

Feature Article

Chinese Flagship Domestic Immersion Capstone Program: Producing Global Professionals with Higher-Level Proficiency

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This paper discusses the lessons learned from the six cohorts of the Chinese Flagship Domestic Immersion Capstone Program at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC). It reflects on factors that have contributed to students' success, practices that can be incorporated more into the DLIFLC Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced classes, and benefits for Flagship faculty. The paper also discusses the contributions that the Program has made to the mission of DLIFLC.

Keywords: *Program Reflections, Program Integration, Flagship, Domestic Immersion, Student Success*

INTRODUCTION

Program Background

The Chinese Flagship Domestic Immersion Capstone Program at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) was part of the national Language Flagship Program and was jointly conducted with the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey (MIIS). The Language Flagship is an initiative of the Defense Language and National Security Education Office (DLNSEO). Through the attainment of professional-level proficiency in a language of strategic importance to U.S. national interests and security, Language Flagship graduates are positioned to become the next generation of global professionals and leaders. Flagship students attend the Flagship Program in their home institution for up to 4 years, and they then can apply for the Capstone Program, which is what DLIFLC participated in. The Program is referred to as a "Domestic Immersion" program because it simulates a study-abroad experience. Students study

in an intensive language program and agree to speak the language not only throughout the school day but also outside of class—including evenings and weekends. Flagship faculty were recruited from DLIFLC teachers. Chinese Mandarin is the only language from DLIFLC that participated in DLNSEO's Flagship Capstone Program.

For more background on the Language Flagship Program and DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Domestic Immersion Capstone Program (hereby referred to as "DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program" or "the Program"), including its curriculum and co-curricular activities, see a detailed description in a prior article (Gao & Tovar, 2022). DLIFLC hosted six cohorts, with the first being in 2020, and graduated a total of 28 students. Due to funding issues, the DLIFLC Chinese Flagship Domestic Immersion Capstone Program ended with the cohort that graduated in May 2026.

Program Success

DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program was very successful in terms of producing higher-level proficiency students. Specifically, 25 out of 28 students who attended this program met the Flagship certification requirement by achieving at least 3/2+/2+ on S/L/R (Speaking/Listening/Reading) or S/R/L at the end of the program yielding an 89.29% success rate. In addition, 16 out of 28 students were certified with distinction by attaining ILR (Interagency Language Roundtable) 3/3/3 or above on S/L/R or S/R/L, which represents 57.14% of the students. These outcomes rank among the strongest results reported by comparable Flagship Capstone programs.

Additionally, despite a variety of challenges faced by the DLIFLC Flagship students, including online teaching during the COVID years and individual challenges faced by some students (such as lack of effective study habits, weaker language foundation, and anxiety issues), none was attritted. Of the 28 students who graduated, 25 achieved a minimal Level 3 on the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), and the remaining three achieved Level 2+. DLIFLC has historically prioritized reading and listening in its military language programs. Speaking practice is, of course, integrated into the language programs and the level of proficiency expected for these students is 1+. DLNSEO's Language Flagship program, however, prioritizes speaking proficiency, requiring students to achieve Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Level 3 (general professional-level fluency). DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program's success in developing students' speaking proficiency to Level 3 or higher is a significant accomplishment.

Table 1 details the scores of the 28 Flagship students that DLIFLC graduated in total over the six cohorts. The table includes the speaking scores obtained via the Oral proficiency Interview (OPI) and the listening and reading scores obtained via the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT).

Table 1

Final OPI and DLPT Scores of all the DLIFLC Chinese Flagship Students (N=28)

Test	No. of Students (Percentage)				
	Level 2	Level 2+	Level 3	Level 3+	Level 4
Speaking (OPI)	0	3 (10.71%)	21 (75.00%)	4 (14.29%)	0
DLPT Listening	0	11 (39.29%)	7 (25.00%)	8 (28.57%)	2 (7.14%)
DLPT Reading	1 (3.57%)	11 (39.29%)	15 (53.57%)	1 (3.57%)	0

As can be seen from Table 1, most students achieved Level 3 or above in speaking (89.29%), DLPT listening (60.71%) and reading (57.14%). More importantly, four students achieved Level 3+ in speaking (OPI), eight students achieved Level 3+ on DLPT listening, two achieved Level 4 on DLPT listening, and one student achieved Level 3+ on DLPT reading.

The DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program's admission requirement was set by DLNSEO at 2/2/1+ (S/R/L or S/L/R). Among the scores presented in Table 1, 25 students improved at least one proficiency level in either speaking, reading, and/or listening (1+ to 2+, 2 to 3, 2+ to 3+), eight students improved by at least one and a half levels in either speaking, reading, and/or listening (1+ to 3, 2 to 3+, 2+ to 4), and one student improved by two levels in listening (1+ to 3+).

In addition to the data above that demonstrate students' successful test scores, students provided overwhelmingly positive comments on the End of Course Student Questionnaire and on other occasions, while acknowledging the demanding nature of the Program. The following comments are from the cohort that graduated in May 2026:

- "I absolutely loved this DLI capstone program! The reason I chose DLI over Taiwan is because I know how much value the DLI program places on getting their students to the absolute highest level of proficiency they can reach. I would 1 million% recommend this program to any student serious about their Chinese proficiency; the teachers are outstanding, the content is enriching, and the program is perfect."
- "I loved the program. As for the program itself, I absolutely loved all of my teachers, and I think that my Chinese language and cultural skills have increased remarkably. The DLIFLC Chinese Flagship Capstone Program is a great program, and I am thoroughly disappointed to hear that it will not be continued."
- A student who started with a very weak foundation, remarked: "This program was very rigorous and at times felt slightly unmanageable. However, the teachers were fantastic through it all. Their care and understanding really allowed me to push through and finish strongly."

PRACTICES CONTRIBUTING TO PROGRAM SUCCESS

For a program to consistently develop students' linguistic proficiency, numerous instructional and curricular components must work together seamlessly and synchronously. Likewise, the

success of DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program was supported by multiple factors, including students' effort, faculty dedication, and leadership support. Specifically, the following five key elements played a critical role: (a) creating a fully immersive learning environment, (b) integrating the Program with Chinese programs in both Undergraduate Education (UGE) and Continuing Education (CE), as well as with the local Chinese community, (c) enriching the Program through co-curricular activities such as guest speakers, workshops, culinary events, and field trips, (d) strengthening student motivation, and (e) implementing a rigorous curriculum. This paper focuses on discussing the first four key practices; curriculum development and implementation were discussed in a previous paper (Gao & Tovar, 2022).

Implementing a Target Language Only Policy

Research indicates that total immersion is one of the most effective approaches to developing high levels of second language proficiency, fluency, and, in many cases, superior academic outcomes (Genesee, 1994; Swain & Carroll, 1987). Language acquisition depends not merely on exposure to input but on learners' ability to process meaningful input and establish connections between linguistic forms and their communicative functions. In an immersion setting, learners are continuously exposed to authentic language across a wide range of communicative contexts, providing opportunities to process language for meaning. This sustained engagement with meaningful input helps learners naturally acquire linguistic nuances and structures, which in turn helps learners accelerate their language acquisition process (VanPatten et al., 2020).

Implementing a Chinese-only policy was of particular importance to the Program, as students must achieve an ILR Level 3 or higher in speaking (OPI) upon completion of the program to be Flagship certified. To enforce this policy, students were required to sign a "Language Immersion Pact" during orientation week. The Pact stipulates that students must use Chinese, either spoken or written, in class, in their interactions with teachers and peers while on the DLIFLC campus, and during Chinese House hours at home. If students violated the Pact, they were told they would first receive a reminder to use Chinese for the first offense. A second offense would result in a written warning. A third and final offense would be reported to their home institution's Flagship program and/or DLNSEO for consideration of possible disciplinary action. There were very few cases of students violating the Pact.

Furthermore, when students communicated with classmates, professors, and friends at their home institutions, as well as with MIIS faculty and students who know Chinese, they were strongly encouraged and regularly reminded to communicate in Chinese whenever possible. To support students in using Chinese 100% of the time, the Chinese Mandarin (CM) Flagship faculty consistently used Chinese in all interactions with students, both inside and outside the classroom. Faculty members were also trained to use the target language effectively in their communication with students. This total-immersion practice strongly supported students' proficiency development, particularly in speaking.

