

Learning Chinese Culture through Multimedia Authentic Materials and Ethnographic Interview in a Blended Learning Environment: A New Approach

(多媒体与民族志访谈相结合的文化教学方法在混合式教学环境下的运用：中文为外语教学中文化教学初探)

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Abstract: This study tests the effectiveness of a multi-modal approach to integrating culture in a language course for beginning learners. The approach combines the use of multimedia materials with an ethnographic interview with native speakers and it takes advantage of: 1) a blended learning environment that saves face-to-face meeting time for language practice, 2) easily-accessible authentic, multimedia materials available on the Internet, and 3) the plethora of Chinese national students on campuses in the United States. Thirty-three second-semester Chinese learners participated in this study. Data include pre- and post-questionnaires and a reflection essay. Results show that this approach not only teaches students about Chinese culture and increases their interest in learning the language, but also helps them acquire a method of learning culture.

摘要：文化在语言教学中的重要性已被语言教学研究者与教师广为认可，研究者也提出了不同的文化教学模式。然而迄今为止，验证这些教学模式是否有效的实证性研究几乎没有。本研究旨在探讨混合式教学中运用一个将多媒体与民族志访谈相结合的多模态文化教学方法对初级中文学习者的影响。此文化教学方法的设计基于三点考虑：1) 文化教学可融入混合式教学，以节约面对面课堂教学时间，使课堂教学集中于目标语练习；2) 文化教学可以合理利用网络上大量的免费多媒体资源；3) 大量中国留学生涌入美国大学校园为中文学习者提供了一个独特的微文化环境，文化教学可以利用这一微文化环境。三十三位初级中文学习者参与了此项研究。通过对于前测后测问卷以及反思文章的分析，作者认为，此文化教学方法增进了学习者的文化知识，增强了学习者对中文学习的兴趣，而且让他们学会了一个新的学习文化的方法。

Keywords: Culture learning, blended learning environment, ethnographic interview, Chinese (Mandarin), multimedia authentic materials

关键词: 文化学习、混合式教学、多模态文化教学、多媒体教学、民族志访谈

1. Introduction

In 1974, Ned Seelye commented in his influential book titled *Teaching Culture: Strategies for Foreign Language Educators*, that “Knowledge of linguistic structure alone does not carry with it any special insight into the political, social, religious, or economic system” (Seelye, 1993, p.5). He underscored that “Learning a language in isolation of its cultural roots prevents one from becoming socialized into its contextual use” (Seelye, 1993, p.10). Over the past decades, the understanding of foreign language education professionals has shifted, with the goal of increasing learners’ intercultural communication competence becoming more important (Kern, 2000; Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy, 2016; Rodriques, 2000; Ryshina-Pankova, 2015; 2018; Sawffar & Arens, 2005; Thorne, 2010).

Meanwhile, technology has enabled teachers to accomplish many things that they could have only imagined in the past, including using blended and online learning environments to enhance culture learning. Teachers also have had the access to free authentic multimedia materials on the Internet (Kern, 2015), of which many can be used to teach culture. In recent years, many Chinese featured videos, aka micro-movies (individually-produced short movies) have become available online. These movies are excellent resources for learning about Chinese culture. Using multimedia for teaching languages (Chapelle, 1998; Grgurović & Hegelheimer, 2007; Yanguas, 2009) and culture (Brown, 2010; Desai, Jabeen, Abdul, & Rao, 2018; Sun, 2013; Kim & Weber-Fève, 2015) is not a new idea, but now teachers can take advantage of the widely available resources in their teaching at a low cost (Zhang, 2015; Zhang, 2016a; Zhang, 2016b).

With the influx of international students from mainland China, CFL learners can experience Chinese culture on campus without the need to go to China. It would be a pity if we did not teach CFL learners to utilize this opportunity. Working together, the blended and online learning environment, the free authentic multimedia materials on the Internet, and the influx of Chinese students on American campuses, can make it convenient to strengthen culture learning.

The importance of cultural learning has been widely recognized, and numerous models of culture learning and approaches to teaching culture have been proposed. Based on many models, Byram (1997) introduced the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model, proposing that to achieve competence, learners should develop the five *savoirs* (*savoir être*, *savoirs*, *savoir comprendre*, *savoir apprendre/faire*, and *savoir s’engager*). Foreign language learners are intercultural speakers who are honing their abilities to learn and achieve a competence that extends beyond the classroom, allowing them to be independent throughout their lives. Kramsch (1993) introduced the notion of “third culture/place.” Viewing that “in most foreign language classrooms, interculturality is not being taught as systematic apprenticeship of difference nor is it generally integrated

into a multicultural view of education” (Kramersch, 1993, p. 235), the concept of third culture was created to “capture the experience of the boundary between NS and NNS” (Kramersch, 2009, p. 239). Meanwhile, Piątkowska (2015) distinguished three approaches of integrating culture into language learning: the knowledge-based approach, the contrastive approach and the intercultural communicative competence approach. Other approaches include using authentic materials, field trips, video showing etc.

However, there is a remarkable scarcity of empirical studies on culture teaching in the classroom (Byram, 2014; Boutin, 1993). There are studies using Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) such as Pinterest to raise students’ cultural awareness (Angelova & Zhao, 2014; Knouse & Abreu, 2016; Oakley, Pegrum, Xiong, Lim, & Yan, 2018; Schenker, 2013). To the best knowledge of the author, only one empirical study has been conducted. Robinson-Stuart and Nocon (1996) examined the effects of an ethnographic approach on Spanish learners’ motivation. They found that the ethnography project brought positive perceptual, affective and cognitive changes to the students and that the students’ attitude towards the study of Spanish had improved. However, Robinson-Stuart and Nocon’s study focused on the intermediate level Spanish learners. No research has been done on introducing culture learning to beginning level Chinese language learners. An empirically-tested approach to teaching culture to language learners, especially beginners is urgently needed. This study is thus to test the effectiveness of a multi-modal approach that was designed for beginning level CFL learners to learn culture in a blended learning environment by utilizing multimedia materials and ethnographic interviews with native speakers (NS) of the target language (TL).

2. Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical assumptions undergird this study: First, learning takes place through interaction and communication with others (Vygotsky, 1962; 1971). According to Vygotsky, learners’ development happens through participation in cultural, linguistic and social settings. Learning occurs within social contexts involving student-to-student and expert-to-student collaboration tasks built on each participant’s “language, skills, and experience shaped by each individual's culture” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 102). Learning is a process of transformation from an interpersonal process into an intrapersonal one, that is, a process of internalization as “the result of a long series of development events” with expert support (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 57).

Second, a blended learning environment could allow for an improved pedagogy, increased access and flexibility (Graham, 2006). Combining Face-to-Face (FTF) instruction and computer-mediated instruction, blended learning was conceptualized as “new culture of learning” (Thomas & Brown, 2011, p. 17), where engagement with learning happens in a distributed environment. Educators choose a blended learning environment for three primary reasons: 1. Improved pedagogy; 2. Increased access and flexibility; and 3. Increased cost effectiveness (Graham, Allen, & Ure, 2003; 2005). Blending can happen at multiple levels depending on the needs of instructors such as activity-level, course-level, program-level, and institution-level (Graham, 2006).

3. Research Questions

To improve students' cultural awareness and their attitude towards learning the TL, a culture learning approach was designed and implemented. To determine if the approach is effective the following research questions were identified:

1. Is the approach effective in improving students' a) cultural awareness; b) awareness of culture learning resources; c) attitude toward the community of people who speak that language; d) interest in learning the Chinese language?
2. Do students believe that they have "learned how to learn" about other cultures from this approach?
3. What are students' perceptions of this approach?

4. Methodology

This study adopted a mixed method research design to investigate the effectiveness of the approach and students' perceptions. A total of 33 second-semester CFL learners in two classes at a large, mid-western university in the United States participated in the study. Demographic statistics of the participating students are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic statistics of the participants

Variables	N (33)	%
Gender		
Male	21	64
Female	12	36
Native Language		
English	25	76
Malay	4	12
Hmong	1	3
Portuguese	1	3
Vietnamese	1	3
Spanish	1	3
Chinese as Their First Foreign Language		
Yes	18	55
No	15	45
Chinese Heritage Learner		

Yes	1	3
No	32	97

A majority of the participants (67%) started to learn Chinese out of personal interest, and 21% of them started to learn because they felt it was fun. Only a small number of participants started to learn because it was required or out of family pressure. (See Figure 1).

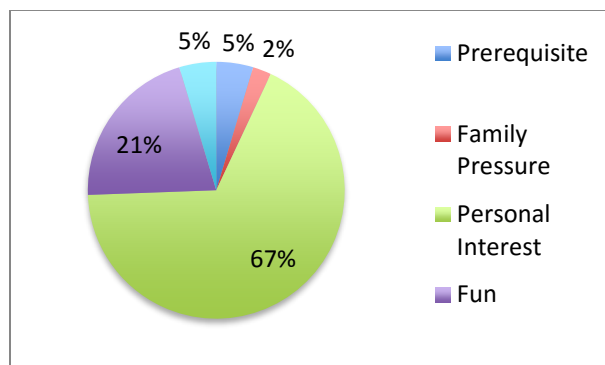


Figure 1 Why did you start to study Chinese?

Before and after the culture learning approach was implemented, participants filled out a questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed based on Gardner (1985) to assess the students' culture awareness, their interests in learning the Chinese language, and their awareness of resources in learning about Chinese culture. After the culture approach was implemented, the participants filled out a post-survey containing Likert scale items and open questions. This was to assess participants' self-perception of the approach and the effect of the approach had on their motivation and interest in learning the language and the culture, their attitude toward people in the target culture community, their culture learning method, and their views about the approach. In addition, participants were required to write a reflection paper at the end of the semester, which was also used as data.

The pre and post questionnaire data were analyzed using a one-tailed t-test. The Likert scale items in the post-questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The answers to the open questions and the reflection papers were analyzed based on grounded theory using open-and-axial coding approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) to identify emerging thematic patterns. Key points were extracted from the reflection papers and the answers to the open questions in the survey are marked with a series of codes. The coded items were grouped into categories. The initial coding was revisited and re-evaluated and items were grouped into similar categories, from which patterns were identified.

5. The Culture Learning Approach

5.1 The Design Principles

The widely available multimedia materials on the Internet used in teaching should lead students to comprehend the way language interacts with the sign system of its culture, including not only linguistic and paralinguistic signs but also cultural artifacts such as traffic noise, folk music, pictures, landscapes (Kramersch, 1999; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Considering these factors, this approach was designed based on four principles which correspond to the four considerations identified by Kramersch (1993).

First, help students establish a ‘sphere of interculturality’ by comparing their native culture and the target culture (also see Schulz, 2007). “Understanding a foreign culture requires putting that culture in relation with one’s own [...] thus, [...] an intercultural approach to the teaching of culture is radically different from a transfer of information between cultures” (Kramersch, 1993, p. 205). Paige et al. (2003) suggested that one technique that could help students establish a sphere of interculturality is reflective observation. We should encourage and develop “an exploratory and reflective approach” to culture learning (Newton, et al., 2010, p. 63).

Second, help students learn culture through an interpersonal process. Meaning emerges through social interaction; therefore, when only fixed and normative phenomena of language use are taught, it does not help with learning. “[T]he teaching of a process that applies itself to understanding foreignness or ‘otherness’” (Kramersch, 1993, p. 206) should be encouraged. To become effective culture learners, students should develop a variety of learning strategies ranging from reflective observation to active experimentation or experiential learning” (Kolb, 1984; Paige et al., 2003). Newton et al. (2010) also found that to learn culture, learners should be encouraged to engage in genuine social interaction.

Third, help students become aware of the multiple aspects of differences in culture. Sometimes it is easy to view culture as a national trait. However, “National traits are but one of the many aspects of a person’s ‘culture’” (Kramersch, 1993, p. 206). With the increase of multicultural identities, it is important to take into consideration the other sub-cultural factors such as age, gender, region, and ethnicity.

