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Dialog on Language Instruction

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Dialog on Language Instruction

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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.

Furthermore, 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 Speaking 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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Action Inquiry

Assessing the Perceived Effectiveness of Early Intervention Action Plans in Improving Outcomes for At-Risk Learners in the Arabic School

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Early intervention (EI) rests on the assumption that learners who are identified early, advised proactively, and supported with tailored follow-up are more likely to recover academically than those who are left to self-correction after repeated failures. The project applied a mixed-methods approach and examined the implementation and perceived usefulness of EI action plans provided to 75 at-risk learners in the Arabic School (UAD) who were placed in EIs between September 2025 and March 2026; of these, 65 learners responded to the six-question survey instrument. Results showed that 55 learners (84.6%) reported receiving and implementing a written action plan, while 10 (15.4%) reported never receiving or implementing an action plan after their EIs. Perceived usefulness was strongly positive: 27 learners (41.5%) rated the plan very helpful, and 33 (50.8%) rated it helpful, meaning that 60 out of 65 respondents (92.3%) described the intervention as beneficial. Qualitative analysis showed that learners most often described authentic listening practice, vocabulary review using digital tools, reading practice, and structured study routines as effective. The respondents also credited zero, seventh, and lunch hours, along with 1-on-1 mentoring, as the enabling conditions that made the action plans workable. The findings support the conclusion that EIs are most powerful when diagnoses are followed by a written plan, repeated mentor contact, and modality-specific strategy instruction that learners can implement immediately. The inquiry offers practice-based implications for EI follow-ups, self-regulated learning, and foreign language support systems in fast-paced instructional settings.

Keywords: *Early Intervention, At-Risk Learners, Intrusive Advising, Self-Regulated Learning*

INTRODUCTION

Early intervention has become a central response to academic risk in higher education because it shifts institutional practice from reaction to prevention. Rather than waiting until learners accumulate repeated failures, an early intervention model identifies performance gaps while there is still time to respond with advising, mentoring, and targeted instructional supports. Research across higher education has shown that such targeted interventions can improve students' academic outcomes when they are focused on a concrete problem, theoretically grounded, and delivered early enough to change learners' behaviors before those behaviors harden into patterns of disengagement (Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Harackiewicz & Priniski, 2018; Lizzio & Wilson, 2013). This premise is especially relevant in intensive language learning programs, where slow recovery is costly because every day of delay compounds vocabulary overload, listening demands, reading speed requirements, and anxiety about falling behind the learning curve.

Within foreign language education, early intervention is not simply an administrative process. It is also a sound pedagogical strategy. A learner who struggles in listening comprehension may actually be facing a layered problem involving inadequate vocabulary breadth, weak metacognitive monitoring, overreliance on word-for-word translation, and a lack of effective review routines. Zimmerman (2002) argued that self-regulated learners set goals, manage time, select strategies, monitor performance, and seek help when needed. In foreign language settings, those capabilities are not peripheral; they are part of successful learning itself. Likewise, metacognitive work in second language listening has shown that learners benefit when teachers make the listening process more explicit and help students plan, monitor, and evaluate their comprehension strategically rather than passively hoping that repeated exposure will solve the problem (Goh, 2008).

The DLIFLC's EI-SOPs provide a solid framework for identifying and supporting at-risk learners through established criteria, procedures, and expectations. Within UAD, limited evidence was available on how consistently learners received and implemented written action plans and how helpful they perceived the recommended strategies to be. This created a gap between the procedural expectations of the EI process and learners' actual experiences with the interventions. This inquiry therefore examined the perceived effectiveness of EI action plans among at-risk learners in UAD. It also identified the targeted skill areas, strategies, and support mechanisms learners considered most useful. The project was informed by self-regulated learning, metacognition, and higher-education intervention research, emphasizing planning, monitoring, strategic practice, and timely, structured support.

For UAD at-risk learners, the problem is intensified by the pace, right-to-left language transition, content density, and the cumulative nature of learning gaps. Missing one set of vocabulary items affects the next reading task, the next listening event, and the next opportunity to speak or write accurately. Wang and Treffers-Daller (2017) found that vocabulary knowledge was a particularly strong predictor of second language listening performance, reinforcing the idea that listening,

reading, and vocabulary retention should not be treated as isolated deficits. In the same way, mentoring and advising matter not only because they deliver information but because they help learners re-enter a cycle of effort, feedback, and accountability. Studies of mentoring and student-faculty partnerships have shown that structured relationships can improve persistence, especially for students who are already at risk of academic failure or disconnection (Nagda et al., 1998; Vivian, 2005). The present project, therefore, treats early intervention as an integrated system composed of identification, written planning, mentor-mentee participation, strategy implementation, and follow-up reflection.

ACTION PLAN

Rationale and Problem of Practice

The problem of practice driving this project is straightforward: UAD needs evidence about whether early intervention action plans are reaching learners in a usable form and whether the content of those plans aligns with the actual learning barriers students report during follow-ups. If the plans are too generic, insufficiently monitored, or poorly matched to modality-specific challenges, then the intervention process may satisfy procedural requirements without producing meaningful academic recovery. If, however, the plans are being implemented and learners can describe concrete benefits from specific strategies and mentor contact, then the school has evidence to strengthen and standardize the most effective features of the current system.

Research Question

How effective are early intervention action plans, as perceived by UAD at-risk learners, after the intervention has been implemented and followed up?

Data Collection

This action inquiry applied a mixed-methods approach for data collection and analysis, combining descriptive quantitative analysis with qualitative thematic coding. The quantitative data described the effectiveness of written and implemented action plans followed for three to four weeks with the support of the learner mentor(s) (also known as counselors). The qualitative strand examined learners' narrative explanations of the strategies they practiced, the support they sought from mentors and teaching teams, and the further assistance they still needed.

The data were collected using MS Forms, comprising six questions (see Appendix), and a link was sent to 75 at-risk learners who participated in EIs from September 2025 through March 2026. The response rate was 87% ($n=65$). For the quantitative analysis, all responses were cleaned for case variation and minor formatting inconsistencies. Simple frequency counts and percentages were calculated for implementation, helpfulness, and modality categories. For the qualitative analysis, the narrative fields were read iteratively and coded for recurring themes. A practical

coding frame emerged around five strategy themes: a) listening practice and authentic input, b) vocabulary tools and review, c) reading practice, d) study routines and time management, and e) speaking or writing reinforcement. A second coding frame was applied to mentor support and requests for further assistance. Because a single response could include multiple ideas, qualitative themes were treated as overlapping rather than mutually exclusive. This approach preserved the complexity of learner narratives and better matched the reality of multimodal language intervention.

Snapshot of the Follow-up Dataset

The quantitative findings indicate a high level of engagement with the action-plan intervention. Among the 65 respondents, 55 (84.6%) reported receiving a written action plan and implementing the recommended strategies. In contrast, 10 learners (15.4%) indicated that they had neither received nor implemented an action plan. Reasons for students not receiving an action plan included: (a) the mentor/counselor changed during that time and the student did not receive the action plan; (b) the student was expected to follow it on his/her own without a written plan; and (c) the action plan was never developed or distributed to the student. These results suggest that the intervention was successfully communicated and translated into practice for most learners, demonstrating substantial participation in the follow-up support process, but that there is room for improvement.