Integrating with UGE/CE CM Programs and the Local Chinese Community

DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program was small (ranging from three to six students per cohort), and students sometimes felt that they were somewhat isolated, which could have negatively impacted their psychological well-being and their academic growth. To resolve this issue, the Flagship Program closely collaborated with CM military classes in both UGE and CE to connect the civilian Flagship students with their military peers.

For example, Flagship students voluntarily tutored CM Basic Course students throughout the second semester, usually for one or two hours per week, which was mutually beneficial to both the Chinese School (UCM) and Flagship students. Additionally, Flagship students regularly joined UCM cultural clubs and events. Some of the culture clubs that Flagship students participated in included the singing club, the Tai Chi club, and the calligraphy club. Flagship students also participated in UCM's annual holiday entertainment performance and annual cultural festival.

Regarding the collaboration with Intermediate- and Advanced-class students, Flagship students participated in joint classes with these students every year, usually in the form of joint student presentations and/or panel discussions on topics of their own choice. Flagship and Intermediate and Advanced students regularly got together to celebrate traditional Chinese holidays as well, such as the Lunar New Year, also called the Spring Festival.

Flagship students were encouraged to get involved in the local Chinese community as much as possible. Students from every CM Flagship cohort volunteered at the annual Chinese Cultural Festival hosted by the Monterey Bay Chinese Association (MBCA). The cultural festival is held at the Monterey Plaza in downtown Monterey every October. This community event features Chinese language, food, and culture. Additionally, Flagship students volunteered at the annual Spring Festival celebration event hosted by the MBCA. They also occasionally participated in other local cultural events, such as attending an art exhibition featuring Chinese heritage artists.

Aside from these events, the Flagship students consistently participated in the annual Mandarin speech contest organized by the Chinese Language Teachers Association of California. Flagship students regularly won top awards. By integrating with both DLIFLC military programs and the local Chinese community, Flagship students benefited not only in terms of their academic development and cultural understanding, but, perhaps more importantly, in terms of their mental wellbeing.

Providing Rich Co-Curricular Programs

In addition to the rigorous language classes, DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program also provided students with diverse co-curricular programs to support their academic growth.

The Program featured a guest speaker series. Each month, the Program identified and invited a Chinese faculty member from UCM or from outside DLIFLC with expertise in a topic related to Chinese language or culture to deliver a talk to CM Flagship students. Topics included (1) Chinese

calligraphy, (2) traditional Chinese games, (3) traditional Chinese musical instruments, (4) the resurgence of interest in traditional Chinese culture, philosophy, and classical studies, (5) the history and development of Chinese cinema, (6) China's incense culture, (7) depictions of the Chinese military in literature and film, (8) educational challenges faced by the children of migrant workers in China, (9) civilizations of the Xixia Dynasty, and (10) Taoism.

During these talks, students listened, asked questions, and engaged in discussion with the guest speaker. The guest speaker series not only helped students develop their linguistic proficiency but, perhaps more importantly, expanded their essential background knowledge of various aspects of China—knowledge that is critical to the Flagship mission of cultivating global professionals. To the greatest extent possible, these topics were aligned with those introduced in the core curriculum.

To help students achieve higher levels of language proficiency, DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program offered three workshops that focused on key aspects of language learning: vocabulary, grammar, and speaking. While the vocabulary and grammar workshops helped consolidate students' linguistic foundation, the speaking/OPI workshop familiarized students with the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and provided strategies for achieving Level 3 or higher—a requirement that was often the most challenging for many Flagship students. These workshops played an important role in helping students increase their language proficiency.

In addition, similar to the military language programs at DLIFLC, the Program incorporated cooking classes and cultural field trips. In the cooking classes, students and teachers prepared authentic Chinese dishes while discussing the cooking process in Chinese, followed by sharing the meal and engaging in conversation. Cultural field trips further enriched students' cultural knowledge and enhanced their motivation for language learning. In end-of-course questionnaires, students consistently rated the cooking classes as their favorite co-curricular activity.

It should be noted that the evening Chinese House was also one of the primary co-curricular components of the program. This evening program was discussed in the 2022 paper on DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program by Gao and Tovar.

Promoting Student Motivation

As is well known, motivation plays a critical role in determining whether students achieve successful learning outcomes. DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program made significant efforts to foster and sustain student motivation. Faculty members were fully aware of the rigor of the Program, which is often much more demanding than the Flagship programs from which students originated. Under such conditions, the ability to encourage and sustain student motivation becomes particularly important.

DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program drew on the ARCS model (Keller, 1987, 2009) and the concept of the growth mindset (Dweck, 2007) to motivate and inspire students to work diligently toward

achieving their proficiency goals. ARCS stands for attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction. According to this model, it is critical to get and hold learners' interests and attention. The learning process should show the usefulness of the content so that learners can bridge the gap between content and the real world. Moreover, learners' level of confidence is closely correlated to their expectations of success and there is a direct relationship between motivation and satisfaction. Learners should feel satisfied with what they achieved during the learning process.

As mentioned above, the teaching materials used in the curriculum were authentic and reflected some of the most significant issues in contemporary Chinese and/or American societies. Topics incorporated in the Flagship curriculum included, for example: the aging population, the pros and cons of social media, the impact of AI on humans, and China's geopolitical issues (e.g., issues related to Taiwan). These contemporary topics kept students engaged because they were both relevant to their lives and directly connected to their future responsibilities within U.S. government agencies. Other activities that contributed to learner motivation included teachers consistently working with students to boost their confidence and satisfaction levels via practices such as joint reports with CE CM classes, providing students with the opportunity to tutor CM Basic Course students, and participating and winning top awards in the Mandarin speech contest.

The Flagship faculty consistently demonstrated a growth mindset – not only in terms of their own professional growth and development, but also when encouraging learners to expand their knowledge and skills. A growth mindset refers to the belief that individuals' basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work – brains and talent are only the starting point. In nearly every cohort of the CM Flagship class, one or two students entered the program with a relatively weak language foundation, whether in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, general world knowledge, or study habits.

By implementing a growth-mindset approach to their instructional practices, Flagship faculty never gave up on any student. Instead, they tailored course materials, instructional strategies, and assignments to accommodate each student's individual circumstances to support their success. This growth-oriented approach among the CM Flagship faculty was one of the key factors that contributed to the Program's high success rate. Throughout the duration of the Program, no DLIFLC Flagship Capstone students were academically dismissed.

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

What We Learned from the Chinese Flagship Program

First and foremost, the Program demonstrated that an adaptive and student-centered Flagship model can successfully guide students with weak or uneven language foundations to professional-level proficiency. Despite students entering the Program with challenges in listening, reading, speaking, fossilized pronunciation, structural inaccuracy, and limited topical

knowledge, the Program helped students to overcome their weaknesses and achieve proficiency levels of 3/2+/2+ and beyond.

To illustrate with specific examples regarding how students were supported to overcome learning challenges, case studies are provided. Below are two case studies involving students who had different learning challenges.

Student A

Described below are some of the strategies the faculty implemented to help a very weak Level 1+ student in reading improve to Level 2+ after attending the 9-month DLIFLC Chinese Flagship Program. The student entered the Program with a very weak Level 1+ reading proficiency. The student mainly read simplified versions of Chinese characters and had very limited Chinese vocabulary. Therefore, the initial focus was to strengthen the foundation by improving character recognition and comprehension.

There were two main components to this support: weekly reading classes and individualized homework tailored to the student's needs. In the reading classes, the instructor kept all materials in traditional characters. As a result, when the student completed her intensive reading preview tasks, she read the materials in traditional characters from the beginning. During class, the instructor went through the lesson texts with students and had them take turns reading aloud. This allowed the instructor to assess students' character recognition—especially for the underperforming student—and provide support through contrastive analysis between simplified and traditional characters to help the student systematically learn both writing systems. It also allowed the instructor to identify students' grammar knowledge and usage and provide targeted grammar intervention when needed.

For the individualized homework, in addition to each week's extensive reading assignments, the Program adopted the Semester II character workbook created by UCM to support this student. The instructor selected this supplemental workbook because it is systematically designed to build character recognition step by step. Since the workbook was developed to accompany Semester II instructional materials, it covered Level 1+ to Level 2 vocabulary.

The design of each lesson in the workbook included 1) knowledge of the Chinese characters introduced in each lesson, such as radicals, phonetic components, etc., together with a chart of the introduced characters and handwriting practice, 2) a vocabulary list for each lesson along with vocabulary exercises, 3) authentic articles incorporating the new vocabulary, and 4) writing exercises, such as sentence translation or discussion questions. Such a design was very instrumental in helping the student improve her Chinese vocabulary.