Fourth, identify effective ways that could help students learn culture, regardless of the discipline they originate. We need to cross disciplinary boundaries to find the most suitable method for integrating culture teaching in practice. One of the methods is the ethnographic approach drawn from anthropology.

Based on the aforementioned principles and in consideration of the availability of resources, this approach was designed with an integrated blended approach using authentic videos and ethnographic interviews. The purpose is to enhance students’ understanding of the target culture, improve their attitudes and motivations for learning about the TL and culture, and provide them with a learning method to use in the future to become life-long culture learners.

5.2 The Phases of the Approach

The approach has three phases that take place mainly outside the classroom. The first phase focuses on learning from instructor-selected and instructor-edited authentic multimedia materials. The second phase focuses on learning from interactions with TL speakers, i.e., through ethnographic interviews. The third phase focuses on student reflections of their culture learning. The first two phases involve two different methods of learning culture, while the last phase complements the first two and allows the students to delve deeper into culture learning. See Figure 2 for the flow chart of the approach.



Figure 2 Flow chart of the approach

5.2.1 Phase 1: Learning from Authentic Multimedia Materials

Phase 1 is divided into three steps. Step 1: Watch the micro-movie or a film clip provided by the instructor (in English or in Chinese). Step 2: Answer a series of instructor-created questions about the movie/clip. Step 3: Participate in the online discussion about the movie/clip (in English). Each week, the students watched one movie/clip in the three steps, as shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3 A cycle happened in Phase 1

Movie selection and editing. The criteria for selecting authentic multimedia materials include: current, accurate, and interesting sources that reflect the “little c” culture. The micro movies and the film clips were edited to make sure students use the English translation to understand particular scenes by providing additional information with respect to culture. Because existing English subtitles do not always accurately render subtle differences in the target culture, the editing provides a direct translation of the TL with brief explanation of the culture point to facilitate understanding.

For this phase, three movie/film clips were selected and edited that focused on different Chinese cultural topics, such as mother’s love, respect for the dead, dining etiquette, giving gifts, and being a guest. These culture themes were chosen because they are important and universal but different in different cultures. One was a three-minute micro-movie titled *Mother* which addresses a mother’s love for her child with a uniquely Chinese cultural perspective. In the movie, other special Chinese cultural aspects were also addressed, such as how unrelated people address each other, adults’ interaction with children, and how people show respect to their deceased loved ones. The other two film clips came from Ang Lee’s *Eat Drink Man Woman*. The first one was 33 seconds long and was about how a host and hostess treat their guests, how guests and the host/hostess interact, and gift giving etiquette. The other clip (1 minute and 7 seconds) provided a scene about dining etiquette.

The primary purpose of the editing was to add an introduction to the movie/film clips and translate what the characters’ dialogue meant directly with the intention of keeping the culture connotations. For example, in a scene in which an elderly woman, the protagonist in the movie, came across a young mother and her little girl, the woman commented on the little girl by saying “真乖” (zhēn guāi). The use of 乖 reflects the culture. While 真 means “really,” 乖 means “behave so well by being respectful to others”, which stressed that the relationship with other people is important in Chinese culture. 乖 is very commonly used to comment on younger children, illustrating how Chinese people expect children to behave. The official translation provided by the film was “What a lovely girl!” which puts emphasis on the girl herself and loses the cultural

connotations in the words. Editing by the instructor supplements the original translation (or omission) by adding notes “乖 guāi, is a word used for praising a child in China. It means “(you) behave so well by respecting others.” See Figure 4.



Figure 4 A scene from the micro-movie, *Mother*, with notes added by instructor

Another example is from *Eat Drink Man Woman*. When the host serves dinner, he says “不成敬意不成敬意，随使用”。The official dubbing translation was “It’s a simple meal! Please help yourself,” which somewhat obscured the cultural signification or references in the scene because “不成敬意” does not just mean “it is a simple meal.” The more accurate translation is “it is too simple to show my respect.” In all situations when this phrase is used, the action or the service the speaker performs is far above what is expected, but using this phrase indicates humility, and in this case, the humility, sincerity, and respect of the host toward his guests, despite the generous and hearty dinner he prepared for them. See Figure 5.



Figure 5 A scene from the film *Eat Drink Man Woman*, with notes and translation added by instructor

Design of the questions on the movie/film clips. The questions for the students were designed to raise students' awareness of special cultural points shown in the movie clips. In order to make sure that students understand the setting of the movie without confusing it as representing all of China, students were asked "Is this in rural China or urban China?" The way unrelated people (familiar or unfamiliar) address one another is a unique Chinese cultural point. In order to call students' attention to how acquaintances address each other, questions were asked such as, "How did the young mother address the elderly woman? Is she related to the elderly woman?" What people say when they depart is also a cultural point that students should notice, so questions were designed such as, "What did the young mother say when she was about to leave?" "What would people in your culture say when one needs to leave during a conversation?" Questions such as "What do you do and how do you react in this situation in your culture?" were designed in order to encourage students to reflect on their own culture and make comparisons between the two cultures (Fenner, 2000).

Online group discussion. The online group discussion asked students to make comparisons between their own culture and Chinese culture. In addition, the discussion provided an opportunity for students to deepen their understanding of the cultural aspects reflected in the movie/clips by interacting with each other. Five to six students with different cultural backgrounds, gender, and ages composed each group. The diversity in each group was meant to elicit different views about Chinese culture and expand the perspectives of the individual participants.

5.2.2 Phase 2: Ethnographic interviews

The second phase adopts the method of ethnographic interviews. The ethnographic interview is a well-established research method in anthropology in which immersive observation and directed one-on-one interviews are used for contextual inquiry to gather qualitative data (Damen, 1987; Spindler & Spindler, 1987). Research suggests that ethnography can be used in second language learners, but literature describing its use is scarce (Allen, 2000; Arries, 1994; Barro, Byram, Grimm, & Roberts, 1993; Hickey, 1980; Morain 1983). In this study, ethnographic interviews were used to complement the online learning from multimedia materials.