Learners also reported highly favorable perceptions of the action plans' effectiveness. Twenty-seven respondents, or 41.5%, rated their action plans as very helpful, while 33 respondents, or 50.8%, rated them as helpful. Combined, 92.3% of respondents provided a positive assessment of the intervention. Only four learners, or 6.2%, selected a neutral response, and one learner, or 1.5%, considered the plan not helpful; no respondent rated it as not helpful at all. Overall, the findings indicate that the action plans were widely perceived as relevant and beneficial for supporting learners' academic needs and the implementation of strategies (see Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive Frequencies Derived from the Follow-Ups

Indicator	Count	Percent	Interpretation
Received and implemented written action plan	55	84.6%	Most respondents confirmed implementation of a formal plan.
Did not confirm written action plan implementation	10	15.4%	A smaller but meaningful group did not confirm application.
Rated plan very helpful	27	41.5%	Strongest positive endorsement category.
Rated plan helpful	33	50.8%	Substantial positive endorsement category.
Rated plan neutral	4	6.2%	Possible partial application or uncertain impact.
Rated plan not helpful	1	1.5%	Very limited negative response.

Note. Multiple selections were permitted, so totals exceed the number of respondents.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Among the 65 respondents (at-risk learners), 55 (84.6%) reported receiving a written action plan and implementing the suggested strategies, with or without their mentors/instructors. Only 10 (15.4%) respondents mentioned that they never received any written action plan to follow for three to four weeks. These results indicate that the school is generally successful in moving from diagnosis to implementation. Yet the data also signal an implementation gap worth attention. If these students had received timely support, they would have largely benefited as well. A rate of 84.6% is strong, meaning that roughly one in six respondents did not confirm receipt and implementation of a written plan. In an intensive language environment, that proportion is large enough to matter because the learners who do not act on the intervention are often the very learners who can least afford a delay in structured support.

Table 1 shows that the perceived helpfulness was strong. Among the 65 respondents, 27 (41.5%) rated the action plan very helpful, 33 (50.8%) rated it helpful, four (6.2%) were neutral, and only one (1.5%) rated it not helpful. Put differently, 60 of 65 learners (92.3%) experienced the plan positively. This pattern matters because action inquiry is concerned with whether local practice is producing usable value, not merely whether procedures were completed. The overwhelming concentration of responses in the helpful and very helpful categories suggests that early intervention is being experienced as more than bureaucratic compliance. It is functioning as applied support.

A closer look at the implementation and helpfulness adds nuance. Several respondents who reported not receiving and implementing a written plan still rated the support as helpful or very helpful. This likely means that the intervention system is delivering useful support even when learners do not perceive it as a formal written action plan. The implication is not that documentation is unimportant. Rather, it is that the school may already be doing some effective advising informally, and that formalization could improve consistency without replacing human responsiveness. In practice, a learner may remember the one-on-one coaching, tailored homework, or zero-hour support more vividly than the document itself. That finding supports a dual emphasis on both paperwork and relationships.

The modality data clearly show where intervention energy is concentrated. Because the survey allowed multiple selections, frequencies reflect the number of times a modality was named, not the number of unique learners with only one need. Listening comprehension appeared most often, selected 57 times (87.7% of respondents). Vocabulary learning and retention came next with 39 mentions (60.0%), followed by study habits and time management with 34 mentions (52.3%). Reading comprehension (23, 35.4%) and speaking (22, 33.8%) were also common but less frequent (see Table 2).

Table 2
Action Plans According to the Modalities

Rank	Targeted Modality or Skill Area	Frequency
1	Listening comprehension	57
2	Vocabulary learning and retention	39
3	Study habits and time management	34
4	Reading comprehension	23
5	Speaking	22

Note. Multiple selections were permitted, so totals exceed the number of respondents.

This modality pattern aligns well with the literature on language-learning difficulties. Listening tends to expose multiple deficits simultaneously: lexical gaps, processing speed, uncertainty tolerance, attention drift, and weak inferencing (Goh, 2008). Vocabulary retention is similarly cross-cutting because insufficient retention undermines both receptive and productive performance (Wang & Treffers-Daller, 2017). The prominence of study habits and time management in the data suggests that many intervention challenges are not purely linguistic (Zimmerman, 2002). They also involve how learners distribute their effort, when they review, how they revisit old material, and whether they can sustain a realistic plan over time. In this sense, the materials support a broad understanding of early intervention. It is not simply about “fixing a weak skill.” It is about helping learners stabilize the study system that carries all skills.

The qualitative narratives from Questions 4, 5, and 6 make this even clearer. The most frequent strategy theme in the responses was listening practice through authentic or semi-authentic input.

Learners repeatedly mentioned that they listened to news audio and listening passages from the core curriculum. They also reported using tools that use authentic materials, such as the University of Maryland's online National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) and DLIFLC's Global Language Online Support System (GLOSS), Parascribe, and Transcript Trainer 5.0. One respondent wrote that "practice[ing] listening on GLOSS and NFLC" was the key action. Another reported that "using Parascribe, listening to authentic material were helpful to close the gap in authentic vocabulary and improve listening skills." Still another described using news and radio because it made the language feel available "while running errands or going to and from places." These comments suggest that action plans were most persuasive when they transformed listening from a vague weakness into a concrete routine linked to a named resource.

Vocabulary learning and retention was the second-strongest theme. Learners shared that they engaged in repeated writing activities, reviewed old vocabulary, studied words before class, and utilized digital flashcards and also DLIFLC's Networked Pronunciation Feedback (NetProf) tool for effective learning and retention purposes. One student reported writing the vocabulary "15-20 times" and then noticing better spelling and retention. Another described learning eight words at a time between homework segments. These descriptions are important because they reveal that vocabulary support becomes more credible when it is operationalized in manageable behaviors such as chunking, spaced repetition, multimodal review, and planned recycling. They also support the larger argument that vocabulary learning is not merely a list-learning task. It is a disciplined review process tied to retention, recognition, and transfer.

Reading practice was also visible in the responses, though it often appeared as part of a combined strategy package rather than as a stand-alone intervention. Students mentioned reading extra passages, reading aloud, previewing material before class, and using reading to support pronunciation or reporting. What stands out is that learners did not describe reading help mainly in terms of grammar explanation. Instead, they framed it as a way to become familiar with passages, reduce surprise during class, and increase speed or confidence. That pattern suggests that intervention in reading is most effective when it reduces cognitive load before graded performance, rather than when it overburdens students with excessive new material.

The study-routines theme may be the most educationally significant of all because it connects specific modality work with self-regulated learning. Learners described setting a timeline after school, dedicating fixed study blocks, previewing the next day's material, taking breaks between homework sections to learn vocabulary, and limiting competing activities. These are classic self-regulatory moves involving planning, pacing, distributed practice, and self-monitoring (Zimmerman, 2002). They matter because many language interventions fail not because the recommended strategies are wrong but because students do not embed them in a sustainable routine. The follow-up comments indicate that action plans were most likely to feel effective when they helped the learner decide not only what to study, but when and how to do it (see Table 3).

Table 3
Tools and Strategies Applied

Rank	Strategy Theme	Frequency
1	Listening practice and authentic input	43
2	Vocabulary tools and review strategies	29
3	Reading practice	21
4	Study routines and time management	16
5	Speaking and writing reinforcement	12

Note. Themes overlap because one learner could mention more than one strategy.

Support from mentors and the teaching teams (TTs) formed the backbone of implementation. According to the early intervention SOPs 2025 (section 6.e), the mentor/counselor develops and implements the action plan with the learner. The most common support theme was structured extra time, especially the zero, seventh, and eighth hours, as well as lunch hours. A second major support theme was one-on-one mentoring sessions. Learners also mentioned that tailored homework, supplemental materials, and topic-specific review content helped a lot in building good study habits and confidence. These findings suggest that the action plans worked best when they were attached to scheduled opportunities for contact rather than left as independent advice. Advising literature has long argued that at-risk students benefit from proactive, structured, and relational support rather than from optional help that requires them to solve the help-seeking problem alone (Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Thomas, 2020). The presented data strongly support that claim (see Table 4).

