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CONTENTS

ARTICLES

ONLINE TEACHING: HOW WE DO IT

FACULTY FORUM

REVIEW

NEWS AND EVENTS

QUICK TIPS

TECHNOLOGY

GENERAL INFORMATION

THANK YOU

ARTICLES

In-school Peer-tutor Training Program: Students Supporting Students

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INTRODUCTION

Since the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) has issued new proficiency requirements; i.e., Levels 2+ (Reading), 2+ (Listening), and 2 (Speaking) on the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) rating scale, and the elimination of the evening study hall program, its undergraduate schools have implemented various academic measures to help students achieve these requirements and reduce academic attrition by increasing support for at-risk students. The Middle East School III (MEIII) has established an in-school peer-tutor training program that allows high-performing students to assist peers experiencing difficulties.

The peer-tutoring program has significant implications for MEIII student academic achievements. Moreover, poor academic performance negatively affects students' psychology, especially those who are young and new to the DLIFLC, without a strong self-efficacy in managing the demanding academic coursework, which may result in even poorer academic performance. Therefore, it is important to address their emotional well-being, an essential factor in the ability to succeed. Student attrition also has an impact on the institute because such failure may result in reduced funding and the eventual demise of the institute.

Various peer-tutoring programs have been implemented by higher education institutions. The programs vary in focus, depending on the institution's needs and objectives (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Noel-Levitz, 2015). At the DLIFLC, however, in-school peer-tutor training programs have not been adopted formally. The MEIII has designed and implemented a peer-tutor training program, which is based on established practice in the field of education.

This paper shares the MEIII's experiences in designing and implementing the peer-tutor training program, presenting ideas for faculty at other schools if they decide to implement and adapt similar programs. These ideas may help organize a learning community at the institute with the shared goal of students' success. The paper starts with brief reviews of the literature of relevant studies in 1) peer-tutoring programs in higher education, and 2) the training necessary for peer-tutor program to succeed. It then continues with a profile of the MEIII peer-tutor training

program, including the rationale, development, piloting, and current practice. Finally, the value and implications of this initiative are discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Administrators and educators in higher education have continuously strived to offer academic support programs, such as those involving the student resource center, tutoring program, and online study to increase student retention and academic achievement (Kram, 1983; Freedman, 1993). Such resources have been effective in assisting students to succeed in universities (Johnson, 2002; Pagan & Edwards-Wilson, 2002; Terrion & Leonard, 2007). The DLIFLC has also taken various innovative measures to promote student success. One beneficial mechanism common in higher education, but not formally conducted at the DLIFLC, is a peer-tutor training program. The civilian and military leadership at the MEIII collaborated to start a peer-tutor training program in which academically successful students receive training to teach and support low-preforming and at-risk students.

Research indicates that peer-tutoring platforms improve self-confidence, motivation, self-esteem, and academic achievement of both the tutor and the tutee. In language learning, such benefits lead to the tutees' willingness to use the foreign language in a friendly environment where they may converse at ease (Robledo, 1990; Sharif, Zakaria, Mansor, Nordin, Fong, & Mustafa, 2012).

Tutoring stimulates both the tutor's and the tutee's cognitive processes because it, as the interaction requires attention, motivation, review of the existing knowledge and skills, and finding ways to simplify, clarify, and provide examples of difficult or challenging concepts. This social interaction may increase students' language proficiency (Sharif et. al., 2012; Topping, 1996, 2005). Moreover, the mutual development of the experienced and the novice is a fundamental element of any learning environment. Based on these findings, peer-tutoring benefits the students involved, as well as the program, school, and institute's objectives, because students engaged in the process develop cognitive and communicative skills, higher-order thinking, and subject matter proficiency (Arco-Tirado, Fernandez & Hervas-Torres, 2019; Topping, 2015). Consequently, such interaction is understood as a collaborative and dynamic process, in which tutors and tutees participate in reciprocal learning that involves reflection, analysis, and problem solving (McGee, 1992).

Furthermore, for effective results, the literature specific to peer-tutoring indicates that peer-tutors need to possess multifaceted skills that can be taught, practiced, and mastered, leading to tangible academic and personal benefits for tutees (McGee, 1992; Pintrich, 2002). Derrick (2015) advocates for having tutoring techniques, which involve effective questioning skills and means for building rapport, as success in mastering the subject matter (e.g., a foreign language) and course requirements alone does not necessarily indicate an individual is a potential effective tutor or mentor.

Staub and Hunt (1993) contend that trained tutors have significantly higher success rates, and therefore, structured and ongoing training is an integral part of a successful tutoring program. Tutors need instructional skills, interactional abilities, evaluative and formative feedback skills that permit learner's engagement and content comprehension (Abt Associates, 2001; McGee, 1992).

In addition to higher education institutions, K-12 schools also have peer training and tutoring programs (Appleby-Ostroff, 2017), suggesting that tutoring is a standard practice across educational sectors. Established peer-tutor training programs are models for other institutions in developing content, structure, and practice. In fact, many established programs offer models, materials, guidance, and support in curriculum design and program delivery (Newton & Ender, 2010). Apart from research and guidance on peer-tutoring, many higher education institutes offer well-established manuals and criteria for the training of peer-tutors (Chandler-Gilbert Community College, N.D.; Goodlad & Hirst, 1990; Lipsky, 2011; MacDonald, 2000; Newton & Ender, 2010; Topper, 1996; PLTC, 2010).

Peer-tutoring, which is more than a casual conversation with a peer in a learning community, requires training and mentoring skills and an understanding of teaching and learning (Driscoll, 2000). Furthermore, tutors are not there simply to complete or assist to complete homework for learners (PLTC2010). For language tutoring programs, some universities have established guidelines for both tutors and tutees, such as the Center for Language Study at Yale University (Yale, 2020) and the Department of Modern Language Studies at Texas Christian University (AddRan College of Liberal Arts, 2020). These tutoring programs are examples of what universities offer foreign language learners.

The established standards of peer-tutoring in the educational field offers potential opportunity for learners at the DLIFLC. The following section describes the development and implementation of the MEIII peer-tutor training program.

PEER-TUTOR TRAINING PROGRAM

Rationale

Considering the 2+, 2+, 2 requirement and the elimination of the evening study hall, the MEIII has designed and implemented a peer-tutor training program since 2018, in coordination with civilian and military leadership and service units. The objective is to prepare high-performing students to later serve as tutors for low-performing students. This program is necessary because high-performing students may not be fully equipped to assist others in learning effectively, as they have only demonstrated that they have done well (Berman, 2017; McGee, 1992). The MEIII tutor training prepares tutors by improving understanding of basic teaching approaches, individual cognitive preferences, and learning strategies (McGee, 1992). Meanwhile, the school assists by matching tutors and tutees who are compatible, allowing tutors to become better mentors and effectively support, motivate, and encourage tutees to master language skills.

Program Development and Delivery

Phase I: The Development

The MEIII peer-tutor program was designed around the availability of students enrolled in the language program and their military schedule and requirements. As high-performing students

were not required to attend the seventh hour of instruction, that is when such sessions were scheduled.

The program was developed after a review of relevant practices at other higher learning institutions. Part of the Wellesley College's Peer-tutor Training Program's handbook (PLTC, 2010) addresses foreign language tutoring specifically (e.g., Spanish, and French). The training content of the Wellesley program consists of three parts: the principles of foreign language instruction (Berliner, 2001); the value of learning preferences (Driscoll, 2000); and teacher training design (Stolovitch & Keeps, 2011). The length of the Wellesley program is 10.5 hours. After completing the first three sessions (4.5 hours), trainees may start to tutor as practice tutors. To become formal tutors, students must complete another three sessions (4.5 hours) as well as a final faculty delivered training session (1.5 hours). Students may complete these three components within the first semester or before the end of the second semester.

Because of the intensive nature of the DLIFLC language programs and the urgency to offer peer-tutoring to low-performing and at-risk students, a decision was made to condense the peer-tutor training program to one week—a five-hour-long training workshop. After the pilot workshop, the content and the length would be evaluated, making any necessary adjustments.

Combining the Wellesley program's structure, content, length, and group size with the MEIII's language instructional curriculum and military unit requirements and logistics, the five-hour workshop engaged the would-be tutors in experiential activities, followed by a reflection on their learning experience.

Phase II: The Pilot

The pilot workshop was taught by the MEIII Academic Specialist in collaboration with the Chief Military Language Instructor (CMLI). Six workshops were conducted in six months. During those six months, the training workshop's structure and content were adjusted in accordance with the participants' evaluations.

Participants in the peer-tutor training program were first nominated by faculty, military, or participants themselves. Those selected had to meet the following requirements:

1) a GPA of 3.4 or above;
2) language modalities at B or above;
3) not on probation;
4) no disciplinary action or academic counseling;
5) enrolled in Semester II; Semester I students could be considered for sound and script tutoring support;
6) in the same military unit; tutor's rank higher than tutee's;
7) meet unit and command team standards.

When evaluating the workshop, participants continually requested hands-on opportunities to tutor at-risk students with the facilitator's guidance. This feedback was incorporated into the training workshop to include a one-hour session of guided, hands-on tutoring. The hands-on tutoring was later expanded to two hours, based on the trainees' request. Whereas the content (i.e., instructional approaches, learning styles, and learning strategies) remained the same, it was taught with less theory and more experiential activities. Moreover, the number of workshop

participants was reduced from 8-10 to 4-6 for each iteration. This provided more opportunities to engage in activities and receive better supervision and personalized guidance from the facilitator.

Phase III: The Finalization of Structure and Delivery

For more than 22 months, the MEIII peer-tutor-training program has been in the format of a five-hour workshop, offered during the seventh hour and taught by the school's Academic Specialist or the Faculty Development Specialist. The five sessions are:

Session 1: basic teaching approaches—inductive vs. deductive approaches, experiential learning, and dynamic interaction;

Session 2: personal profile characteristics—sensory input preferences, cognitive preferences, personality types, and motivational orientation;

Session 3: learning strategies—examining how to best match strategies to an individual's learning preferences; and

Sessions 4-5: hands-on practice peer-tutoring.

Before each session ends, a case study scenario (focusing on one language skill and a particular learner profile) engages trainees in small-group discussions to assess a tutee's needs. This is an informal assessment, indicating the trainees' understanding of key concepts. Based on the facilitator's observations, the trainees must score *competent* (from three levels—*competent, not-yet-competent, not competent*) in all three case study activities by the end of each session, before participating in the two-hour-long, hands-on practice of peer-tutoring. For *not-yet-competent* trainees, the facilitator holds a one-on-one meeting to assess areas needing further work, to help the trainee reach the *competent* level and progress to certification.

Outcome of the Training Program

Between June 2018 and May 2020, the MEIII peer-tutor training program trained more than 150 student tutors in face-to-face and virtual formats. The virtual training format has been added because of the COVID-19 restrictions. These trained peer-tutors have worked with more than 100 low-performing and at-risk students.

It is difficult to separate the benefits of peer-tutoring from those gained through one-on-one instruction with teachers, the seventh and eighth hours of instruction, and the special support from the school academic specialist, diagnostic specialist, and student learning services specialist. In other words, it is incorrect to correlate any improved results *directly* to peer-tutoring alone, like the situation whereby student achievement cannot be attributed separately and exclusively to the support from a teaching team, the multi-faceted support from the school, and the academic assistance within the service unit. Therefore, the success of a given student is the result of an individual's efforts, faculty support, school support, and institute-wide support.

Henard and Roseveare (2012) assert that excellence in education is achieved through interconnected efforts across an institution at the macro- (i.e., policy and wide-scale projects), the meso- (i.e., school/program design and delivery), and the micro-level (i.e., local initiatives that support teachers and students). Teachers are no longer only subject matter experts conveying

their expertise in an isolated classroom, but as those who should coordinate with all stakeholders within the team, department, and school to provide learning opportunities (Henard & Roseveare, 2012). To respond to this need, schools have adopted innovative teaching and learning approaches. Henard and Roseveare (2012) contend that one such mechanism is "[p]roviding guidance and tutoring to students with new means and methods" (p. 5). Additionally, the literature previously discussed (Chandler-Gilbert Community College, n.d.; Driscoll, 2000; Goodlad & Hirst, 1990; Lipsky, 2011; MacDonald, 2000; Newton & Ender, 2010; Topper, 1996; PLTC, 2010) highlights the increase of peer-tutoring as a valuable practice in higher education, making it vital in coordinated academic support.

To shed light on the positive impact of the MEIII Peer-Tutor Training program, qualitative data—personal accounts (case studies) from various perspectives, are offered. Tutors, tutees, teachers, Military Language Instructors (MLIs), and academic support faculty, who rely on various mechanisms to coordinate student support, describe their experiences in peer-tutoring.

Case Study 1: Student A

Student A, a Levantine Arabic student, volunteered early in Semester I to be an at-risk student in the peer-tutor training workshop, to be tutored in sound and script by a high-performing student. Student A was active in the workshop hands-on tutoring practice, and later was visibly active in communicating with teachers and diligent in class. In Semester II, Student A was taken off the seventh hour due to improved grades. Her performance was so successful that she was nominated for the peer-tutor training program and enrolled in it. She had valuable experience to share with voluntary tutees in the peer-tutor training workshop. This indicates that the peer-tutor training program, in conjunction with her efforts and school support, has played a positive role in her academic and personal development.

Case Study 2: Student B

Student B, enrolled in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) after successfully completing training in another language at the DLIFLC, participated in the peer-tutor training program. With his maturity, military experience, life awareness, and success in intensive language learning, he was a role model for younger and lower-ranking peers. His engagement went beyond tutoring language, extending to sharing previous and current DLIFLC learning experiences and offering valid suggestions. He often stressed how much he gained from the peer-tutoring training workshop, especially from its content. This shows that peer-tutoring provides a valuable learning experience for both experienced tutors and young learners.

Case Study 3: Student C

Student C, an at-risk Levantine student, volunteered to be a tutee for the tutor training workshop. After going through an Early Intervention Board, he was formally assigned a peer-tutor by MEIII. He worked with the peer-tutor over an extended period. Subsequently, he reported that his peer-tutor was not there merely to help him complete his homework, but rather understand how to address the gaps in his language foundation. The Academic Attrition Board, noticing his

improvement and hearing of his experience, assessed his additional needs and provided assistance. This shows not only the value of peer-tutoring, but also the efficacy of coordinated school and military efforts in employing the resources available through peer-tutoring.

Case Study 4: Instructor A

According to Instructor A, an Egyptian Arabic instructor, two high-performing students enrolled in the peer-tutor training workshop described, with enthusiasm, that the workshop had provided them not only the know-how to assist fellow students, but also an insight into their own learning. Both students were highly engaged in the workshop and afterwards tutored at-risk peers in the department. These students represent the way reflection can extend the value of training content to personal development. Their positive feedback raised the instructor's awareness so that other students might also benefit from the peer-tutor training.

Case Study 5: Instructor B

Instructor B, a Levantine team leader, requested a peer-tutor for speaking practice on behalf of a student who was not in academic jeopardy. The student was motivated in building her speaking proficiency. She took advantage of the seventh hour and split sessions, which enabled her to practice one-on-one speaking with teachers. Upon hearing Instructor B's request, the department chair secured additional support for the student. This points out the easy accessibility of the peer-tutoring resources at the MEIII, available not only for at-risk students, but also for successful ones.

Case Study 6: MLI A

MLI A, in Egyptian Arabic, was extremely active in coordinating peer-tutoring in the department, as she recognized the importance for providing student support after class hours in school or in the service unit. She, like other MLIs in the school, was proactive in recruiting and nominating high-performing students to participate in the peer-tutor training program. The MLI's support was a fundamental part of the successful operation of the peer-tutor training program. This demonstrates the coordinated civilian and military efforts in developing an effective student-support resource in the school.

IMPLICATIONS

A high-performing student, who understands how to effectively manage learning, cognitive, and personal preferences to succeed in learning, does not correlate to the ability to understand what peers need or prefer. Therefore, the MEIII in-school peer-tutor training program prepares peer-tutors by understanding basic teaching approaches, personal and cognitive preferences, learning strategies, and ways to match these when working with a tutee.

Tutors often become mentors, not only providing academic support, but also motivating and encouraging their peers who do not do as well. As both the tutor and tutee are in the same

course and may have struggled at times, the peer-tutor may have a better understanding of what the tutee faces. There are abundant instances where tutees benefit academically and personally from the support of assigned tutors who have received training. The peer-tutor training program has become a valuable and sought-after resource in the school.

The peer-tutor training program fosters skills of learner autonomy, self-initiative, and peer leadership, which students may draw upon when serving as peer trainers, advisors, and leaders. Some of the skills are included in life coaching, which may seem an odd concept in a military context, as life coaching is usually affiliated with entrepreneurs and business leaders. However, service members are trained to help others grow. A military linguist develops over time, and training proceeds long after graduating from the DLIFLC. A military linguist leader, regardless of rank, is also cultivated over time, and often the synergy of minor and various training experiences contributes to an overall understanding of teaching, communication, mentoring, and flexibility in working with a variety of individuals. Peer-tutoring has allowed students to practice how to identify and develop an actionable plan to achieve goals for peers in their class, unit, work center, office, or place of duty.