By the time they watched the video clips, answered questions, finished the online group discussion, and received answers to any pending questions (during the FTF discussion session), students had established some preliminary ideas about the differences between their own culture and Chinese culture. They may not have totally understood some dimensions of the assigned topics, and they may have wanted to explore Chinese culture further. At this point, the ethnographic interview activity was introduced to provide an opportunity for further discovery through interpersonal contacts with students from the target culture. Prior to the ethnographic interview activity, the instructor introduced the framework, requirements and procedures for the interview, and then demonstrated how to conduct an ethnographic interview. To complete the interview, students needed to decide on a topic, prepared questions, conducted the interview, and composed an interview report that described the process and their findings. A partial sample of a student's interview report is provided in Figure 6.

Student May 23

Friends Far, Friends Near

Walking into my friend's room at the Hyland Apartment complex, I smelt a strange, yet comforting scent of cooking--like a late breakfast of vegetable dumplings--that hung in the air and occupied the whole room. Noticing how strangely designed the entrance door was, I realized that the kitchen was exposed (in a bar-like manner) to the main room, explaining why the smell was so strong. Even though the kitchen was a mess, it was pretty interesting in the fact that the dishes were the kind that are white with a lovely blue design around the edges. In addition, there were chopsticks. Continuing on into the front room, there were blankets draped over a rope, as if it was a wall of a fort (to which I found out later it was a friend of my friend's housemate needing a place to stay).

My friend offered me a seat which was placed next to the kitchen's bar, and immediately offered me dumplings. I reluctantly accepted (since I ate beforehand), and we began to chat. It has been a while since I saw my friend, **Justin Johnson**. Born and raised in Nanjing, China, **Justin** grew up with the English language taught in his school. I've (surprisingly) met him while I was on a trip in China at the Elephant's Trunk, Guilin, Guangxi, China--the funny thing is that we were both on vacation. It turned out that he was only a few months younger than me, and he was going to the same college! With him was his girlfriend and my fellow design classmate, Wanting Sun. She is a few months older than me, and she has learned English in her academic years. She is also from Shanghai, where **Justin** went to high school. What a small world.

Figure 6 A sample of the student interview report

5.2.3 Phase 3: Reflection

The third phase is reflection, a proven key in gaining developmental opportunities (Dewey, 1933; Hatcher & Bringle, 1997). "Reflective inquiry invites a consideration of how we know, how we learn and asks us to be attentive to our own awareness, to become conscious of ourselves as knowers" (Lyon, 2010, p. 26). This is also the fundamental process through which human beings gain knowledge from their experiences (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Guthrie & Bertrand, 2012). As an important form of personal response to experiences, situations, events, or new information where thinking and learning take place, reflection has been proven to be a critical step in learning.

After the students finished the online discussion and the ethnographic interview, they wrote a reflection paper that included their feelings, thoughts, and experience conducting this culture project. Students were given instructions on how to write a reflection paper and what they were trying to accomplish. Figure 7 is a partial sample reflection written by one student.

Student, reflection, April 30

With the school year coming to an end, these two semesters of Chinese language classes have prepared me exceptionally well for my future endeavors as an ESL teacher, as well as a traveler, and ultimately, as a global citizen. In just two semesters, I find myself confident enough with my language abilities to converse with other (patient) people, whereas when I began learning **Chinese**, it took me about four years until I was proficient enough to communicate with conviction. Although learning the language has been an outstanding experience for me, the culture project helped me to realize that there is much more to learning a language than vocabulary and grammar. Culture is reflected in every language of the world. The two go hand-in-hand, and after completing the culture project, it's clear to me why language education is not complete without at least a crash-course in culture. In this particular course, I'm thankful to have had the opportunity to receive the best authentic resources and guidance to learn about Chinese culture.

I've learned many new things about Chinese culture, but the most fascinating for me are the things that show up in everyday speech. For example, '你吃了吗?' this greeting infuses food culture of China in with language! It outlines the importance of food in the culture, and how it's involved in relationships between friends. In our own culture, however, a simple 'hello,' will do for strangers and friends alike. Additionally, the kinship terms used to address close friends are very different from our own culture. As demonstrated in the videos we watched, kinship terms such as 'grandma,' 'grandpa,' and 'auntie' are used to address close family friends, as well as blood relatives. This indicates a stronger set of relationships than most Americans have, since it seems that we have more distance between those of us who are not exclusively related. It was great to see multiple examples of these linguistic phrases, too. That way, we are able to compare and contrast the phrases with one another, seeing when, where, and with whom it's appropriate to use them.

Figure 7 A partial sample of student reflection

Time Distribution. The three phases of this culture learning approach requires students to spend most of their time learning culture outside of the FTF class time. However, there are two class sessions during which such learning happens in the classroom. The first occurred at the beginning of the culture project when the instructor gave a short (about 20 minutes) FTF mini-lecture in English about what culture is and why it is important to learn culture while learning a foreign language. This mini-lecture included the differences between the “big C” culture and the “little c” culture. The instructor used what it meant to be polite in China as an example in explaining the “little c” culture, such as how to greet different people with such different registers as seniority, gender, relationship and age, what to say upon receiving praise, and how to start a conversation with different people.

The second FTF activity took place after Phase 1 was finished. This activity brought the whole class together to discuss the movies/film clips. The instructor also answered questions from students. During this meeting (about 30 minutes), Phase 2 was introduced; students learned what an ethnographic interview is, and they viewed sample ethnographic interviews. See Figure 8, in which the size of the circles indicates the appropriate time they spent on each activity.

