

THE EFFECT OF DESIGNING AN ONLINE TEACHING OF CHINESE CLASS FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS ABOUT SICHUAN-BASHU CULTURE: A CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS FROM HELLOTALK PLATFORM

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Abstract

As online teaching becomes increasingly widespread and sophisticated in international Chinese education, integrating regional culture presents new opportunities and challenges for online Chinese classrooms. This qualitative research aimed to 1) explore the feasibility and practical approaches of integrating Bashu cultural elements—such as architecture, cuisine, and art—into online Chinese language instruction, 2) analyze the impact of cultural integration on learners' classroom performance in terms of interaction, target language use, and intercultural awareness, and 3) identify challenges and propose instructional strategies for effective cultural teaching in virtual environments. The study involved 50 international Chinese learners on the HelloTalk language learning platform. The study collected data through pre-class instructional design analysis, classroom observation, and semi-structured interviews with 20 participants.

Data collection tools included observation notes and interview protocols focused on cultural comprehension and student engagement. The results showed that integrating Sichuan Bashu culture significantly enhanced learners' language interest, classroom engagement, intercultural understanding, and expressive skills. While challenges such as platform instability and varying levels of cultural background knowledge were noted, the findings suggest that adopting flexible teaching strategies and leveraging platform functions can effectively address these issues. Based on the results, this study proposes instructional guidelines in three key areas: adaptive content design, interactive cultural tasks, and platform-based engagement strategies.

Keywords: Language and Cultural Integration, Course Design, Online Chinese Teaching, Learner Engagement. Teaching Effectiveness Study

Introduction

With the rapid development of information technology, online Chinese language education has become an increasingly important mode in international Chinese teaching, while the role of cultural instruction has gained growing academic attention (Yin, 2023). Language and culture are inherently interconnected, and many learners are initially motivated to study Chinese due to a strong interest in Chinese culture (Wen, 2024). However, online classrooms face challenges in providing authentic cultural experiences (Song, 2022), necessitating the integration of diverse digital tools and instructional strategies to enhance learners' engagement and cultural understanding (Dai, 2022).

Although most Chinese courses include a "Chinese culture" module, the content often emphasizes general national knowledge and is delivered in a relatively uniform format, lacking regional specificity (Cheng & Li, 2019). This may not fully meet learners' growing demand for diverse and in-depth cultural experiences (Han, 2023). The integration of regional cultural elements, such as local cuisine, festivals, and dialects, has been shown to enhance learners' cultural competence and intercultural communicative ability, while significantly influencing course acceptance and classroom participation (Hou, 2023).

Bashu culture, as a key component of Sichuan regional culture, encompasses belief systems, values, customs, arts, and language, carrying both historical heritage and strong pedagogical appeal. Cultural symbols such as Sichuan opera, hotpot, and Shu embroidery are highly recognizable and communicative. Their rich content and diverse forms make them highly adaptable for online classrooms, enabling immersive language and cultural learning experiences (Fan, 2021; Zheng & Xing, 2022).

Nevertheless, existing research has predominantly focused on language knowledge acquisition and communicative competence, with limited systematic investigation into the integration of regional culture (Cheng & Li, 2019). This study sampled adult Chinese language learners from the HelloTalk online language learning platform and employed a combination of instructional design, classroom observation, and semi-structured interviews to examine the integration of Bashu culture into online Chinese teaching. In this matter, researcher focuses on the effects on learners' classroom participation, intercultural competence, and the challenges of incorporating regional culture, aiming to provide theoretical insights and practical guidance for integrating regional culture into digital language education.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the feasibility and specific approaches of integrating Bashu cultural elements into online Chinese language teaching

Exploring the feasibility and specific approaches of integrating Bashu cultural elements into online Chinese language teaching. This objective focuses on analyzing how

traditional festivals, culinary culture, and folk customs from Bashu can be effectively incorporated into the online Chinese education system, aiming to promote deeper integration of language and culture and evaluate the practical effects of such integration in virtual learning environments.

