



The Application and Advantages of an E-Learning Platform (MOODLE) on an Intermediate Chinese Speaking and Listening Course

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Abstract

In the 21st century, computer technologies have developed at a tremendous rate. With the impact of technological development, the Chinese language teaching method at the Chinese University of Hong Kong has changed significantly. Classroom teaching has shifted from blackboards and chalk to overhead projectors and computer-aided programs. Students attend language laboratories, and meet teachers face to face; they use electronic devices to search for definitions of new words, take photos of notes and handouts, record lectures, and download sound files for listening and practice.

Those teaching Chinese as a second language use smart search engines and Internet databases to collect, edit, and upload contents to automatically generate teaching materials, thus combining methodology and curriculum with computer technologies to manage teaching online. This study mainly focuses on how MOODLE, an e-learning platform, is applied in our Intermediate Chinese Speaking and Listening Course, particularly on how it manages and supervises students' rates of study, and on how it coordinates with classroom teaching. This paper also addresses feedback from students about the comprehensive computer technologies employed in teaching Chinese as a second language, and the reflections of teachers who use MOODLE.

1. Introduction

MOODLE (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) is a free-source e-learning software platform developed by Martin Dougiamas to help educators create online courses with more interaction and collaborative content.

Because MOODLE encourages interaction and exploration, students' learning experiences are often non-linear. MOODLE enforces order upon a course using conditional activities arranged in sequences. Courses contain both conditional and non-linear activities.

MOODLE has been widely used in the language teaching curriculum of the Yale-China Chinese Language Centre of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CLC), helping teachers manage language courses, and providing students with multidimensional Chinese language learning environments.



E-learning teaching methodology defies traditional classroom teaching, fostering new methodology and models. MOODLE fulfills different levels of students' learning needs. Students with poor listening skills may improve their abilities after class. MOODLE also provides good foundations, preparing students for class discussion. Teachers may start discussion immediately instead of drilling basic language points. Teachers use MOODLE to manage and supervise learning processes of each student, adjusting to the student's ability.

The Intermediate Chinese Speaking and Listening Course is open to foreign students. When they complete 270 to 325 hours of Chinese courses, or pass the placement test at the same level, they may register.

This teaching methodology improves students' pronunciations. There are individual differences in students' pronunciations, so teachers must help students correct those not yet fossilized defects. If teachers find grammar mistakes, they immediately correct and fine-tune lessons. The methodology also focuses on daily use expressions—slang and idioms—strengthening students' oral skills in daily life situations. Finally, it improves students' logical expression skills in complicated contexts—especially usage of conjunctions—training students with expressive techniques for different language situations.

2. Teaching advantages of MOODLE in the Intermediate Chinese Speaking and Listening Course

MOODLE helps teachers implement teaching objectives, finish tasks, motivate students, and enliven classroom atmosphere. Students can solve certain practical questions, understanding and mastering the texts and skills they have learned. There are seven indicators for measuring the course's teaching effectiveness: average student results; satisfaction towards the teachers and the course; motivation; self-learning ability; classroom teaching atmosphere; students' willingness to express themselves in Chinese in front of others; and presentation skills. When these factors improve, teaching effectiveness has increased.

MOODLE provides more inputs for students, targeting different needs. Students focus on their weaknesses by specializing in vocabulary, listening and comprehension, or other content, helping them prepare for classroom interactions. Teachers make listening quizzes for each chapter to test students' mastery of the text. These quizzes test listening skills, requiring students to fill in the blanks according to the sentences they hear. The result is calculated in their final grades, so listening quizzes are arranged in the Language Lab.



2.1 Table I comparing four groups of students' average grades of listening quiz

	term	Average mark of listening quiz (full mark 100)	Number of students	Teaching methodology
1	Spring term 2011	81.3	19 (only one class)	Not yet using MOODLE 3 hours teaching
2	Autumn term 2011	83.0	27 (total two classes)	Not yet using MOODLE 3 hours teaching
3	Spring term 2012	89.4	24 (total two classes)	MOODLE in use 3 hours teaching
4	Autumn term 2012	87.8	19(only one class)	MOODLE in use 1.5 hours teaching + 1 hour Lab session

These students all took the same course with the same textbook and teacher. The curriculum, exercises, listening quiz, and assessment standard were all the same. Table I indicates students' performance on listening quizzes in 2012 was better than in 2011.