Table 4
Support Sought or Received from the Teaching Team/Mentor

Rank	Support Category	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percentage
1	Structured extra hours	45	48.9%
2	One-on-one mentoring sessions	34	37.0%
3	Tailored homework or instructional materials	10	10.9%
4	No additional support reported	3	3.3%

Note. Theme frequencies are non-exclusive, and percentages represent the share of coded mentions, not the share of 65 respondents.

The final qualitative field, further assistance needed, adds a useful corrective. Many learners requested no further help, which implies the suggested strategies supported them, and they wanted to continue with what was working. Additional strategies addressing current or emerging weaknesses are incorporated during follow-up by a student learning specialist. However, a sizable subset still asked for stronger planning support, additional listening help,

more vocabulary retention support, or a better balance in homework load. One learner, for example, said that too many passages created overload and that learning would be better supported by focusing deeply on “one or two passages” and reviewing needed vocabulary. This comment is pedagogically important because it warns against confusing intervention with volume. More work is not necessarily a better intervention. Improved sequencing, a narrower focus, and realistic pacing may lead to greater impact (see Table 5).

Table 5

Further Assistance Requested After Completing EI Action Plan

Rank	Further-Assistance Theme	Frequency	Percentage
1	No further assistance requested	27	42.9%
2	Additional planning and time-management support	14	22.2%
3	Additional listening support	8	12.7%
4	Additional vocabulary-learning and retention support	8	12.7%
5	Adjusted homework load or instructional materials	4	6.3%
6	More individualized support	2	3.2%

Note. Counts based on coded themes from nonblank responses (not the number of respondents) and may overlap.

DISCUSSION

Taken together, the findings present a coherent picture. Early intervention action plans are perceived by students as working, but not because they exist as documents alone. They work when they convert a diffuse sense of academic risk into a manageable set of actions tied to specific modalities, concrete resources, and repeated contact with mentors. The strongest evidence for this conclusion is the combination of high helpfulness ratings and the specificity of learner narratives. Students did not merely say that the plan “helped.” They described what they actually did: for example, listening to authentic material, reviewing vocabulary on digital platforms, reading ahead, chunking learning into smaller units, writing summaries, and attending extra instructional hours. In action inquiry terms, that is valuable because it demonstrates behavioral commitment.

This project also clarifies the relationship between language deficits and study deficits. In many intensive programs, academic difficulty is initially categorized by modality: listening, reading, speaking, or vocabulary. Yet the follow-up data suggest that these categories are deeply entangled with self-regulatory processes such as planning, reviewing, distributed practice sessions, and help-seeking. This is consistent with the literature. Zimmerman (2002) positioned self-regulation as a cyclical process involving forethought, performance, and self-reflection. Goh (2008) similarly argued that listening development is strengthened when learners engage metacognitively with the task rather than remaining passive recipients of input. Students who described fixed study times, repeated reviews, or resource-specific listening routines were often the same students who described the action plan as genuinely useful.

The prominence of listening comprehension in the modality data deserves special emphasis. Listening is often the skill that exposes a learner's true processing load because it cannot be easily slowed down under live or test conditions. The findings suggest that the intervention was most useful when listening support moved beyond exhortation to resource-based, repeatable practices such as transcription, authentic listening, and guided repetition. This aligns with empirical work showing that vocabulary knowledge and general language proficiency are major contributors to listening performance, while metacognitive awareness helps learners manage the process more effectively (Wang & Treffers-Daller, 2017). For regular practice, the implication is that listening support should continue to integrate vocabulary recycling, strategic note-taking, tolerance for ambiguity, and post-listening reflection rather than treating listening as exposure alone.

The data also support the importance of carefully planned and proactive advising. Several learners benefited from zero-hour, lunch-hour, or one-on-one teaching sessions, which suggests that support was more effective when the path to access was clear and immediate. This pattern mirrors findings from higher education intervention research showing that proactive advising with clear goals can improve course outcomes and persistence (Lizzio & Wilson, 2013; Thomas, 2020).

Another important finding is the subtle mismatch between formal documentation and learner perception. Some respondents benefited from support even though they did not report receiving or implementing a formal written action plan. This implies that regular seventh hour instruction or interventions may be more visible to learners than the written artifact itself. From an EI-SOPs perspective, that is both reassuring and cautionary. It is reassuring because it shows that support is reaching students through human channels. It is cautionary because uneven recognition and implementation of the written plan can lead to less consistent follow-ups. A stronger common template, coupled with explicit discussion of what the written plan is and how it should be used, would likely increase coherence without diminishing flexibility.

Project Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings, several implications are useful for UGE schools' practice. First, the existing early intervention process laid out in EI-SOPs (2025) must be continued systematically and refined around the practices learners reported as helpful. The findings show that 84.6% of respondents received and implemented a written action plan and that 92.3% rated the action plan as helpful or very helpful. These results support maintaining written action plans while giving greater attention to consistent delivery, clear communication, and follow-up for learners who do not receive or recognize a written plan. The 15.4% implementation gap suggests that the immediate priority is to ensure that the existing process reaches all identified at-risk learners in a timely and understandable manner. In addition, greater transparency and stronger quality-control measures would enhance the effectiveness and consistency of the written action plan, enabling learners to receive timely, targeted, and meaningful support.

Second, listening comprehension should remain a major focus of early intervention because it was the most frequently targeted area, identified by 57 respondents (87.7%). The qualitative findings also showed that listening practice and authentic input were the most frequently reported strategy theme. Learners described using online tools and authentic listening passages. Therefore, EI action plans for learners with listening difficulties should continue to emphasize concrete, repeatable listening practices and resources that can be incorporated into regular study routines. This recommendation is further supported by learners who continued to request additional listening assistance after the intervention.

Third, vocabulary learning and study routines should be addressed as closely connected intervention needs. Vocabulary learning and retention were identified by 39 respondents (60.0%), while study habits and time management were identified by 34 respondents (52.3%). Learners reported benefiting from repeated review, digital vocabulary tools, writing words repeatedly, learning vocabulary in small chunks, previewing materials over time, and setting fixed study slots. The findings therefore support action plans that match these strategies to the learner's identified difficulty and organize them into manageable routines. This is especially relevant because planning and time-management support was the most common remaining assistance request after "no further assistance," and additional vocabulary support was also requested.

Fourth, structured mentor-mentee sessions produce better results and enhance trust and learning. Structured extra hours were the most frequently reported form of support, followed by one-on-one mentoring sessions. Learners also identified tailored homework and supplemental instructional materials as useful sources. These findings indicate that action plans are more likely to be experienced as meaningful when learners have scheduled opportunities to discuss difficulties, practice targeted skills, and receive individualized guidance. The data therefore support preserving accessible extra-hours and one-on-one sessions within the existing intervention process and connecting that support directly to the strategies identified in each learner's action plan.

Fifth, follow-up sessions complete the EI cycle and must be used to determine whether the original action plan is meeting the learner's needs and whether adjustments are necessary. Although many learners requested no further assistance, others identified continued needs in planning and time management, listening, vocabulary retention, homework load, instructional materials, or individualized support. The qualitative data also indicate that excessive practice volume may create overload for some learners, and that a narrower, better-paced focus may be more useful. Accordingly, follow-up conversations should use learner feedback to refine the existing action plan, adjust the amount or pacing of assigned support as needed, and focus on unresolved needs.

Limitations and Future Research

This action inquiry is limited in its timeframe and scope in terms of the number of at-risk learners. The data reflect input/feedback from the learners, which is self-reported and therefore subject

to memory, impression management, and individual interpretation. The qualitative coding was interpretive and designed for improvement rather than for hypothesis testing with inter-rater reliability statistics. In addition, the sample reflects a defined follow-up subset rather than the entire population of UAD at-risk learners. Also, this project does not provide UGE-wide practices and systems established in each school. Even so, these limitations do not diminish the inquiry's practical value; it still centers on the core EI-SOPs, which are implemented across UGE. In addition, action inquiry does not require perfect generalizability to be useful; it just requires disciplined data and evidence strong enough to inform better practice.