2. To examine the impact of cultural integration on learners' classroom performance and intercultural communicative competence

By systematically observing learners' classroom engagement, frequency of interaction, responses to questions, and use of the target language, this objective investigates whether including Bashu cultural content can enhance learning motivation and foster learners' intercultural awareness and communicative skills.

3.To identify challenges and propose strategies for integrating regional culture into online Chinese language learning

This objective addresses the technical and pedagogical challenges of combining regional cultural content with Chinese instruction in online settings. It aims to propose practical adjustments in teaching approaches and platform usage to improve the overall effectiveness of online cultural instruction.

Theoretical and Conceptual framework

This study designs an online Chinese course tailored for foreign learners based on remote internet technology, with Sichuan/Bashu culture as the core teaching content. To ensure the course design's scientific rigor and practical applicability, the study integrates three key theoretical foundations.

1. Constructivist Theory of Learning.

The Constructivist Theory of Learning emphasizes that learners construct knowledge through social interactions and experiences (Zhou & Brown, 2015). In the context of online Chinese language learning, interaction between international students and native speakers via HelloTalk exemplifies social constructivism, where students build language competence through meaningful real-time communication. Online platforms offer personalized, interactive learning environments that align with the constructivist principle of learner-centered education. In Chinese language courses featuring Sichuan/Bashu culture, students explore cultural themes through multimedia resources and peer collaboration, facilitating both language acquisition and cultural internalization (Fan, 2021). Within this framework, teachers shift from knowledge transmitters to facilitators. They design open-ended tasks and guide student discussions, allowing learners to co-construct cultural understanding in a social context (Zhou & Brown, 2015). Such tasks—like discussing Sichuan cuisine or reflecting on local customs—help learners develop both linguistic skills and cultural awareness through experience-based learning. Constructivism also values learners' individual backgrounds and

experiences. Platforms like Hellotalk support personalized, self-paced learning, enabling students to choose culturally relevant topics that match their interests and goals (Fan, 2021).

2. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach emphasizes developing communicative competence through interaction in authentic contexts. In online Chinese courses focused on Sichuan/Bashu culture, CLT is realized through culturally themed tasks such as describing Sichuan dishes, explaining local festivals, or simulating travel experiences, allowing students to practice meaningful language use (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Platforms like Hellotalk facilitate both synchronous and asynchronous communication, fostering intercultural exchange with native speakers. This supports integrating cultural content and language learning, helping students apply classroom knowledge to real-world situations (Byram, 1997). In CLT, teachers act as facilitators who design communicative tasks and provide feedback. Assessment shifts toward evaluating students' ability to express ideas, interpret cultural meanings, and participate in cultural tasks, rather than rote memorization of vocabulary or grammar rules (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

3. Cultural Learning Theory

Cultural Learning Theory posits that language learning is fundamentally a process of cultural cognition and adaptation (Kramsch, 1993). In online Chinese courses incorporating Sichuan/Bashu culture, this theory supports embedding traditional festivals, local cuisine, and customs into language instruction to enhance both linguistic and cultural proficiency. Through cultural activities involving imitation, guidance, and collaboration, students not only learn the language but also learn how to interact within another culture. (Tomasello, Kruger, & Ratner, 1993).

Interactive platforms such as Hellotalk provide immersive environments for cultural learning by enabling real-time communication with native speakers (Yang & Chen, 2021). Learners acquire the language within rich cultural contexts by discussing topics such as Sichuan hotpot and Spring Festival customs. Language and culture are closely intertwined in the learning process, and teachers situated in native cultural environments play a crucial role in guiding learners to connect linguistic input with cultural meaning (Kramsch, 1993). Through reflective tasks and contextual learning, students not only learn Chinese but also develop intercultural sensitivity and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997; Li, 2023).