Moreover, the peer-tutor training program helps instill the concept of lifelong learning in many enlistees and reinforces it for experienced service members by exposing them to pedagogical and foreign language principles and applications. Because the peer-tutoring program undergoes a nomination and selection process based on criteria, participants may reflect on their learning experiences, and the awareness of their own learning may contribute to lifelong learning, which is voluntary, self-motivated for personal and professional reasons, and beyond the formal classroom.

Recently, peer-tutor training has been offered virtually because of the COVID-19. Similarly, peer tutors also must address the challenges brought by virtual peer-tutoring. Peer-tutors, like teachers, must consider screen fatigue after a full day of virtual instruction, while engaging tutees in on-and off-screen activities. This demonstrates students' learning autonomy, both the peer-tutors' and the tutees', who have devised alternative ways of accomplishing learning outcomes in the virtual environment. It also speaks highly of the qualities of dedicated foreign language linguists who remain flexible and creative as needs arise.

It is worth mentioning that the MEIII peer-tutor training program is based on a fundamental principle of the military services—acting as a force multiplier by using the available resources. In the MEIII context, the available resources are the high-performing students and their capabilities to stimulate the potential of their peers to achieve individual and institute goals.

Beyond its visible academic and personal benefits for tutors and tutees, the training program places responsibility, power, and accountability into the hands of platform teachers, school academic support individuals, and department MLIs, allowing them to make decisions regarding language practice. Additionally, with multi-service and civilian missions, the peer-tutor training program fosters military and civilian collaboration to meet at-risk students' needs.

Military institutions are often provided with directives from a macro level, but the shared-governance approach adopted by the DLIFLC offers various stake holders to *plan for learning* (Van den Akker, 2003), giving a meaningful role to all members of the institution. Mission goals are usually broad in nature, and therefore, school and "site-specific" approaches are needed to achieve the mission (Van den Akker, 2003). The MEIII in-school peer-tutor training program is an

example of how a shared governance approach may inform a site-specific need, positively impact macro- and micro-level objectives, and increasingly foster a collaborative environment.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that the MEIII in-school peer-tutor training program serves as an important tool to support and promote students' language proficiency in a less stressful, non-judgmental, and therefore, comfortable environment, in which tutors and tutees develop themselves academically, cognitively, and personally. The experience gained at MEIII, as well as the literature of such programs in other higher education institutions, indicates that this program can support students in achieving their academic goals in the DLIFLC context. With acquired skills and competences, tutors and tutees may develop abilities and skills to advance in their future careers. It is possible to expand peer-tutoring practice across the DLIFLC learning community by harnessing existing resources to better serve students and meet mission goals.

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The Role of Virtual Reality in Second Language Acquisition

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Target-country immersion is often presented as an effective way to learn a foreign language but entering an immersive environment with limited knowledge of the target language can be stressful. Indeed, many language learners lack the confidence to stay engaged, particularly when focusing on grammar and vocabulary simultaneously.

The challenge of providing a relevant immersive experience has recently increased during the transition from face-to-face to online instruction, further reducing the options for target-country immersion. A possible solution to maintaining language skills in a non-classroom environment is virtual reality, which will be discussed in this paper.

Virtual reality (VR) is a tool for replicating an authentic environment in which each student improves speaking, listening, and reading skills at his/her own pace. Indeed, the objective of virtual reality is to "bridge the gap between reality and abstract knowledge by the discovery method" (Lee, 1999, p. 72).

This paper will explain how virtual reality may create the immersive environment needed for students at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) to practice language skills. It will explore how language acquisition can be successful via the use of virtual reality. Finally, the VR tools available to the DLIFLC students as well as their possible implementation within the curriculum will be addressed.

VIRTUAL REALITY AND IMMERSION

The argument for contextualized language learning is rooted in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes the role of interactions between contexts and individuals in the acquisition process of a foreign language (Lan, 2020). Indeed, learning a foreign language in context transfers what one learns in the classroom to real life (Wong, Zhao, & MacWhinney, 2018).

In this regard, virtual reality is a computer-generated simulation of a three-dimensional environment that can be interacted with, physically, by a person using specific electronic equipment, such as a helmet with a screen or gloves with sensors. In Gabriel D. Ofeisch's words, "as long as you can see the screen, you are not in VR. When the screen disappears [...] then you are in VR" (as cited in Pimentel & Texeira, 1993). Steuer (1992) concurs by adding that VR is a simulated environment in which the perceiver experiences telepresence, where telepresence is the represented vividness and interactive involvement with the electronic display.

Thus, the sense of immersion manifests itself as images, sounds, and tactile sensations, while interactivity is added by coordinating display with the motion of the user's body. As

mentioned by Ryan (1999), the physical presence of the body, defined as the ability to navigate and interact with other virtual avatars through high-resolution graphics, reinforces the sense of physical presence in the virtual world.

Immersion created by VR also relates to the involvement of the user in a virtual environment during which awareness of time and the real world often becomes disconnected, providing a sense of being in the task environment instead (Radianti, Majchrzak, Fromm, & Wohlgenannt, 2020). Freina and Ott (2015) define this term as the perception of being physically present in a non-physical world by surrounding the user with images, sounds, or other stimuli, so that the user feels like being actually there.

The features of authenticity and immersion make VR an ideal tool to provide language learners with experience in manipulating and interacting with the objects in the VR environment when embodied cognition is simultaneously considered (Mohsen, 2016). In a truly interactive system, the virtual world must respond to the user's actions.

The high level of immersion allowed by the use of VR is currently being used in many different sectors: in video games, for medical training (diagnostics, robotic surgery), to resolve medical issues (in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder, pain, anxiety, and autism), for scientific visualizations (in astronomy and engineering), in construction (for architecture design and viability), in the fashion and automotive industry (equipment design and innovation), for military training (flight and battlefield simulations), and in tourism (virtual visits of monuments and museums). Recently, there has been an increasing interest in the pedagogical use of virtual reality. At the DLIFLC, it could have an even bigger impact, as our students need to be fully immersed in the language they are learning while deeply understanding the target culture, sometimes without having the opportunity to do overseas immersions.

VIRTUAL REALITY AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Virtual reality can be considered a student-centered learning method. In such an immersive environment, learners' senses are highly stimulated via auditory and visual components and the learner can rewind, skip, or pause the experience (Lin & Lan, 2015). The learner also interacts with a very patient computer-generated character that can repeat the input indefinitely. This method could also be linked to traditional teaching methods as it would allow teachers to pinpoint student needs to later address them individually. Virtual reality is appropriate for all students and particularly for shy students, due to its lack of face-to-face interaction with a teacher or classmate. The major advantages of implementing virtual reality in the language learning process are: low financial costs (a VR headset being less expensive than a stay in a foreign country); provide an authentic immersive environment; quickly strengthen listening, reading, and speaking skills; foster interactivity and culture learning; enhance problem-solving skills; increase confidence; offer superior cognitive outcomes and more positive attitudes toward learning than traditional teaching methods; and foster "intrinsic motivation, more intercultural awareness, and a reduction of the affective filter" (Schwienhorst, 2002, p. 230).

For Neville, Shelton, and McInnis (2009), virtual reality also combines communicative structures and sign systems as well as provides an experimental space to observe the important "interaction of linguistic forms and social meanings" that shapes culture (Kramsch, 1993, p. 11).

They analyzed virtual gaming-like immersion environments and the possible impact on vocabulary retention scores, demonstrating that immersive virtual environments have positive effects on learning outcomes, especially vocabulary. Of course, the effectiveness of such environment may depend on learners' specificities, language proficiency, and technology experience. Some students expressed frustration about the goals of the game and their inability to make noticeable progress within the game space, despite scaffolded hint features. Moreover, several students felt that the game was too difficult for their level of language expertise. But the inspiring conclusion was that all students participating in that study indicated that they would be interested in taking a course in which virtual reality would be used to teach a foreign language.

It is interesting to note that the 2017 study by Cheng, Yang, and Andersen sought to address whether VR could improve language acquisition, stimulate an interest in the target culture, and enable users to learn cultural behaviors. It focused on the cultural importance of bowing in the Japanese culture and how VR could teach learners when and how to bow properly. The results showed that 58.8% of participants felt more involved in the target culture. Most participants wrote positive comments on using VR to interact within a cultural context. Additionally, 17.6% reported feeling more immersed in the target culture when using VR. Another study also suggests that students retain more information and better apply what they had learned after participating in VR exercises (Krokos, Plaisant, & Varshney, 2019).

Regarding language performance, it has been found that VR is beneficial to vocabulary learning (Vázquez, Xia, Aikawa, & Maes, 2018), writing (Lan, Lyu, & Chin, 2019), listening (Lan & Liao, 2018), oral communication (Liaw, 2019), intercultural perception (Liaw, 2019), and autonomy (Yeh & Lan, 2018). Current literature highlights several positive effects of VR immersion on language learning and demonstrates that the learning activities are student-centered rather than teacher-dominated (Lan, 2020).

Overall, virtual environments are relevant and effective but should be carefully introduced into the curriculum either by scaffolding them into existing, more familiar, instructional approaches or by designing instruction around game experience so that activities can be seamlessly blended with classroom activities and homework assignments.

Virtual reality and Curriculum implementation

To evaluate if a virtual reality environment is relevant, efficient, and enjoyable for the learner, Reinhardt, and Sykes (2014) propose the factors to be considered when creating a language-related game, summarized in the reflection axis in Table 1.

Table 1

Elements to Consider When Creating a Language-related Game

Game basics	Game play	Game language
• How much language-based interaction is present? • What kind of feedback does the game provide to the user? • How does the game motivate the user?	• Are there levels? • How are the levels achieved? • What activities are involved (e.g., quests, etc.)?	• What kind of vocabulary is used? • What kinds of production choices does the user make? • What cultural elements are in the game?

Reinhardt and Sykes (2014) concluded by showing that a well-designed virtual environment should 1) provide goal-oriented activities; 2) distribute skills, knowledge, and resources unevenly to encourage social interaction; 3) adapt to the user and provide customized feedback; 4) situate activities in meaningful contexts, and 5) motivate learners by rewarding successful task completion.

A relevant VR environment should focus on input, feedback, notice, and output because each has an important role in the acquisition process. Indeed, a learner receives input and produces output based on understanding of that input. Game designers also understand that they cannot entirely control interactions, because it depends on the user, who may choose, at any time, not to interact (Atkinson, Churchill, Nishino, & Okada, 2007). Therefore, each portion of a virtual world, as well as the user in-game behavior, is interdependent in allowing for the relevant and pedagogical aspect of language learning through an interactive and immersive technological tool (Reinhardt & Sykes, 2014).

Several VR tools are available for practicing a foreign language at different levels. The following two platforms can be used at the DLIFLC in place of in-class instruction or as part of homework to complement language practice with real-life situations.

The first immersive tool is Mondly. It is available in 33 languages, including Spanish, French, Russian, Arabic, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Indonesian, Hindi, Hebrew, Persian-Farsi, and Thai. Three levels (beginner, intermediate, and advanced) are available for each of the topics currently on the platform. Topics such as Family, Countries, Travel, Animals, Weather, Sports, Airports, Hotel Reservations, Restaurant Ordering, Food, and Banks, can easily be used as homework during the first semester at the DLIFLC and for subsequent review. Like gamification, this platform also allows the user to garner points and awards during the pursuit of various language-related quests. Developed in partnership with the Oxford University Press, Mondly offers personalized grammar and vocabulary tips and more than 100 tests and 3,500 questions for the language. In addition to being available on desktop, it is also compatible with iPhones and iPads, allowing for the practice of language skills anytime, anywhere.

The second immersive tool is Immerse Me. It currently offers nine languages (including Japanese, Chinese, French, Spanish, and Indonesian) at three levels (beginner, intermediate, and advanced). Students proceed through four scaffolded learning modes: Pronunciation, Dictation, Translation, and Immersion. It integrates speaking and listening skills while providing relevant

vocabulary and grammar references. Hundreds of interactive scenarios are available for each language, among which are ordering food in a restaurant, buying a train ticket, etc. To ensure a realistic environment, Immerse Me filmed real-life discussions and interactions with native speakers, offering the highest level of authenticity currently available, with little to no computer-generated graphics.

Those immersive tools are dynamic and meaningful, and can easily be added into any curriculum, from Semester 1 to Semester 3, for both language practice and review, during or after class.

Conclusion

This paper has explained how virtual reality may create the immersive environment needed for the DLIFLC students to practice language skills. It has also presented available VR tools and the ways they may be implemented in the curriculum.

These platforms are easy to use and may motivate students who are already familiar with gamification. VR tools are ideal to utilize students' interests for the purpose of increasing language competencies.

As new technologies improve, virtual reality has become increasingly available to the public and educational institutions across the United States. It has relevant pedagogical implications, especially for language learners. For this reason, the pedagogical aspect of using virtual reality should be further studied and increasingly integrated into traditional language teaching to improve fluency, motivation, and confidence while learning a foreign language.

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ONLINE TEACHING: HOW WE DO IT

Creating an Online Learning Community Using *Microsoft Teams Wiki*

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WHAT IS WIKI?

Simply put, a wiki may be defined as a Web 2.0 platform where users collaborate to create, edit, and publish information, among which Wikipedia may be the best known. The word "wiki" has been underlined backronymed to mean "What I Know Is" (The Economist, 2006). While instructors once scour the internet for authentic materials to compile course content, using wikis, students now autonomously create much of their knowledge base themselves (Kurt, 2017). In this article, we outline the benefits of creating an online learning community by using wikis on *Microsoft Teams* and provide an example of creating synergistic learning activities that enhances sociocultural competence.

BENEFITS OF USING MICROSOFT TEAMS WIKI

Figure 1
Microsoft Teams Wiki

1.   Community and Collaboration

Even though *Microsoft Teams Wiki* is a minimalist app, with wikis, we can promote an online learning community that supports collaborative learning. Collaborative learning means that knowledge is created within an intellectual and academic community whose members actively interact with one another by sharing expertise. In this community, learners capitalize on one another's skills and resources, rely on and are accountable to one another for learning (University of Maryland, n.d.). Wikis "literally allow groups of people to get on the proverbial 'same page'" (The Economist, 2006).

2.   Creation and Critical Thinking Skills

By using wikis, students evolve from "consumers of knowledge" into "creators of knowledge," making a paradigm shift in the transformative learning era ("A wiki," n.d.). In this sense, wikis redefine the traditional teacher-student relationship by fostering learner autonomy and empowering students to apply critical thinking to create meaningful content collectively.

3.   Connection

Wikis are also excellent tools for forging quick connections between topics and concepts, which students would otherwise compartmentalize as distinct and separate. As we demonstrate in CHIN5400's sample activities, it is easy to link a wiki page to another page or section to organize content and cross reference information throughout a course. As Weinberger (2008) avers, "We are not in the Information Age. We are not in the Age of the Internet. We are in the Age of Connection" (p.445). Creating an online learning community by using Teams Wiki not only promotes linguistic and cognitive development but also sociohistorical competence by fashioning new neural connections with wiki hyperlinks (Vanderbilt University, 2020).

EXAMPLE: CHIN5400 HISTORICAL TIMETABLE AND AUTHOR WIKI

In this section, we highlight activities designed for CHIN5400, Modern Chinese Prose, as an exemplar for creating an online learning community by using wikis. CHIN5400 is an advanced reading course featuring the prose of prominent Chinese authors who advocate the May Fourth New Culture Movement (1915-1925). It presents various types of prose weekly, focusing on narrative, lyrical, philosophical prose, and essays. These works emerged during tumultuous social upheaval by political forces that eventually shaped modern China; subsequently, students need a solid grasp of sociohistorical knowledge to analyze the complex cultural, political, and philosophical issues that literary figures addressed in prose.

As the course consists of more than fifteen articles released across several decades—a few written by the same author at various times, having students collaborate on a timetable with a built-in author timeline is an excellent way to control their own learning by mapping out the intricate connections between the sundry authors and historical forces at play (Figure 2).

Prose Type 散文分类	Course Content 课程内容	
Week 1 Narrative Prose (people, events) 敍述性散文（記人、記事）	背影（朱自清, 1925） 一件小事（魯迅, 1919） 籐野先生（魯迅, 1926） 從百草園到三味書屋（魯迅, 1926）	
Week 2 Lyrical Prose (scenery, objects) 抒情性散文（寫景、寫物）	荷塘月色（朱自清, 1927） 春（朱自清, 1933） 失根的蘭花（陳之藩, 1957） 端午的鴨蛋（汪曾祺, 1981）	**Different types of prose written by the same author**
Week 3 Philosophical Prose 哲理性散文	路（艾雯, 1975） 時間（季羨林, 2002） 匆匆（朱自清, 1922） 謝天（陳之藩, 1961）	
Week 4 Personal Essay 議論性散文	敬業與樂業（梁啟超, 1922） 紅眼綠眼青白眼（朱琦, 2009） 最苦與最樂（梁啟超, 1919）	

Figure 2
CHIN5400 Course Content Overview
Note: Works written by the same author are highlighted in the same color.