Future research could extend this project in several important directions. First, a UGE-wide analysis of EI action-plan implementation could examine similarities, differences, and emerging trends across schools, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how consistently the EI-SOPs are being applied. Second, future studies could analyze the implementation and effectiveness of EI action plans among a substantially larger population of at-risk learners. This would allow researchers to identify recurring intervention patterns, learner outcomes, and factors associated with successful or less successful interventions. Third, a qualitative review of the content and quality of individual EI action plans could determine whether the plans contain clearly stated, measurable learning objectives, learner-specific interventions, and appropriate follow-up measures. Such an analysis could also examine whether variation in the quality of written action plans is associated with differences in learner outcomes. Finally, a longitudinal study could follow at-risk learners over multiple semesters or academic phases to determine whether improvements associated with EI interventions are sustained over time and whether types of action plans produce stronger and more durable academic outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This action inquiry finds that early interventions at UAD were generally perceived by learners as helpful as they progressed from identifying academic challenges and impediments to implementing specific learning strategies. Most respondents reported receiving and implementing a written action plan and rated the intervention as helpful or very helpful. The findings further showed that listening comprehension, vocabulary learning and retention, study habits, and time management were the most frequently targeted areas of support. Learner responses also highlighted the value of specific learning strategies, identified resources, structured extra instructional hours, and one-on-one mentoring in implementing their action plans. At the same time, the findings identified areas requiring continued attention, including ensuring that all at-risk learners receive and implement their action plans and providing additional support in planning, listening, vocabulary retention, and a manageable instructional workload for at least three to four weeks consistently. Overall, the findings support maintaining focused action plans, accessible and structured mentor or teaching-team support, and continued use of learner feedback to guide appropriate follow-up adjustments within the EI process.

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APPENDIX

Student Feedback

Title: Assessing the Perceived Effectiveness of Early Intervention Action Plans in Improving Outcomes for UAD At-Risk Learners.

Dear Student,

These questions are used to gauge the impact or effectiveness of the provided action plan after early intervention. All information provided here is anonymous and will be solely to guide instruction.

1. Do you agree to participate in this action inquiry project? Yes/No

If YES, please move to the next question. If no, you can close the file.

2. Did you receive a written action plan and implement the suggested strategies? Yes/No

3. How helpful was the provided action plan?

A) Very helpful

B) Helpful

C) Neutral

D) Not helpful

E) Not helpful at all

4. For which modality/skill were you provided with the learning strategies? Select all that apply to you.

A) Listening comprehension

B) Reading comprehension

C) Vocabulary learning and retention

D) Speaking

E) Study habits & time management

F) Others

5. List the strategies you practiced and explain how effective they were for you.

6. To follow the action plan, what specific help did you seek or receive from your teaching team/mentor? For example, 1-on-1 sessions, lunch hour, zero hour, 8th hour, etc.

7. What further assistance do you need from the Student Learning Specialist or the TT/Mentor?

Thank you so much for your time and valuable input. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact XXX.

Action Inquiry

Structured Transcript Use in L2 Listening: Comprehension, Vocabulary, and Confidence

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Listening to authentic spoken language can be especially demanding for learners in intensive language programs. Learners are often expected to follow rapid speech, recognize unfamiliar vocabulary, and make sense of the overall message at the same time. This action inquiry project involved 12 students in the same Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) course at DLIFLC, with students representing different levels of listening proficiency. The project examined how these military language learners experienced a structured approach to transcript-supported listening, with particular attention to their perceptions of comprehension, vocabulary retention, and confidence. To help address these challenges, transcripts were built into listening activities using a structured approach. Students first listened to the audio to understand the main idea. Afterward, they used the transcript to confirm their understanding and examine the content more closely. Student feedback was collected anonymously through Microsoft Forms and indicated that students perceived the transcripts as helpful for understanding the audio and remembering new vocabulary. Many students also reported that having access to the transcript made difficult listening tasks easier to work through and increased their confidence when listening to unfamiliar material. Students reported that when the transcript came later, they could focus on understanding the main idea first and use the written text afterward to check what they had heard. This feedback supports using transcripts at selected stages of a listening activity rather than throughout the entire task. Pedagogically, instructors can use delayed transcripts to support comprehension without replacing independent listening practice.

Keywords: *Listening Comprehension, Vocabulary Development, Learner Confidence, Transcript-Supported Listening, Structured Transcript Use*

BACKGROUND

Listening is a difficult skill for second language (L2) learners. They have to deal with unfamiliar sounds, new vocabulary, and overall meaning all at once, which can be especially difficult under pressure. Goh (2023) noted that learners often struggle to recognize words in connected speech and quickly apply their vocabulary and grammar knowledge to understand what they hear.

At the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), the pace of instruction can make these listening problems harder to manage. As part of their listening instruction, students are regularly exposed to authentic audio that reflects natural, native-speaker speech, reduced forms, different accents, and even culturally specific expressions. Although this exposure is essential for developing proficiency, it can also make listening more challenging. Even intermediate and higher-performing students can struggle as it becomes more complex. Faiz (2023) examined the relationship between learner autonomy and listening and reading achievement among 86 military learners of Arabic. The students' mean scores on the In-Course Proficiency Test (ICPT) were 74.90 in listening and 84.08 in reading. Because the study compared only these two skills, the results cannot establish that listening was the hardest skill at DLIFLC. They do show that the listening average was lower for this group of Arabic learners. Kazemi (2026) examined a different aspect of listening among Persian learners. He focused on the problems students experienced when processing speech in real time and used a six-step approach to teach them to break spoken sentences into smaller units and recognize their structure.

Transcripts are commonly used during listening activities, yet students may depend on the written text when it is available while the audio is playing. Instead of working through what they hear, they may follow the transcript. For this reason, decisions about how and when to use transcripts matter. Hartshorn and Stephens (2023) examined the use of transcripts during repeated listening and found that learners benefited from having the written text as part of the listening process. Qiao and Chen (2023), however, reported different experiences among the L2 learners in their study. Some students had trouble listening to the audio while reading the live transcript. Errors in the transcript and delays between speech and text made the task harder. Students also worried that frequent use might cause them to depend on the written text. Qiao and Chen recommended reducing transcript access over time and adjusting the amount of support to students' needs. These concerns informed the present project, in which students listened to the audio before receiving the transcript.

Written support can further help students work with unfamiliar vocabulary. Wei and Fan (2022) found that seeing text along with spoken language can support vocabulary learning. The timing of that support, however, may be just as important. Benati (2023) and Pourtousi (2022) suggest that learners generally attend to meaning first, which provides a reason for introducing the transcript after students have already worked with the audio. Together, this research informed the sequence used in the present project. Students' perceptions of this sequence in relation to listening comprehension, vocabulary retention, and confidence were gathered and analyzed.

Although previous research supports transcript-assisted listening and structured listening instruction, considerably less is known about how military learners of Arabic at DLIFLC perceive the use of transcripts when access to the written text is deliberately delayed until after initial listening. Existing DLIFLC scholarship establishes the importance of Arabic listening and structured approaches to listening instruction, while broader second language acquisition (SLA) research identifies potential benefits associated with transcript support. The present action inquiry project builds on these areas by examining students' reported experiences with a structured listen-first, transcript-later approach, particularly their perceptions of comprehension, vocabulary retention, and confidence.

