

Effective Pedagogy for the Optimal Use of Free E-resources for Supporting Chinese Learners to Learn Primary English Grammar

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Abstract: This research aims to explore a pedagogical strategy for the optimal use of free e-resources for supporting Chinese learners in Hong Kong to learn primary English grammar. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, this research will progressively design, evaluate and then establish an effective pedagogical strategy that optimizes the use of free e-resources for learning primary English grammar. A twofold documentary analysis will be conducted for the design of a potential pedagogical strategy. To evaluate the effectiveness of the designed pedagogical strategy in the real classroom environment, two classes of local Primary 4 students will be subsequently invited to a one-month trial teaching. Students in the experimental group will learn primary English grammar under the designed pedagogical strategy; whereas their counterparts in the control group will receive no treatment during the trial teaching period. These two groups of students will sit for a pair of identical pre-test and post-test before and after the trial teaching, respectively, to investigate the impact of the designed pedagogical strategy on the learning achievement of students. Students in the experimental group will be asked to complete a questionnaire survey after the trial teaching to indicate their perceptions of the designed pedagogical strategy. One-fifth of the students in the experimental group will be further invited to attend individual interviews to share more in-depth opinions on the designed pedagogical strategy. This research will finally advise a model of the pedagogical use of free e-resources that optimizes the learning of primary English grammar among Chinese learners in Hong Kong.

Keywords: English, free e-resources, grammar, pedagogy, primary school, Chinese learners

Research Motivation

The trend toward the use of e-resources in language education has spread over the world for decades. Through a preliminary review of the recognized academic journals in the relevant fields, such as *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *Computers and Education*, and *Educational Technology and Society*, it is noticed that in recent years more and more researchers continuously devote their effort to research studies regarding the use of different types of e-resources for supporting learners to develop language competence in the modalities of reading [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6], writing [7], listening and speaking [8]. The findings of these previous studies generally support the positive impact of the use of e-resources on enhancing the quality of language education. Based on the preliminary review of relevant literature, five directions are identified to be promising for future research in the related fields.

First, future research should address the shift from the traditional paradigm of learning from e-resources to the emergent paradigm of learning through e-resources in language learning with the use of e-resources [9, 10]. Second, future research should design experimental treatments that aim to increase germane cognitive load, moderate intrinsic cognitive load, and decrease extraneous cognitive load in language learning with the use of e-resources [2, 5]. Third, future research should focus more on investigating the approaches for meaningful integration of practical pedagogies with the use of e-resources in language classrooms [9, 10]. Fourth, future research should focus more on investigating the impact of the use of e-resources on supporting learners to develop high-level linguistic knowledge about syntactic rules [3, 9]. Finally, future research should put more effort into the investigations into the impact of the use of e-resources in language classrooms in the primary school sector, because language learning in primary school is critical for young learners to build foundation for the long-term development of linguistic intelligence [7, 9].

The research delineated in this paper is motivated by these five promising research directions. It sets to identify a pedagogical orientation that fosters Chinese learners in primary schools in Hong Kong to engage in the true learning of English grammar through the use of e-resources that maintain germane cognitive load in the learning process.

1. Research Plan

This research aims to explore a pedagogical strategy for the optimal use of free e-resources for supporting Chinese learners in Hong Kong to learn primary English grammar. Three research questions are made for this research:

- (i) Which free e-resources are particularly constructive for the learning of English grammar in primary schools in Hong Kong?
- (ii) Which pedagogical approaches are particularly suitable for the teaching of English grammar in primary schools in Hong Kong?
- (iii) Which model for pedagogical use of free e-resources is particularly effective for the learning and teaching of English grammar in primary schools in Hong Kong?

This research will last for two years. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods will be adopted in this research to explore a pedagogical strategy that optimizes the use of free e-resources for supporting Chinese learners in Hong Kong to learn grammatical knowledge in primary English classrooms.

