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THE USEFULNESS OF USING DIKIR BARAT IN MANDARIN LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to shed some light on the usefulness of using Dikir Barat in Mandarin in supporting Mandarin learning among the non-native Chinese learners. Song can be a very useful tool to enhance learning Mandarin motivation among learners. This study was carried out during a Dikir Barat in Mandarin competition held at UiTM (Kedah). A self-developed questionnaire was distributed to gain understanding on the view of the participants on the usefulness in using Dikir Barat in Mandarin to support Chinese learning among these non-native Chinese learners. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the gathered data. It was found that students agreed that Dikir Barat in Mandarin is useful to enhance their learning motivation. Thus, activity such as Dikir Barat in Mandarin can be used as creative practice in teaching Mandarin as a foreign language in specific and also for other foreign languages.

Keywords: *teaching Chinese as a foreign language, singing, learning motivation, Dikir Barat, Dikir Barat in Mandarin contest.*

INTRODUCTION

Singing can be an effective tool for teaching Chinese as a foreign language (Xie & Lu, 2005). Singing competition such as Dikir Barat in Mandarin can be used to support Mandarin teaching outside the classroom environment.

Dikir Barat is a musical form, native to the Malay Peninsula that involves singing in groups. Using Dikir Barat for Mandarin singing competition is an innovative method for teaching Chinese to the non-native Chinese learners. Dikir Barat in Mandarin singing competition is a combination of Malay culture and Mandarin language group singing which is introduced to the non-native Chinese learners in order to enhance Mandarin learning motivation. Hence, the objective of this study is to validate its usefulness to support Chinese learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many literature reviews supporting that singing can be used as an effective tool to enhance language learning. These set as backbones to support the use of singing activity in and outside Mandarin teaching classrooms.

Chinese pronunciation is considered as quite difficult to be mastered by non-native Chinese learners. Music and singing is introduced to the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language to assist the non-native learners to master the Chinese pronunciation (Jiang, 1999).

The notion of left brain and right brain tendency for foreign language memory strategy has been widely studied. (Jia, 2003) The purpose is to use various methods which include singing to enhance the effectiveness of foreign language learning such as Mandarin. Students are able to use Mandarin songs to memorise Chinese vocabulary, sentences, and etc thru the use of their right brain in singing.

In order to enhance the effectiveness of foreign language instruction, multiple intelligences are believed to have played a vital role. (Cui, 2004) Singing which is strongly related to musical intelligence hence should be utilized to formulate and more effective Chinese teaching approach.

Research findings have proven that there was a positive relationship between music intelligence and listening as well as speaking skill. (Pei, 2005) Learners with higher musical intelligence performed better than learners with lower musical intelligence. With the use of musical based activity such as singing, it is definitely beneficial to non-native learners of Chinese.

There were many positive gains in the use of songs for Mandarin teaching (Xie & Lu, 2005). By participating in singing activity, students were able to improve their pronunciation, appreciate the song lyrics, and etc.

Goh, Nasirin, Noor Aileen & Raja Mariam (2006) reported that language activities are very relevant for second and foreign language learning. The challenges are placed on the approaches and methods used by the instructors in making these language activities effective for foreign language learning. This is especially true for the use of singing in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language.

Interest and motivation is the key to the success of foreign language learning. (Duan, 2008) Various research findings have approved the motivational aspect of foreign language learning. The use of singing is definitely able to heighten learning motivation and interest among the learners. (Goh, 2004) Learners with higher learning motivation are able to perform better compared to learners with lower motivation. (Goh and Ng, 2004).

At the same time, there are many factors that will affect the effectiveness of the use of language activities such as singing on language learning. (Goh, Nasirin, Noor Aileen, & Raja Mariam, 2006) Among them, the level of students' attainment of language, the preparedness of students, the winning factors, gender, and etc, would have affected students' perceptions.

In sum, instructors are called to use singing as a popular tool to boost up the learning motivation in the language learning classroom. As Dikir Barat have the Malay cultural elements, it could be utilized in a good way in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out during a Dikir Barat in Mandarin singing competition held at UiTM (Kedah). The research procedure was summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Research procedure

Stage	Research procedure
1	Students and instructors are prepared for the Dikir Barat in Mandarin competition
2	Singing competition was held
3	All participants were given a self developed questionnaire (derived from Xie & Lu, 2005) as to gather their perceptions on the usefulness of the use of Dikir Barat in Mandarin for Mandarin learning

All the participants of this Dikir Barat in Mandarin singing competitions were samples for this study. The distributions of the samples were shown in Table 2. A sample of participants (Silver-Plate award for Dikir Barat in Mandarin Competition won by participants from UiTM Terengganu) was shown in figure below.