Research Questions

This project focused on the following questions:

1. How do students perceive the use of structured transcript support in helping them understand spoken Arabic during listening activities?
2. How do students perceive the use of structured transcript support in helping them retain vocabulary encountered during listening activities?
3. How do students perceive the role of structured transcript support in building their confidence during listening activities?

In L2 listening, the timing of giving learners the transcript is an important consideration that could affect the way they approach the task. Instead of being given the written text at the onset of the task, learners can process the listening material before receiving the transcript. As a matter of fact, Kajiura et al. (2025) found advantages when transcript reading and listening were done separately rather than together. This allows learners to work through the spoken material without immediately depending on the written text. The transcript can then provide an opportunity to return to the material and examine unfamiliar vocabulary and expressions. In a related study, Hartshorn and Stephens (2023) examined repeated listening in which students listened to the audio before working with the transcript. Their study points to the timing of the transcript as an important part of the listening activity. Used this way, the written text comes after students have already tried to understand the audio on their own.

ACTION PLAN

Context

This project involved 12 adult military L2 learners enrolled in the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) basic program at DLIFLC. All students were enrolled in the same intensive course, and none were native Arabic speakers or heritage learners. Listening was an instructional priority for the entire class as students continued developing their ability to process spoken Arabic. Daily classroom listening activities often involved authentic or near-authentic audio under time pressure,

requiring students to work through unfamiliar vocabulary, rapid speech, reduced forms, and culturally specific expressions.

The project followed U.S. Army and DLIFLC Human Research Protections Program guidance and received supervisory approval before data were collected. The transcript-supported listening activities were incorporated into regular classroom instruction. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and students were informed that choosing not to participate would have no effect on their grades or instruction. Of the 12 students invited to complete the survey, 11 participated, and one declined. Survey responses were collected anonymously without names, email addresses, or other identifying information.

Actions Taken

The transcript activities were introduced during Semester 2 as part of the students' regular MSA listening instruction. The students typically received two to three listening-comprehension hours each day, but those hours were divided among teachers according to the teaching rotation. For this project, I used the structured transcript approach during the listening hours assigned to me. Students worked with the audio for overall meaning first, followed by a closer review using the transcript. Because teaching assignments varied according to the instructional rotation, the project activities did not occur a fixed number of times each day. During the instructor's assigned listening hours, the structured listen-first, transcript-later procedure was used with the selected listening activities.

The listening materials were generally within Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Levels 1 to 2 and covered a range of Final Learning Objective (FLO) topics. Individual audio selections did not exceed approximately two minutes and were drawn from a combination of DLIFLC curriculum materials, the Global Language Online Support System (GLOSS), authentic media, and instructor-selected materials. All materials were in MSA.

Students worked with each listening passage in stages. They began with the audio only and listened for the topic, main idea, and overall message rather than trying to catch every word. Afterward, I asked students what they thought the passage was about and what main idea they had understood. Their answers were not graded. They listened a second time, again without the transcript, to pick up details they might have missed or change their first answers. Later, students checked the topic, main idea, and details during the transcript review and class discussion.

The transcript was not used until after the second listening. At this point, the class went back to sections of the audio that had caused difficulty and checked them against the written text. This transcript comparison and the instructor-led discussion were used to confirm or correct the topic, main idea, and important details students had identified during the audio-only stages. Some of the problems came from missed words, while others involved unfamiliar vocabulary, expressions, or connectors. These became part of the class review, with the audio replayed when necessary to clarify what had actually been said.

Discussion was used throughout to reinforce learning. These discussions occurred between the instructor and students as part of the classroom listening activity. The instructor asked questions, clarified misunderstandings, and guided students in identifying strategies that could help them process similar listening material. Students shared what they noticed, clarified misunderstandings, and talked through strategies that helped them follow the audio. These conversations also made them more aware of how they approached listening tasks.

The project activities were implemented as a repeated instructional routine rather than as a single isolated activity. The same listen-first, transcript-later sequence was used during the instructor's assigned listening-comprehension hours rather than being limited to one passage or lesson. In each activity, the listening lesson began with audio only. Students were asked to focus on the main idea, key topic, and overall message before paying attention to individual forms. A second listening then gave them an opportunity to confirm or revise that first interpretation. Only after these meaning-focused stages were transcripts introduced. Students then compared their first understanding of the passage with what they found in the transcript. This helped them notice words or phrases they had missed and look more closely at how certain expressions were used.

Vocabulary, key expressions, and recurring connectors were reviewed once students had the transcript in front of them. They also went back to places where what they first understood did not match the spoken text. Written support was not always the same. As students became more familiar with the routine, some activities used a full transcript, while others included only part of the text or key vocabulary. In some cases, students worked without a transcript. This gradual reduction gave students more responsibility for working through the audio independently. Across the activities, the instructional sequence generally followed these steps:

1. Students first listened to the MSA audio without a transcript and focused on the overall meaning.
2. Students listened again to confirm or revise their initial understanding.
3. The transcript was introduced only after the two audio-only listening stages.
4. Under instructor guidance, students compared the spoken and written input and reviewed missed information, vocabulary, expressions, and connectors.
5. As students became familiar with the procedure, written support was reduced in selected activities to encourage greater reliance on listening.

In the DLIFLC setting, where students work through large amounts of challenging material, this sequence provided support without turning the transcript into a substitute for listening.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Approval to use the survey for data collection was obtained through Army Records Management. The survey was sent to all 12 students via Microsoft Forms one day after the project activities ended, while the listening activities were still fresh in their minds. Eleven students responded,

and one chose not to participate. Participation was voluntary and had no effect on students' grades or instruction, and anonymity was maintained by collecting no information that could identify individual students.

The survey had Likert-scale items and three questions that students answered in their own words. The Likert-scale items covered comprehension, vocabulary, confidence, engagement, and students' reported stress during listening activities. The three questions asked students what helped them, what difficulties they had, and what they would change. The survey focused on their experience with the listening activities rather than measuring changes in listening performance or vocabulary learning.

Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the Likert-scale responses, while the open-ended answers were reviewed for common patterns that helped explain the numerical results. No inferential statistics were used. Appendix A contains the survey items, and the Findings section reports the results.

FINDINGS

Students generally responded positively to the way transcripts were used during the listening activities. Their responses pointed to differences across the areas examined, including comprehension, vocabulary, and confidence. These results come from what students reported on the survey rather than from tests of their listening or vocabulary.

Perceived Support for Listening Comprehension

For RQ1, 85% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that the transcripts supported their understanding of the listening material. Their written comments added more detail to this result. Students described going back to the transcript after listening to check sections they had missed or did not fully understand. The text was used afterward to confirm what they thought they had heard and clear up parts of the audio that were unclear.

What stood out was how students used the transcript once it became available. They had already worked through the audio on their own, so the text helped them check what they had heard rather than guide them through the passage. This order was viewed as effective by 78% of the students who responded.

Perceived Vocabulary Retention Support

RQ2 focused on how students experienced vocabulary during the listening activities. Students first encountered unfamiliar words through the audio and later saw them in the transcript. For 82% of the students, this process helped them remember new vocabulary. Their comments provided some context for this response, particularly by showing how words were used in the passage and noting expressions or patterns that recurred. Vocabulary was not tested separately,

however, so this finding reflects what students reported rather than a measured change in vocabulary knowledge.

Perceived Increase in Listening Confidence

In relation to RQ3, 81% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more confident when listening to unfamiliar material after participating in the transcript-supported activities. Students' responses suggested that being able to check difficult portions of the audio after first attempting to understand them through listening contributed to their confidence when working with unfamiliar material.

Students also reported that the activities felt less overwhelming when transcript support was available after listening. This result provides additional context for how students experienced the structured activities, but it was not treated as a separate construct.