Literature Review

Bashu (Sichuan) Culture Elements

Bashu culture originated from the ancient Chinese states of Ba and Shu, covering present-day Sichuan Province and Chongqing Municipality. Archaeological discoveries, such as the Sanxingdui and Jinsha sites, reveal a highly developed early civilization in this region

(Hou, 2023). Bashu culture is renowned for its distinctive features in Chinese cuisine, drama, arts, and language. Language and food, as key cultural carriers, profoundly reflect the local cognitive and social patterns (Li, 2012). Integration of Bashu Culture in Online Chinese Language Teaching Bashu culture offers considerable potential for teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Incorporating vocabulary related to Sichuan cuisine into lessons can enhance semantic comprehension and stimulate learners' interest in Chinese food culture (Li, 2023). Multimedia resources, situational simulations, and project-based learning help integrate cultural content with linguistic objectives, promoting both language acquisition and cultural understanding (Zheng & Xing, 2022). In online teaching, visual materials such as videos and documentaries serve as effective bridges between language and Chinese culture, enhancing classroom engagement and broadening learners' cultural perspectives (Hou, 2023). Despite recognition of the value of regional culture, research on systematically organizing Bashu cultural resources and optimizing online course design remains limited.

Impact on Learners' Classroom Performance

Integrating culture into Chinese language instruction can enhance learners' linguistic performance and intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Exposure to authentic Chinese cultural materials strengthens intercultural awareness, communicative strategies, and motivation to use Chinese (Mao, 2022). Empirical studies indicate that culturally rich courses increase classroom participation (Han, 2023), while music-centered cultural instruction can improve language retention and foster emotional engagement (Zhang, 2023). In online environments, cultural content further facilitates interaction and language production, improving practice quality and peer collaboration (Yue, 2023). However, the specific effects of different types of cultural content on learners from diverse backgrounds require further systematic investigation.

Challenges and Strategies for Cultural Teaching in Virtual Environments.

Online Chinese language teaching faces multiple challenges, including differences in learners' self-regulated learning abilities and the lack of non-verbal cues, which may weaken cultural experiences (Fan, 2021). Culturally responsive teaching emphasizes flexible strategies to accommodate individual learner differences (Gay, 2010), while constructivist and sociocultural approaches advocate learner-centered instruction through meaning negotiation to promote understanding of Chinese culture (Zhou & Brown, 2015). In online contexts, multimodal approaches—such as guided videos, interactive tasks, and group discussions—can enhance cultural internalization (Zheng & Xing, 2022). Teacher professional development and innovation in digital teaching resources are also critical for effectively disseminating regional Chinese culture (Guo, 2022; Hou, 2023).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach aimed at exploring effective integration of Bashu culture into online Chinese language teaching and analyzing the impact of cultural instruction on learners' language performance and intercultural awareness. Utilizing a case study design, the researcher comprehensively applies instructional design, classroom observation, and semi-structured interviews to conduct an in-depth analysis of cultural acceptance, language use, and learning experiences during the instructional (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Research Design

This study adopted a multiple-case study design to explore the integration of Bashu culture in online Chinese language teaching and analyze the impact of cultural instruction on learners' language performance and intercultural awareness. The study combined instructional design, classroom observation, and semi-structured interviews to examine learners' cultural engagement, language use, and learning experiences in depth.

Researchers recruited participants from the HelloTalk language learning platform. Based on their Chinese proficiency and level of cultural engagement, learners were divided into three groups: beginner ($n = 33$), intermediate ($n = 12$), and advanced ($n = 5$), ensuring diversity and representativeness in language ability and cultural performance.

Instructional Design

A 55-minute online Chinese lesson themed "Sichuan Bashu Hotpot" was designed to stimulate learners' interest by integrating language and culture. The lesson used multimodal instructional materials, including informational slides, documentary clips, and interactive role-play activities, to provide comprehensive knowledge of the historical origins, social context, and cultural significance of Sichuan hotpot.

The lesson emphasized practical vocabulary input, covering ingredient names, common dining expressions, and communication strategies. Through simulated real-life dining scenarios and role-playing activities, learners practiced oral communication in an immersive cultural environment, thereby enhancing cultural awareness, vocabulary retention, and overall Chinese communicative competence.