Once the underperforming student's foundation was strengthened during the fall semester, the Program then moved on to metacognitive language skills training in the spring semester. During this process, the student was guided to analyze her reading ability and strategies after each weekly homework reading exercise, as well as after the midterm and final reading exams, using

a reflection form that allowed students the opportunity to document their progress as well as any questions or challenges they encountered. The reflection form enhanced learner accountability.

Student B

Below is what the Program did to help a very weak Level 2 speaker achieve Level 3 after completing the DLIFLC Chinese Flagship Program. When the student entered the program, she demonstrated Level 2 speaking proficiency. However, the student needed targeted support in pronunciation, vocabulary expansion, grammatical accuracy, and oral expression. To support her development, our program provided additional weekly Special Assistance (SA) sessions in addition to our daily one-on-one speaking classes.

In the one-on-one speaking classes, in addition to working with the student to complete the assigned speaking tasks, the instructor spent extra time working with her on pronunciation by having her read aloud texts used in the listening or reading classes, helping her become more familiar with the input she had listened to or read that day. During the read-aloud practice, the instructor provided immediate feedback on her pronunciation and helped her correct systematic errors in certain sounds and tones.

In the 6th-hour SA sessions, the instructor focused on helping the student build a stronger grammar foundation by designing tailored grammar lessons. These ranged from Chinese verb compounds (e.g., resultative verb compounds, serial verb constructions, directional verb constructions, etc.) to sentence structures (e.g., *ba* sentences, *bei* sentences, verb-copying sentences, etc.), and then to more complex sentence structures (e.g., *yuqi... buru* “would rather...than...”, *bujin... erqie*, “not only...but also...”, etc.).

In the spring semester, the Program focused on speaking development at a macro level. To be certified, students need to reach Level 3 speaking proficiency, which requires the ability to discuss both familiar and unfamiliar topics extensively. As a result, the instructor supported the student in developing discourse devices, discourse structures, and content organization. The class worked on a range of language tasks, including narration in the past, present, and future, description, hypothetical situations, supporting opinions, and discussions of abstract and/or unfamiliar topics. As a result, the student achieved Level 3 on her exit-program OPI.

Upon further reflection, the Flagship team learned that collaboration, communication and trust play key roles in helping learners achieve their highest levels of proficiency. Collaboration among Program members was critical in the team’s work in developing the curriculum and deciding on strategies to implement for individualized teaching approaches. Despite being a small program, the team demonstrated exceptional collaboration. The Program Director and faculty maintained constant communication regarding students’ progress, performance, and needs. This close collaboration allowed class scheduling and the selection of teaching materials to be adjusted

quickly in response to students' situations and learning needs, which substantially contributed to student success.

Additionally, responsibilities and workload were shared effectively, and communication was consistent and constructive. More importantly, the Program fostered a culture of trust and psychological safety, where teachers felt comfortable sharing ideas, taking risks, and supporting one another. This positive and supportive environment contributed significantly to both teacher satisfaction and overall program effectiveness.

What Practices can be Incorporated into Basic, Intermediate, or Advanced DLIFLC Classes

Some Flagship practices that can be incorporated into DLIFLC classes include the following:

A Proficiency-Driven Approach

From Day 1, the Program consistently focused on improving students' functional language proficiency and real-world communication capabilities instead of only focusing on covering textbook content, by engaging students in real life conversations, projects, debates, reports, etc.

Different from the UGE or CE language programs, DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program had a rather flexible curriculum. Although it also had daily vocabulary quizzes and its teaching was also guided by the Program's Scope and Sequence to ensure that all important topics were covered, it implemented a more proficiency-based pedagogy: emphasizing real-world application, student-centeredness, and three modes of communication (interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational).

During classes, particularly speaking classes, students were allowed to spend time discussing their own major fields of study, hobbies, career goals, etc., which are both relevant and meaningful to students' lives. They were also required to select breaking news to read or listen to, be it on culture and society, science and technology, economics, entertainment or sports, and then discuss issues related to the news with the teacher. Additionally, each week students were required to make a PowerPoint presentation to the class and teachers. Although the theme of presentation was pre-determined to align with the theme of the week, the specific topic was determined by students themselves in accordance with their own interest.

