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Navigating the Terrain:
Emerging Frontiers in Learning Spaces, Pedagogies, and Technologies

Heutagogical-based mobile social media space: Exploring A framework to develop students' intercultural communication competencies

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This concise paper aims to propose a framework for enhancing intercultural communication competencies among Chinese as foreign language (CFL) learners using Heutagogical-based Mobile Social Media spaces. Integrating qualitative and quantitative data analysis with Activity Theory (AT) and the Design for Transformative Mobile Learning (DTML) framework, this study seeks to develop a potentially effective educational approach. By leveraging mobile social media, the envisioned framework intends to support autonomous learning and foster intercultural competencies among CFL learners.

Keywords: Mobile social media space; Language education; Intercultural communication; Design-Based Research

Introduction

With globalization accelerating and international interactions becoming more frequent, developing intercultural competence has emerged as a crucial objective for cultivating modern talent (López-Rocha, 2021). The proliferation of the internet and the rise of the digital age have further intensified online interactions among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, significantly reducing geographical barriers (Yan et al., 2024). In this context, the role of international Chinese education (previously called Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language) has gained prominence (Cui, 2022). Chinese, as the most widely spoken language globally, serves not only as a means of communication but also as a conduit for bridging cultural gaps and fostering intercultural understanding (Jin & Dervin, 2017). Despite its educational value, enhancing the intercultural communication competencies of international students learning Chinese and facilitating their adaptation to multicultural environments remain formidable challenges in education (Ji, 2023). To address these challenges, this study proposes integrating mobile social media with heutagogy theory to facilitate autonomous learning in the mobile online learning space, aiming to enhance students' capabilities and support the future evolution of education (Blaschke, 2018; Cochrane et al., 2017).

Establishment of Research Theme Concepts

Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) has evolved over the decades, but the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 posed significant challenges to international Chinese education, especially in intercultural communication (Ji, 2023). This required a shift from traditional teaching methods. With advances in multimedia technologies, teachers began integrating short video platforms like TikTok, Bilibili, Kuaishou, and Xiaohongshu, leading to new breakthroughs. Short videos, which appeared in the US in 2005 and developed rapidly by 2011, are now key components of social media platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. These platforms have thrived due to the proliferation of information technology and mobile devices. Snelson (2008) observed that web-based video in education offers a vast repository of free content, though not all videos are suitable for learning. Hsin and Cigas (2013) found that using short videos as mini-lectures in online courses reduced dropout and failure rates while improving student satisfaction. Since 2017, researchers have increasingly studied short videos. Zhang (2020) noted that short videos, being concise and rich in content, foster knowledge sharing and collaborative learning. Si (2020) found that TikTok videos effectively aided vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation in

language learning. Deliema et al. (2023) compared video education and traditional education, highlighting the innovative potential of short videos.

Chinese scholars began focusing on short video research around 2019. Yan et al. (2024) discussed the trend of creating a "short video + education" content matrix. Cui (2022) emphasized the need for international Chinese education to adapt to modern multimedia methods. While multimedia integration in Chinese teaching has become effective, specific research on short videos remains limited. Huang and Dong (2019) highlighted how mobile short videos promote cultural exchange. Ren (2019) emphasized TikTok's role in global cultural dissemination. Liu (2020) analyzed YouTube's rules from an international audience perspective, suggesting strategies for expanding intercultural communication. Despite recognizing the potential of short video platforms in cultural dissemination, the focus on intercultural communication competence is minimal. Therefore, this study aims to establish a mobile social media learning framework to enhance the intercultural communication competence of CFL learners (see Figure 1 among their relationship).
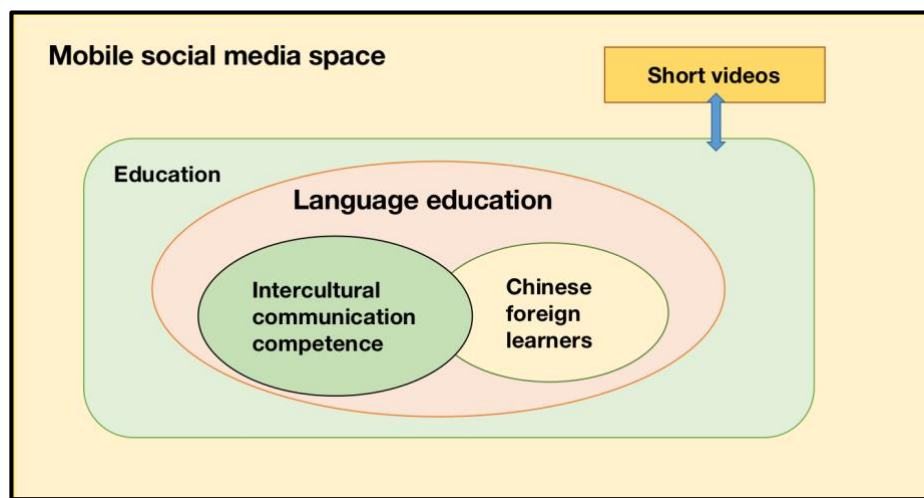