Research Instruments and Procedures

Observation Scheme

This study adopted a structured classroom observation as the primary research instrument. Based on a pre-established observation framework, the researcher systematically

recorded and analyzed learners' behaviors in the online Chinese classroom. The observation process covered learners' verbal and non-verbal behaviors, classroom participation, comprehension levels, and spontaneous cultural responses, aiming to provide a comprehensive picture of learners' dynamic language and cultural learning processes.

The classroom observation was designed around three core dimensions:

1. Learners' Emotional Engagement and Classroom Participation

This dimension examined learners' emotional states and participation in class, including their interest, enthusiasm, confidence, and involvement in instructional activities. The observation focused on whether learners actively responded to teachers' questions, participated in group discussions, and expressed personal opinions smoothly. These indicators were used to assess learners' motivation and depth of engagement in the online learning environment.

2. Frequency and Patterns of Target Language (Chinese) Use

This dimension focused on how frequently and accurately learners used the target language—Chinese—during classroom interactions. The observation emphasized learners' use of Chinese in oral communication, task-based activities, and culturally themed discussions. The analysis included variations in learners' linguistic output, accuracy, and application of classroom-learned expressions, thereby reflecting the effectiveness of language learning and instructional guidance.

3. Learners' Intercultural Awareness and Cultural Understanding

This dimension examined learners' cultural sensitivity and understanding demonstrated during classroom interaction. The observation focused on whether learners could recognize, interpret, and respect symbols, customs, and values of the target culture, and whether they could conduct cross-cultural comparisons during discussions. These behaviors indicated learners' openness and reflective capacity toward diverse cultural perspectives.

The observation design drew on Spradley's (1980) theory of participant observation and the educational observation model proposed by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011). Both time sampling and event sampling methods were employed to enhance the systematicity and comparability of the collected data.

Post-Class Semi-Structured Interviews

Post-class semi-structured interviews explored learners' course experiences, perceived learning outcomes, and the transfer of cultural knowledge into language use. Interview questions focused on the following themes:

1. Learners' understanding of and engagement with cultural content in the course;
2. Learners' overall experience and perceptions of language–culture integrated instruction;

3. Learners' interest in and expectations for future culturally-related courses.

The interview guide was developed following Kvale's (1996) qualitative interview principles, ensuring open, focused, and exploratory questions. All interviews were conducted with participants' consent, audio-recorded, transcribed, and anonymized.

Collection of Learning Outcomes

Data on learning outcomes were collected from multiple sources to provide a comprehensive picture of learners' performance and progress in both language and cultural learning. Specifically, the data sources included:

1. Classroom observation records, documenting learners' verbal and non-verbal behaviors, participation, language use, and cultural responses during classroom activities;
2. Post-class learner feedback, collected through interviews and reflective comments, capturing learners' perceptions of their own learning and cultural understanding;
3. Teacher reflection logs, which recorded the instructor's observations and reflections on learners' engagement, learning progress, and the effectiveness of instructional strategies.

By triangulating these three data sources, the study enhanced the credibility and richness of the findings, providing a nuanced understanding of how learners internalize cultural knowledge and apply it in Chinese language use. Together, these data offer a systematic representation of learners' cultural comprehension and the transfer of cultural knowledge into language practice.

Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to qualitative research ethics. All participants were informed in advance about the research objectives, data collection procedures, and intended use of the data before voluntarily taking part in the course. Informed consent was obtained electronically to ensure participants understood and agreed to participate. All personal information was kept anonymous and confidential, and the collected data were used solely for academic research purposes.

This study followed the qualitative research guidelines proposed by Creswell (2014), emphasizing respect for participants' autonomy, protection of privacy, and transparency throughout the research process. The researcher maintained ethical integrity throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting to ensure compliance with academic ethical standards.

Trustworthiness and Validity: To ensure the rigor and academic validity of this study, the researcher followed the three qualitative research criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

Credibility: The study's credibility was strengthened through data triangulation, combining classroom observations, teacher reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews.

The researcher conducted ongoing observation and documentation throughout the instructional process to enhance data representativeness and the depth of interpretation.