There are various tools for reaching learning objectives, but *Microsoft Teams Wikis* is a user-friendly and efficient Web 2.0 tool that optimizes students' learning experiences for the Chinese course's specific goals. Figures 3 and 4 demonstrate the differences between students using *Lino* and *Teams Wiki* to create historical timetables. Although both *Lino* and *Teams Wiki* allow students to take turns updating the historical timeline with essential information, including the authors' background, writing styles, and the historical period that informed the work, *Lino* is more difficult to organize and compare information that demonstrates the intricate connections between authors and their works. As demonstrated in Figure 3, the timetable created on *Lino* is both difficult to read and organize. In addition, *Lino* has no hyperlink function to cross reference any information or resources that one may seek to add.

Figure 3
Historical Timetable Created on Lino with No Hyperlinks

Creating a historical timetable on *Teams Wiki,* however, has several advantages, as shown in Figure 4. On *Microsoft Teams Wiki*, students can work collaboratively to fill in the table with the information synthesized from conducting research, and then providing hyperlinks to cross-reference information that links to other wiki pages, making in-depth analysis much easier.

Figure 4

Historical Timetable Created on Microsoft Teams Wiki

Note: Students may add ✐ hyperlinks for in-depth comparative analysis.

By using *Teams Wiki,* students engage in critical comparative analysis on how their research relates to other timetable entries created by peers. In the comparative analysis section, learners exercise critical thinking to reflect on questions such as

- How did an author's writing style evolve? What are the sociohistorical factors that influenced that evolution?
- How did authors in the same era express their thoughts and emotions differently? Why did they proffer different solutions to the same issues?

Students may increase sociohistorical knowledge by inserting a hyperlink in any part of the timetable to cross-reference information and resources for further research and in-depth learning. For example, by inserting an "Author Wiki" hyperlink to the author's section, students can easily navigate to another wiki page and learn in detail about how historical movements and personal experiences shaped a writer's philosophical views and literary works (see Figures 4 and 5).
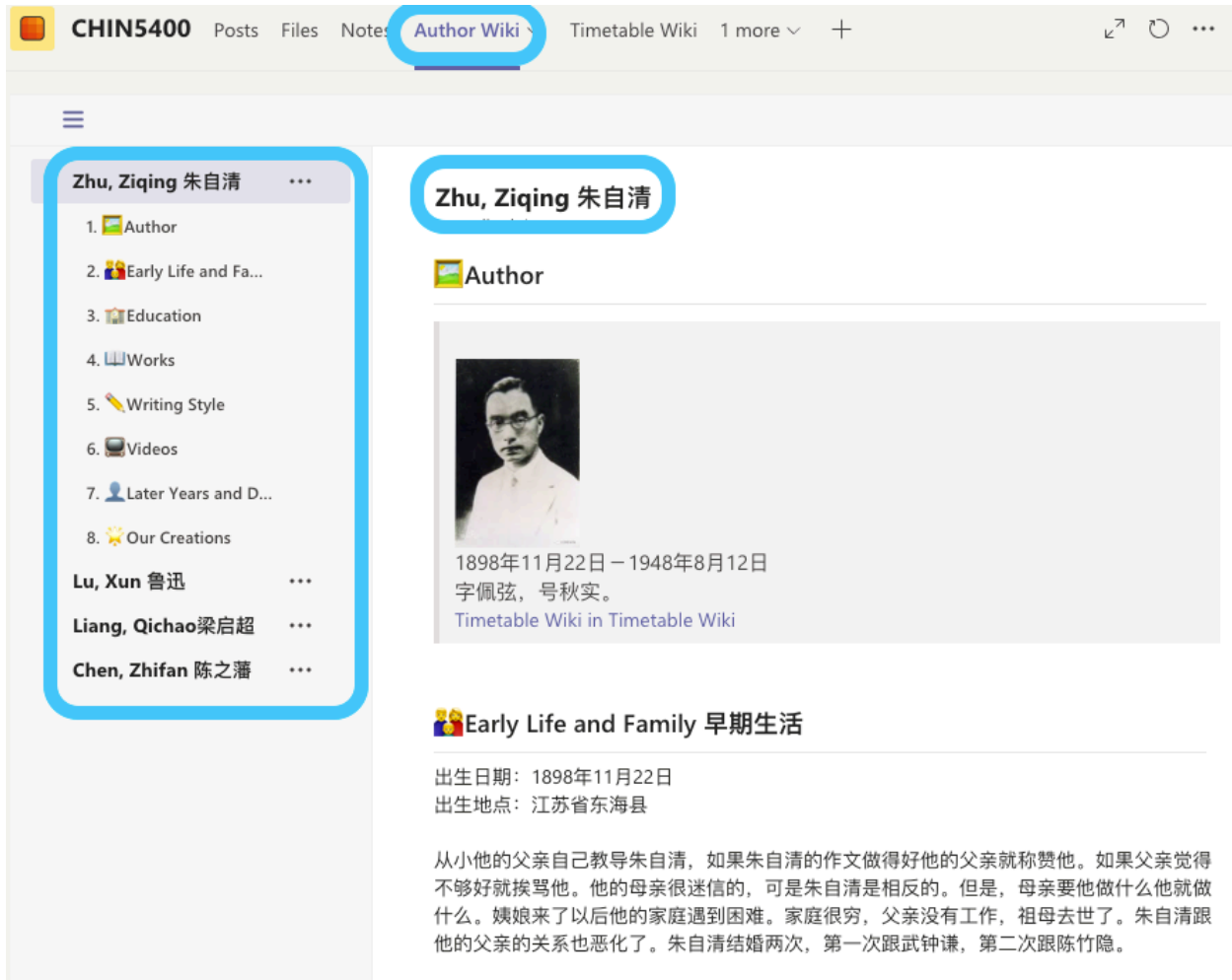

Figure 5
An Author's Wiki Page on Microsoft Teams
Note: Students created this Author Wiki page for Zhu Ziqing, a renowned Chinese poet and essayist, and cross-referenced it with other Wiki pages.

In addition, *Teams Wiki* offers a convenient platform for interacting with peers and instructors synchronously and asynchronously. By clicking the chat box in any of the Wiki sections, they may interact with one another, sharing views on points of interest and working together on problematic areas. In the example below, a student provided insights about two writers' approach to the father-son relationship and how the differences emerged in their writing (Figure 6). By clicking on "reply", students may exchange opinions, interpretations, and literary analysis either synchronously or asynchronously.
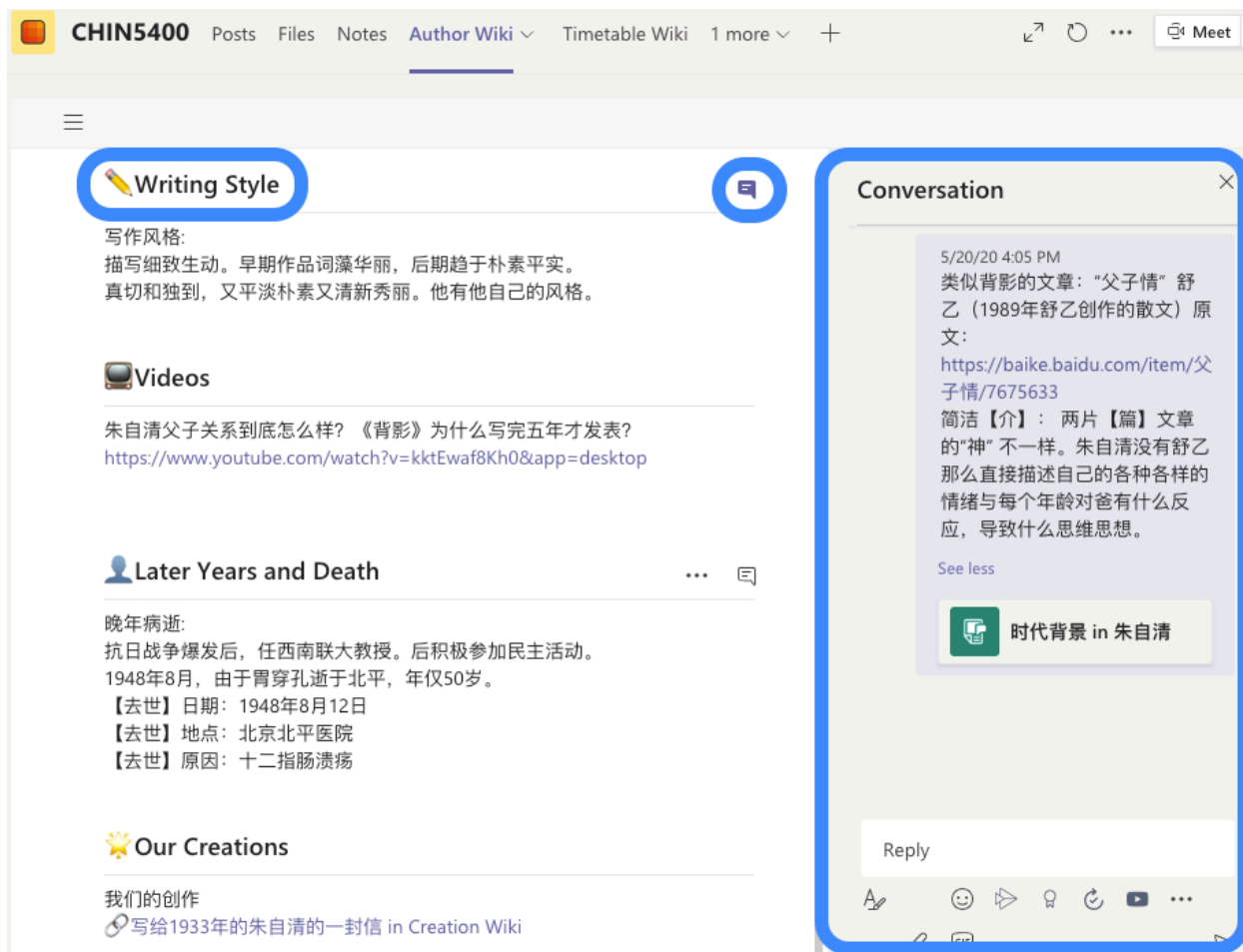
Figure 5
Conversation Box in the "Writing Style" Section of Author Wiki

REFLECTIONS

Navigating through CHIN5400 is like going on a fascinating journey where students become acquainted with several of the greatest modern Chinese writers by analyzing and interpreting their work. Those they encounter along this journey arise from a backdrop of complex historical events spanning several decades. Learners need to engage in critical comparisons, drawing constant connections among authors, historical periods, and philosophical movements, which helps them understand what they sought to convey.

Using *Microsoft Teams Wiki* to create a historical timetable and an author wiki collaboratively allowed students to cross-reference information synthesized from background research and promoted understanding of the content by weaving research findings into an intricate pattern of knowledge in a structured way. Wikis signify "the purest form of participatory creativity and intellectual sharing and represent 'a socialization of expertise'" (The Economist, 2006, p. 10-11).

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Using *Google Earth* and *Microsoft Sway* in Virtual Immersion

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INTRODUCTION

When instruction shifted online because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it became apparent that immersion activities in a face-to-face environment were no longer suitable. As an immersion specialist in the Middle East School II (UMB), I faced the challenge of adjusting the program to an unprecedented online teaching context.

I developed new activities and scenarios for online delivery. My primary objective was a virtual experience for students to apply what they had learned in class to real-life situations while maintaining motivation and engagement. Consequently, I sought to create an authentic virtual experience whereby students travelled to the target country and completed tasks by communicating in the target language.

Microsoft Sway and *Google Earth* were used to create new immersion experiences conducted in *Microsoft Teams.* One of the immersion activities was called a "Virtual Trip to Egypt" for Semester One students of the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) course in the Middle East School II (UMB), which is used as an example to showcase the virtual immersion activities.

OVERVIEW OF THE VIRTUAL IMMERSION ACTIVITY

The "Virtual Trip to Egypt" includes four tasks for booking a hotel reservation, renting a car, and making plans for two sightseeing trips to various Egyptian sites and locales. Each task starts in *Sway* with a brochure that features authentic reading and video clips, requiring students to navigate through the materials and make choices to complete each task.

The *Microsoft Sway* Brochure

The *Sway* brochure includes step-by-step instructions. For example, the hotel reservation brochure contains details and descriptions of four well-known Cairo hotels, including authentic readings and videos of the hotels (see Figure 1).
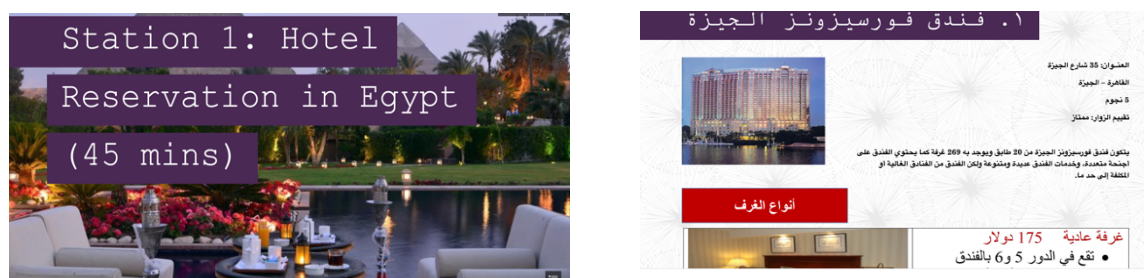

Figure 1
The Hotel Reservation in the Sway Brochure

Another example is the rental car reservation brochure that contains details and descriptions of three car rental companies (See Figure 2). The car rental information includes type of cars, model, rental rate, extra miles rate, the mileage allowed, and available colors.

Figure 2
Renting a Car in the Sway Brochure

As students navigate through *Sway*, they must collaborate and reach a consensus about hotel accommodations and car rentals, and then role play with a teacher as a reservation agent, negotiating the details/prices of the rooms and types of cars they seek.

Sway's advantage is its capability to allow users to store texts, photos, and videos in a single location. It lets the viewer watch the videos directly on the page, so there is no need to go to different sites or open other apps. Moreover, everything is organized and presented in a visually

appealing way—*Sway* does the formatting and graphic design, allowing those without training or skills to create a viable product.

Google Earth Project

After completing the first two tasks, students go from *Sway* to *Google Earth,* where they engage in planning two trips—a sightseeing tour of a famous site and a shopping trip to a traditional marketplace.

Google Earth whisks students across the world, allowing them to experience the local culture firsthand, see the sights, and hear the sounds. It is an interactive, immersive experience.

Students open the *Google Earth* Tour project, walking the streets of Cairo and exploring various tourist destinations. Every *Google Earth* project contains several slides with images and written information in the target language and about cultural history. Besides reading about each location, students can navigate in three dimensions, making it an immersive experience (see Figure 3). Afterwards, they discuss and select the sites they want to visit and make an itinerary. They then role play with a teacher who acts as a travel agent, finalizing the details of the trips.
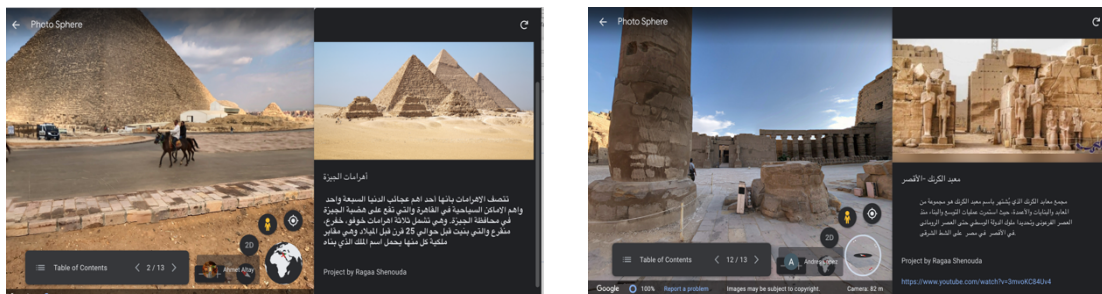

Figure 3
Google Earth Project of a Sightseeing Tour

An in-person immersion day consists of four stations hosted by teachers. Students go from one station to the next, making hotel reservations, renting a car, sightseeing, and visiting a traditional market. This format continues in virtual immersion.

Students are divided into four groups, each group completing one task at a time. The groups are rotated among the four stations every 45 minutes. Every group navigates through *Sway* and uses *Google Earth* to complete the tasks, and concludes with a *PowerPoint* presentation, by which they share their experiences, followed by an open discussion about travel and tourism.

IMPACT ON THE STUDENTS

From my observation, students work collaboratively with peers and teachers. They seem engaged when using *Sway* and *Google Earth* to complete the tasks. The activities motivate them, require that they use the target language, and give them the feeling of being in Egypt, walking its streets, and sightseeing. It also raises their cultural awareness of the target language culture.

So far, the feedback from the students and teachers has been positive and constructive. The students' comments focus on how the tasks encourage them to use the target language meaningfully, increase engagement, and motivate them. They also state that these activities expose them to real-life situations, which is beneficial for their language learning. As one student expressed it: "Virtual tours were a great way to experience places relevant to the TL [target language]. Honestly, it was very well thought out and I could tell there was a lot of effort put into it."

