make a comparative study with students who have learnt a subject knowledge and those who have not studied it. This curriculum model can be recommended as a framework for those who are to design and develop curriculum for language for other specific purposes.

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