Transferability: The study established transferability through thick description of the instructional context, learner characteristics, classroom interaction patterns, and cultural content design, providing sufficient contextual information for future researchers to assess the findings' applicability in other instructional settings (Creswell, 2014).

Confirmability: The researcher ensured confirmability through reflexive notes and cross-checking multiple data sources. The researcher continuously examined personal assumptions and analytical decisions to minimize subjective bias. By triangulating classroom observation records, learner feedback, and teacher reflections, the conclusions were grounded in multiple layers of empirical evidence, reinforcing the objectivity and confirmability of the results.

In summary, the multi-dimensional strategies employed in this study enhanced the credibility and scholarly value of its findings.

Research Results

This study aimed to investigate the feasibility of integrating Bashu cultural elements into online Chinese language teaching, the impact on learners' classroom performance, and the associated teaching challenges and improvement strategies. Following the principle of voluntary participation, this study conducted post-class semi-structured interviews with 20 online Chinese learners representing diverse national backgrounds, including Brazil, the United States, and Russia. The results are presented according to the research objectives in the following subtopics.

1. Feasibility and Practical Approaches to Integrating Bashu Cultural Elements into Online Chinese Teaching

The findings indicate that integrating Bashu cultural elements into online Chinese teaching is both feasible and pedagogically meaningful. Through deliberate instructional design and multimodal resources, teachers can effectively achieve dual objectives in language and culture education. During the preparation stage, teachers selected topics closely related to learners' daily experiences and cultural interests—particularly culinary culture, such as hotpot and ingredients. These themes not only resonate with learners' personal experiences but also stimulate their motivation to learn. Teaching materials, including high-quality images, short videos, and concise cultural background introductions, help learners establish emotional and visual connections with the target culture while preventing cognitive overload.

Classroom observations reveal that teachers introduced cultural knowledge progressively—from basic concepts to more complex cultural details—allowing learners of varying proficiency levels to engage meaningfully. By using Zoom features such as screen

sharing, breakout rooms, and live chat, teachers designed communicative cultural tasks that encouraged authentic language use in context.

In practice, learners of different proficiency levels exhibited diverse but active participation patterns: beginners relied on images and sentence frames to express preferences such as “I like spicy food” or “I have eaten hotpot.” Intermediate learners compared Chinese and foreign culinary cultures and articulated personal opinions, while advanced learners explored the historical and social reasons behind Sichuan people’s preference for spicy food, demonstrating strong analytical and critical thinking skills.

Interview data further supported these observations. One learner from South America commented, “I really like this kind of class—the videos and pictures make me feel as if I were in a real Chinese restaurant.” Another learner from Europe noted, “Through these cultural materials, I’m not just learning vocabulary—I’m learning how Chinese people interact at the table.” Such feedback suggests that cultural input enhances learners’ sense of immersion and motivation, enabling them to experience authentic cultural contexts while using the Chinese language.

Overall, the study found that by combining multimodal resources with digital interaction tools, teachers successfully integrated Bashu cultural elements naturally into online Chinese classrooms. This practice shows that fusing cultural content with technological tools not only promotes language proficiency but also deepens cultural understanding, confirming the feasibility and educational value of embedding regional culture in online Chinese instruction.

2. The Impact of Cultural Integration on Learners’ Classroom Performance and Intercultural Communicative Competence

The findings show that integrating cultural elements had a significant positive effect on learners’ classroom performance, engagement, and intercultural communicative competence. Classroom observations and interview data revealed that learners demonstrated stronger willingness to express themselves, greater cultural sensitivity, and more confident, natural language use in culturally rich contexts.

In terms of classroom performance, teachers guided learners to communicate around familiar life themes such as food, enabling them to use the target language in meaningful situations. With visual support and teacher scaffolding, beginners could accurately express personal preferences such as “I like spicy food” or “I have eaten lamb rolls,” demonstrating high levels of engagement. A learner from Thailand mentioned in an interview, “When the teacher showed us a hotpot video, I could understand many words and wanted to speak more.” This positive emotional response suggests that culturally contextualized tasks can reduce language anxiety and enhance classroom interaction.