CONCLUSION

Despite the challenges presented by the transition to online teaching, with careful selection and use of technology, we can still provide students with a meaningful immersive experience. The virtual immersion experience has made us more competent and confident in using technological tools. *Microsoft Sway* is helpful in creating lesson plans and projects. It is a great presentations tool because we can leave design and layout to *Sway* and focus on content. *Google Earth,* on the other hand, is an engaging and open-ended app conducive to enhancing student motivation and interaction. Through *Google Earth* projects, students connect classroom learning to real-life scenarios. Technology tools make it possible for teachers to communicate with students who have grown up in the digital age.

Cultivating Reflective Learning with Digital Badge Reflective Journals

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INTRODUCTION

Reflective learning is a strategy that has been used by educators and learners in various areas, including the field of language teaching and learning. Students may engage in reflective learning as instructed by their teachers, but they often encounter multiple challenges. This paper proposes a digital badge reflective journaling system that overcomes various challenges and yields meaningful learning results. The framework, context, design, and benefits of this innovative system will be elaborated upon in this article, illustrated by student samples.

FRAMEWORK: REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Dewey (1910) first proposed the concept of reflective thinking or reflection. He posited that reflective thought is an "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and further conclusions to which it tends" (p.6). After Dewey's initial work, scholars have continued to develop the concept and proposed various models to capture the essential components or steps in the reflective process.

One of the well-known models is Kolb's learning cycle. Kolb (1984) identified four stages in the cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Learners need to become competent in all phases of the process to ensure complete learning. Another model was Gibbs's cycle of reflective learning. Gibbs (1988) added the element of feeling and emotion to the learning process and outlined six stages in the cycle, including descriptions of the event, feelings during the experience, evaluations of the good and bad, analyses of the situation, conclusions on what could have been done, and action plans. Both models represent a cyclical process, where learners engage in the cycle repeatedly as they gain new knowledge and skills and use them in new contexts.

Reflective Learning in Language Education

Based on these reflective learning theories and models, educators have incorporated reflective learning into the practice of language education. The ways to carry out meaningful reflection may vary. Some learners engage in reflective writing, whereas others resort to alternative forms or media. Writing reflective journals is a strategy adopted by many language learners. Researchers support reflective journaling as a successful strategy in foreign language education (Chau & Cheng, 2012; Chang & Lin, 2013). Through reflective journaling, learners examine their thought processes and knowledge construction with critical thinking and personal insight (Chang & Lin, 2013). Reflective journals written in the second language may also be an assessment of learners' language competence (Scott, 2005).

Context and Challenges

Because reflective learning provides many benefits in foreign language education, we decided to use reflective journaling as an alternative assessment to enhance learning autonomy in a 19-week-long, intermediate Chinese course at Hawaii LTD. Journal writing may provide significant benefits, but it also brings challenges. For example, students often do not know what to write in the journal, especially if they lack writing experience in their native language. Some students do not see the benefits of journal writing and consider it busy work with no tangible learning results. The biggest challenge, perhaps, is to make teachers' feedback more effective. Teachers often give valuable feedback to students' journal entries, but few students make good use of such feedback to improve learning.

DIGITAL BADGE REFLECTIVE JOURNALING

With these challenges in mind, we designed an innovative system of reflective learning by incorporating digital badges into journal writing, using a skill-focused approach. Digital badges are commonly used in education to promote *continued engagement* by supporting *skill acquisition through performance*, which motivates learners to achieve learning goals and objectives and provides recognition and validation of *skill mastery* and *levels of attainment* (Gibson, Ostashewski, Flintoff, Grant, & Knight, 2013). By bringing gamification elements into journal writing, we encourage students to accept new challenges while providing validation of their progress and achievements, boosting motivation to practice reflective learning.[1]

We designed digital badge categories by first identifying three core competencies essential to achieve higher language proficiency: discourse, sociocultural, and critical thinking. For each of the competencies, we provided a general competency description and three specific sub-skill requirements (see Figure 1). When claiming a new digital badge for reflective journals, students refer to the badge category and skill description and reflect on the degree of mastery achieved in each skill.

Badge Category and Skill Descriptions

Badge Category	Competency Description	Sub-Skills Required
Discourse Competency Badge	Ability to understand, create and develop forms of the language that are longer than sentences (stories, conversations, letters, …) with the appropriate cohesion, coherence and rhetorical organization to combine ideas.	1. Recognize and analyze the cohesion of the discourse structure, patterns, and sequence. 2. Decode coherence between the underlying ideas, logical organization, and development of the thematic content. 3. Identify and interpret rhetorical organization and effectiveness, style, register, and figurative devices.
Sociocultural Competency Badge	Ability to fully grasp customs, rules, beliefs and principles of TL society and its peculiarities. Appropriately apply the knowledge of the language features of social classes, different generations, genders, social groups, their habits, traditions, standards of behavior, and etiquette.	1. Examine and relate to TL country beliefs, customs, traditions, and habits. 2. Compare and contrast social identity perspectives and behaviors. 3. Evaluate and argue the influence and effect of philosophy, arts, and literature on values, ethics, and societal mindset.
Critical Thinking Competency Badge	Ability to discover and process information, draw conclusions, defend positions, analyze concepts, theories, clarify issues, solve problems, transfer ideas to create new contexts, explore implications and consequences.	1. Conduct research, present and justify the findings. 2. Scrutinize situations from multiple perspectives. Provide and support the argument. 3. Identify problems and create solutions to problems using novel methods and processes.

Figure 1
Digital Badge Categories and Skill Descriptions (Students refer to the skill descriptions when writing journal entries.)

Reflective Journal Structure

We require each journal entry to include the following four elements:

Element 1: Claim your badge. In each journal entry, students need to first state which badge they would like to claim and which subskill on which they would like to focus. A student may choose freely among the three badges and nine subskills, based on individual learning experiences.

Element 2: Share your experience. In this part, students describe the learning experiences associated with the badge and subskill they choose to claim. They can address issues such as the challenges they faced, the strategies that worked, the cultural or linguistic knowledge that sparked their interest, etc.

Element 3: Provide your evidence. Students must provide evidence from their coursework to support the claim. They can select any previous homework, research assignment, in-depth analysis task, or class project as evidence of subskill mastery.

Element 4: Build your strategy. In the last part of the journal, students list detailed strategies and plans for further improvement on the chosen subskill. As they repeatedly engage in this reflective learning cycle, their learning trajectory and metacognitive skills should improve by building on past and current work.

Student Samples

Figures 2 and 3 are journal samples from two students. Both were submitted during week 10 of the course. One student chose to claim a sociocultural competency badge, and the other a discourse competency badge. The reflective journal structure can be seen in the journal samples.

Figure 2
Student A's Journal Entry for Week 10

The following is a brief English translation of Student A's journal entry:

- *Claim Badge*: After ten weeks of study, I can use sociocultural competency to analyze and comprehend the article and the author's intentions.
- *Share Experience*: I use my background knowledge and my understanding of Chinese culture to predict the topic of the given material. For example, when I read an article about traditional holidays, I can use my existing knowledge to predict what activities may be described in the article. Besides improving background knowledge, learning Chinese culture, and enhancing sociocultural competency also help me learn vocabulary, especially Chinese idioms. For example, I started studying the *Three Character Classic* last year and used it to learn new vocabulary. Also, Chinese culture influences Chinese language too. For example, red represents popularity.
- *Support with Evidence*: During Week 10, we learned about the relations between China and its neighboring countries, which are heavily influenced by sociocultural factors. In Tuesday's homework, I used my background knowledge and sociocultural competency to analyze and understand the article regarding the South China Sea conflict. I was also able to articulate my opinions on this topic in my homework and contribute to in-class discussions.
- *Improve Learning Strategy*: My plan is to continue learning Chinese culture and Chinese society. I am also planning to take East Asian Studies as my college major, which includes many courses such as Chinese history and modern Chinese culture.

Figure 3
Student B's Journal Entry for Week 10

The following is a brief English translation of Student B's journal entry:

- *Claim Badge*: Through homework, class activities, and learning by teaching during the review week, I was able to analyze the context and identify the author's opinion and supporting arguments. In turn, I have made improvements in my discourse analysis competency.
- *Share Experience*: When I took the DLI courses, I learned how to identify the sequence of events using the five factors: who, what, where, when, and why. Practicing how to find the subject, verb, and object in a sentence also helps with comprehension. Creating the FLOW mind map helps me to categorize opinions and their supporting sentences.
- *Support with Evidence*: Through homework and class activities, I was able to connect keywords in each paragraph. These keywords are essential in explaining the main points of each paragraph. During the week of learning by teaching, to teach my fellow classmates, I was able to further analyze the logical sequence in a complicated article, simplify it, and make the main idea easier to identify. I emphasized the supporting arguments in each paragraph to help others easily see the main points of view. I also used mind map to demonstrate the article structure and show the coherence of the author's ideas. My project on Chinese medicine also showed my ability to extract useful information from multiple sources and create a presentation with a good flow and coherence.
- *Improve Learning Strategy*: I find it very beneficial to identify the subject, verb, and object in a sentence. I need more practice on analyzing complex sentences. I also plan to spend more time on learning different writing styles, genres, and figurative speech.

Journal Submission Cycle

Before engaging students in reflective journal writing, we provided detailed descriptions of each digital badge core competency, a clear journal writing structure, and a sample journal as guidance and scaffolding. Reflective journals were submitted bi-weekly. After the initial submission, teachers would evaluate the journal entry to determine whether the badge claimed was relevant to the shared experience and the coursework evidence was sufficient to support the claim. If the requirements were met, the badge would be awarded. Otherwise, the student would receive teachers' feedback for revision, and resubmit the journal the following week for re-evaluation. Figure 4 shows the timeline for the journal submission cycle. Because students were familiar with the collaborative learning website *Linoit.com*, we used that as a convenient platform to award digital badges. Each student had a *Lino* canvas to keep track of the badges awarded throughout the course. Figure 5 shows the digital badge section on our class's *Linoit* site, and Figure 6 displays the digital badges collected by one student.
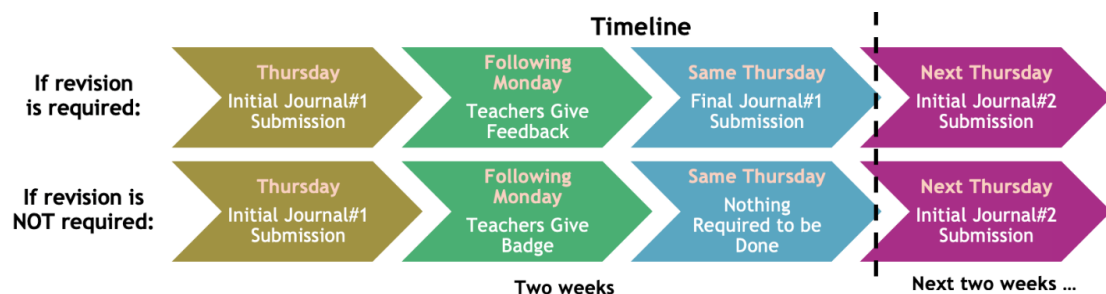
Figure 4
Journal Submission Timeline

Figure 5
Digital Badge Section on Linoit
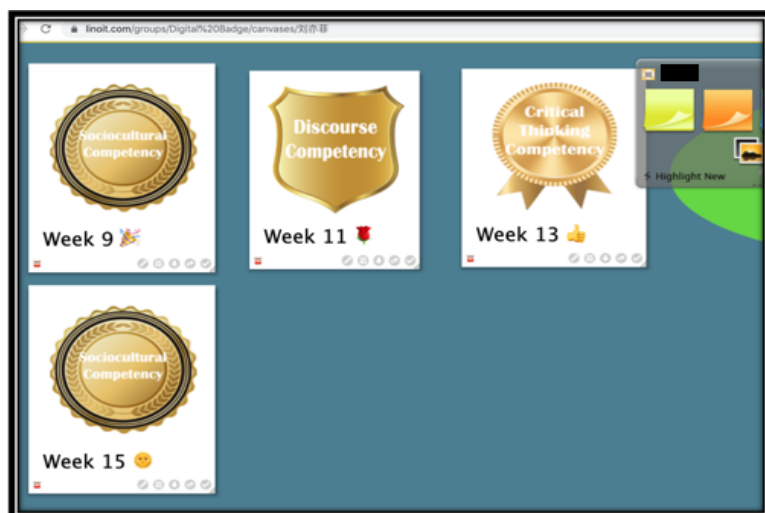
Figure 6
Individual Student's Digital Badge Canvas

DISCUSSION

Advantages

The digital badge reflective journal system offers several advantages when compared with traditional ones. First, its structured framework provides clear guidance and step-by-step instructions on how to engage in the reflective learning process. Second, our proposed submission timeline promotes personalized learning that can be tailored to the individual learning style, pace, and ability, providing struggling learners more flexibility and preparation time in the learning cycle. Third, it serves as an alternative assessment method that gives faculty a better idea of what students can do with the linguistic, discourse, and sociocultural competence. The digital badge

reflective journal system offers faculty valuable information. Moreover, it provides students with an opportunity to assess their strengths and weaknesses as they exercise critical thinking to reflect on learning and cultivate metacognitive skills. Having a better picture of where they stand, learners can formulate and modify study plans. Finally, its skill- and process-focused design makes it a sustainable and systematic reflective learning cycle. Rather than evaluating students only on writing skills, the innovative gamification approach makes writing reflective journals an integral part of reflective learning, systematically combining different phases in the learning cycle, encouraging cross-fertilization of the FLOs topics, and granting a sense of achievement.

Student Feedback

Students who graduated from the 19-week Chinese intermediate course in 2020 were able to claim the three digital badges by continuously engaging in the reflective journaling cycle. At the beginning of the program, a student who felt clueless about her learning strategies described her Chinese learning method as "trying to catch random raindrops from the sky with a bucket." At the end of the program, she was thrilled with her own growth, commenting: "I think it's greatly beneficial to write reflective journals that focus on specific skills. When I looked back at the homework, research, and projects that I have done, I needed to think about how these works showed that I had applied those specific skills. Then, it made more sense to me why I should develop and use these skills and how to proceed in the future."

As instructors, we have observed that students' self-awareness of thinking and learning process significantly improved as they clearly identified and articulated how, when, and why they might apply specific linguistic, sociocultural, and discourse analysis skills. In addition, they were enthusiastic about devising strategies to further their skills.

Vision of Lifelong Learning

As we have received positive student feedback and excellent learning outcomes from incorporating digital badge reflective journals into our Chinese intermediate course, we would like to share our vision of applying it in a larger context. Instead of documenting 19 weeks of language learning, what if we incorporate digital badges into an e-portfolio that tracks student learning progress and achievements from day one of their language training and throughout their careers as linguists? An e-portfolio is "a digital archive that documents the achievement of specified goals and learning outcomes within language learning. It also functions as an educational blueprint of learning opportunities in and beyond the classroom" (Lafayette.edu, n.d., n.p.). When learning is limited to students enrolled in a class, growth is limited. A digital badge e-portfolio is a useful tool to promote lifelong learning and trace the evolution of linguistic, discourse, and cultural competence throughout their careers.

As our vision is grand, we face the challenge of putting it into practice. First, we must expand our framework and design. The current subskills required for the digital badges were designed for students at Level 2 to Level 3. But if we include students from day one, we must include subskills below Level 2 and above Level 3. To expand the practice across the Institute, close coordination at many levels is needed. We should consider, debate, and address questions of ways

to standardize skill descriptions and assessment rubrics for different proficiency levels, as well as which platforms to use for a lifelong digital badge e-portfolio.

CONCLUSION

This article has elucidated the significance of reflective learning, as well as the rationale for incorporating digital badges into journal writing. It has also outlined the framework and design of our experiment, providing both short-term and long-term applications. The paper has also discussed the advantages and learning outcomes of digital badge reflective journaling. As the saying goes, "We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience." This article is the product of our collective reflection on how to cultivate reflective learning in language learners.

NOTE

1. Gamification refers to the use of "game-design elements" such as points and badges in non-game contexts. For instance, rewarding students who successfully demonstrated mastery of specific linguistic or sociocultural skills with digital badges would be an application of gamification in foreign language education to boost engagement and motivation (Walter, n.d.).

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Hybrid Teaching: Reflections and Ways Ahead

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INTRODUCTION

When COVID-19 impacted face-to-face teaching, all language schools and the Educational Technology and Development (ETD) Directorate provided training workshops to teachers on how to conduct classes through *MS Teams* effectively, including specifics for using its essential features, such as screen sharing, the whiteboard, the chat function, and creating/using sub-channels. Teachers were also trained to use *Padlet* and *Linoit*, to increase students' engagement and collaboration, and create authentic target-language interactions with peers and instructors. These tools were crucial for designing meaningful and interactive activities during hybrid teaching, tested during Phase 1 of the return to face-to-face instruction. In this article, we shall share how we adapted *Padlet*, *Linoit*, and *Google Poly* in our classroom, the benefits observed, the challenges we faced while utilizing these tools, and our solutions to those challenges. We conclude by sharing the takeaways and paths ahead.

OUR EXPERIENCE

In the Middle East School II (UMB), our team returned to in-person teaching when Phase 1 started. Due to extenuating circumstances, not all students were physically present in the class. Therefore, we had to adopt the hybrid teaching model. We tried to find the most effective way of employing *Padlet*, *Linoit*, and *Google Poly* during our hybrid lessons to maximize engagement, motivation, and collaboration. What follows is a description of how we implemented these resources.