The first stage of this research will focus on designing a potential pedagogical strategy that is particularly effective for supporting Chinese learners in Hong Kong to learn grammatical knowledge in primary English classrooms. At this stage, a twofold documentary analysis will be conducted to inform the formulation of the target pedagogical strategy. The first documentary analysis sets to gain insights into a list of free e-resources that is considered constructive for learning primary English grammar. Official documents about local primary English Language curriculum and academic work on learning primary English grammar will be thoroughly reviewed. The second documentary analysis sets to gain insights into a range of pedagogical approaches that is considered suitable for teaching primary English grammar. Academic work on pedagogical use of e-resources, in the contexts of both general for primary school education and specific for English Language subject, will be thoroughly reviewed. Based on the results of the documentary analysis, a pedagogical strategy potential for the optimal use of free e-resources for learning and teaching English grammar in primary schools in Hong Kong will be designed for further evaluation.

The second stage of this research will focus on evaluating the designed pedagogical strategy in the real classroom environment. At this stage, a local primary school that has rich experience in IT in education will be purposefully sampled as the partner school for this research. A trial teaching in the form of one-month summer supplementary course, which amounts around 20 one-and-a-half-hour lessons, will be arranged in the partner school. Two classes of Primary 4 students, of each consists of around 30 students with similar learning ability, will be randomly selected and then assigned to the experimental and control groups. Students of the experimental group will learn English grammar under the designed pedagogical strategy. A set of tailor-made learning materials such as activity worksheets will also be provided for students. The author of this paper will take charge of the material design and classroom instruction for the one-month trial teaching. Students of the control group will receive no treatment during the trial teaching period.

Three methods will be adopted in the evaluation work to investigate the effect of the designed pedagogical strategy. First, students of both the experimental and control groups will sit for a pair of identical pre-test and post-test [11] before and after the trial teaching, respectively. The test papers will include a series of questions that assesses knowledge of the students about key grammatical knowledge of English Language, such as tense and agreement. Second, a questionnaire survey [11] will be conducted at the end of the trial teaching. All students in the experimental group will be asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire to indicate their perceptions of the implementation of the designed pedagogical strategy for lessons about English grammar. Third, one-fifth of the students in the experimental group will be randomly selected for the semi-structured, individual interviews [11] to further investigate their perceptions of the implementation of the designed pedagogical strategy. The selected students will be asked to describe the changes in their process, motivation and achievement in the learning of English grammar through the lessons that implement the designed pedagogical strategy. The evaluation results obtained at this stage will contribute to the establishment of a model of the pedagogical use of free e-resources that optimizes the learning of primary English grammar among Chinese learners in Hong Kong.

2. Research Contribution

The traditional classroom instruction in the topic of English grammar in primary schools exhibit two limitations, namely the overemphasis on the provision of mechanical learning practices; and the inadequacy in the provision of authentic learning contexts [12]. The pedagogical use of suitable e-resources is considered helpful in addressing these limitations for two reasons. First, the capability of multimedia data representations makes e-resources potential to offer a high flexibility in implementing diverse types of classroom activities for active learning [13]. Second, the tremendous e-resources related to everyday issues, in particular those available on the Internet for free access, are potential to provide plentiful sources of authentic learning contexts [12].

This research is of significance in inspiring teaching professionals to cope with the hotly debated challenges for the meaningful integration of free e-resources into subject-specific curriculum delivery in school education in the twenty-first century. English teachers in Hong Kong nowadays prefer using free e-resources, ranging from static PowerPoint slides to interactive subject-related websites, available on the Internet and provided by educational publishers to induce authentic learning for the development of integrated ability in language use. With the global acceleration of e-learning in school education in these years, there is a pressing need for English teachers to effectively make pedagogical designs that optimally use free e-resources for subject learning and teaching.

The effective learning of grammatical knowledge is essential for primary school learners to advance linguistic intelligence. In view of the inherent differences in the language systems between Chinese and English Languages, grammatical topics such as tense and agreement are considered to be the very important but most difficult component in the primary English curriculum in Hong Kong. For learners who succeed in mastering grammar use in English Language, a solid foundation will be laid for future development of integrated ability in the use of English Language. For learners who fail in developing a genuine understanding of the target topic, a lag in the growth of integrated language ability will occur. This will in turn have an adverse effect on the confidence of learners in learning English in general. This research, therefore, contributes to the preparation of Chinese learners in local primary schools for a sustainable development of linguistic intelligence.

The outcomes of this research will lead to a twofold benefit. First, this research will provide teaching professionals with insights into the most inspiring strategies for pedagogical design for the integration of e-resources into the classroom teaching of English grammar. Second, this research will prompt young learners to gain opportunities for the most effective process in the classroom learning of English grammar.

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