How Developmental Psychology Strategies Can Help the In-Class Assignments More Interesting in Order to Help Elementary School Students Get Better Grades in Learning Mandarin?

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Abstract. Action research is a method of research that is being conducted to gain knowledge of a certain study or theory. It often requires the person who performs the research to take action and interact with the participants during the research process. It also includes a series of experiments and a conclusion at the end of the research. Using developmental psychology strategies when designing the in-class worksheets for Mandarin class will make the class time more interesting. Observation has shown that It will also increase the completion rate of the in-class worksheets. Therefore, to help elementary school students get better grades in learning mandarin.

Keywords: Action Research; Learning Mandarin; In-Class Assignments.

1. The Action Research

Action research is a method of research that is being conducted to gain knowledge of a certain study or theory. It often requires the person who performs the research to take action and interact with the participants during the research process. It also includes a series of experiments and a conclusion at the end of the research.

In the Model Student Research Paper, the action research project is mainly focused on finding different ways to help improve students' performance in learning mathematics. In order to help the readers have a better understanding of the researcher's topic, there are one pre-step and four main steps in an action research cycle, which are understanding the context and purpose first, and then diagnosing, planning action, taking action, evaluating action.

The Model Student Research Paper also follows the steps of the cycle of action research. The action research frame in this paper is reflected in seven subtitles, which are The Phenomenon or Puzzle, Conceptual Framework, Research Question, Setting, Research Methods, Findings, and Conclusion. The researcher identified that the action research is aiming to figure out how different ways of mathematical discourse or discussion can affect the student's learning outcomes. Then the researcher set the research question as the "relationship between participation protocols and discourse patterns" (Mendel). The researcher used multi-faceted research that include several technics, such as interviews with students, interviews with teachers, targeted instructions of teaching, analysis of teaching footage and focus group interviews. Then with those action research technics, the researcher came up with the conclusion that when using different participation protocols, helped with students' incentives to participate in class learning. Teachers also need to use questions that are fully understood by students in order for them to facilitate. Students stated that their favorite discussions are those that they can learn from their classmates' interpretation of the mathematics problems.

2. The Phenomenon or Puzzle and The Research Question

In Educational Research Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitive and Qualitative Research, Creswell talks about the importance of educational research, the steps of the research, how to conduct educational research, and the things the researchers should be careful about ethically when

conducting research. The reading also talks about the role of the research question in the research study is the primary thing that needs to be set up when conducting educational research.

Identifying the research question is the major step to figuring out how the research is going to be conducted in the next steps.

For my educational research, the puzzle would be students in my class tend to have difficulty focusing and lose interest in completing the in-class worksheets. Most of the students in my class are in first or second grade, some of them are in third grade, and all of them are under the age of 10. They tend to have a hard time focusing throughout the whole entire time in class and lose interest in learning Mandarin very quickly in the 40 minutes of class. Therefore, I would like to derive a research question from this puzzle, which would be figuring out what are some strategies for students around the age of 10 could increase the completion rate of the in-class worksheets. The puzzle and research question I posed above interest me because I have a great passion for teaching people all around the world how to speak Mandarin. I also think that the students in my class are at their best age to learn a different language, I would like my teaching about Mandarin could bring them my passion and enthusiasm for the fascination of another culture. A lot of the students in my class are also American-born Chinese, so some of their parents don't speak English at home, therefore teaching them Mandarin is also a great way to help them learn and connect more with their parents.

3. The Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a way designed to help the researcher to connect the phenomenon in their field site with the topic they are researching about. The conceptual framework is mainly formed either graphically or textual. According to the textbook, a conceptual framework can be fundamental or detailed, theory-driven or commonsensical, illustrative or causal. And the graphical framework is preferred over textual. The conceptual framework can illustrate the relationships between the researchers' subject and the available literature all at once. It provides a clear map of the researchers' work from their data collection.

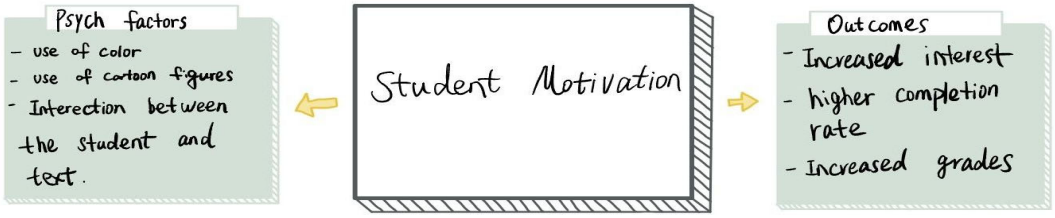


Figure 1. My conceptual framework

My conceptual framework model explains the relationship between the phenomenon I am engaging with around my research topic in my field site, and the change I want to make in order to observe the difference before and after. It provides a clear mapping when using the conceptual framework to view my research top and its relationship with the process of the experiment I conduct in my field site.

To help me connect the phenomenon I am currently researching, which is how using developmental psychology strategies on students' in-class worksheets will increase their interest and focus when learning a different language. The research reports Mandarin Chinese Immersion Program for Preschool Children in an Urban Private School in California: A Case Study demonstrates how various instructional strategies could be used during language immersion education, especially in teaching Mandarin to elementary school students. Which is a huge inspiration for me to write this research paper. Another article that motivates me is Academic Studying: The Role of Learning Strategies by John W. Thomas & William D. Rohwer Jr. It helped me develop the strategies I used to design for students' new in-class worksheets. Such as using colorful fonts and cartoon figures. Another article would be Teaching Vocabulary for Elementary School Students by Gede Yoga

Permana, it shows that “teaching vocabulary for elementary school, teachers are required to use interactive media such pictures, games, and songs” (Permana). in Indonesia.