Concerning reading and listening skills, we utilized *Padlet* and *Linoit*. *Padlet* was used for creating a wall, posting the instructions and questions, and uploading the video/audio/reading passages. We shared the wall with the students. Then we designated an answer box for students that allowed them to provide their answers. We also added another box beneath for the teacher and classmates to provide feedback. Students were required to read the questions, play the video/audio, or read the passage, and answer the questions. After they finished the activity, we asked them to provide feedback in the comment box. *Linoit* was adopted similarly; we posted notes that included the activity's instructions, the audio/reading passages, the questions, and boxes designated for the answers. Unlike *Padlet*, *Linoit* does not provide a shareable link to check activities. Therefore, we gave students credit for logging into *Linoit* and then had them open the activity, read the instructions, read/listen to the passage, and answer the questions.

As for speaking skill, *Google Poly* was used for 3D pictures and virtual reality. To make speaking more interesting, interactive, and engaging, we designed a Jeopardy-style game utilizing *Google Poly*. For this game, students, who were divided into groups, engaged in team competitions.

We divided the Jeopardy-style game table into categories matching the instructional topics, such as describing familiar places, buying a plane ticket, renting a car, culture, miscellaneous, and more. Because our students were in Semester I, we looked for 3D pictures applicable to the topics, including describing a person, a city, a room, or a house. We also searched for pictures that best represented the culture of Levant countries and had the students describe what they had seen in them. Students were also given more challenging tasks, including doing further research on a particular cultural site and providing more information about it in the target language.

BENEFITS

Padlet and *Linoit* were among the first application tools that we considered for our hybrid classes because they provided a platform for the students to post their answers and share them with peers. Given that teachers had to maintain social distancing while teaching, we could not move around to see every student's answers. *Padlet* and *Linoit* provided a platform for us to check student answers; by opening the apps on the main computer we were able to give feedback. As *Padlet* and *Linoit* are comparable in terms of features, we utilized both consistently to give students a chance to try various technological applications.

Furthermore, given that *Padlet* possesses many functions and tools for learning, we used it in homework assignments: reading, listening, and speaking activities, collaborative projects, and as a resource-gathering site. Research shows that, in addition to classroom instruction, asynchronous activities are important because they allow one to repeat and control the pace of learning, thereby reducing learning anxiety (Meskill & Anthony, 2015).

Google Poly has immense benefits. Students loved the idea of working with virtual reality, 3D pictures, and 360° images. Using *Poly.Google* in the speaking hour motivated the students to participate in class activities and speak more of the language. The 3D pictures, such as pictures of rooms and houses, allowed students to see the places from different angles. By doing this, students were able to provide more detailed and accurate descriptions of the pictures. When presenting pictures about the target culture, students also felt excited to learn more about the cities and look at real, 360° images of the Levant countries, which encouraged them to produce more language.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

We noticed that sometimes *Padlet* and *Linoit* were not consistently engaging and did not provide the kind of collaboration that the students needed to hone their language skills. After completing the assigned activity, writing down their answers, and then peer reviewing in the comment box, they did not practice speaking and discuss among peers. Thus, the online teaching may make students feel isolated.

Google Poly also came with different challenges. For instance, we noticed that it has limited resources (3D pictures and 360° images) for some countries and areas. As pictures were uploaded/created randomly, it was difficult to find pictures that matched our needs. *Google Poly* also requires a speedy internet connection. Given that students and teachers had many tabs open

along with the *MS Teams*, *Poly* could slow down the laptop and cause freeze-ups. Moreover, when the teacher shared the screen and put the image in the full-screen mode, the whole screen might freeze and the cursor would not move, making it impossible to see where the teacher was pointing.

To overcome these difficulties, we asked students to give peer feedback through *MS Teams* instead of writing the comments through the comment box. To give students more speaking tasks, we asked them to discuss the passages through *MS Teams*. Additionally, we paired one to two online students with one to two in-person students and had them join a separate call for a group discussion while leaving the speaker on. By doing so, the teacher could hear the discussions and provide feedback. Although this approach added another level of preparation for teachers, maximizing the synchronous activities in hybrid teaching was the best alternative to the classroom experience for those who could not physically join the class. Anecdotally, these activities helped reduce feelings of isolation.

Concerning *Google Poly*, we decided to use various online platforms to provide the same features as those of *Google Poly*. For example, *YouTube* could also present 3D pictures if we typed the word "3D" at the end of the search. We also used *Google Earth* to exhibit authentic photos of the target culture. As *Google Poly* does not possess map feature, we used *Google Maps* to practice giving directions. We also explored the use of *ThingLink*, a newer, more comprehensive technological tool equipped with features to facilitate oral presentations.

TAKEAWAYS

The abrupt transition from the traditional face-to-face classes to virtual/hybrid classes during the COVID-19 pandemic forced teachers to quickly learn and adapt new technological tools in their teaching. Research shows that well-planned and thoughtfully designed virtual/hybrid learning is not inferior to face-to-face instruction (Cavanaugh & Jacquemin, 2015). However, scholars warn that the current virtual classroom situation, warranted by a global emergency, should not be compared to well-planned online classes which may take up to nine months to effect (Moser, Wei, & Brenner, 2021). For that reason, we advise you to think it through, start slowly, and master one or two technological tools to increase asynchronous and synchronous interaction with peers, instructors, and content.

We believe that the silver lining for this pandemic is the enormous digital library of training workshops now available to all instructors. We urge you to watch training videos and tutorials and learn from other teachers when you can. Moreover, as in traditional classes, always have a plan B for implementation in the case of technological failure.

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FACULTY FORUM

Some Thoughts on a Flipped Class

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INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

What is a flipped class? A flipped class differs from a traditional class in that the content material is studied by the students independently before class, and the class time is used for learning projects and activities. The idea was proposed by Bergman and Dams, high school chemistry teachers from Colorado, who used recorded lectures in 2007 (Arnold-Garza, 2014). This innovative learning scenario has gained widespread popularity thanks to the capabilities of digital tools such as podcast (an audio file), vodcast (audio with video files), and pre-vodcasting materials, which are prepared by the teacher (iSpring, 2020).

Both the traditional and flipped classes have strong and weak points. Students in a traditional classroom work on homework independently, applying the information and instruction presented to them through lectures. From a cognitivist perspective, a lack of direct instructional guidance during the application process may result in cognitive overload, thus hindering students' storing knowledge in long-term memory (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006). In a flipped class, however, students devote classroom time to learning activities, focusing on learned content to solve problems in a collaborative setting with the teacher's guidance (Roehl, Reddy, & Shannon, 2013). From an educational psychological perspective, learning happens when the learner is actively generating meaning, instead of passively receiving information. According to Wittrock (1992), passive learners do not take the initiative in educational activities. Although students in different parts of the world may still *listen, memorize,* and *perform*, many traditional classrooms have incorporated various technologies, giving students more choices in learning.

It may seem that the phrase "Teacher is the King and God", widely accepted for centuries, has lost its significance in today's world. The teacher is no longer the central figure in the learning process. In the flipped class setting, students and teachers switch roles in the learning process. The teacher's role is still important, but has become less visible. Lecture time is freed up for the teacher to provide attention and assistance to specific needs.

Akcayir and Akcayir (2018) from the University of Alberta in Canada reviewed 71 studies to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of the flipped classroom. Tables 1 and 2 display the identified advantages and disadvantages, along with the percentage of studies from which the

themes are derived. The tables only include the advantages and disadvantages indicated in 10% or more of the studies.

Table 1
Advantages of a Flipped Class

Advantages	Percentage of Studies (N=71)
Improved learning performance	52%
Flexible learning	23%
Increased interactions	20%
Enhanced student satisfaction	18%
Enhanced student engagement	14%
Enhanced student enjoyment	11%
Individualized learning	11%

Table 2
Disadvantages of a Flipped Class

Disadvantages	Percentage of Studies (N=71)
Time consuming (teacher's perspective)	14%
Limited student preparation	13%
Poor video quality	13%
Time consuming (student's perspective)	11%
Increased workload (student's perspective)	10%
Inability to get immediate help/feedback	10%

Traditional lower-level learning, such as remembering and understanding, happens in the classroom, whereas higher-level learning, such as problem solving and critical thinking, is left to students out of class. The flipped class reverses this learning model. Figure 1 shows the scheme for organizing the flipped classroom according to a revision of Bloom's Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002), which means that students are doing lower level cognitive work (gaining knowledge and comprehension) outside of class, and focusing on the higher forms of cognitive work (application, analysis, synthesis, and/or evaluation) in class. Teachers must establish specific targets for the flipped approach. It is important to outline a plan of what to reinforce and enhance in learning activities, based on the knowledge and skill areas that students need to develop and grasp (Realinfluencers, 2016).
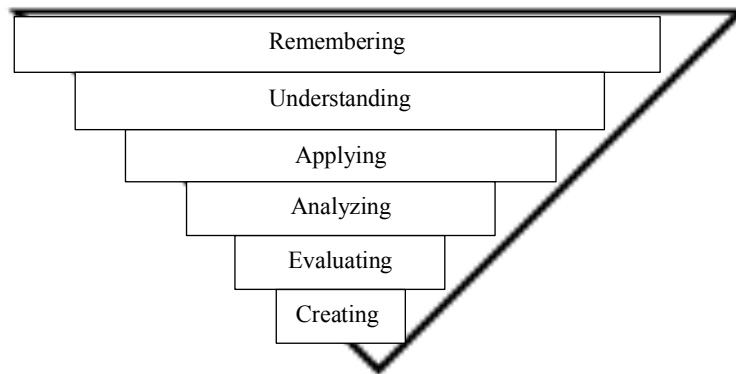
Figure 1
Revised Bloom's Taxonomy in the Flipped Classroom

The flipped classroom requires a high level of student self-discipline. The benefits include increasing students' awareness of responsibility for their studies because the better they are prepared at home, the better results they will have in class. Students learn the fundamental concepts on their own time and at their own pace, which helps those who need more time to process information. Students may also utilize digital content to explore knowledge beyond textbooks (EduSys, 2019). Engaging in active learning in class, students work individually, with a partner, and/or in group, which allows them to scrutinize one another's understanding of new material, identify weaknesses, and work on difficult areas.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR INSTRUCTORS

Be it a traditional or a flipped classroom, it is important for instructors to understand that their role is not just to present a new lesson, deliver content, and then administer tests. Their role is to create a learning environment for students to engage in independent cognitive activities (Markina, 2019). For foreign language instructors at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), the flipped approach presents opportunities to improve teaching. Below are several considerations for teachers who adopt the flipped class, followed by an example of a flipped lesson plan.

1. Prepare lesson plans and instructions. Poorly developed lesson plans and instructions may hinder the learning process. Use various instructional approaches.
2. Prepare audio, video, and SMART board material with group or individual work assigned, thus giving students an indication of what to expect in class.
3. Choose technology. Make sure that students know how to use it. Appropriate technology and the daily workload are very important. According to the DLIFLC 350-10 Guidelines, "The amount of homework assigned per night will not exceed three hours for the average student."
4. Monitor students to identify those in need of assistance. Address students concerns.

Module 3, Lesson 18 (Russian Basic Course)

Topic: Department Stores, Shopping.

Grammar: The genitive case to express absence; the genitive case to express possession and non-possession in the present, past, and future tenses; the genitive case of singular nouns following the numerals 2, 3, and 4.

Resources to be used:

1. Smart Board (SB) material prepared by the instructor
2. Material retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdknk8kJT3Q

The student's responsibilities to prepare for class are the following:

- learn the new vocabulary of Lesson 18 in the textbook
- study the Smart Board material
- watch the video and write down examples of the genitive case
- read and learn the grammar material in the textbook
- apply the new grammar by creating sentences or composing a small passage that includes the new words of the active vocabulary based on the examples in the video lesson
- enter stress marks on the words of the discourse material by using the following link:
  https://morpher.ru/accentizer/?fbclid=IwAR1IJVKZE2B4layLCoTi9g-ghnLSIUrnj8OGGZ5iYmRwai7pwpJTFG_fQ3E

After studying the topic, students should:
- know the lexical items of the topic
- be able to apply grammar material appropriately (ex. 3, p. 25, Student Workbook Homework Assignments)

Instructor's responsibilities:
- assign homework
- supply appropriate material
- correct homework
- conduct feedback in class by identifying errors and providing explanations
- reinforce the material with additional exercises (Exercise. 2, p.122; Exercise 4, p.123; Exercise 7, p.125 in the textbook)
- reflect on improving the material

CONCLUSION

Knowledge that is actively acquired is retained better than that learned passively. By rearranging the lesson, replacing passive perception with active, we can almost double the time

for the development of active perception (Nikolaeva, 2018). In essence, the concept of the flipped class is about active involvement in the learning process. Flexibility, adaptability, ability to work independently, in teams, and self-education are factors contribute to successful learning.

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Reflections on Emergency Remote Teaching

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The year 2020 brought with it an array of challenges to educational establishments all over the world, resulting in the need for online teaching. This transition has focused attention on several technological, methodological, and psychological issues. Although online learning is not new, it is impossible to disregard the distinction between the regular practice of online learning and the emergency remote teaching caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, and Bond (2020) state that everyone involved in this abrupt migration to online learning must realize that such a crisis also disrupted the lives of students, staff and faculty.

Technocratic communicating with students by programs like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Blackboard, and their attendant microphones, cameras, and an Internet that periodically malfunctioned caused considerable complaint. According to Loeb (2020), Schroeder (2020), and Palmer (2020), the periodic disruptions of instructors' lesson plans, resulting from the unavailability of the Internet and electronic equipment, have a negative impact on students' motivation and teaching efficiency. Blum (2020) states that when she sees students' isolated faces on her computer screen, she loses the sense of interacting with the class, making it difficult to implement student-centered teaching and learning. She also notes that the technocratic character of the virtual classroom inhibits students' exchange of opinions. The reason for this is due to the time it takes to adjust to different teaching and learning processes.

In addition, some instructors are alarmed by the characteristics of synchronous and asynchronous online learning because their presence in the classroom during the working day is more limited when compared to the time available for regular classroom teaching. In the opinion of Hodges et al (2020), however, asynchronous activities may be more reasonable than synchronous ones. Instructors tend to agree with the above opinion if taking into consideration that a combination of asynchronous and synchronous hours opens a wide range of possibilities for flipped learning, which Bergman and Smith (2017) define as the operating system for the future of talent development. Christensen, Horn, and Johnson (2011) see in the flipped learning or disrupting class, as they call it, the possibility to critically intensify the process of knowledge acquisition by providing every student with an opportunity to apply an individual learning strategy. The efficiency of the flipped classroom in language acquisition is demonstrated in a study of an elementary German language course for Australian students (Tonkin, Page, & Forsey, 2019). During the asynchronous hours the students learned rules and did grammar exercises; then, in the synchronous hours they performed task-based activities in the target language. Similarly, students of more advanced levels master the material through reading, listening, and watching audio-visual fragments during the asynchronous hours, and are engaged in scenarios, role plays, discussions, presentations, and other hands-on activities in the synchronous hours. Moreover, flipping the classroom means handing various technological operations over to students, allowing instructors to concentrate on methodology.

Online teaching involves many technological issues. One of the challenges is that the instructor cannot see all students at the same time on the monitor. For example, the Blackboard software used by the Language Training Detachments (LTDs) at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) for intermediate and advanced courses, allows an instructor to see only four students on the computer monitor at a time, even though a class usually has six to eight students. Microsoft Teams, used by the Basic Course, allows the instructor to see six to nine students, which may be adequate for monitoring the work of one group, Group A or Group B. However, because Groups A and B regularly gather in some instructional hours, the joint class may have 14 students or more. Subsequently, every student periodically appears on, or disappears from, the screen during a synchronous hour. Some students exploit this, as mentioned by Drew (2020), hiding from the instructor when seeking to be left alone. Unobserved by the instructor, they may eat, babysit, keep house, or attend to chores unrelated to their studies.

One student confessed to the author of this article that he had hid from his teachers because he felt exhausted. This student considered the Russian Basic Course the most severe punishment in his life. Studying at the DLIFLC meant that he had to learn a constant accrual of new words and complete steadily more difficult homework. His academic experience at a public high school had not prepared him for such a regimen. During the asynchronous hours he had to struggle with the incredibly complicated assignments. In addition to the regular synchronous hours, the instructors offered him individual assistance, but he was incapable of absorbing the information at a rate to which he was accustomed. Fear and frustration coalesced to the point that he knew no other option than avoidance.

This is certainly an extreme case. Most students are responsible for their academic studies and can manage their learning. Nevertheless, the avoidance sought by students is a cautionary tale; that is to say, online teaching software must be carefully chosen, always keeping the number of students in mind. Another possibility is to match the number of students in a group to the number of the chosen software's capacity to display them on the screen.