Figure 1. Concept relationship

Discussion on Learning Frameworks

The development of a new framework to cultivate intercultural communication competence among CFL learners within a mobile social media context draws upon both heutagy theory and authentic learning. Heutagogy, coined by Hase and Kenyon (2001), emphasizes self-determined learning where learners take charge of their educational journey with teachers acting as guides (Moore, 2020). This approach, grounded in humanism and constructivism, encourages learners to use past and present knowledge to construct their own understanding, focusing on both knowledge acquisition and skill development (Carpenter & Green, 2017). Heutagogy promotes learner autonomy, allowing students to decide what and how they learn, fostering an engaging and flexible learning environment (Blaschke, 2018).

Authentic learning complements heutagogy by placing learning tasks in real-world contexts, which is crucial for developing practical and transferable knowledge (Herrington et al., 2014). Rooted in situated cognition theory, authentic learning involves complex tasks that mimic real-life challenges (Herrington & Кenyon, 2007). The integration of authentic learning into digital environments has enhanced its applicability in online and higher education, making it a pivotal method for modern educators (Herrington et al., 2014). By embedding learning in realistic contexts, authentic learning aligns with heutagogy's principles, promoting learner agency and self-efficacy through meaningful, contextualized experiences (Blaschke, 2019).

Combining these frameworks in the context of mobile social media creates a robust model for developing intercultural communication competences among CFL learners. The use of short video platforms like TikTok, Bilibili, and Xiaohongshu offers a dynamic environment for self-determined learning and authentic engagement

with diverse cultures. This approach allows learners to encounter real intercultural communication scenarios, enhancing their competence through experiential learning and reflective practice. By leveraging the strengths of heutagogy and authentic learning, it is necessary to establish a comprehensive framework that supports the development of intercultural communication skills in CFL learners within a mobile social media landscape.

Methodology

Design-based research (DBR) is an iterative approach focused on developing practical solutions and theoretical insights through real-world testing. Reeves (2015) highlights its application in addressing practical educational challenges while maintaining a strong emphasis on teaching methodologies and interdisciplinary perspectives. This study adopts DBR to create a mobile social media framework grounded in heutagogy for enhancing intercultural communication skills among learners of CFL.