Intermediate learners displayed a stronger awareness of cross-cultural comparison. For instance, one learner commented, “Although Sichuan food is spicy, it has a lot of flavor layers.” Such remarks indicate that learners could use more complex sentence structures to express nuanced cultural perceptions. Observations further revealed that these activities encouraged learners to move from “learning the language” to “using the language to understand culture,” fostering deeper cultural thinking.

Advanced learners demonstrated higher levels of reflective and analytical thinking. For example, an American learner asked, “Why do Sichuan people like spicy food? Is it related to the weather or geography?” Such inquiries reflect a growing intercultural perspective and the simultaneous development of cultural understanding and linguistic reasoning.

Moreover, cultural integration effectively enhanced learners’ intercultural communicative competence. Several participants mentioned in interviews that they were more willing to use Chinese to communicate with native speakers after class and even tried ordering Chinese dishes in restaurants. A learner from Europe said, “Learning about the history of hotpot helps me talk more easily with Chinese people—they feel I really understand their culture.” This feedback indicates that cultural learning fosters learners’ sense of cultural belonging and communicative confidence.

In summary, systematically integrating cultural content into language teaching not only improves the quality of learners’ language output but also strengthens their cultural awareness and intercultural communication skills. Through a progressive sequence of learning tasks, learners transition from basic vocabulary expression to cultural comparison and analytical thinking, shifting from being mere “language learners” to “cultural communicators.” This finding further validates the essential role of cultural instruction in fostering the bidirectional integration of language and culture.

3. Challenges and Coping Strategies in Online Cultural Chinese Teaching

Despite the clear benefits of integrating regional culture into online Chinese instruction, the study identified several practical challenges, primarily related to technical support, classroom interaction, and cultural content presentation.

First, technical issues were among the main obstacles affecting classroom efficiency. Some learners had difficulty using Zoom—such as disabled device permissions, unstable connections, and audio/video delays—which disrupted lesson flow and reduced interactivity. A learner from Europe stated, “Sometimes I don’t know how to raise my hand or connect the microphone, so I miss my turn to speak.” Such problems not only reduced learners’ willingness to participate but also weakened the immersive experience of cultural tasks. To address this, teachers used the first five minutes of class to practice platform operations and set clear participation rules such as “raise hand to speak” and “use emojis for responses,” which increased learners’ technical familiarity and confidence.

Second, insufficient real-time interaction in cultural activities also limited effectiveness. In some lessons, learners showed strong interest in cultural topics but lacked adequate collaboration and peer feedback, leading to superficial cultural understanding. A learner from Thailand noted, “I like watching videos, but I hope we can talk more about the differences between my country and China.” This feedback highlights learners’ desire for deeper cultural exchanges rather than passive cultural reception. In response, teachers incorporated more group discussions, cultural comparison tasks, and role-playing activities, encouraging learners to share personal cultural experiences in Chinese and thereby increasing interaction between cultural input and language output.

Third, aligning the depth of cultural content with learners’ proficiency levels posed another pedagogical challenge. Some beginners found certain cultural details—such as Sichuan’s geography or the history of hotpot—too complex, which led to cognitive overload. A learner from South America commented, “I like the pictures and videos, but sometimes there’s too much information to understand.” To address this, teachers adopted a scaffolding strategy: starting with accessible, life-related cultural elements and gradually guiding learners toward understanding the historical and social contexts of cultural phenomena, thus facilitating layered cultural learning.

Overall, technical limitations, limited interaction, and content complexity were the three most common challenges in online cultural Chinese teaching. However, the study also found that when teachers provided technical training, established clear classroom procedures, and designed diverse, level-appropriate tasks, these difficulties became opportunities for pedagogical improvement rather than barriers. The combination of flexible instructional adaptation and active learner participation effectively enhanced overall teaching quality.