In general, the survey results were favorable across all three areas considered in the research questions. Students also responded favorably to the listen-first, transcript-later sequence. These results reflect students' experiences with the instructional strategy and cannot be used to establish cause-and-effect relationships or measurable improvement.

DISCUSSION

The listening took place before the transcript was introduced, with the initial focus on understanding the message. Vocabulary, expressions, and missing information were addressed afterward when the written text became available. The process is in accordance with the meaning-before-form approach explained by Benati (2023) and Pourtousi (2022). Such an approach was perceived as being effective for 78% of the students. This percentage shows how the students felt about the method and not how their listening ability had changed. Kajiura et al. (2025) also found some advantages to presenting listening and the transcript sequentially.

The findings are particularly relevant in the DLIFLC setting, where students regularly work with authentic material within an intensive instructional schedule. Support is often necessary, but the larger goal is for students to become less dependent on it over time. Faiz (2023) examined listening development among military learners of Arabic, while Kazemi (2026) used structured listening with military language learners. The transcript activities used here approached that instructional challenge differently by giving students written support only after they had worked with the audio.

The students' experiences with transcript use can also be considered in relation to other L2 research. According to Hartshorn and Stephens (2023), transcripts helped learners connect spoken language with its written form, as reflected in how students in this inquiry used the transcript to check parts of the audio they had missed. Vocabulary followed much the same pattern. Students described hearing words first and then seeing them in writing as helpful for

remembering vocabulary, which relates to Wei and Fan's (2022) work on combined auditory and written input. Students reported greater confidence as well, with 81% indicating that they felt more comfortable listening to unfamiliar material after using the structured transcript activities.

The use of transcripts is not always easy for learners. In Qiao and Chen's (2023) study, some students found it difficult to follow the audio while referring to the transcript. Additionally, learners experienced technical difficulties and expressed concerns about becoming overly reliant on the written text. Teachers must then decide when written support should be provided and how long students may need it. In this project, learners were not given the transcript from the beginning, which allowed them to work with the audio before turning to written support.

This action inquiry offers a classroom view of how structured transcripts worked for military learners of MSA. Most students responded positively when the transcript followed the initial listening, suggesting that written support can have a useful place in intensive listening instruction. Because the results represent students' experiences rather than measured changes in performance, future classroom research could examine whether these perceptions are accompanied by changes in listening or vocabulary outcomes.

Future research could examine the gradual reduction of transcript support more systematically by comparing students' performance across activities using full transcripts, partial support, and no transcript. Adding direct measures of listening performance and vocabulary learning would provide another source of evidence alongside students' survey responses. This would make it possible to examine whether the experiences reported in this project are reflected in actual listening performance and vocabulary learning.

CONCLUSION

In listening instruction, access to written support does not necessarily mean that it needs to be available from the beginning. For the students in this project, working with the audio first gave them an initial attempt at understanding the passage before the transcript was introduced. Once available, the transcript helped them return to missed information and unfamiliar vocabulary. Students also reported feeling more confident and less overwhelmed with this approach. These experiences point to the value of using transcripts selectively, particularly as support that follows listening rather than accompanying it from the start.

For listening instruction at DLIFLC, this approach can provide support without taking away the initial challenge of working through spoken language independently. Students still have to rely on what they hear first, but the transcript is available later when they need to check or clarify their understanding. As students become more comfortable with this process, the amount of written support can be reduced so that they gradually take on more of the listening task on their own.

The project is limited by its small sample size and its reliance on students' perceptions, so the findings should be interpreted with caution. Because listening performance and vocabulary retention were not directly measured, the findings cannot establish that these project activities caused learning gains. Hartshorn and Stephens (2023) examined transcript use through a structured repeated-listening sequence and measured listening comprehension directly. Learners who received transcript support outperformed those in the comparison group. This paper instead provides evidence of how participating students experienced the structured use of transcripts during their MSA listening instruction. Still, the findings provide useful classroom-based direction for refining listening instruction in an intensive language-learning environment.

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APPENDIX

Student Feedback Survey Questions

1. Listening first without transcripts helped me focus on the overall meaning.
2. Reviewing transcripts after listening clarified parts I did not initially understand.
3. Transcript-based activities helped me notice how words are used in context.
4. Seeing and hearing new vocabulary at the same time helped me remember words better.
5. Transcripts reduced my stress during listening activities.
6. Transcript activities made listening lessons more engaging.
7. I feel more confident listening to audio in the target language after doing these activities.
8. The balance between listening first and reading later was effective.
9. What aspects of transcript use were most helpful for your learning?
10. What challenges did you experience when using transcripts?
11. How could transcript-supported listening activities be improved?

Faculty Forum

Integrating Genre-Based Strategies into Listening Instruction

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Listening is one of the most challenging skills for language learners due to its fleeting nature and the demand of real-time processing of spoken input. To comprehend different types of listening texts, learners need strategies that help them anticipate discourse and respond effectively. A key strategy is the ability to distinguish between genres and become familiar with the vocabulary, conventions, and organizational features specific to each text. This article discusses how genre-based strategies can be systematically integrated into listening instruction to enhance students' comprehension of conversations, narratives, news reports, and discussions. Instructional activities are structured around a three-phase listening process—pre-listening, during-listening, and post-listening—to scaffold learners' engagement with spoken input. Students are guided to identify genre-specific features, track discourse markers, and make inferences while applying listening strategies. Classroom activities foster collaboration, reflection, and learner autonomy. This instructional approach suggests that explicit genre instruction may help support learner engagement, strategic listening, and enhanced listening comprehension. It provides a practical framework adaptable across languages, proficiency levels, and instructional contexts.

Keywords: Genre-based Strategies, Listening Strategies, Listening Comprehension, Discourse Markers, Inferencing

INTRODUCTION

Listening comprehension is widely recognized as one of the most difficult skills for second language learners, particularly in intensive programs like the DLIFLC Chinese Basic Course. Traditional listening instruction often focuses on vocabulary acquisition and discrete grammar points, but recent research emphasizes the importance of understanding the overarching structure and communicative purpose of spoken texts (Field, 2008; Goh, 2014). In response, we

implemented a genre-based listening instruction model targeting four key spoken genres: conversations, narratives, news reports, and discussions.

By explicitly teaching the defining features and communicative functions of each genre, our aim was to enhance students' comprehension, promote strategic listening, and foster learner autonomy. This approach allows students to engage with listening texts efficiently as purposeful, structured discourse rather than isolated language fragments.

The Characteristics of Genres

A genre refers to a type of text that serves a specific communicative function within a social context (Martin & Rose, 2008; Paltridge, 2001). Each genre is characterized by recognizable patterns in structure, language use, and pragmatic features. For instance, conversations typically involve informal language and turn-taking, while news reports often follow the “inverted pyramid” format that prioritizes key information upfront (Hyland, 2019; O'Halloran, 2013).

Each genre has its own unique linguistic and structural characteristics that can serve as cues for listeners. By understanding how different genres operate, learners can predict organizational patterns, identify discourse markers, recognize key points, and apply strategies to enhance their overall listening comprehension.

Building on these general characteristics, we define the specific genres used in our instruction as follows (Kizi & Abdujabbarovna, 2025):

- Conversation: Informal, real-time interaction between two or more participants, emphasizing negotiation of meaning rather than formal or scripted content.
- Narrative: Spoken texts that recount events in a coherent and logically sequenced manner. We used *narrative* instead of *storytelling* because our instructional focus was on how the event was organized and logically connected, not on expressive or dramatic performance.
- News report: Journalistic spoken texts that present factual information using a clear, organized structure, with emphasis on key points.
- Discussion: Structured, interactive exchanges among multiple speakers in which ideas are presented, developed, and critically examined, often through argumentation and counter argumentation. This genre is used in place of the *academic lecture* format to reflect its collaborative and participatory nature.

