

From text book based Chinese language learning to Computer Assisted Language Learning in Sri Lanka

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INTRODUCTION

University of Kelaniya is the first university in Sri Lanka to offer Chinese as a main subject for the Bachelor Degree Programme. Chinese Studies has been offered by the Department of Modern Language for the Bachelor Degree Programme for several decades. Currently, the highest number of students at the Department is for Chinese as a Foreign Language with each batch numbering close to 200. Initially, the teaching of Chinese language was basically done by using text books. Students were expected to refer a series of text books in the class room. The role of the academics was to explain the text book to practice pronunciation, writing system and grammar of Chinese language by using a white board. In the text book based learning system both academics and students have to undergo many difficulties. From the student's aspect they could only see one perspective on a concept, information shared with students was not current or relevant, and the students assumed that learning was simply a collection of facts and figures. Some of the students could not read or understand important concepts and they tend to see learning as an accumulation of correct answers. On the other hand, the teachers did not have an opportunity to design lessons considering specific attributes and interests of the students.

BACKGROUND

Since 2010 facilities for Chinese language learning was increased following the re-establishment of Confucius Institute in the University of Kelaniya. Confucius Institute has rendered invaluable service and support to enhance Chinese Language Teaching and Learning in Sri Lanka. Several native speakers of Chinese were dispatched to the University of Kelaniya, many scholarships were granted to staff and students to Chinese Universities and

competitive international proficiency examinations were introduced. Furthermore, employment opportunities for Sri Lankans proficient in Chinese also increased in line with the national development projects in the country and the increase in the flow of tourists from China to Sri Lanka.

PURPOSE

As a result the demand for Chinese language learning has dramatically increased and the number of students who register for Chinese language learning was about 160-200. Text book based learning became a challenge and this traditional method of teaching was not feasible for teaching a large class. As an alternative method teaching with PowerPoint presentation was introduced for first year Bachelor of Arts students to complete the course units CHIN 11012 *Introduction to Chinese language and culture* and CHIN12042 *Guided writing and composition*. The novel approach to teaching was introduced to the students during the 2014/1025 and 2015/2016 academic years where each batch comprised 200 students. This paper is aimed at exploring new method for a large class room teaching for Chinese language and its benefits to the language learners.

APPROACH

By using Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) students have to shift from teacher centered learning to student centered learning process. The students have taken on multiple roles through their participation in different activities.

RESULTS

When teaching grammar lessons phonetics could also be incorporated to the lessons thus students could read and comprehend the grammatical structures with less effort. Time taken for teaching was reduced with computer aided teaching which allowed the teacher to engage in many class room activities including reading and listening practices, grammar exercises. Computer

literacy of students to use computers with Chinese characters was also improved. There were also a few challenges to implement Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) effectively. The numbers of computers in the class room with have Chinese character key boards were not adequate and there were no internet facilities available to use in the class room for interactive sessions.

CONCLUSION

Computer Assisted Language Learning system for teaching and learning Chinese can provide many important benefits to the students who learn Chinese as a Foreign Language. Adequate facilities should be available in the class room to enhance student performance.

KEYWORDS

Computer Assisted Language Learning, Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language in Sri Lanka, teaching language to large classes

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