The findings suggest that successful online culture-oriented Chinese teaching depends not only on technological stability but also on teachers’ cultural sensitivity and reflective pedagogy. By developing learner-centered cultural task systems, teachers can create authentic, interactive, and culturally rich online learning experiences—offering a valuable model for future online Chinese instruction integrating regional culture.

Research Limitations and Measures Taken

1. Sample limitation

The participants were primarily autonomous learners from the Hellotalk platform, resulting in a relatively small and potentially unrepresentative sample. This may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of online Chinese learners. To mitigate this limitation, the study included participants from diverse nationalities and language proficiency levels, and combined semi-structured interviews with detailed

classroom observations to obtain richer qualitative data, enhancing the credibility of the conclusions.

2. Teaching environment limitation

Teaching environment limitation: The study was conducted exclusively on the Zoom platform with a limited instructional duration, focusing mainly on selected aspects of Bashu culture, such as culinary culture, while other cultural domains (e.g., architecture, traditional opera) were not incorporated. To address this limitation, the curriculum was designed with a scaffolded, step-by-step approach, utilizing Zoom's multiple functions (screen sharing, breakout rooms, and live chat) to maximize interaction and immersion, thereby laying a foundation for integrating additional cultural content in future studies.

3. Limitations of the Researcher's Dual Role

The dual role of the researcher as both instructor and investigator may have introduced subjectivity in interview design, data analysis, and evaluation of teaching outcomes, potentially compromising the study's objectivity and rigor. To mitigate this limitation, structured interview guides and systematic analytical procedures were employed to ensure objectivity and minimize the influence of personal bias on the findings.

4. Technical limitations

Variability in network quality and students' devices may have disrupted classroom interaction and affected teaching effectiveness. To overcome this challenge, the study incorporated a pre-class technical orientation, established clear interaction protocols during lessons, and integrated multimodal teaching resources (images, videos, text) to ensure smooth lesson delivery and maintain learner engagement.

Research Discussion

1. Instructional Content Design and Cognitive Load

The study found that the course covered core aspects of Bashu hotpot culture, including its origins and development, dietary customs, communicative expressions, and cultural symbols. However, limited instructional time made some complex concepts difficult for learners to grasp. This finding aligns with Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988), which posits that excessive information may increase learners' cognitive burden. Previous studies also indicate that careful sequencing of cultural content can improve learners' comprehension and internalization efficiency (Cheng & Li, 2019). Beginner learners primarily relied on images and fixed sentence patterns to express preferences, whereas intermediate and advanced learners could process more complex cultural information. Learners' prior life experiences and cultural backgrounds also influenced learning outcomes; culturally familiar topics, such as everyday dietary practices, tended to engage students more and increase participation.

2. Classroom Interaction and Learner Engagement

The study found that classroom interaction mainly relied on basic Zoom features, including screen sharing, verbal Q&A, and chat, resulting in relatively limited interaction. According to Constructivist Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), learners construct knowledge more effectively through collaboration and interaction. This research found that learners' interaction and participation were influenced by their preferred modes of information acquisition: some learners preferred video materials to obtain cultural information, while others relied more on images or simulated activities for understanding and experience. However, when the course incorporated diversified interactive activities, such as group discussions and collaborative tasks, learners demonstrated significant improvements in both language output and cultural comprehension (Song, 2022). Specifically, intermediate and advanced learners actively engaged in cultural comparisons and analytical discussions, while beginners required teacher guidance and multimodal support to participate effectively.

3. Multimodal Resources and Cultural Understanding

Previous studies have demonstrated that multimodal resources can effectively facilitate cultural understanding and language output in cross-cultural learning contexts (Luo, 2021). This course utilized images, short videos, and brief cultural background explanations to help learners establish visual and emotional connections with the content while reducing cognitive load. This approach also supports Multimedia Learning Theory (Mayer, 2005), which posits that integrating visual and auditory information enhances comprehension and retention. The study found that although learners preferred visual or auditory information, the vivid images and videos significantly improved learners' understanding of Bashu dietary customs and cultural symbols.