Once a month, students were engaged in an hour-long debate on significant, sometimes controversial, issues faced by today's society, such as the pros and cons of AI, the pros and cons of use of social media, and pros and cons of China's One-Child Policy. In developing learner proficiency, the Flagship teachers built on what students already knew, respected students' diverse learning styles and allowed for personalized growth by offering tailored homework and assignments.

DLIFLC's language programs (particularly its upper-level programs), could also implement some of the above practices in its program design.

An Emphasis on Learner Autonomy and Inquiry

Flagship students were given a considerable amount of autonomy and encouraged to research, present and engage deeply with topics of their own personal and professional interest. This shifted the paradigm from students being passive recipients of information to active owners of their educational journeys. DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program cultivated learner autonomy by offering choices in assignments, teaching goal setting, and scaffolding problem-solving. Flagship teachers consistently gave students a choice in terms of quantity and type of assignments they would complete based on their current academic strengths and weaknesses. Additional assistance from teachers was also based on students' voluntary requests. Moreover, students had complete control over the topics and content they selected for the Capstone research project.

Flagship teachers also guided students in identifying their respective short-term and long-term learning objectives based on their entry level of proficiency in the Chinese language. They allowed students to develop their own learning goals and evaluate their own progress. Rather than telling students what to do when a student struggled, the CM Flagship teachers provided resources and guidance that helped students formulate their own solutions. This commitment to helping students develop their own learning autonomy required a student-centered approach and flexibility to accommodate student needs.

Encouraging more student ownership, inquiry-based learning, and independent exploration in DLIFLC classes could contribute to increased motivation and engagement and hence improved student learning. This balance between rigor and support created an environment in which students felt motivated and engaged.

A Culture of Continuous Feedback and Reflection

DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program practiced frequent counseling, coaching, and reflection to promote students' development of target language and culture proficiency. Flagship faculty invariably provided timely feedback to help students understand which strategies worked well for them and what type of adjustments were needed. Expanding formative feedback practices and developing students' reflective learning habits in lower-level courses in the fall semester helped students develop stronger self-awareness and learning strategies earlier.

Additionally, the Flagship Program built in milestone checkups (usually after each mid-term and final exam) where students would be asked to reflect on what they learned, how they learned, what worked and what didn't, and what they would need to improve in the future. To pinpoint students' specific weaker areas that warrant focused development, the Flagship teachers designed a reflection form for students to complete after each mid-term and final exam to identify the reasons why they answered a test question incorrectly, e.g., unfamiliar vocabulary, lack of grammar knowledge, lack of background knowledge, carelessness, time constraint, etc.

A Teaching Approach that Integrates Oral Production across the Curriculum

Since the Flagship certification/graduation requirement is Level 3 on the OPI, whereas Level 2+ on listening and reading, the Program placed heavy emphasis on speaking practice in its curriculum design. As mentioned above, one of the tools used was the target-language-only policy, which required students to interact with teachers and fellow students in Chinese only both in and outside of class whenever on campus and during Chinese House hours.

In addition to this, each day the Program scheduled one speaking class and each student was provided with one-on-one or one-on-two speaking practice. Aside from speaking classes, the last section of the three-hour listening and reading class each day invariably included a speaking production task, such as a role play, a mini-debate, a mini-forum, or a presentation. Weekly student presentations and monthly student debates were designed to strengthen students' speaking abilities, particularly higher-level speaking abilities, as well.

In contrast, since the speaking requirement is lower at DLIFLC for many of our language programs, teaching teams tend to place less emphasis on students' speaking practice, which is understandable given the time constraint faced by all DLIFLC's language programs. Nevertheless, in students' language development, the potential benefits of speaking practice should not be overlooked. Among many other things, regular speaking practice can help reinforce grammar and vocabulary, improve pronunciation and therefore help promote students' overall language proficiency. Furthermore, speaking transforms passive learning into active social interaction, which can serve as a confidence booster and learning motivator.

Speaking also likely plays an important role in improving listening since it requires learners to integrate vocabulary, grammar, and phonology in real time, the same way as listening does (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). Within the CM Flagship Program at DLIFLC, students consistently achieved strong learning outcomes in listening. In reflection, the Flagship faculty attributed the success to our emphasis on speaking practice, among other factors. If this is indeed the case, then DLIFLC classes may consider scheduling more speaking hours in their weekly schedule to help students develop their listening proficiency.