In addition to understanding the typical features of each genre, students can be guided to identify common listening challenges associated with each genre and develop strategies to support comprehension. Identified challenges include unclear pronunciation and idiomatic expressions in conversations; tracking event sequences and interpreting figurative language in narratives; processing rapid speech and complex syntactic structures in news reports; and managing multiple speakers and technical vocabulary in discussions. Instructional strategies may

emphasize predicting content, recognizing discourse markers, summarizing key points, and attending to organizational patterns and emotional tone.

Through genre-based instruction, students are trained to notice these features, identify challenges, and apply appropriate strategies, enabling them to activate prior knowledge and set realistic expectations for incoming spoken input (Field, 2008). Research indicates that genre awareness may enhance comprehension and facilitate more effective processing of spoken texts (Chen & Chen, 2021; Sadeghi et al., 2014). Instead of passively decoding speech, students listen with an informed framework that helps them anticipate the structure and meaning of the text. The following section focuses on how we provided genre-based instruction for our students to enhance their listening comprehension.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLEMENTATION

Our instructional approach follows a three-phase listening cycle—pre-listening, during-listening, and post-listening—combined with explicit genre instruction. Throughout each phase, students are guided to develop metacognitive awareness by planning, monitoring, and evaluating their listening processes through structured instructional support (Goh, 2014). In addition, learners are encouraged to engage in cognitive processing strategies such as inferencing, predicting, and note-taking, as well as collaborative interaction through peer discussion and reflection, to support meaning construction during and after listening tasks.

In our curriculum, students are gradually introduced to four spoken genres sequenced by increasing complexity and proficiency demands: conversations, narratives, news reports, and discussions. Each presents characteristic features and learner challenges: conversations require attention to colloquial markers and implied meaning; narratives rely on temporal sequencing and cultural references; news reports demand extracting facts from dense, rapid delivery; and discussions challenge learners to follow multiple speakers and track argumentation.

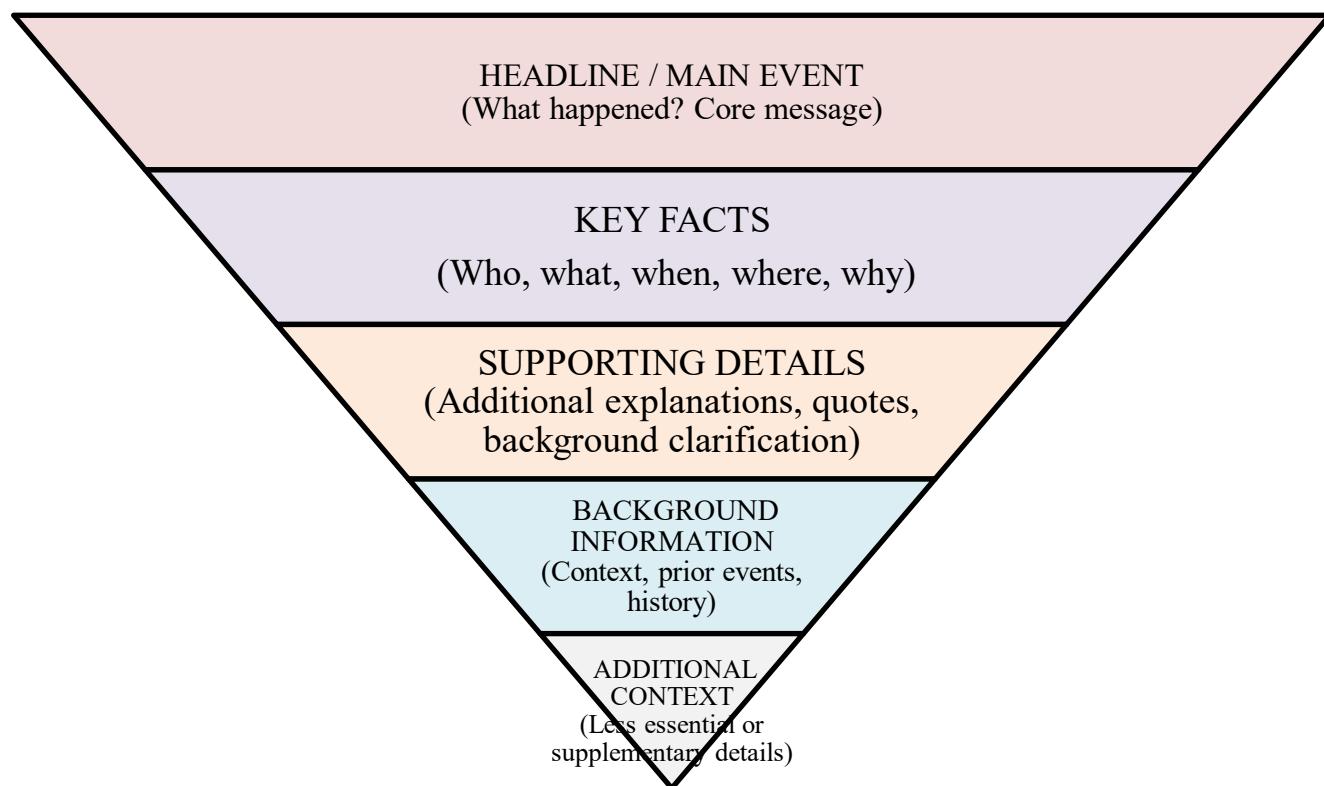
To address these challenges, our listening instruction focused on the following strategies to scaffold students' comprehension:

1. Activating Background Knowledge and Predictions

Before engaging with a listening text, teachers activated background knowledge and encouraged predictions related to genre signals. For a conversation between spouses about starting a business, students predicted relevant vocabulary, possible concerns, speaker perspectives, and likely conversational turns such as expressing hesitation, asking questions, or discussing financial risks. In a narrative titled *"A Day in the Life of Zhang Xiaomin"*, students anticipated temporal markers and vocabulary associated with narratives, such as 早上 (morning), 中午 (noon), 然后 (later), and 晚上 (evening). Similarly, before listening to a news report, teachers introduced this organizational structure visually using a simplified reverse pyramid diagram (see Figure 1) to help students understand how information is prioritized in news reports. This visual scaffold

supported learners in anticipating the sequence of information from the most important facts to supporting and background details, thereby improving comprehension of rapid and information-dense news texts. For discussion-based listening passages, students were prompted to recognize discourse cues signaling multiple perspectives and to consider potential stances on a given topic (e.g., on the other hand, nevertheless, I disagree, etc.). These tasks encourage top-down processing and prepare learners to listen strategically.

Figure 1
Simplified Reverse Pyramid Structure of a News Report



Note. Figure created by authors

2. Recognizing Discourse Markers

During listening, students were encouraged to move from gist to details while attending to genre-specific features that aid comprehension. A key focus is recognizing discourse markers, which help structure meaning across genres. In conversations, phrases like 对啊 (yeah, right), 可是 (but), and 然后 (then) signal agreement, contrast, or sequencing respectively, enabling learners to follow the flow of interaction. In narratives, temporal markers such as 后来 (later) and 最后 (finally) assist listeners in reconstructing the storyline. In news reports, connectors such as 首先 (first), 其次 (next), and 最后 (finally) highlight the inverted-pyramid structure. In discussions, contrastive markers such as 但是 (but) and 不过 (however), and qualifiers such as 也许 (maybe) and 我觉得 (I think) cue shifts in stance and perspective.