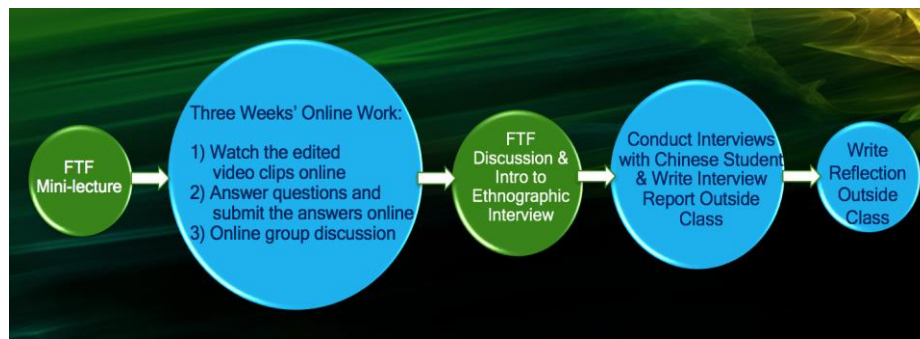


Figure 8 Approximate amount of time distribution (FTF Versus Online) of the process

6. Findings

The results show that using the culture learning approach combining multimedia authentic materials and ethnographic interviews in a blended environment improved learners’ cultural awareness and their interests in learning the Chinese language. The students’ attitudes towards the community of people who speak Chinese also changed. The pre and post questionnaires only show that the participants became more aware of culture learning resources but did not show that they have learned a method of learning culture. However, the reflection papers reported that they have learned new *ways* of learning culture. In addition, they reported that they have not only learned about culture, but also learned how to interact with people from a different cultural background.

6.1 Pre- and Post-Questionnaire

The results of the one tailed t-test showed that the students' interest in learning the Chinese language was significantly improved after the implementation of the culture learning approach, showing statistically significant improvement at the 0.05 level (See Table 2). As noted above, 67% of students responded that they were enrolled in the Chinese course because of their personal interest in learning the language. These results indicate that despite the fact that the students were interested in learning Chinese before using this approach, they became even more interested in Chinese learning after using this approach.

The one tailed t-test shows that there was no significant change in students' perception regarding their knowledge about methods of learning culture. However, results show that the students became more aware of the resources for culture learning, such as micro-movies on the Internet, NS on campus, and Quora.com after implementing the learning approach. The improvement in their score for awareness of culture learning resources is statistically significant at the .025 level (See Table 2).

Table 2 Changes in participants' interest in learning the Chinese language, awareness of resources for learning about Chinese culture, and knowledge of culture learning methods

	Interest in learning Chinese language	Awareness of resources	Knowledge about Culture Learning Method
M pre-questionnaire	27.10	3.81	3.85
M Post-questionnaire	28.82	4.45	4.67
P (one-tailed t-test)	0.036	0.012	4.22

6.2 Post-survey Likert scale items

The post survey data show that the participants' attitudes towards the people in the target culture community has changed positively. After the culture project, they reported that they had more respect for and understanding of people from China or Taiwan. See Figure 9.

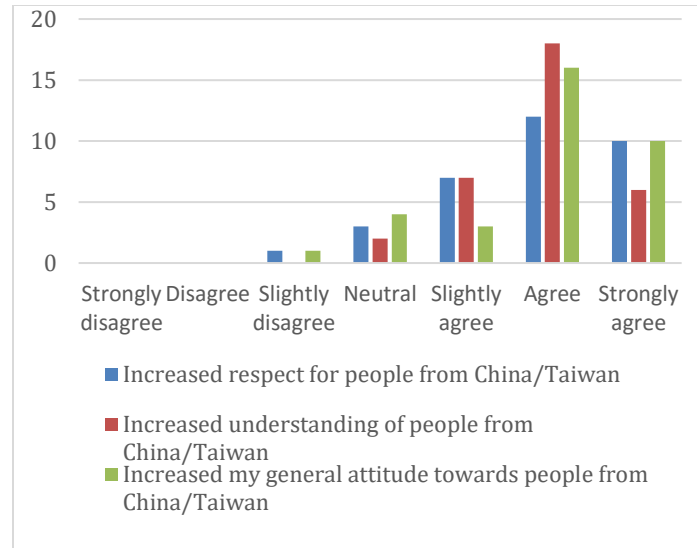


Figure 9 Participants' self-perception of their positive change

In the survey, participants reported that after the culture project they had become more interested in learning the Chinese language. This finding confirmed the findings in the pre and post questionnaire data (See Figure 10). Participants also reported that they had learned about Chinese culture, improved their understanding of their own culture, and increased their understanding of the differences between the two cultures (See Figure 11).

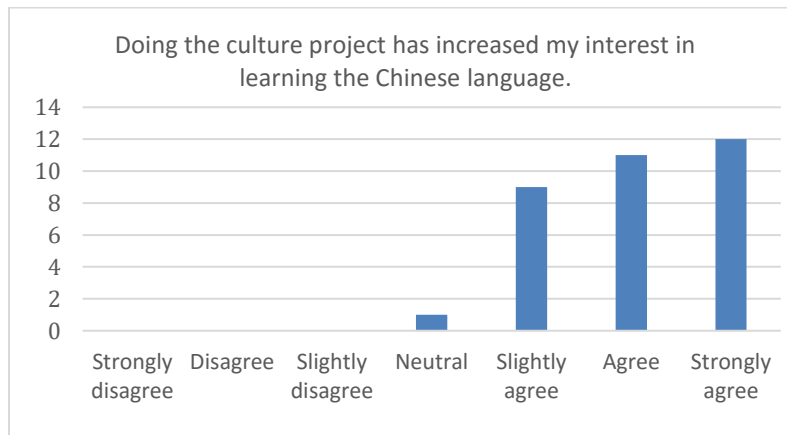


Figure 10 Participant's self-perceived change in interest in learning the Chinese language

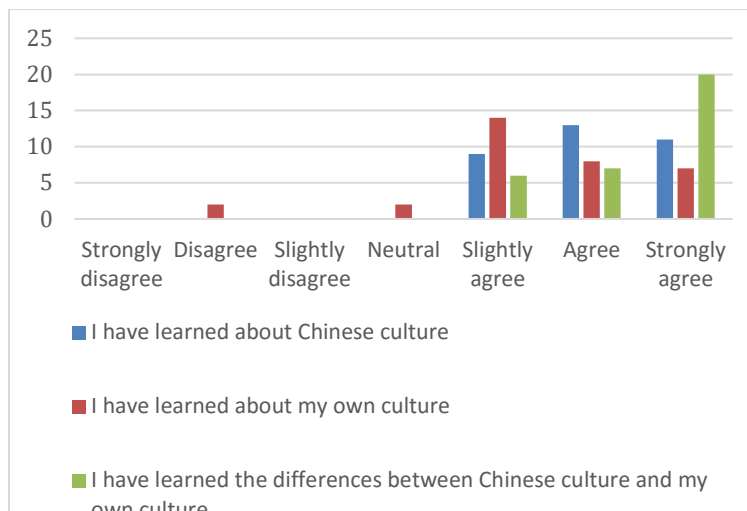


Figure 11 Student self-perceived change in culture awareness and the culture differences

In addition, participants reported that they had learned how to interact with people from China or Taiwan and how to learn about culture. See Figure 12.