As a speaking and listening course, comparing only listening quizzes is not comprehensive. We must also compare students' oral speaking skills. This information is found in Table II.



2.2 Table II comparing four groups of students' average grades of oral exams

	term	Average mark of oral exam (full mark 100)		Number of students	Teaching methodology
		Mid-term	final		
1	Spring term 2011	80	76.3	19(only one class)	Not yet using MOODLE 3 hours teaching
2	Autumn term 2011	81.5	86.9	27 (total two classes)	Not yet using MOODLE 3 hours teaching
3	Spring term 2012	89.2	89.3	24(total two classes)	MOODLE in use 3 hours teaching
4	Autumn term 2012	89.3	90.9	19(only one class)	MOODLE in use 1.5 hours teaching + 1 hour Lab session

The average marks above were calculated based on the original records of that term. We separate the marks into two parts: the “not yet using MOODLE” part, and the “MOODLE in use” part. The average mark of 2012 is higher than from 2011. In 2011, teachers sent listening exercises to students by email, but now upload exercises to MOODLE. In the 2012 spring term, students tried vocabulary exercises, text listening exercises, and the listening versions of reading comprehensions. Although students from 2011 received the same exercises by email, it was neither interesting nor convenient without MOODLE, and the teachers couldn't supervise.



2.3 Table III comparing four groups of students' final grades of this course

	term	Final grades of this course (full mark 100)	Number of students	Teaching methodology
1	Spring term 2011	81.7	19 (only one class)	Not yet using MOODLE 3 hours teaching
2	Autumn term 2011	83.4	27 (total two classes)	Not yet using MOODLE 3 hours teaching
3	Spring term 2012	88.3	24 (total two classes)	MOODLE in use 3 hours teaching
4	Autumn term 2012	83.6	19(only one class)	MOODLE in use 1.5 hours teaching + 1 hour Lab session

2.4 Table IV comparing four groups of students of degree of satisfactory to the teacher and the course

	term	Number of students	Number of students finish the survey	Satisfaction to teacher and course (full mark 6)
1	Spring 2011	19	14	5.45
2	Autumn 2011	27	23	5.74
3	Spring 2012	24	21	5.89
4	Autumn 2012	19	16	5.57

Table IV shows that students from the Spring 2012 term were most satisfied with the teacher and the course. The university collected the data anonymously. These were the official data distributed by the school.

After unofficially using MOODLE during the 2012 Spring term, the students from 2012 earned higher marks in listening and speaking than those from 2011. Students from the 2012 Spring term earned the highest final grades among the four groups.



3. Conclusion

MOODLE manages and monitors students' learning processes more easily and effectively than traditional methods, helping teachers improve the effectiveness, breadth, and depth of classroom teaching by giving students more exercises on preparation, revision, intensive drilling, and assessment. The advantages are obvious from the improvement in students' marks after using MOODLE.

Students give positive optimistic feedback about using computer technology in Chinese Language Teaching. The e-learning platform, MOODLE, matches students' learning habits and methods, so they willingly use it. Students prefer daily life materials to learn Chinese. Although some encounter technical problems, most have adequate computer knowledge, and can solve the problems quickly.

Most of the language teachers agree that MOODLE helps improve teaching quality and effectiveness. MOODLE's design embodies the slogan "timely handling doubles the effect and halves the effort." But, if neither teachers nor students possessed technical skills, and if technicians were unavailable, then MOODLE would achieve little.

In this computer era, universities training Chinese Language teachers should open more cross-disciplinary majors, like combining professional language teaching with advanced website designing programmes, so students may learn Chinese in a mixture-style method. Learning Chinese in a happy and relaxed atmosphere is not a dream. In the future, we hope Chinese software developers can design some Chinese learning software which would be easier to learn and use. Even users with less computer knowledge could handle a situation with ease, and teachers (with the support of computer software) could create many more and more efficient web exercises to improve students' Chinese abilities.

References

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