When transitioning from the regular to the online classroom, instructors should realize that it may affect the efficiency of certain classroom techniques. It would be erroneous to assume that all classroom activities may be transferred automatically. For example, the pair work practice in a regular classroom may lose efficiency in an online classroom. In a regular classroom, the instructor walks around the classroom, keeping an eye on the whole class and offering immediate support to any pair when needed. In an online classroom, pair work requires separating each pair by placing them in a virtual breakout room. To monitor the activities of each pair, the instructor must go to various virtual rooms, which takes more time than in a regular classroom. In a group of eight, an instructor must observe four virtual rooms. As the instructor works with a pair in one room, the other three pairs are left without assistance. In other words, if 20 minutes of pair activities are conducted and the instructor spends five minutes with one pair, the others are bereft of any assistance or monitoring for 15 minutes, and that amounts to 75% of the pair activities time. Many students, when left alone, relapse into English, reducing the time spent on the target language.

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The emergency remote teaching, caused by Covid-19, has brought many changes to the teaching and learning process due to the advantages and disadvantages of technology. Despite

the negative reactions of some instructors and students to the temporary alteration, the emergency online language education compels instructors to adjust methodological techniques and to learn about the principles of online education. This may have a positive effect on the success of online education in the long run.

Asynchronous and synchronous hours open the possibility of flipped class, where mastering language materials during asynchronous hours prepares students for the task-based creative activities in synchronous hours.

The following methodological recommendations may be beneficial for the success of synchronous hours:

1. When choosing software such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or Blackboard for a group, the number of students in the group should be taken into consideration so that the instructor can always see every student.
2. The pedagogical techniques used in the virtual classroom should not impede the instructor from monitoring the entire group. Therefore, the practicability of certain techniques such as pair work should be evaluated.

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Reflection on the Teachings of Mindset: The New Psychology of Success

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Mindset: The New Psychology of Success (updated edition) by Dweck (published by Ballantine Books in 2016), is an eclectic reading that addresses the power of beliefs about learning and intelligence and derives interest from educators, parents, and leaders. The main idea is that mindsets drive change. The author posits that individuals display characteristics of either a fixed or a growth mindset. Growth mindset is based on the belief that qualities can be nurtured through efforts and strategies, whereas a fixed mindset is centered on the assumption that qualities are immutable. Also, although genes influence our aptitudes and talents, these attributes are not predetermined at birth and do not remain constant throughout our lives. On the contrary, the individual can change with the right mindset.

SUMMARY OF THE BOOK

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success has eight chapters that comprise three main topics. The first three chapters focus on the definition of mindset, different types of mindsets, how mindsets change, the role of positive and negative reinforcement for mindset change, and how mindset alters the meaning of failure and effort. These chapters set the foundation of the mindset concept. More importantly, they discuss the connection between mindset, feelings of being judged, and self-improvement. The next four chapters address the interest of different audiences: Chapter Four is on the mindset of champions from the point of view of sports; Chapter Five focuses on the effect of mindset on business leaders; Chapter Six addresses the impact of mindset on relationships; and Chapter Seven deals with messages about success and failure as enunciated by parents, coaches, and teachers. Chapter Seven is of interest because of its relevance to our work and the support we provide to the students at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC). The final chapter discusses the concept of change and the sustainment of a growth mindset through examples and analyses.

REFLECTIONS AND APPLICABILITY

We recommend this book to colleagues, especially those who work closely with students. Mindset impacts how students view language learning, peer interaction, and teacher correction. The author posits that mindset is a powerful belief that predominates learning and success. As such, it is important to cultivate a growth mindset in students.

At the DLIFLC, the concept of mindset is officially introduced to students during the Introduction to Language Studies week when a brief assessment determines where they stand in

terms of mindset. Mindset may be peripherally evaluated and revisited again for students in need of Diagnostic Assessment, in the form of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ)—a 44-item instrument that uses a 7-point Likert scale. The results of this inventory show where students are in terms of controlling learning beliefs, which reflect their dominating mindset. The information also provides instructors with ideas for strengthening growth mindsets and creating a learning environment that motivate students.

For students, a fixed mindset leads to avoiding language learning challenges, giving up easily in the face of setbacks, feeling threatened by the success of other language learners, and ignoring the teacher's feedback. In contrast, a growth mindset leads to developing language skills by embracing challenges of language learning, persisting in the face of setbacks, viewing effort as a key to mastery, learning from criticism, and feeling inspired by the success of other language learners. Mindset is the fundamental ingredient of success in language learning and requires constant effort and growth (Lou & Noels, 2019).

The author also asserts that a learner's mindset weighs heavily on attitude toward learning. It is known that the learners' belief systems and metacognitions are important for intellectual performance (Schuster, Stebner, Leutner, & Wirth, 2020). Many studies have investigated the relationships between attitude and language proficiency (Dewaele, Witney, Saito & Dewaele; 2018; Rashid & Jabbar, 2017; Seker; 2016) and have found that attitude is as important as aptitude for language achievement. Attitude to languages and to the learning of a specific language has long been known to correlate with success (Getie & Popescu, 2020; Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). Many investigations of attitude focus on the various conceptions of motivation. In many scholarly works, attitudes and motivation are conflated, but attitude to language learning should be regarded as a subset of motivation, as stated by Mitchell and Myles (2004).

The correlation between attitude and motivation is emphasized in *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. The author states that students with a growth mindset show high levels of interest when the work becomes more challenging, whereas those with a fixed mindset tend to regress when the task increases in difficulty. Lamb (2017) substantiates the claim that motivation plays a crucial role in various areas of language learning; among these are learners' control, the teachers' role, developing learner autonomy, individualization, increasing opportunities for communication, and digital technology. Al-Hoorie (2017) has advocated that motivation develops through interaction with various events in one's life, focusing on integrative-oriented motivation in second language acquisition.

We also concur that using growth-oriented praise improves the growth mindset. It does not mean we only praise students' success, good grades, and talent in language learning. Instead, we should appreciate effort, concentration, and effective study strategies. In a growth mindset, grades are not seen as the ends but the means to continue to grow. In addition, research suggests that praise of students' intelligence only may undermine motivation and performance (Glerum, Loyens, Wijnia & Rikers, 2020). Inappropriate use of motivational strategies such as immediacy behaviors may also negatively impact student motivation (Christophel & Gorham, 2009). As a result, implementing motivational strategies, such as helping learners develop an internal sense of control and improving their language-related values and attitudes, may enhance motivation correlated with the growth mindset. On the other hand, as posited by Haimovitz and Dweck (2017), if the learner is taught to see failure as the debilitating focus of their performance and ability,

rather than the learning process, they tend to believe that intelligence is fixed rather than malleable.

Additionally, we appreciate the ideal learning environment portrayed by the author where all students fulfill potential. Teachers with a fixed mindset create an atmosphere of judging, but those with a growth mindset create a nurturing environment by providing an atmosphere of affection and genuine concern. When students cannot do tasks that others can, the gap may seem unbridgeable. Teachers with a growth mindset help students identify gaps and give them tools to bridge them. In such an environment, teachers grow along with students.

A limitation of the book is the simplicity in which it discusses how individuals show either fixed or growth mindsets. Learners often appear to have fixed or growth mindset traits in various areas of learning. Interventions, such as suggesting strategies to help students translate a growth-mindset belief into practice, may motivate them to develop the proper mindset (Lou & Noels, 2000).

CONCLUSION

We have reflected on and discussed the concepts emphasized in Dweck's book about mindset exploration, considering its potential to transform individual beliefs about oneself. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* has contributed to our understanding of mindset change and its implications for teaching and learning. By examining the elements of changing from a fixed to a growth mindset, we have gained insights on how our own views of failures and success may hinder our development or empower us.

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Implementing the New Iraqi Curriculum: Lessons Learned

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INTRODUCTION

Work on the new Iraqi curriculum for Semesters Two and Three began in January 2020. After the Iraqi Curriculum Development (CD) Team met the deadline of September 2020, the implementation of the new curriculum started in November 2020. In this paper, we—a teacher and a curriculum development team member—will discuss implementing the curriculum in the classroom, focusing on its strengths and weaknesses with reference to its pedagogical framework. We begin with a brief description of the main objectives of the new Iraqi curriculum, then focus on the challenges faced by the teaching teams in achieving those objectives, the approaches to overcome the challenges, and the three takeaways for future practices.

THE PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

To achieve learner autonomy and higher-order thinking, the Iraqi CD team adopted the principles of instruction outlined by the educational researcher and teacher M. David Merrill (2002). The five core principles are the following: 1) activating the student's background knowledge through lead-in activities; 2) explaining skills through example or visual demonstration; 3) promoting learner engagement by solving real-life problems; 4) applying what is learned through interactive problem-solving and task performance; and 5) integrating knowledge into the learner's daily life so that they can see how that knowledge leads to real-world benefits.

The Iraqi curriculum includes seven units, each containing three chapters, with each chapter including five lessons. The structure reflects Merrill's instruction principles. For example, listening passages in Semester Two are preceded by a lead-in activity and followed by a production activity. The lead-in portion activates the student's background knowledge whereas the production activity provides the opportunity for students to use what they learned in a meaningful way. Iraqi-Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic are presented through authentic reading and listening passages, totaling 750 for Semester Two and 330 for Semester Three. Each chapter concludes with a two-hour block of instruction for a task-based scenario that requires students to work in teams to solve a real-life problem. Moreover, the new curriculum tasks students to conduct independent research on the chapter topic and present the results to the class. By doing so, students integrate acquired language and cultural knowledge with individual interests and needs.

STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES FOR TEACHERS

When implementing the new curriculum in Semester Two, teachers first faced the challenge of presenting vocabulary. Its presentation took too long and reduced the time to conduct other activities such as listening, reading, and language production exercises. The new curriculum gave us ideas for presenting vocabulary more effectively. Unlike that of Semester One, the new curriculum for Semester Two does not include a vocabulary list for each listening and reading passage at the end of the chapter. Semester One ends at Unit 5, and Semester Two begins at Unit 6, which includes vocabulary-in-context activities for listening passages, helping students figure out English meaning from contextual clues. These activities gradually disappear as they progress.

Adopting the approach of teaching vocabulary in context, teachers spent more time on preparation. Utilizing materials already familiar to the student, we introduced new vocabulary in context and emphasized authentic language use. This approach was more effective because we demonstrated the new vocabulary while directing students' attention to the ways vocabulary is used in the passages. In addition, we began instructing students to preview the next day's passages to identify necessary vocabulary. We also enlisted the help of our school's student learning specialist who introduced students to strategies aimed at previewing new material to identify key terms. After two or three weeks into Unit 6, we began to notice that vocabulary presentation at the start of the lesson took less time, leaving enough time to complete one of the two production activities within each lesson.

Because the new curriculum is composed entirely of authentic listening and reading materials, the transition from Semester One to Semester Two requires a period of adjustment, particularly in dealing with authentic listening material. Semester One ended with shorter authentic listening and reading passages, targeting the Interagency Language Roundtable (IRL) levels of 1 and 1+. When starting Semester Two with the new curriculum, students encountered authentic listening passages, all at the ILR levels of 1+ and 2. The ascendancy to the ILR levels took about two weeks to adjust to hearing authentic speech lasting 30 to 45 seconds. During the adjustment period, it would have helped if teachers had had more training in motivating students.

In Semester Two, each chapter concludes with a flipped lesson, requiring students to complete a Universal Curriculum and Assessment Tool (UCAT) module and a task-based lesson based on a real-life scenario before the next day's class. Having proficiency-based activities embedded in the curriculum is a strength because the activities offer teachers more level-appropriate and ready-to-use activities, saving time in finding supplementary materials. In addition, students at the ILR 1+ or higher enjoy learning autonomously through the flipped classroom and task-based activities. These students are thriving and well on their way to reaching higher language proficiency.

Whereas most students benefit from the flipped lesson, underachieving students are not always able to complete the tasks independently, resulting in less classroom participation. It seems that the new Iraqi curriculum has not taken into adequate consideration of the plight of underachievers. To overcome this challenge, we incorporated group activities during class by teaming up students with various skill levels. As the curriculum is designed to promote cooperation and teamwork, it was easy for teachers to organize group activities.

STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES FOR STUDENTS

One month into using the new curriculum, the Iraqi CD Team conducted sensing sessions in December 2020 with students in the two Iraqi teams that had implemented the new curriculum. Student feedback was generally positive, but also highlighted challenges similar to those observed by the teaching teams.

Overall, students agreed that the new curriculum allowed them to become more autonomous in learning through its new structure, organization, and features. They highlighted the benefit of the materials' authenticity, quality, and quantity. They appreciated the frequency of grammar lessons, the diversity of the content topics, and the well-organized homework activities that prepared them for the next lesson and enforced what they had learned. Additionally, they found the journal-writing and speaking activities in the homework useful, letting them use what they had learned. Students enjoyed the task-based project at the end of the chapter where they chose a presentation topic related to the chapter's topic. It gave them the opportunity to expand learning of the topic through independent research, personally selected materials, and presentation of findings in class.

The sensing sessions also compared the new way of presenting vocabulary with the old way of providing a glossary list at the end of the chapter. Most students agreed that the new way of introducing vocabulary, though more challenging, was more beneficial in the long run, allowing them to create their own vocabulary lists and classify vocabulary according to personal preference, better preparation for their future work as linguists or, as one student commented, "no one will give us a vocab list on the job."

The most common challenges for students were 1) adapting to the volume of authentic passages; and 2) completing all lesson activities within the class hour. Students agreed, however, that this became less challenging as time passed, which could be attributed to the teachers' adjustment to introducing the new material and improvement in time management.

TAKEAWAYS

The three major takeaways are the following:

1. Preparation is key. Although we always prepared for class, the new curriculum required additional preparation time. Because it was new, teachers must familiarize themselves with the new materials. Preparation also entailed timing each activity, be it listening or reading, and considering that the pace of the virtual class tends to be slower than the traditional in-person class;

2. Teachers must keep in mind that the new Iraqi curriculum for Semester Two demands guiding students through a rise in ILR levels. The shift to a higher level required the teachers challenging and helping student to advance, and keeping them motivated. It is crucial to involve student learning strategists and early intervention specialists, especially at the start of Semester Two. It is therefore helpful for those preparing to teach the new curriculum to receive training in the means of motivation; and

3. The projects and task-based scenarios required teachers to incorporate group activities into lesson design. Mixing and matching students at different skill levels may allow underachieving students to participate more in class, thereby reinforcing motivation.

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Share Your Teaching Ideas

In

Dialog on Language Instruction

REVIEW

Culture General Guidebook for Military Professionals

(2017). By Kerry Fosher, Lauren Mackenzie, Erika Tarzi, Kristin Post, & Eric Gauldin. Quantico, VA: Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning. Pp. 233.

Reviewed by **David Masters**, *University of Texas at San Antonio*

In an increasingly globalized world, the need to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and communities is well-explored in the literature (Sands & DeVisser, 2015; Ucok-Sayrak, 2016; Alexandra, 2018). In *Culture General Guidebook for Military Professionals*, Fosher, Mackenzie, Tarzi, Post, & Gauldin (2017) synthesize academic discourse on culture and military professionalism in a text which presents principles in cross-cultural communication, intercultural communicative competence, and culture-general practices, interspersed with vignettes describing US military engagements from service members' perspectives. Fosher and Mackenzie, the principal authors, have published in this field before, examining cross-cultural competencies and training in the military (Fosher, 2014; Mackenzie & Wallace, 2014) and translational research in the Marine Corps (Fosher, Lane, Tarzi, Post, Gauldin, Tashev, Edwards, & McLean, 2020).

Although the authors' primary audience is military personnel, they also note applications for educators seeking to enhance their curricula with effective and explicit multicultural instruction. The authors assert that by focusing on generalizable concepts and skills associated with culture writ large (a *culture-general* approach, as developed by Brislin, 1986) rather than attempting to fully understand the region-specific and culture-specific patterns and behaviors associated with a given group, educators and service members may correctly contextualize the diverse array of experiences in unfamiliar intercultural settings. Throughout the book, the authors address the tendency for cultural education in the military to involve static and stereotyped portrayals of culture, encouraging those in the military to think critically and exercise self-awareness and introspection during cultural interactions.

The book consists of three chapters and a series of appendices. In the first chapter, the authors introduce terms and highlight deficiencies in the existing theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing culture employed by the US military's various branches. The authors critique the longstanding dissociation between social sciences and the Department of Defense (DoD) and its use of outdated and ill-defined terms and concepts, including *culture* itself. They define culture as "the creation, maintenance, and transformation of semi-shared patterns of meaning, sense-making, affiliation, action, and organization by groups" (p. 11), and through this lens, they identify several ways that understanding culture may manifest. Whereas specific knowledge (region-

specific or culture-specific) of a community's practices may be useful for addressing specific security concerns and patterns of behavior, the predictive capability of such knowledge is severely limited by the diverse array of human action and interaction.

Nothing that while these attempts to categorize culture may be more effective for observational notetaking or reporting in certain military contexts, the authors caution against viewing or representing cultures as monoliths, stating that "these patterns of meaning and behavior do not appear out of thin air" (p. 12) and highlighting the need for the military to adopt a culture-general foundational framework instead. This framework is the "underlying thinking concepts, content areas, and skills that help you be better consumers and users of available information" (p. 9). Applications of culture-general frameworks have been explored by other researchers (Bhawuk, 1998; Smith, Wasti, Grigoryan, Achoui, Bedford, Budhwar, Lebedeva, Leong, & Torres, 2014; Degens, Hofstede, Beulens, Krumhuber, & Kappas, 2016). The authors aver that the following chapters will discuss the concepts and skills involved in the approach which allow one to make sense of, and act effectively in, unfamiliar sociocultural settings.