Group	Kampus	Number of samples
1	UiTM Kedah A	38
2	UiTM Kedah B	30
3	UiTM Perlis A	25
4	UiTM Perlis B	25
5	UiTM Terengganu	22
6	UiTM Kuala Terengganu	28
7	UiTM Sarawak	20
8	UiTM Melaka	25
9	UiTM Malaysia	20
	Total	233



Figure 1: Participants' picture

There were altogether nine groups participating in this competition which consists of 233 participants coming from various campuses. All the participants filled up the questionnaires. The data was analyzed by using SPSS package in order to get the information on the descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings were shown in the next section.

There were several hypotheses made for this study. They were shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Hypotheses for this study

Number	Hypothesis
H ₁	Students were positive on the use of Dikir Barat in Mandarin for Mandarin learning
H ₂	There wasn't any significant difference among the groups of participants on the use of Dikir Barat in Mandarin for Mandarin learning
H ₃	The perception of the students with higher level of Mandarin learning was more positive than students with lower level of Mandarin learning
H ₄	The perception of the students from the winning teams was more positive than students from the non-winning teams

FINDINGS

There were ten questions in this questionnaire. A scale of 5 was used in which 1 was strongly disagreed and 5 was strongly agreed. The perceptions of the students according to groups were shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Perceptions of students according to groups

Group	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Overall view
1	4.33	4.28	4.28	4.14	4.06	4.31	4.22	4.36	4.39	4.19	4.26
2	4.27	3.93	3.97	3.97	4.03	3.93	3.97	4.13	4.07	3.97	4.02
3	4.24	4.2	4.24	4.16	4.24	4.16	4.16	4.32	4.32	4.36	4.24
4	4.04	3.96	4.08	3.8	3.64	3.96	4.08	4.16	4.2	3.96	3.99
5	3.64	3.59	3.5	3.59	3.41	3.59	3.55	3.59	3.64	3.68	3.58
6	4.04	3.96	4	3.75	3.75	3.93	3.93	3.96	3.93	3.86	3.91
7	4.85	4.85	4.75	4.65	4.6	4.7	4.65	4.75	4.75	4.8	4.74
8	4	3.92	3.96	4.12	3.92	3.92	4	4.04	4.04	4	3.99
9	3.75	3.65	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.4	3.4	3.55	3.65	3.55	3.56
Overall	4.1	4.01	4.01	3.94	3.88	3.97	3.97	4.08	4.09	4.01	4.01

For all the items, students have shown a positive perceptions (with overall mean=4.01 > 4.0). It showed that the students were affirmative that Dikir Barat in Mandarin was useful for their Mandarin learning (testing hypothesis 1, H1 was accepted).

However, there seemed to be some differences in perceptions among the nine groups. The means were distributed from the lowest mean (3.56) ranged to the highest mean (4.74). F test was used to validate its significance. The result is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: F test – comparing perceptions of students according to groups

	N	Std. deviation	Std. Error	F	Sig.
9 groups	9	.81	.33	.34	0.03

The result showed that there was a significant difference among the participating groups ($F(9 \text{ groups}) = 0.34$, $p=0.03 < .05$). It showed that the participating students were differ on the perceptions on the usefulness of Dikir Barat in Mandarin to support their Mandarin learning (testing hypothesis 2, H_2 was rejected). Hence, there was a need to verify the factors to bring about the differing perceptions among the participating groups.

The first factor validated in the study was on the level of Mandarin taken. Table 6 showed the level of Mandarin taken by the participants and the means of perceptions. It showed that students from higher level of Mandarin learning were have more positive perceptions on the use of Dikir Barat in Mandarin to support their Mandarin learning. F test was used to test if this was significantly different.