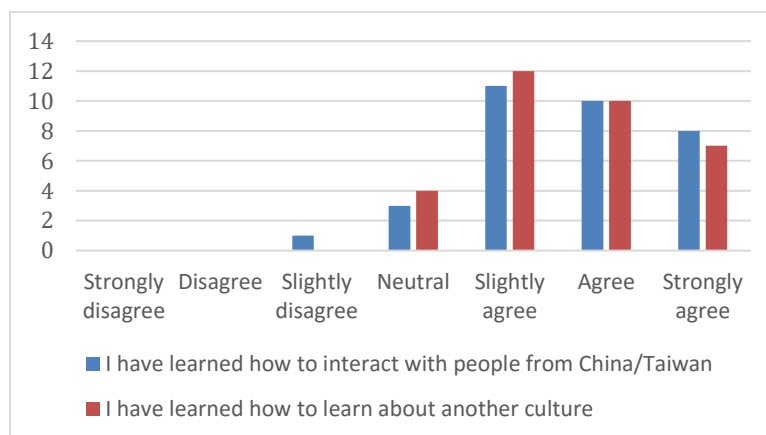


Figure 12 Participants' perceptions of changes in their culture learning method

When results of the survey question on the culture learning method are compared to results of the pre and post questionnaire items addressing the same construct, there is a discrepancy. Most participants agreed that they learned how to learn about another culture. However, there was no significant improvement in the learning *method* between the results of the pre and post questionnaires, which could be a result of the item's wording. The pre and post questionnaire item addressing this construct was "I know how to learn culture." The students might have thought that they knew how to learn about culture before doing the culture project. Different people have different understandings of what culture is. For most people, culture takes the form of "big C" culture. After they completed the culture project, participants' perception that they knew how to learn about another culture had not changed, even if the methods for doing so may have changed. One of the themes in participants' reflection papers also proved this point, as illustrated in the following section.

The analysis of the responses to the open-ended question in the post-survey shows that all participants enjoyed completing the culture project. Responses also showed that the approach had a positive impact on their culture learning and that the implementation of the approach had changed the students' attitude towards community of people who speak Chinese. This culture learning approach provided students with an opportunity, in a student's words, "to learn information about the real world from a classroom atmosphere."

Some of the reasons participants gave for enjoying the project included: learning a lot about Chinese culture rather than just learning the language, "taking a break from language skills," having a fun way to learn culture, being "not super hard", and "not too time consuming," and being spread over a several weeks. The project also encouraged them to "seek out sources otherwise might not have." Overall, students liked "the opportunity to learn how to learn about other culture" and said, "it was short but useful to learn more about the culture."

6.3 A Spectrum of Learning Outcomes: From Culture Itself to Methods of Learning about Culture

First, the participants learned the importance of culture learning and different aspects of Chinese culture. The quantitative data show that the culture project significantly improved students' cultural awareness. The participants not only realized the importance of learning culture (as one student put it, "I realized that culture is more important than language") but also learned many specific (both the "big-C" and the "little-c" culture) aspects of Chinese culture. These aspects included: parenting, the hierarchy of the average Chinese family, marriage, dating, education, gift-giving etiquette, censorship in China, suburban life in China and the housing problem, how the younger generation is encouraged to interact with older generation, real Chinese cuisine, education, university life in China, hospitality when there are guests, use of kinship terms among familiar and unfamiliar people, visiting and dining etiquette, how familiar people greet each other, and so on. For example, some students wrote in their reflection papers that they had learned that, "people don't open gifts in front of each other in Chinese culture," "foods are often cooked more than a family could eat when they invite guests to home," "hosts are very amiable to their guests." These cultural aspects were not limited to what the video clips refer to, because students learned a great deal from the online discussion and the ethnographic interviews as well. In short, using the words of one of the participants, the culture project "changed the way I usually think about Chinese culture and gave me an opportunity to explore new knowledge about Chinese culture that I have not yet known."

Second, the learners achieved a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese culture and partially improved their previous understanding about China. The implementation of the approach has re-enforced their cultural understanding. It made them more aware of some aspects of Chinese culture that they thought that they knew before, but didn't understand correctly. It also "connected dots" and helped them gain a better understanding of the target culture.

In addition, by exploring and learning about Chinese culture via this culture project, some students had changed their previous perceptions of China. One student wrote, “[doing the culture project] helped clear up some of the stereotypes Western culture often associates with China.” The approach has also changed some perceptions of Chinese communication that the students had. For example, one student said that he learned that some things he considered to be rude and strange in Chinese culture were actually very normal and acceptable there.

Third, the learners noticed the differences between their own culture and Chinese culture. Students started to think about how Chinese culture relates to theirs. Most important of all, half of the participants started to realize that there were more similarities than differences. One student said, “[M]y Chinese friends are not very different from my American friends. They just have a language barrier.” “I learned that my culture has a lot of similarities with the Chinese culture.” “Interactions between family and friends are really similar except for the titles we give each other.” “It changed my view on the culture of people that’s different than mine. I’ve always thought that since we’re so far away from each other, our culture will be the complete opposite, but it turns out we share some of it.” “I feel that it changed my perspective on other cultures. I realized that Asian cultures aren’t all that different from us, like most people think.”