4. Technical Support and Classroom Management

Technical issues remained a key factor affecting the smooth delivery of online lessons, including unstable internet connections and variations in learners' devices. Differentiated Instruction Theory (Felder & Silverman, 1988) suggests adapting teaching strategies to learners' abilities and needs. Previous research has also emphasized that technical training and backup tasks can help maintain instructional continuity (Dai, 2022). In this study, pre-class technical orientations, clear classroom rules, and multimodal resources were used to improve lesson fluency and learner engagement. Additionally, differences in learners' cultural backgrounds and prior online learning experience influenced their adaptation to the technical platform and modes of classroom interaction.

Suggestions of Online teaching research

Based on the findings and discussion above, several suggestions for online Chinese language teaching can be proposed.

1. Recommendations for Teachers

The findings indicate that teachers should adjust instructional strategies to students' language proficiency to ensure effective learning outcomes. Research shows that beginner learners rely more on visual support to comprehend basic cultural concepts; therefore, teachers are advised to simplify language input, provide clear explanations, and incorporate multimodal resources such as images and short videos to facilitate understanding of regional culture (Mayer, 2005). Intermediate and advanced learners demonstrate stronger abilities in cultural comparison and critical thinking; thus, teachers may introduce more complex language structures and deepen cultural understanding and language use through discussion or problem-solving tasks (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, given the variability in students' responses to class interaction and task difficulty, teachers should flexibly adjust class pace, interaction methods, and task complexity while effectively utilizing multimodal resources and interactive activities to enhance learner motivation and engagement.

2. Recommendations for Students

Research suggests that active participation in class activities and adequate pre-class preparation significantly improve both language output and cultural understanding. Students are encouraged to review relevant materials and videos before class to establish a foundation for effective engagement in language- and culture-related tasks (Sweller, 1988). Furthermore, differences in students' use of online resources and participation in discussions highlight the importance of cultivating autonomous learning skills. Self-directed learning activities, such as vocabulary review, listening practice, or independent cultural exploration, can further improve classroom performance and accelerate language acquisition.

3. Recommendations for Online Chinese Course Design

The study shows that integrating language learning with cultural content can substantially increase student engagement and cultural understanding. Course design should focus on topics closely related to students' experiences, such as Sichuan's geographical background, local customs, and culinary culture, to create meaningful learning experiences. Instructional methods should combine task-based teaching, communicative approaches, and diverse interactive activities to enhance students' language expression and cultural adaptability (Vygotsky, 1978). Given the variation in learners' proficiency, differentiated instruction is recommended to ensure that both beginner and advanced learners can effectively comprehend and apply the knowledge they acquire. Additionally, situational role-playing, group projects, and problem-solving exercises can promote active participation and authentic language use. Teachers should also make full use of online platform features, such as breakout discussions, collaborative whiteboards, and real-time interactive tools, to increase classroom immersion and sustain high levels of student engagement.

Further Research

1. Future research on the integration of Bashu culture into online Chinese language teaching can further investigate its multifaceted impact on learners' language acquisition, motivation, and classroom interaction. By systematically examining these dimensions, future studies can offer valuable insights into how cultural elements enhance pedagogical outcomes in virtual learning environments. In particular, researchers could explore how incorporating region-specific cultural content—such as Bashu customs, cuisine, and performing arts—can stimulate learners' interest, deepen cultural understanding, and improve overall learning engagement.

2. Moreover, future research can delve deeper into the role of online interaction in shaping learning outcomes. Various modes of interaction—such as synchronous discussions, pre-recorded video lectures, interactive multimedia, and real-time feedback—can be studied to assess their effectiveness in supporting comprehension, retention, and academic performance across learners with different proficiency levels. Investigating how synchronous and asynchronous communication contribute to the development of linguistic competence and cultural literacy would also provide valuable empirical evidence for optimizing online instructional strategies.

3. In addition, examining learner preferences and patterns of engagement may help educators design more personalized and effective online learning experiences. By integrating these findings, future research can help refine culturally enriched, learner-centered instructional frameworks, thereby enhancing both the educational quality and cultural inclusivity of online Chinese language education.

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