Teaching Chinese with Games: Knowledge, Attitudes and Experience of Teachers

Paul Martin
University of Nottingham Ningbo China
199 Taikang East Road
Ningbo, Zhejiang, PRC
+86 (0)574 8818000, ext. 8172
paul.martin@nottingham.edu.cn

Yanhui Zhang
University of Nottingham Ningbo China
199 Taikang East Road
Ningbo, Zhejiang, PRC
+86 (0)574 8818000, ext. 8876
yanhui.zhang@nottingham.edu.cn

Keywords

game-based language learning, Chinese, second language acquisition, CALL, ludic language pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

Scholars researching the use of games in second language acquisition have long-recognised the importance of the teacher in facilitating language learning through games (Miller and Hegelheimer 2006; Peterson 2013; York et al. 2021). However, the precise roles that the teacher plays in game-based language learning are currently under-researched (deHaan, 2021; Thanyawatpokin and York, 2021; York et al. 2021). This pending research program investigates the role of teachers in game-based language instruction in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in mainland China and the UK. The proposed presentation will focus on methodological and theoretical issues in the early phases of this proposed project, which aims to understand why teachers use or do not use digital games to teach language.

Attitudes, knowledge and experience of digital game-based learning are likely to be culturally specific. China has a regulatory environment that has been very hostile to digital games (Golub and Lingley 2008; Liboriussen, White and Wang 2016; Szablewicz 2020), and a longer tradition that has seen play as anathema to education (Martin and Song 2021). On the other hand, Chinese game companies have frequently turned to educational games as a means of selling games and game consoles as 'learning machines' (Liao 2016, 286). These factors are likely to create a unique context for the development or deployment of educational games.

Several researchers in game-based learning have warned against the assumption that a well-designed educational game can be deployed without any guidance from a teacher (e.g. Anderson et al. 2008; Caftori 1994; de Haan 2021; Halverson 2005; Kirriemuir and McFarlane 2006; Miller and Hegelheimer 2006; O'Neil, Wainess and Baker 2005; Peterson 2013; Ray and Coulter 2010; Thanyawatpokin and York 2021; York 2019, York et al. 2021). Teachers perform several important tasks in game-based learning

environments, including selecting appropriate games and scaffolding learning through pre- and post-play tasks that direct learner attention. Teachers who understand the full potential of games as educational tools, are committed to using games to their fullest, and are knowledgeable about different sorts of games are more likely to be effective in this 'pedagogical mediation' (Reinhardt 2019) or 'ludic language pedagogy' (York et al. 2021). There is some evidence from non-language learning contexts that teachers with little experience of games or game-based learning tend to use games in a limited way, as a means of making drill exercises more fun (Takeuchi and Vaala 2014) or 'more as a springboard to learning, than a means of learning in themselves' (Beavis et al. 2014, 577). Apart from lack of knowledge of games and game-based learning, teachers may also be sceptical about the effectiveness of games as teaching tools, and this may undermine their ability to make the most of the games (Gaudelli and Taylor 2011). Clearly, understanding the knowledge, attitudes and experience of teachers is an important first step in deploying games in a classroom context.

This project uses the theory of reasoned action as its theoretical framework (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). This theory proposes that people form an intention to behave in a certain way based on their beliefs about that behavior. These beliefs relate to their attitude, perceived norms, and perceived control. People will act upon their intention to behave so long as these beliefs remain in place when the opportunity to behave is presented. This model has been widely tested and found to be highly predictive of human behavior in a range of contexts. It has been used not only to predict behavior but also to design interventions that increase or decrease the likelihood of the target behavior by changing relevant beliefs.

Based on the research gap identified above and the theoretical framework of reasoned action, our research questions are as follows:

> 1/ What are the relevant beliefs that determine teachers' decision to use or to not use digital games to teach language?
> > 1a/ What differences in relevant beliefs exist between teachers of different languages (Chinese versus English)?
> > 1b/ What differences in relevant beliefs exist between teachers from different cultures (China versus UK)?
> > 1c/ What differences in relevant beliefs exist between teachers located in institutions in different countries (China versus UK)?

To answer the above research questions, we will follow a standard methodology in theory of reasoned action research for measuring beliefs and intended behavior. The presentation will discuss theoretical and methodological issues in using this approach to understand why teachers in China and the UK do or do not use digital games to teach language.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, T., Reynolds, B.L., Yeh, X. P., and Huang, G.Z. 2008. "Video Games in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom." In *Proceedings of the Second IEEE International Conference on Digital Game and Intelligent Toy Enhanced Learning*, edited by M. Eisenberg, M.C. Kinshuk, and R. McGreal, 188–192. Los Alamitos, CA: IEEE Computer Society.