Fourth, the learners’ understanding of people from different cultures has expanded, and they have become more reflective. Four students specifically pointed out that they understood people from the other culture more and that they respected people from other cultures more. The project helped them reflect more on why Chinese people do some things differently from Americans, which has helped them respect and appreciate their culture more. Some students thought that they unfairly judged some of their Chinese friends for doing things that turned out to be normal in the Chinese culture. Through the face-to-face interaction with NS, some students learned not to judge Chinese people just from what they have learned on social media. The approach helped them to have a world-wide perspective and learn the importance of other cultures on their lives. As a result, students have become more open-minded and their “world was broadened a little bit more.” They learned to become “more accepting of other people’s viewpoints and opinions” and “more receptive of how people act, interact and the effects of history on people’s culture today.” Their interests in learning more about the Chinese culture has increased. For example, one student wrote that doing the culture project had made her “fall in love with China” and made her “even more excited to go back to China this summer.”

Fifth, the learners have learned how to interact with people from another culture and become more confident of their future interaction with them. Five students mentioned that they learned how to conduct a proper interview and learned how people from China interact with each other. They found that the interaction between Chinese people in the videos was interesting. Additionally, they learned how to strengthen their connection with their Chinese friends and their own classmates. After finishing the culture project, students had learned many social-interaction related manners, such as what the proper things to do inside a Chinese home are, what they should expect from their culture in social interactions, and how to address friends in China. As a result,

students felt that they became “more comfortable with their interactions with people from China or Taiwan.”

Sixth, the learners learned a method for culture learning, and the project was regarded as a starting point for a more systematic way of learning culture. Six students mentioned that they had learned methods of learning about another culture and had “become more conscious of the cultural environment.” They planned on taking Chinese culture courses, watching micro-movies that could be found on the Internet, making more Chinese friends, watching the classical films pointed out by the instructor, and traveling to China someday.

Overall, the implementation of the approach deepened the students’ understanding of Chinese culture and positively impacted their attitudes towards people from the culture and their interests in the language. This effect was achieved not by one or two phases or by one or two components of this approach, but through the integration of all the phases and components. However, it is still crucial to know which components of the approach were regarded as the most helpful in improving their culture learning and which components could be improved to be more beneficial in the future implementation.

Among the components of the three phases, the ethnographic interview was regarded as the most helpful. In the students’ words, the ethnographic interview was a “1 on 1 with culture” which has allowed them to meet “awesome new people,” “really gets you personally acquainted,” gives them “a chance to find out more about Chinese culture from a primary source,” and helps them “get a lot of information that one wouldn’t have got in a classroom.” In addition, the interview allowed the students to clarify and become informed about the areas of Chinese culture they knew least about.

Another highly regarded component was watching the instructor-selected and edited movie/film clips. Most students felt that they were given the best resources to work with and the videos highlighted many cultural differences. The reason that the movie/film clips were enjoyed included: 1) they were “short and cute” and easy to understand; 2) they were modern and reflected today’s life, like modern documentaries, which gave them “a look at what today’ life would be like;” 3) students were directed to pay attention to the critical cultural issues through the edits that the instructor made and the questions students had to answer. The edits “ensured proper learning from the video and discussion” and helped students realize how different cultures were; 4) each of the selected movie and film clips has a story in itself that provided good information about what was happening and the students did not get lost easily.

Out of the three movie/film clips, the micro-movie “*Mother*” was identified by some students as their favorite. There were two reasons. First, the theme of the movie focuses on familial ties, and the students could relate this aspect to their own experience. Second, the artistic or aesthetic qualities attracted their attention and left space for them to contemplate. One of the artistic qualities, for example, was the unspoken things that provoked audience members’ thoughts and emotions, such as the black and white photograph of a mother. Students appreciated the questions about the movie/film clips,

because those questions helped them “get more out of the culture project” and “analyze the video and go deeper into the “why” aspect.”

The online discussion was also popular because it allowed students to interact with their peers and discover their perspectives on Chinese culture. Students liked that “everyone pointed out something different” and that others “had good viewpoints that made me reconsider mine or brought new ideas to light.” In addition, they enjoyed learning about other cultures by reading posts made by their peers, sharing thoughts with people from other cultures, and learning more about the Chinese culture and another culture, such as Puerto Rican or Vietnamese culture.

Another component that most students liked was the writing activity, including the interview report writing and the reflection writing. “I liked write ups, as they condense knowledge,” said one student. Reflection writing was especially appreciated because it helped “realize self-growth through the reflection paper” and it “really helped me understand my findings from the whole project and made me realize that when I go back to China this summer I want to learn and pay more attention to the Chinese culture.” See Figure 13.

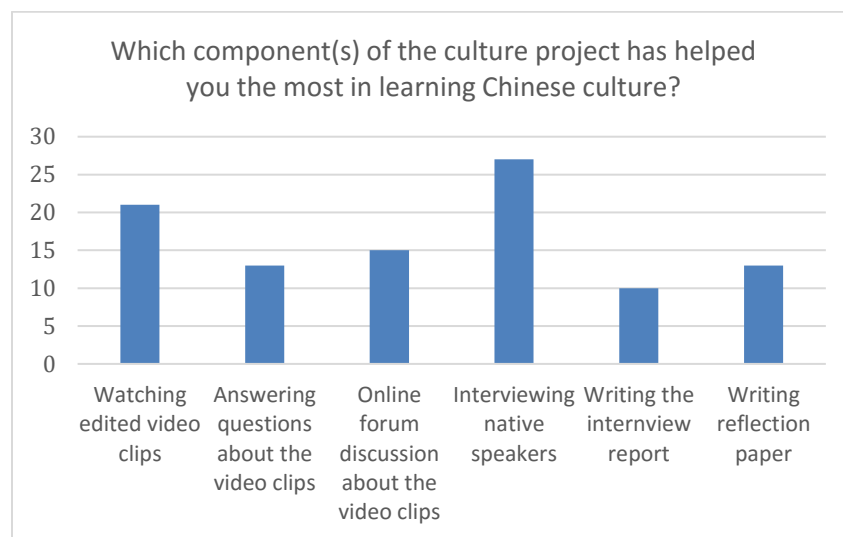


Figure 13 Participants’ perceptions of the different components of the approach

Despite the fact that students generally enjoyed the culture learning approach and improved in many aspects, there are aspects that the students did not like. For example, some students were not satisfied with the length and number of film clips available for this culture project. Seven students commented that the film clips could be longer. Three students would have liked to have more than three video clips to watch. However, there was disagreement regarding the amount of information provided on the film clips. Two students suggested having no subtitles so that the film clips could be more enjoyable. Another two students thought that more information in the subtitles would help them understand the film clips better.