Chapter Two describes *holism*, *variation*, and *change* as foundational concepts to recognizing cultural differences and contextualizing behavior within a culture-general framework. In discussing the need for the military to take a holistic perspective, the authors describe the interconnectedness of human sociocultural situations, such that action in one area can lead to unanticipated consequences when actors hold only limited or superficial views of those with whom they work. Variation and change are further presented to demonstrate that manifestations of culture vary across space and time, therefore individual actors must not be assumed to act according to a snapshot of monocultural ideals or principles. They remind readers that "the local people have not organized themselves, their beliefs, or their behavior patterns for your convenience" (p. 23). This is particularly important not only for the military but also for educators working with US military populations, as supported in Bjørnstad & Ulleberg's (2016) analysis of the individualism-collectivism cultural construct relating to military organizations.

Given this broad, conceptual framework for understanding culture, the authors discuss categories of behaviors that a community may display. The categories include the ways that its members interact with one another and the external world. Despite the authors' thesis that service members must develop culture-general awareness to mitigate intercultural conflict, the book includes frequent problematic generalizations about "Western" or "US military" tendencies and behaviors. Phrases such as "in the United States people tend to think…" appear multiple times without any clear rationale or justification. In doing so, the authors perpetuate monolithic cultural ideologies (Hollins, 1990; Vatsyayan, 2002; Flache & Macy, 2011). Particularly disconcerting is the fable-vignette of the banker and the fisherman (p. 95), which is presented as a means of contrasting approaches to leisure and work between a pan-Western attitude (portrayed as industrious) and a generically "African" attitude (portrayed as less industrious). Fosher (2017) has previously spoken about the need to adopt an academic communicative style to the needs of the military populations by whom she is employed. As such, the authors may have chosen to employ these generalizations to appeal to what they perceive to be a less open military population. However, this generalization appears to underestimate the openness of military communities and individuals.

Moving from the conceptual frameworks, Chapter Three discusses the *thinking skills* in a culture-general framework to correctly interpret a cultural situation as observed through the conceptual lenses presented in the previous chapter. The authors discuss necessary macro-level skills (observation, suspending judgment, self-regulation, perspective-taking, and intercultural communication skills), and then frame the skills in common military practices for ease of understanding. For instance, the observation of the physical landscape is compared to the cultural landscape, with the example of military routine military foot patrols to illustrate the need for attention to detail in cultural contexts.

These macro-level skills can be encapsulated under the broader skill of *metacognition*, as it relates to cultural intelligence and experiential learning, as described by Gulistan Yunlu & Clapp-Smith (2014), Van der Horst & Albertyn (2018), and Morris et al. (2019). This "thinking about thinking" (Earley & Gibson, 2002, as cited in Van der Horst & Albertyn, 2018) is a critical component of cross-cultural coaching. The authors have included techniques for applying these metacognitive skills in Appendix C (pp. 207-230), with specific applications for lesson planning, discussion topics, classroom activities, and supplemental materials for developing cross-cultural competencies. Many activities are easily adapted to classroom settings to encourage students to think carefully about intercultural interactions.

Overall, the book is a layperson's guide to thinking about culture while avoiding academic jargon that may make the text less accessible. It is disappointing that despite the authors' description of the nuanced differences between cross-cultural competence and other similar terms like intercultural competence or cultural capabilities, they have not addressed the differences in depth. Although they state that the guidebook will "generally use cross-cultural competence" (p. 10), no clear definition is provided in the book. Another weakness is the date of the source material's release, as the median source year is 2006—eleven years prior to the book's publication. In military contexts, the proximity of this median year to the events surrounding September 11th, 2001 and the ensuing conflict in the Middle East has impacted the text's content, as demonstrated by many vignettes referring to US counterinsurgency operations in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Whereas *ethnocentricism* is on display in several places, the vignettes presented generally fail to demonstrate the many layers of meaning beneath surface observations of communities, presenting some as more primitive and fundamentally inferior. From this perspective, the very ethnocentricism and ethnosuperiority the book seeks to disparage are reinforced by the authors. A specific example is in the vignette discussing Marine-provided land-navigation training in a Middle Eastern country. Although the Marine who observed an unwanted behavior among the trainees recognizes the rationale for this behavior, he still reports it. The vignette closes with the statement that "because he understood their actions in context, he was no longer frustrated" (p. 108). This centers the topic on the Marine's emotional reaction and its resolution as the priority rather than on the positive recognition of the cultural signifiers within the situation.

Nevertheless, the accessibility of this book to a wide audience and its message of self-awareness and rejection of stereotypes provide a clear outline for military engagement with foreign cultures. It presents a path forward for educators to incorporate culture-general principles into their curricula. This book calls readers to challenge their ethnocentric attitudes and develop ethnorelativistic cultural humility, as cross-cultural competence is a two-way responsibility

between instructors and students (Varga-Dobai 2018; Colibaba et al., 2020). It is not enough for the onus of managing these competencies to rest on students alone. Instructors should actively work to understand the student populations and model culturally sensitive behavior, recognizing points of cultural difference for either implicit or explicit instruction as needed. In this capacity, the *Culture General Guidebook for Military Professionals* provides effective guidance for bridging cross-cultural divides, strengthening the learning experience, and building cultural metacognition in readers.

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NEWS AND EVENTS

Headstart2

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Headstart2 is an eLearning product created by the Technology Integration Division (TI) of the Educational Technology and Development (ETD) directorate at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC). It is an interactive, self-paced course designed to introduce users to the daily communicative interactions and culture of the target language. It provides a unique opportunity for immersion in real-life scenarios using state of the art technology. The interface is user-friendly with simple instructions. *Headstart2* may be accessed with laptops and mobile devices at https://hs2.dliflc.edu/index.html or DLIFLC.edu, under eLearning.

Each language course consists of two basic units. Unit One, Sound and Script, introduces learners to the basics of the target language and enforces concepts through various interactive games. Unit Two introduces learners to real-life scenarios that align with military training. The scenarios range from basic communication with locals to conducting investigations and gathering intelligence. Activity tasks integrate games, audio, video, text, and avatars to reinforce learning concepts. Activities also provide instant feedback, letting learners know if they responded correctly. Feedback offers linguistic and cultural tips as lessons progress.
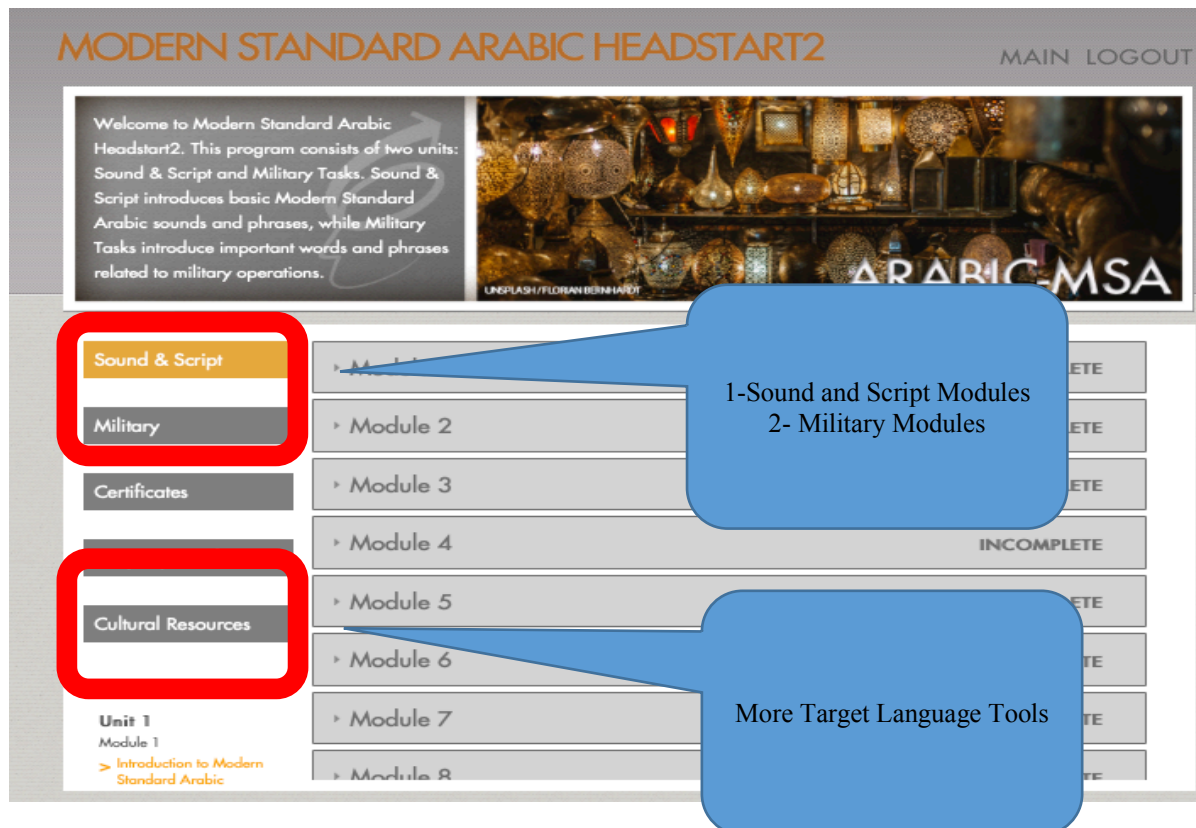
Headstart2 utilizes pedagogical concepts to help learners understand diversity and cultural concepts. The cultural segment serves several purposes. First, it introduces the target language culture, traditions, and values. Second, it helps learners understand the importance of culture in influencing locals. Third, it has the potential to save lives and prevent conflict whenever possible. Helping learners build background knowledge and understand acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and actions can benefit communication and help build relationships to achieve the mission and maintain peace. Each module has a cultural note in an educational video that introduces the traditions and values of the target language country.

Teachers may use *Headstart2* in various lessons, alongside existing curriculum, to introduce or reinforce target language basics and enhance academic achievement. Sound and script are often a challenge for novice learners. Students might feel intimidated and discouraged, especially in category five languages. *Headstart2* can be used as an engaging tool to introduce and reinforce the basic concepts of sound and script, helping build a solid language base.

Teachers may use the self-learning aspect of *Headstart2* to help students build their schemata. For example, in a flipped classroom, teachers may assign some lessons the day before as homework and ask students to present and exchange information in class on the following day. The course's key points can be addressed as part of language application and practice during class. A teacher can also use *Headstart2* as a lead-in target language activity.

Headstart2 lessons can be used in various ways. The grammatical notes can be used to introduce grammar concepts. Students may be told to complete the grammar notes, and then discuss them in class, while teachers verify the information and elaborate basic concepts, as needed. The cultural notes may be assigned in class or as homework. Students can be asked to make notes in daily journals or use a mind mapping tool to further learning and discussion of the target culture. Headstart2 issues learners a certificate of completion, which students can share with their teachers.

QUICK TIPS

Idiom-learning Activities

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Using idioms correctly is essential for developing foreign language learners' sociocultural competence and linguistic skills. Learning idiomatic expressions helps learners comprehend texts containing metaphors and inferences, as well as explore the language in a more profound way. The purpose of this narrative is to share sample activities that incorporate idiom-learning into daily lessons to improve figurative language learning.

The activities may be treated as *separate activities*, but if they are applied occasionally yet systematically within other learning tasks, they may be productive. They should complement the main learning objectives, unless a lesson is specifically designed to address idioms. The following can be used in individual, small-group, or whole-class activities:

1. **Brainstorming:** Students analyze and discuss the meaning of high-frequency idioms and sayings in context or as a separate item based on their knowledge.
2. **Identifying:** Students detect idioms in the given material and discuss strategies for distinguishing set phrases.
3. **Exploring:** Students investigate the purpose of idiom usage in context, its appropriateness, tone, authors' intent, and impact on the audience.
4. **Guessing:** Students construct the meaning of an idiom based on the scenario or communicative situation.
5. **Snowballing:** Students recall or guess other cases where the idiom is used or recall other possible expressions applicable in the same context.
6. **Compensating:** Students deduce the meaning based on contextual clues such as words or phrases around the unknown idiom that may help decipher meaning and purpose.
7. **Rephrasing:** Students restate an expression by using other words in the target language.
8. **Equating:** Students find the English equivalent of an idiom, if any, or translate the primary meaning into English, saving its nuances.
9. **Substituting:** Students replace a selected idiom with another, compare and explain the nuances in their connotations and applications.

10. **Visualizing or anchoring:** Students insert or imagine a picture that explains an idiom, or find a related rhyme, riddle, or another literary device to create an associative link.

11. **Rooting:** Students relate an expression to its history or find information about its origin.

12. **Systematizing:** Students compose multiple idioms by using graphic organizers such as tables, charts, models, or mind maps, which are based on themes, language styles, synonym clusters, and target and native languages.

13. **Extending:** Students incorporate idioms to learn grammar or explore other areas, such as literature and art (for example, defining nuances in the titles and names of works of art).

14. **Editing:** Students replace textual idioms text with standard language phrases and vice versa.

15. **Creating:** Students write an anecdote, or a joke based on an idiom/set phrase, use misinterpretation of it as humor, and produce other texts saturated with expressions.

In addition to the above-mentioned activities, teachers, and students may find employ online tools for practice or assessment of idiomatic knowledge. Internet applications such as *Kahoot, Quizlet,* and *Quizizz* offer multiple options for learning idioms.

1. **The matching game**: students match idioms with their meanings.

2. **Multiple-choice:** students choose the correct response from the provided options. Multiple choices may include synonyms, antonyms, descriptions of meaning, idiomatic interpretations, various application contexts, proper grammar usage, etc.

3. **Fill in the blank:** students insert the most appropriate idiom in the provided space in the text, its synonym, English equivalent, or other appropriate item, such as a grammar-related answer.

4. **Flip cards**: students learn the idiom's meaning by checking the correct answer on the reverse side of the card. They cards may be developed by instructors or students.

5. **Open-ended questions**: following a prompt, students complete a statement, answer a question, or share thoughts and ideas.

Instructors may also address figurative language based on students' *production work, significant tasks, or projects* in a physical or virtual classroom environment. For example:

1. While completing assignments through **blogging or online discussion**, students create and share analysis of selected idioms, review other posts, and exchange opinions and thoughts, via designated apps, such as *Blackboard*'s discussion board, *Padlet*, and *Linoit*.

2. In **storytelling**, students use idioms in narratives of a given topic, or apply them in various written and spoken forms, such as opinion, review, essay, poem, and presentation.

3. Students incorporate idioms in **role-playing and scenario-based** tasks according to scenarios and guidelines provided.

4. **Conferences, roundtables, debates, and other types of discussions** are excellent opportunities for students to employ idioms that enhance speech and convey a message to an audience.

5. In **E-portfolios** or **journals,** students record and reflect upon idioms by using specific structures. They provide illustrations, descriptions of meanings, interpretations, or native equivalents, examples of applications in various contexts, related jokes, or thoughts following the idioms.

The above is a summary of activities that may be used in learning idioms. It is hoped that the suggestions proffered in this paper will inspire creativity in the teaching of idioms.

TECHNOLOGY

Videogames and Language Learning: *Rebel Inc.*

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Assessing and selecting videogames that promote language learning can be a daunting task. The number of titles increases every year, and several factors such as language content, availability, and compatibility between platforms vary significantly. The *Games2Teach* project by Dr. Julie Sykes (University of Arizona) and Dr. Jonathon Reinhardt (University of Oregon) facilitates the selection process. Beyond providing a theoretical framework for understanding how videogames may promote language learning and how lesson plans may be articulated around them, the project includes several rubrics to evaluate individual games for language learning purposes. This review of *Rebel Inc*. is based on the Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS*) Place and Experience‑based Language Learning Evaluation Tool,* suggested by the *Professional Development Manual for Game-Enhanced Pedagogy*, and the game evaluations available on the CASLS site (Center for Applied Second Language Studies, 2018; Reinhardt & Sykes, 2014, 2018).

PREMISE

Rebel Inc. is a game of strategy that puts the player in the midst of a post-conflict scenario where an insurgency is gaining momentum. As the appointed governor, the player takes on a nation-building project to create the country's infrastructure, tackle corruption, gain popular support, and negotiate a peaceful conclusion of conflict with the insurgents. Military power is one piece of this puzzle—the player relies on coalition soldiers, but must also train a national army, and other nations may interfere. The key to the endgame is to gain international public opinion support.

While *Rebel Inc.* takes place in an unidentified nation in the Middle East, it is obviously inspired by events in Afghanistan. The developers contacted the Afghan embassy in London and received positive feedback for the game (Vaughan, 2020). They also talked to non-profit organizations (NGOs), journalists, politicians, and organizations in the region to improve various aspects of the project (Endemic Creations, 2020). Consequently, the game's context may be applied to other post-conflict scenarios where nation-building and stabilization are needed. In fact, the in-game end-of-conflict negotiations were inspired by the peace process as it transpired between the government and rebel groups in Colombia (Vaughan, 2019).