The research unfolds in four phases: analysis and exploration, design and construction, evaluation and reflection, and iteration and refinement (See Figure 2). Initially, the analysis phase explores the relationship between heutagogy and intercultural communication within mobile social media contexts. It includes a comprehensive literature review and needs analysis to inform the subsequent development of the framework. Following this, the design phase conceptualizes and builds the initial framework prototypes, integrating heutagogy principles with mobile social media functionalities tailored to educational settings. Subsequent phases involve implementing and refining the framework based on real-world feedback, ensuring its effectiveness in fostering self-determined learning and intercultural communication competence among learners.
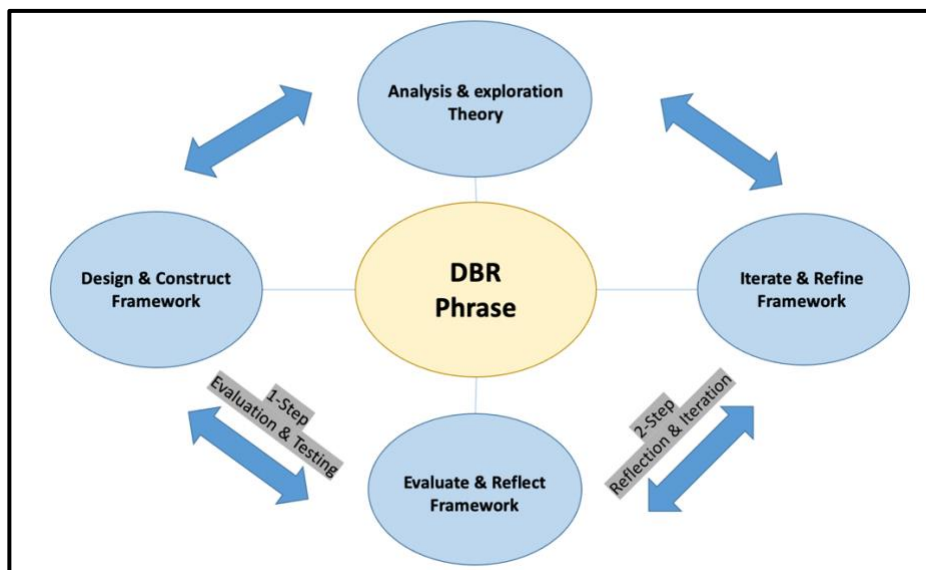

Figure 2. Research process

Data collection and analysis

Participants in this study will be CFL learners enrolled in Chinese universities, chosen for their involvement in International Chinese Education programs that emphasize intercultural communication (Larbi & Fu, 2017). Engagement metrics such as download/view counts on mobile social media platforms (e.g., Bilibili, YouTube, Xiaohongshu) will be tracked to capture insights into student learning and self-agency. Specifically, this study selected 60-80 CFL learners from four universities to track and investigate the help of mobile social media in their ICC training. The quantitative data will illuminate student engagement and reach in intercultural communication activities facilitated through mobile media. In tandem, qualitative analysis of students' posts and interactions on these platforms will reveal patterns of engagement and content dissemination dynamics. This mixed-method approach leverages observations within the mobile online space to authentically capture self-directed learning behaviors without imposing external influences.

For data analysis, the study will employ Activity Theory (AT; Engeström, 2001) alongside the Design for Transformative Mobile Learning framework (DTML; Cochrane et al., 2017) and the Pedagogy-Andragogy-Heutagogy Continuum (PAH; Luckin et al., 2010). AT provides a structured framework to examine learners' interactive processes in sociocultural contexts, crucial for understanding how mobile learning mediates intercultural communication outcomes (Rozario et al., 2016). Integrating DTML complements AT by addressing practical application gaps, focusing on transformative educational agendas and authentic learning community construction (Kearney et al., 2020). The PAH Continuum informs the progression from teacher-directed pedagogy to learner-driven heutagogy, essential for fostering learner autonomy and reflective practice (Blaschke & Hase, 2019; Moore, 2020). Additionally, the core literacy three-dimensional goals of Chinese education—knowledge and skills, processes and methods, and emotional attitudes and values—will be integrated into this analysis, ensuring the framework aligns with educational objectives in China and effectively supports the development of intercultural communication competence among CFL learners.

Conclusion

This concise paper outlines a proposed framework to foster intercultural communication competence among CFL learners through Heutagogical-based Mobile Social Media spaces. The study integrates qualitative and quantitative data analysis with Activity Theory AT and DTML-PAH framework to develop a tailored educational framework. By leveraging these methodologies, the research endeavors to advance understanding and practice in using mobile social media for enhancing autonomous learning and intercultural communication skills among CFL learners. Additionally, considering the ethical concerns regarding student privacy and cultural sensitivity, we will engage in discussions with course organizers at Chinese universities to ensure proper handling of these matters.

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