Although almost all participants appreciated the ethnographic interview, four students mentioned that it was hard to find an interviewee within a short time frame. The most frequent reason for the difficulty was that they did not personally know someone from China or Taiwan. Furthermore, due to different personalities of students, one shy student had a hard time interviewing the NS because it was hard to start a conversation with a stranger. Another student found that the interview was a little bit awkward because he had never interacted with NS before. One student preferred that the interview be more in depth, which would require a longer time than most students could afford. This student wrote, “We did not go deeply in depth with culture differences with society and personal roles (as much as I would like). If the work (ethnography) was to be more personal (such as hanging out or staying over with the interviewee) then I could have learned more.”

7. Discussion

The implementation of this culture learning approach that combines authentic multimedia materials and ethnographic interviews in a blended learning environment, designed upon the principles proposed by Kramsch (1993), helped achieve the goals of culture instruction (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993; Stern, 1992). These goals include “to become more aware of conventional behavior in common situations in the target culture, to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture, to stimulate students’ intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people” (Tomalin & Stempleski 1993:7-8). Stern suggests the additional goal of obtaining a research-minded outlook, affective goals, interest, intellectual curiosity and empathy (1992). After completing the culture learning project, students improved their cultural awareness of the “little c” culture that reflects the network of relationships, meanings, and shared expectations that bind people together into a culture, and their understanding of the differences and similarities between the Chinese culture and his/her own culture.

The approach also helped improve participants’ awareness of culture learning resources, whether they be watching films or interacting with people from the culture. Furthermore, the ethnographic interview allowed students to be involved in conducting their own “research” by finding their own culture representative, setting up an interview with them, preparing for the interview, conducting the interview, analyzing the results of the interview, and writing up what they concluded from this research. The whole process enabled them to take a critical perspective and analyze the information they collected by conducting comparison and synthesis. During the process, they learned how to interact with people from a different cultural background. This approach helped the students learn ways to learn culture, conduct research and analysis, and develop a critical perspective. These skills will benefit them throughout their lives.

Participants’ attitudes towards the community of people who speak Chinese also improved, and their interest in learning the Chinese language increased. The participants gradually came to understand some of the behaviors of the people from the target culture that they had not been able to understand before. This also inspired them to continue learning about and interacting with the Chinese culture in the future. The suggested

approach gives students access to the cultural realities that embedded in the Chinese language so that they can better understand better how words refer to culturally determined concepts. This increased interest in learning the language and the culture could help retain persistence in learning Chinese despite the challenges participants may face in the future (Seelye, 1993).

Most importantly, from a perspective of instruction, the successful implementation of the approach and the positive results of using this approach have shown that guided culture learning can happen in the online and blended learning environment without reducing precious FTF classroom instruction time. Instructors can use the FTF meeting time for language learning and communicative practice. It is true that the FTF language learning process should also be culturally loaded. However, to learn much about culture, students should have opportunities to focus on learning culture and culture learning methods. With the approach outlined in this manuscript, students can enjoy learning culture while still focusing the FTF meeting times on language learning. When instructors have limited FTF meeting time to teach culture (Seelye, 1974, 1993; Paige, et al., 2003), the approaches suggested by this research offer teachers alternative venues and platforms for teaching culture to their students.

The sequence of the approach also worked well. Watching edited film clips gives students a second-hand channel to learn “little c culture” in China. With the questions to answer, the students needed to go back to the film clips for at least a second viewing when they needed to focus their attention to the culture. Therefore, watching film clips with specific questions in mind adds another layer to understanding the plot in order to understand the important aspects in personal interactions where the culture lies. Furthermore, their understanding about the culture was clarified and deepened by getting their peers’ perspectives in the online discussions and then from the whole class discussion.

After the second-hand input of culture, students might want to learn more about the target culture or might have questions about the other aspects of the culture. That makes it the right time for them to have the real contact with their peers from China. During the interaction process, i.e. the ethnographic interviews, they learned more about this culture. Through reflection, they reflected upon what they had learned, what could improve their learning, and their plans for the future in terms of culture learning.

Although the approach is successful, it can be improved. For example, to maximize learning, movie editing and movie choices could be more differentiated. More than three film clips could be used, with different lengths and plot complexities. Perhaps a fixed number of film clips would be required and the rest would be optional. The film clips could also be categorized into different cultural dimensions, such as values, relationships, customs, and taboos. For example, students may be required to choose one clip from each category. Furthermore, film clips can provide options for turning the subtitles and explanations off or on. More advanced students can choose to turn off the captions and explanations. Less advanced students can turn on the captions and explanations as needed.

8. Conclusion

This is the first study in the literature to examine the effectiveness of an approach that combines authentic multimedia materials, ethnographic interviews, and a blended learning environment on students' culture awareness, interests in the language learning, and attitudes towards the community of native speakers of the target language. The analysis is also the first to examine students' perception of such an approach. It demonstrates a number of strengths, such as using mixed methods in collecting rich data, and using design-based research to test the feasibility and effectiveness of the approach.

That said, the study also has its limitations. For example, even though the study used Gardner's (1985) survey (with modification) along with another survey to test the effectiveness of the approach, other methods also exist for testing the effectiveness of the method, such as asking for student responses to culture scenarios. Another method is interacting with NS using the culture about which they learned. These methods might be able to maximally test whether the students have improved in their cultural awareness or not. However, they are time-consuming and may be difficult to integrate into beginning language courses. In addition, before using these methods, we may need to fill in the gap between being students' cultural awareness and their ability to translate that awareness into a complex web of cultural behaviors and interactions as practiced in the target culture.

This study was an important first step in designing and testing an approach to teaching culture in a blended learning environment. Clearly, additional research and trials would expand the limited empirical base on this topic. In addition, a systematic development of a culture curriculum that might inform the uses of cultural learning in blended courses and engage NS as peer informants more fully, particularly in beginning language courses, is still urgently needed.

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