4. The Participant Observation

In Schensul’s Essential ethnographic methods: Observations, interviews, and questionnaires. The chapter Exploratory or Open-ended Observation has demonstrated the importance of observation and some techniques that could help the researchers during the observation of their fieldwork. First of all, researchers need to participate or interact with the people in their field setting, so that they can collect data for their observations. Second of all, an observation requires the researchers to be detailed and unbiased when recording the data, they see in the field setting.

To have an accurate fieldwork recording, this chapter also explained that the recording should be followed by the steps of observing the setting, tracking event sequences, ethnographic mapping, and searching for indicators of socioeconomic difference. At the end of chapter 5, it also stated the directions when writing fieldnotes. For example: use exact words and detailed descriptions, use special signs to protect privacy, note activities in sequences so they don’t get messed up, and record the date, place, time, and researcher’s name at the top of the fieldnote. Overall, this chapter is very informative in helping researchers record their observations in their field settings.

In the observation I conducted in my class this week, I observed that using psychological strategies on students’ in-class notes sheets will increase their interest and focus when learning a different language. In my field setting, students are first grade through fourth grade under the age of 10. The problem I observed from weeks 1 and 2’s fieldwork showed that in my class, students can be easily distracted by so many things and most of the students in the class tend to lose interest and cannot focus for the entire 45 minutes of class. In weeks 1 and 2, I observed that when the teacher is giving a lecture and students are supposed to take notes, some students started to play with their pencils or hair, some students will start talking to one another, and some students will stand up or walk around. At the end of the class, a few students will end up not finishing the worksheet. These kinds of behaviors showed signs of losing interest and hard to focus on doing one thing. It usually happens during the middle of the class period. Therefore, I want to conduct this task to demonstrate whether psychological strategies can be helpful in improving students’ interests and keeping them focused during class time.

In weeks 1 and 2’s class period, the main instructor Peng will give students one worksheet that usually contains all the information and in-class work that students need to learn and complete during the class. In week 3, Peng gave out this new type of worksheet that is designed not only with pieces of information and questions and blanks that require students to learn and fill in but also with colorful fonts and cartoon figures on it, the cartoon figure will indicate where the students need to write down. And the cartoon figures are also designed with compatible purposes, for example, during one class, students are learning about different animal names in Mandarin characters, then the corresponding worksheet for that class day is designed with colorful animal pictures asking them what is the animal’s name on it. Another example would be on a day learning about polite expressions, the worksheet handed out on that day is designed with cartoon figures of boys and girls doing the action such as shaking hands, leaving the door, and giving gifts to one another. And it has conversation boxes on it asking students to write down what they should say under the circumstances.

After observing students' in-class performance during week 3, I have noticed that compared to weeks 1 and 2, they are more interested in the newer version’s worksheet. And they have a higher rate of completing the worksheet than before. During the middle of the class, students are still focusing on their worksheets instead of wandering around. All the signs showed that students have been more focused during class. It also appeared in the results of the daily quiz. Students are getting better grades than in weeks 1 and 2.

This task I conducted shows that when psychological strategies are applied to students learning material, it will help them to be focusing longer during the class period, therefore students will have

enhanced memories of the knowledge they learned during class, and it will also reflect a result on their grade.

5. The Interviews

Some important considerations researchers should have when conducting semi-structured interviews. First of all, use simple, comprehensible language.

Secondly, use questions that are corresponding to the respondent's characteristics. It will help the respondent to understand the interviewer's intention, therefore, giving back a practical answer. Secondly, avoid long, complicated, and confusing questions for respondents. Those questions will make respondents give insufficient answers that are not helpful to the researcher. Thirdly, be sensitive with questions choosing. Therefore, respondents would not feel offended.

These considerations shaped my interview in two different ways when preparing my questions with a third-grade student in my class. First of all, I formed my interview question temporally. I ranked my questions regarding how this student felt about the in-class assignments from the older version to the newer version.

Secondly, I shaped my interview questions according to their complexity, therefore I asked the easiest question and then a more complicated question to the respondent. These considerations helped me to get answers from my respondent smoothly.

My interview is conducted with a third-grade student in the Mandarin class I have been participating with. I prepared five questions for this student. Mainly about how this student feels about the newer version of in-class assignments I designed using developmental psychology strategies. I arranged my question from the simplest to the hardest, and from the event that happened earlier to the events that happened most recently. Since my respondent is a third-grade student, I try to keep my questions simple and held the whole interview in a less formal way. I also asked a few warmup questions to keep the respondent interested such as "what is your favorite animal?" and "what is your favorite ice cream flavor?" The respondent replied to me with the answer "Dog." and "Chocolate." My first question to the respondent related to my research is "Do you like the old in-class assignment?" The respondent answered with "Not really." My second question is "Which one do you like better? The older one or the newer one?" The respondent replied with the answer "I like the newer one." My third question is "Why do you like the newer one better" The respondent replied, "Because it has a lot of cartoons and animals on it." My fourth question is "Is there anything you want to change on today's assignment?"

And the respondent said, "I don't know." My fifth question is "Do you think the newer version of in-class assignments has helped you in your study of Mandarin?" The respondent said "Yes."

Overall, my interview with this student is very successful, even though the respondent did not give me a very constructive answer to my fourth question, I think that is because the question I designed is too complicated for a third-grade student. I have gained knowledge of how this student thinks of the assignment I designed, and it will help me when I am going to design a new worksheet in the future using developmental psychology strategies.

6. The Findings

Overall, my research at Yuming Charter school has shown results that using developmental psychology strategies when designing the in-class worksheets for Mandarin class will make the class time more interesting. Observation has shown that It will also increase the completion rate of the in-class worksheets. Therefore, to help elementary school students get better grades in learning mandarin.

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