Program Benefits to the DLIFLC Flagship Faculty

DLNSEO, the organization that funds all Flagship programs, provided the DLIFLC Flagship faculty with a variety of opportunities to grow professionally. DLNSEO regularly funded teacher training workshops in the summer. The DLIFLC faculty participated in summer workshops on leveraging technology in language teaching, effectively developing students' reading proficiency, and integrating reading and writing through "read-to-write" and "write-to-read" strategies.

DLNSEO also funded the Flagship Language Technology Center to conduct design studios, which are hands-on technology-based language and culture projects. Flagship faculty participated in a design studio on how to develop autonomous and independent learners. Furthermore, DLNSEO funded a site visit by Flagship Faculty to the Taipei Chinese Flagship Capstone Center to learn

about their best practices and to exchange teaching experiences with colleagues from other Chinese Flagship programs. DLNSEO supported the Flagship faculty's participation in ACTFL conventions and ACTFL OPI training as well. Such extensive exposure to current best practices in the language teaching community outside of DLIFLC brought fresh ideas into the classroom and enriched instruction. Through this experience, Flagship teachers strengthened not only their instructional skills but also their identities as reflective and adaptive educators.

Through teaching in the Program, the faculty benefited from becoming more adaptive and responsive instructors through working with diverse learner profiles. They gained extensive experience designing individualized interventions and scaffolding strategies. Last but not least, the collaborative teaching environment strengthened teamwork, reflection, and instructional flexibility.

Contributions to the DLIFLC Mission

DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program made a positive impact on DLIFLC both internally and externally. Internally, the Flagship Program contributed to each of the three key components of DLIFLC: students, faculty, and curriculum. As mentioned above, each spring the Flagship students tutored Basic Course students for about four months, either one on one, one on two, or one on three. They supported Basic Course students in developing their speaking, grammar, pronunciation, and study strategies, among other skills. By joining other events, such as culture clubs and the holiday entertainment program, together with the Basic Course students, the Flagship students helped motivate the Basic Course students to work harder and aim higher in terms of their own language proficiency goals, among other things.

The Flagship students also participated in joint workshops, presentations, and holiday events with the CM Intermediate and Advanced Class students, which proved to be a strong motivator for the Continuing Education students as well. Finally, the Flagship students frequently spoke Chinese with Basic Course students during class breaks. Since their classrooms were typically adjacent, these informal interactions provided Basic Course students with valuable speaking practice and helped them develop the habit of using their target language consistently.

In terms of contributions to the professional growth of DLIFLC faculty, the CM Flagship faculty regularly shared what they learned from the professional development events outside of DLIFLC and the Flagship Program's best practices with DLIFLC faculty at professional development functions, such as the UCM Annual Conference and the Language Learning and Teaching Conference, and thus contributed to the professional growth of DLIFLC faculty and the DLIFLC mission.

Regarding curriculum, building on the CM Intermediate and Advanced Course curricula, the Flagship faculty developed an updated, robust, and effective curriculum that contributed significantly to the success of the CM Flagship Program. As requested, the Flagship Program shared its curriculum with the CE Chinese Program based in Maryland, which helped to strengthen its curriculum.

Perhaps equally, if not more, significantly, the positive impact that the Program has made on DLIFLC takes place externally in the foreign language education community. The consistent outstanding learning outcomes of the graduates from DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program helped consolidate its reputation as a premier foreign language education institution in the world. Additionally, the regular cooperation and collaboration between the DLIFLC Flagship Program and other Flagship programs strengthened the partnerships between DLIFLC and academic institutions, which in turn has contributed to the missions of DLIFLC.

CONCLUSION

With the hard work of the Flagship students and faculty and the strong support from the DLIFLC leadership, DLIFLC's Chinese Flagship Program was a great success. It produced 28 global professionals who not only possess a high-level proficiency in Mandarin Chinese but also major in at least one academic field, and in some cases several fields, both of which will help contribute to the national interests and security of the United States. DLIFLC's Flagship graduates found employment with the National Security Agency, the Department of Justice, the Department of Treasury, and Congress, among others. By hosting the Program, DLIFLC gained valuable experience with developing students to higher proficiency levels, expanded its breadth of functions as a government educational institution, and consolidated its status as the premier foreign language education institution in the world.

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