Beavis, C., Rowan, L., Dezuanni, M., McGillivray, C., O'Mara, J., Prestridge, S., Stieler-Hunt, C., Thompson, R., and Zagami, J. (2014). "Teachers' Beliefs about the Possibilities and Limitations of Digital Games in Classrooms." *E-Learning and Digital Media*, 11(6), 569–581. https://doi.org/10.2304/elea.2014.11.6.569

Blume, C. 2020. "Games People (Don't) Play: An Analysis of Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Behaviors and Beliefs Regarding Digital Game-Based Language Learning." *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 33(1–2), 109–132. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2018.1552599

Caftori, N. 1994. "Educational Effectiveness of Computer Software." *THE Journal,* *22*(1). http://www.thejournal.com/articles/13354.

deHaan, J. 2021. "Is Game-Based Language Teaching "Vaporware"?" In *Digital games and language learning: Theory, development and implementation*, edited by M. Peterson, K. Yamazaki, and M. Thomas, 257–276. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (2010). *Predicting and changing behavior: The reasoned action approach.* Taylor & Francis Group.

Gaudelli, W., and Taylor, A. 2011. Modding the Global Classroom? Serious Video Games and Teacher Reflection. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 11(1), 70–91.

Golub, A., and Lingley, K. 2008. "'Just Like the Qing Empire': Internet Addiction, MMOGs, and Moral Crisis in Contemporary China." *Games and Culture*, 3(1), 59–75. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412007309526

Halverson, R. 2005. "What can K-12 School Leaders Learn from Video Games and Gaming?" *Innovate,* 1(6). http://www.innovateonline.info/index.php?view=article&id=81

Kirriemuir, J. and McFarlane, A. 2006. *Report 8: Literature Review in Games and Learning*. Bristol, UK: Futurelab.

Liao, S. X. T. 2016. "Japanese Console Games Popularization in China: Governance, Copycats, and Gamers." *Games and Culture*, 11(3), 275–297. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015583574

Liboriussen, B., White, A., & Wang, D. 2016. "The Ban on Gaming Consoles in China: Protecting National Culture, Morals, and Industry within an International Regulatory Framework." In *Video Game Policy. Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, edited by S. Conway and J. deWinter, 230–243. New York, NY, USA: Taylor & Francis.

Martin, P., and Song, W. (2021). "Gaming on Campus: The Promotion of Esports in Chinese Universities." In *Global Esports: Transformation of Cultural Perceptions of Competitive Gaming*, edited by D.Y. Jin, 281–296. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.

Miller, M., and Hegelheimer, V. 2006. "The SIMs Meet ESL: Incorporating Authentic Computer Simulation Games into the Language Classroom." *Interactive Technology and Smart Education*, 3(4), 311–328. https://doi.org/10.1108/17415650680000070

O'Neil, H.F., Wainess, R. and Baker, E.L. 2005. "Classification of Learning Outcomes: Evidence from the Computer Games Literature." *The Curriculum Journal*, 16(4): 455-474.

Peterson, M. 2013. *Computer Games and Language Learning*. New York, NY, USA: Palgrave Macmillan US. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137005175

Ray, B., and Coulter, G. A. 2010. "Perceptions of the Value of Digital Mini-Games." *Journal of Computing in Teacher Education*, 26(3), 92–100. https://doi.org/10.1080/10402454.2010.10784640

Reinhardt, J. 2019. *Gameful Second and Foreign Language Teaching and Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Szablewicz, M. 2020. *Mapping Digital Game Culture in China: From Internet Addicts to Esports Athletes*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36111-2_4

Takeuchi, L.M. and Vaala, S. 2014. "Level Up Learning: A National Survey on Teaching with Digital Games." New York, NY, USA: The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop. http://www.joanganzcooneycenter.org/

Thanyawatpokin, B., & York, J. 2021. "Issues in the Current State of Teaching Language with Games." In *Digital Games and Language Learning: Theory, Development and Implementation*, edited by M. Peterson, K. Yamazaki, and M. Thomas, 239–256. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.

York, J. 2019. "Kotoba Rollers Walkthrough: Board Games, TBLT and Player Progression in a University EFL Classroom." *Ludic Language Pedagogy*, 1, 58-114.

York, J., Poole, F.J., and deHaan, J.W. 2021. "Playing a New Game—An Argument for a Teacher-Focused Field Around Games and Play in Language Education." *Foreign Language Annals*, 54(4), 1164–1188. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12585