Table 6: Comparing perceptions of students according to levels of Mandarin taken

Level of Mandarin taken	Groups	Means of perception
1	4	3.99
	6	3.91
	Overall mean for level 1 (2 groups)	3.95
2	2	4.02
	5	3.58
	7	4.74
	8	3.99
	9	3.56
	Overall mean for level 2 (5 groups)	3.98
3	1	4.26
	3	4.24
	Overall mean for level 2 (2 groups)	4.25

Table 7: F test – comparing perceptions of students according to levels of Mandarin taken

	N	Std. deviation	Std. Error	F	Sig.
3 levels	3	.26	.55	4.18	0.00

In Table 7 the result showed that there was a significant difference among the participating groups according to the level of Mandarin taken ($F(3 \text{ levels}) = 4.18$, $p = 0.00 < .05$). It showed that the participating students were differing on the perceptions on the usefulness of Dikir Barat in Mandarin according to the level of Mandarin taken. Students with higher level of Mandarin were more positive in viewing that Dikir Barat in Mandarin supported their Mandarin learning (testing hypothesis 3, H3 was accepted).

For the second factor validated in the study was on the winning aspect. Table 8 showed the means of perceptions of students from the winning teams (the first placing to the fourth placing) and non-winning teams (other than these four). It showed that students from higher level of Mandarin learning were having more positive perceptions on the use of Dikir Barat in Mandarin to support their Mandarin learning. F test was used to test if this was significantly different.

Table 8: Comparing perceptions of students according to winning aspect

Winning	Groups	Means of perception
1	1	4.26
	3	4.24
	5	3.58
	2	4.02
	Overall	4.03
2	4	3.99
	6	3.91
	7	4.74
	8	3.99
	9	3.56
	Overall	4.04

The result showed that there was no significant difference among the participating groups according to winning state ($t(2 \text{ groups}) = 2.247$, $p = 0.37 > .05$). It showed that the non-winning participating students (mean = 4.04) were having slightly higher positive on the perceptions on the usefulness of Dikir Barat in Mandarin than the winning students (mean = 4.03). The winning students did not have more positive perception than the non-winning teams on the usefulness of Dikir Barat in Mandarin in supporting their Mandarin learning (testing hypothesis 4, H4 was rejected).

Table 9: T test – comparing perceptions of students according to winning aspect

	T	Df	Sig.	Mean difference	Standard error difference
Equal variance assumed	2.247	1	.37	-.01	1.6021

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has shown that in the whole the students were positive on the usefulness of Dikir Barat in Mandarin to support their Mandarin learning. It implies that instructors are encouraged to use all kinds of language activities such as singing to engage students in active learning of Chinese as a foreign language.

There was a significant difference among the groups of participants on the use of Dikir Barat in Mandarin for Mandarin learning. It implies that there are various extraneous factors that may have affected the usefulness of language activities such as singing to support Mandarin learning. The keenness in the use of all kinds of activities has to be balanced up with the gains the students may have in the involvement in all these activities. If not, the efforts in engaging students in all kinds of language activities will be in vain without yielding any substantial benefits.

The perception of the students with higher level of Mandarin learning was more positive than students with lower level of Mandarin learning. It implies that in the use of any form of language activities, the language ability has to be taken into considerations. Instructors may have organized various types of language activities; however the students involved might not gained maximized benefit. There might be the situation that only students with Chinese background were benefited. Hence instructors have to put in efforts in diversify the language activities in order that students of various levels will gain benefits in the participating process.

Lastly, the perception of the students from the winning teams was not more positive than students from the non-winning teams. It implies that students will gain benefits in the participating process disregards that they will be in the winning positions. The more important part lies in the preparation stages.

Hence, in helping students to do translation of Malay Dikir Barat lyrics into Chinese texts, instructor may engage students in the use of dictionary, such as desktop dictionary (Goh, 2009), web-based dictionary (Goh, 2011), online Malay dictionary (Goh & Saiful, 2013), and etc. Students with hands on experience in first edition of lyrics texts can then be edited by instructors to improve the accuracy of the translated texts.

In order to strengthen the mastery of Chinese pronunciation as to prepare students in participating in singing competition such as Dikir Barat in Mandarin, instructors may use various educational technologies to assist them. One of the approaches suggested is the use of Pinyin text to speech system (Goh, Saiful Nizam, Aileen, & Mohd Suhaimi, 2013).

There are other aspects of singing related factors which do not cover in this study.

For example comparing students with high musical intelligence and low musical intelligence, students who enjoy singing and students who do not like singing, and etc. This opens door for further studies in this area.

In summary, the usefulness of Dikir Barat in Mandarin to support Mandarin learning is definitely positive. The hitch is on how the process of preparing students in the involvement makes the whole process more meaningful and enriching.

CONCLUSION

Dikir Barat in Mandarin offers a creative practice in supporting Mandarin learning. It is certainly encouraged to be used in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language with proper preparation.

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