TECHNICAL DETAILS

The game is available in English, Spanish (Spain), German, French, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese (Brazil, Portugal), Russian, Chinese (Simplified, Traditional), Turkish, Dari, and Pashto. The application form for request additional languages, including Arabic, is available on the website. It may be played on a PC through *Steam* (for early access, but does not include Dari or Pashto yet), Android, and iOS. As of the writing of this review, the *Steam* version costs $15, the iOS, $2, and the Android is free. The unlocked extras, offered by in-app purchases, are not essential to play the game.

Multiplayer is being developed for both cooperative and competitive modes, but it is so far unavailable in the PC version. There will also be an option to allow users to create scenarios for other players. Age ratings range from seven to twelve (7-12) years old because it is non-violent; the subject matter, however, is intended for adults. The reviews for all versions have been positive (Ndemic Creations, 2020).

LANGUAGE COMPONENT

As *Rebel Inc*. is a turn-based strategy game, as opposed to an action-oriented one, the player must work with the game's language to complete the scenarios. While there is sufficient language in the game, it is not presented in big blocks of text but rather in short paragraphs and sentences, making it suitable for 1 and 1+ proficiency level learners. Key vocabulary relates to politics, policies, state institutions, and the military, which is not obscure or highly specialized, so most may benefit from it. Beyond the language presented in the menus, news items, and reaction to the player's initiatives, random events that involve decision-making and appropriate actions require language comprehension. Those random events may include how to respond to the intervention of a foreign government, troop desertion, popular demands, etc.

The game themes and the player's experience can be used to create various activities. The non-linearity of the game allows for multiple ways to win; thus, students may discuss the different strategies adopted by each player and how they affected success. A follow-up discussion of how realistic the game progression is may also be implemented. Students could narrate their experience from the perspective of their in-game avatar as well (role-playing) or outline a digital narrative through an essay. The scenario editor, on the other hand, may be used for project-based learning, particularly if students can play one another's scenarios. Future cooperation/competition modes between players may also open the door to other communicative tasks. Social media links for *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Discord* are visible in the game's title screen, taking you to the developer's official site. When winning or losing a scenario, the player is prompted to share the results on these platforms so that other people can react to it, providing another avenue for activities.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The game is culturally appropriate and, the conflict is explained in simplistic terms. Military power and superiority are necessary for achieving peace, but are not sufficient, being only a few of the various requirements necessary for success. The learning curve is also short: the different options may seem overwhelming at first, but the player must only focus on one menu to play. Finally, the game is more engaging than it appears. Although the visuals are not striking, the well-designed gameplay should appeal to most players.

In conclusion, *Rebel Inc.* may be a very useful tool in the language classroom, and particularly in the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) setting, because of its theme, mechanics, and language content. The fact that Dari and Pashto are included in the mobile versions is a rare occurrence, and something we can hope to see in future games.

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APPENDIX

26 March, 2020

The Embassy supports Rebel make peace!

Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in London supports any initiative promoting peace and coexistence in Afghanistan and the world. In this regard, we support Rebel Inc. a game heavily influenced by the culture and socio-political landscape of Afghanistan. This game is based on an extensive research aimed at providing conflict management choices, mitigating violence, and achieving success through stability and peace.

H.E. Ambassador Jawad and staff members met with Ndemic Creations, creator of Rebel Inc. before the release of the game and tested the trial version. The game will help users to realize what is going on in Afghanistan and encourage players to explore and understand the complexity and scale of the situation in the country.

> "Rebel Inc. is sophisticated and engaging. It shows the complexity of war and insurgency with interesting options to achieve success through stability and peace."
>
> **H.E. Said T. Jawad**
> **Ambassador**

We are pleased to know that Ndemic Creations, based on recommendations from the embassy, translated the game into Pashto and Dari languages, which is now available on iOS and Android.

We wish to thank Ndemic Creations for their thoughtfulness in involving insider opinion in creating Rebel Inc. We wish them all the best and hoping that the users including those in Afghanistan will find the game entertaining and informative.

Figure 1
Afghanistan Embassy's Letter to Rebel
Image source: Twitter account of the Afghanistan Embassy in the UK.
https://twitter.com/AfghanistanInUK/status/1243214929768976385/photo/1

Figure 2
Rebel Inc. screenshot

Figure 3
Rebel Inc. screenshot

GENERAL INFORMATION

EVENTS 2021

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MAY-JUNE

May 30-June 4	NAFSA: Association of International Educators Annual Conference and Expo, Orlando, FL Information: www.nafsa.org

OCTOBER

October 28-31	Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Annual Meeting, Montreal, Canada Information: mesana.org/annual-meeting/future-meetings

NOVEMBER

November 19-21	American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Annual Convention (ACTFL), San Diego, CA Information: www.actfl.org
November 19-21	American Association of Teachers of Japanese (AATJ) Fall Conference, San Diego, CA Information: www.aatj.org
November 20-22	American Association of Teachers of German (AATG) Session, San Diego, CA Information: www.aatg.org

VENUES FOR ACADEMIC PUBLICATION

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Academic Journals on Language Education and Language Studies: Guidelines for Authors

ADFL Bulletin

(Published by the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages, a subsidiary of the Modern Language Association of America) http://www.adfl.mla.org/ADFL-Bulletin

Al-'Arabiyya

(Published by the Georgetown University Press on behalf of the American Association of Teachers of Arabic)
http://press.georgetown.edu/languages/our-authors/guidelines

American Journal of Evaluation

(Published by Sage Publishing on behalf of the American Evaluation Association)
http://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/american-journal-of-evaluation/journal 201729#submission-guidelines

Applied Linguistics

(Published by the Oxford Academic) http://academic.oup.com/applij/pages/General_Instructions

Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice

(Published by Routledge)
http://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/

Brain and Language

(Published by Elsevier)
http://www.journals.elsevier.com/brain-and-language

CALICO Journal

(Published by the Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium)
http://journals.equinoxpub.com/CALICO/about/submissions

Canadian Modern Language Review
(Published by the University of Toronto Press)
http://utorontopress.com/ca/canadian-modern-language-review

Chinese as a Second Language
(Published by the Chinese Language Teachers Association, USA)
http://clta-us.org/publications/

Cognitive Linguistic Studies
(Published by John Benjamins Publishing Co.)
http://benjamins.com/content/authors/journalsubmissions

Computer Assisted Language Learning
(Published by Routledge)
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Connections
(Published by the Foreign Language Association of Northern California)
http://www. https://flanc.net

Educational and Psychological Measurement
(Published by Sage Publishing)
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measurement#submission-guidelines

Educational Assessment
(Published by Routledge)
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Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
(Published by Sage Publishing)
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analysis#submission-guidelines

Educational Technology Research and Development
(Published by Springer)
http://www.springer.com/education+%26+language/learning+%26+instruction/journal/11423?d
etailsPage=pltci_2543550

Foreign Language Annals
(Published by Wiley-Blackwell on behalf of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign
Languages) http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/19449720/homepage/forauthors.html

Hispania

(Published by the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese)
http://www.aatsp.org/page/hispaniasubmissions

International Journal of Applied Linguistics

(Published by John Wiley & Sons)
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International Journal of Testing

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Japanese Language and Literature

(Published by the American Association of Teachers of Japanese) http://www.aatj.org/journal

Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education

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Profession

(Published by the Modern Language Association of America) http://profession.mla.org/

RELC Journal

(Published by Sage Publications on behalf of the Regional Language Center of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization) http://journals.sagepub.com/home/rel

Review of Cognitive Linguistics

(Published by John Benjamins Publishing Company)
http://benjamins.com/content/authors/journalsubmissions

Russian Language Journal

(Published by the American Council of Teachers of Russian) http://rlj.americancouncils.org/

Second Language Research

(Published by Sage Publishing)
http://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/journal/second-language-research# submission-guidelines

Slavic and East European Journal

(Published by the Ohio State University on behalf of the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages)
http://u.osu.edu/seej/

Spanish Journal of Applied Linguistics

(Published by John Benjamins Publishing Company)
http://benjamins.com/content/authors/journalsubmissions

Studies in Second Language Acquisition

(Published by the Cambridge University Press) http://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/studies-in-second-language-acquisition/information/instructions-contributors

System

(Published by Elsevier)
http://www.journals.elsevier.com/system
The American Journal of Distance Learning

(Published by Routledge)
http://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/

The French Review

(Published by the American Association of Teachers of French)
http://frenchreview.frenchteachers.org/GuideForAuthors.html

The International Journal of Listening

(Published by Routledge)
http://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/

The Korean Language in America

(Published by the American Association of Teachers of Korea) http://www.aatk.org/

The Language Educator

(Published by the American Council on the Teaching Foreign Languages)
http://www.actfl.org/publications/all/the-language-educator/author-guidelines

The Modern Language Journal

(Published by Wiley-Blackwell on behalf of the National Federation of Modern Language
Association)
http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/15404781/homepage/forauthors.html

TESOL Quarterly

(Published by Wiley-Blackwell on behalf of the TESOL International Association)
http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/15457249/homepage/forauthors.html

INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

1. Submission

Dialog on Language Instruction publishes only original works that have not been previously published elsewhere and that are not under consideration by other publications. Reprints may be considered, under special circumstances, with the consent of the author(s) and/or publisher.

Send all submissions electronically to the Editor.

2. Aims and Scope

The publication of this internal academic journal is to increase and share professional knowledge and information among Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) faculty and staff, as well as to promote professional communication within the Defense Language Program.

Dialog on Language Instruction is a refereed journal devoted to applied research into all aspects of innovation in language learning and teaching. It publishes research articles, review articles, and book/materials reviews. The community-oriented columns – Faculty Forum, News and Views, Quick Tips, and Resources – provide a platform for faculty and staff to exchange professional information, ideas, and views. Dialog on Language Instruction prefers its contributors to provide articles that have a sound theoretical base with a visible practical application which can be generalized.

3. Review Process

Manuscripts will be acknowledged by the editor upon receipt and subsequently screened and sent out for peer review. Authors will be informed about the status of the article once the peer reviews have been received and processed. Reviewer comments will be shared with the authors.

Accepted Manuscripts: Once an article has been accepted for publication, the author will receive further instructions regarding the submission of the final copy.

Rejected Manuscripts: Manuscripts may be rejected for the following reasons:

- Inappropriate/unsuitable topic for DLIFLC;
- Lack of purpose or significance;
- Lack of originality and novelty;
- Flaws in study/research design/methods;

- Irrelevance to contemporary research/dialogs in the foreign language education profession;
- Poor organization of material;
- Deficiencies in writing; and
- Inadequate manuscript preparation.

Once the editor notifies the author that the manuscript is unacceptable, that ends the review process.

In some cases, an author whose manuscript has been rejected may decide to revise it and resubmit. However, as the quality of the revision is unpredictable, no promise may be made by this publication pursuant to reconsideration.

4. Correspondence

Contact the Editor.

GUIDELINES FOR MANUSCRIPT PREPARATION

PLANNING:
DECIDE ON THE TYPE OF PAPER

First, decide for which column you would write: Research Articles, Review Articles, Reviews, Faculty Forum, News and Reports, Quick Tips, or Resources. Refer to the following pages for the specific requirement of each type of article.

1. Research Articles

Divide your manuscript into the following sections, and in this order:
1. Title and Author Information
2. Abstract
3. Body of the text, including:
   - Acknowledgements (optional)
   - Notes (optional)
   - References
   - Tables and figures (optional)
   - Appendixes (optional)

Ensure that your article has the following structure:

Cover Page	Type the title of the article and the author's name, position, school/department/office, contact information on a separate page to ensure anonymity in the review process. See the example below: Foster Learner Autonomy in Project-based Learning JANE, DOE Assistant Professor Persian-Farsi School, UGE jane.doe@dliflc.edu 831-242-3333
Abstract	Briefly state the purpose of the study, the principal results, and major conclusions in a concise and factual abstract of no more than 300 words.
Introduction	State the objectives, hypothesis, and research design. Provide adequate background information, but avoid a detailed literature survey or a summary of the results.
Literature Review	Discuss the work that has had a direct impact on your study. Cite only research pertinent to a specific issue and avoid references with only tangential or general significance. Emphasize pertinent findings and relevant methodological issues. Provide the logical continuity between previous and present work.
Method	State the hypothesis of your study. Describe how you conducted the study. Give a brief synopsis of the methodology. Provide sufficient detail to allow the work to be replicated. You may develop the subsections pertaining to the participants, the materials, and the procedure. Participants. Identify the number and type of participants. Indicate how they were selected. Provide major demographic characteristics. Materials. Briefly describe the materials used and their function in the experiment. Procedure. Describe each step in conducting the research, including the instructions to the participants, the formation of the groups, and the specific experimental manipulations.
Results	State the results and describe them to justify the findings. Mention all relevant results, including those that run counter to the hypothesis.
Discussion	Explore the significance of the results of the work, but do not repeat them. A combined Results and Discussion section is often appropriate. Avoid extensive citations and discussion of published literature.
Conclusion	Describe the contribution of the study to the field. Identify conclusions and theoretical implications that can be drawn from your study. Do not simply repeat earlier sections.

Acknowledgments	Identify those colleagues who may have contributed to the study and assisted you in preparing the manuscript.
Notes	Use sparingly. Number them consecutively throughout the article. They should be listed on a separate page, which is to be entitled Notes.
References	Submit on a separate page with the heading: References. References should be arranged first alphabetically, and then sorted chronologically if necessary. More than one reference from the same author(s) in the same year must be identified by the letter 'a', 'b', 'c', etc., placed after the year of publication.
Appendix	Place detailed information (such as a sample of a questionnaire, a table, or a list) that would be distracting to read in the main body of the article.

2. Review Articles

It should describe, discuss, and evaluate several publications that fall into a topical category in foreign language education. The relative significance of the publications in the context of teaching realms should be pointed out. A review article should not exceed 6,000 words.

3. Reviews

Reviews of books, textbooks, scholarly works, dictionaries, tests, computer software, audio-visual materials, and other print or non-print materials on foreign language education will be considered for publication. Give a clear but brief statement of the work's content and a critical assessment of its contribution to the profession. State both positive and negative aspects of the work(s). Keep quotations short. Do not send reviews that are merely descriptive. Reviews should not exceed 2,000 words.

4. Faculty Forum

This section provides an opportunity for faculty, through brief articles, to share ideas and exchange views on innovative foreign language education practices, or to comment on articles in previous issues or on matters of general academic interest. Forum articles should not exceed 2,000 words.

5. Fresh Ideas

Reports, summaries, and reviews of new and innovative ideas and practices in language education. Fresh Ideas articles should not exceed 2,000 words.

6. News and Events

Reports on conferences, official trips, official visitors, special events, new instructional techniques, training opportunities, news items, etc. Reports should not exceed 1,000 words.

7. Quick Tips

Previously unpublished, original or innovative, easy to follow ideas for use in the language classroom or in any aspect of foreign language learning and teaching, such as technology tips, useful classroom activities, learner training tips, etc. (Examples include: Five strategies for a positive learning environment; Using iPad to develop instructional video; Four effective strategies for improving listening – tips that your colleagues can easily adapt to their classrooms). Tips should not exceed 800 words.

8. Resources

Brief write-ups on resources related to the foreign language education field, such as books, audio/video materials, tests, research reports, websites, computer and mobile apps, etc. Write-ups should not exceed 800 words.

WRITING:

FOLLOW THE SPECIFICATIONS FOR MANUSCRIPTS

Prepare the manuscripts in accordance with the following requirements:

- Follow the APA style (the 6th Edition) – the style set by the American Psychological Association;
- Do not exceed 6,000 words for research articles (not including reference, appendix, etc.); for other types of paper, see the section above for instructions;
- Use double spacing, with margins of one inch on four sides;
- Use Times New Roman font, size 12;
- Number pages consecutively;
- Text in black and white only;
- Create graphics and tables in a Microsoft Office application (Word, PowerPoint, Excel);
- Provide graphics and tables no more than 6.5" in width;
- Do not use the footnotes and endnotes function in MS Word. Insert a number formatted in superscript following a punctuation mark. Type notes on a separate page. Center the word "Notes" at the top of the page. Indent five spaces on the first line of each sequentially-numbered note; and
- Keep the layout of the text as simple as possible.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Dialog on Language Instruction is an occasional, internal publication of the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) and part of its professional development program. It provides a forum for faculty and staff at DLIFLC to exchange professional information. Dialog encourages submission of articles, reviews, forum articles, articles on best teaching practices, brief news items, quick tips, and resources.

Deadline: Submissions are welcome at any point. Manuscripts received by 31 January will be considered for the fall issue and by 31 July for the spring issue.

For guidelines in the preparation of your manuscript, please refer to the previous section—Information for Contributors.

THANK YOU, REVIEWERS

Dialog on Language Instruction relies on peer review for quality and suitability to the journal's aims and scope. Special thanks go to the colleagues listed below, who volunteered their time and expertise to serve as reviewers and consultants for this issue. The publication of Dialog on Language Instruction was made possible with their generous support.

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