For example, in a discussion on online education, Speaker A comments, “我觉得网课可以提供更多灵活性。” (I think online classes can provide more flexibility.) Speaker B replies, “嗯, 这也许对一些学生有帮助, 不过面对面的交流还是不可替代的。” (Hmm, that might help some students, but face-to-face interaction is still irreplaceable.) Although Speaker B does not explicitly reject Speaker A’s view, the softening word 也许 (maybe) and the contrastive marker 不过 (however) signal polite disagreement. Recognizing these relational cues enables learners to interpret perspectives and interactional dynamics effectively, reinforcing the predictions and expectations they established prior to listening.

3. Making Inferences

Making inferences beyond the literal text is a crucial skill in language learning, and genre awareness can guide students in anticipating meaning and interpreting implied information. For example, in conversations or dialogues, meaning is often implicit and must be inferred from speakers’ tones, discourse markers, and rhetorical devices. In a conversation between a couple about starting a transportation business, the husband asks for the wife’s opinion, but she responds, 開公司那麼容易啊? 想开就开了? (Is it really that easy to start a company? Can you just start one whenever you want?). Rather than directly rejecting the idea, she uses rhetorical questions to express skepticism and concerns, thereby implying the seriousness and challenges of entrepreneurship.

In another example, the female speaker asks, “你听到那个消息了吗? 你觉得怎么样?” (Did you hear the news? What do you think?) The male speaker responds, “现在我终于可以睡个好觉了。” (Now I can finally get a good night’s sleep.) Students were able to infer that the male speaker was previously anxious, stressed, and unsettled, but the news was positive or reassuring enough to remove his worry and put his mind at ease. Students were guided to recognize indirect disagreement and turn-taking patterns typical of conversational genres, allowing them to infer tone, attitude, and implied meaning.

4. Managing Variability in Speech

During listening, students were guided to manage speech variability while listening for key details. In news reports, this may involve tracking numbers, dates, or place names delivered at high speed. In conversations, colloquial fillers and hesitations require learners to distinguish essential from nonessential information. Narratives may contain vivid descriptive details that enrich visualization but risk distracting learners from the main events. Discussions, often the most cognitively demanding genre, challenge learners to follow multiple speakers, overlapping speech, and varied accents while still identifying the main ideas and supporting evidence.

Through guided activities across genres, students learned to combine marker recognition, inference, and detail-oriented listening with bottom-up decoding and top-down contextual

reasoning. This interactive processing helps them remain engaged and strategically focused even when input is fast-paced or implicit.

5. Consolidating Comprehension

In post-listening activities, students engaged in collaboration and reflection to consolidate comprehension through tasks such as summarizing, role-plays, debates, and reflective writing on implied meaning. For instance, in the news report activities, students summarized key facts in their own words and reflected on how reporters used sequencing and citation to build credibility. After listening to a discussion, students participated in small-group debates or reflective writing that mirrored the original text's structure, evaluating multiple viewpoints and identifying language features that support comprehension, including qualifiers (words or phrases like "maybe," "I think," or "it seems") that signal uncertainty or soften statements, and contrast markers that indicate shifts in perspective. For example, after listening to a discussion on online education, students worked in small groups to complete a comparison chart identifying each speaker's position, supporting reasons, and discourse markers signaling agreement or disagreement. Groups then orally summarized the discussion using the organizational structure of the original text.

These activities reinforce genre awareness, promote critical thinking, and support transfer of strategies to authentic listening situations, helping learners apply the comprehension and inferencing skills they developed during pre- and during-listening phases.

Additional strategies included structural mapping and targeted information extraction. For example, students created simple organizational outlines while listening to narratives or news reports to visualize sequencing and relationships among ideas. In other activities, students practiced selective listening to extract specific information such as speaker stance, supporting evidence, or key factual details, depending on the genre and communicative purpose of the text.

STUDENT FEEDBACK

Upon completion of genre-based strategy instruction, students were asked to provide anonymous feedback on the instruction. They were positive about this approach, as evidenced by comments such as: *"I find it easier to understand what I'm listening to because I know what to expect from each genre"; "Knowing the structure makes it easier to follow along and take notes"; and "I feel more confident when listening to different genres of authentic materials outside the classroom."*

Some students also expressed the desire for more practice with challenging genres such as discussions, while a few of them were concerned that it was difficult to transfer classroom strategies to real-life listening. Additionally, several requested a slower instructional pace for deeper exploration of each genre. Students' feedback prompted us to reflect on the implementation of the genre-based listening strategies and make instructional adjustments to

better meet students' learning needs. In response to this feedback, we plan to adjust future instruction in several ways. To support the transfer of classroom strategies to real-world listening, authentic materials such as interviews, news segments, and online discussions will be incorporated, accompanied by pre- and post-listening scaffolds. Instructional pacing will be modified to allow more time for students to analyze structures, identify key discourse features, and reflect on comprehension strategies. Finally, we will implement ongoing reflection and feedback cycles, enabling students to share their experiences with new activities and allowing us to refine instruction iteratively. These adjustments are intended to strengthen genre-based listening strategy instruction, build student confidence, and ensure learners can effectively apply strategies in authentic listening contexts.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Integrating genre-based strategies in listening instruction offers multiple benefits. Genre awareness helps scaffold students' ability to anticipate and process information in real time. In addition, genre awareness supports the development of metacognitive awareness by helping learners monitor their listening processes and apply strategies more independently. It also fosters communicative competence, as listening is treated not just as decoding but as understanding language in context (Field, 2008; Goh, 2014). Finally, it cultivates critical thinking in listening to discussions and news reports as genre knowledge enables learners to effectively evaluate arguments and synthesize information (O'Halloran, 2013).

This approach is especially relevant to the learning context like DLIFLC, where students face high-stakes listening assessments and real-world application demands. One practical advantage of genre-based listening instruction is that it can be integrated into existing lessons without requiring extensive curriculum redesign. Teachers can introduce genre features and discourse cues briefly during pre-listening activities and reinforce them during regular instruction or supplemental listening sessions. Once students become familiar with common organizational patterns and discourse markers associated with different genres, teachers can refer to these features flexibly across lessons and proficiency levels. This adaptability makes genre-based instruction a practical framework for strengthening listening comprehension within existing instructional time constraints. A sample lesson sequence illustrating the implementation of genre-based listening instruction is included in the Appendix to support instructional application and sequencing for faculty members.

CONCLUSION

Genre-based listening instruction equips learners with essential tools to interpret meaning, anticipate structure, and engage more effectively with spoken texts. At DLIFLC, this approach appears to support student engagement, comprehension, and strategic listening, although formal evaluation of performance was not conducted for this instructional approach. By embedding genre awareness into each phase of the listening process—pre-, during-, and post-listening—and supporting it with metacognitive, cognitive, and social-affective strategies,

students can develop more strategic and autonomous listening habits. Overall, genre-based strategies offer a practical framework with potential to enhance listening instruction across languages, proficiency levels, and instructional contexts.

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APPENDIX

Sample Genre-Based Listening Lesson Sequence

Lesson Phase	Sample Activity	Instructional Focus
Pre-listening	Students preview the genre and predict vocabulary, organizational structure, speaker perspectives, and possible content using titles, visuals, or key phrases.	Activate background knowledge and prepare students to anticipate genre-specific features.
During-listening	Students identify discourse markers, temporal sequencing, speaker stance, and organizational patterns while listening to the text.	Develop strategic listening through recognition of genre cues and discourse features.
	Students complete note-taking charts or structural maps to organize key information and relationships among ideas.	Support comprehension through structural mapping and targeted information extraction.
Post-listening	Students summarize the text, participate in discussions or role-plays, and reflect on implied meaning, speaker perspective, or organizational structure.	Consolidate comprehension and promote transfer of listening strategies.
Reflection/ Feedback	Students discuss which strategies were most helpful and identify areas that require additional practice.	Encourage metacognitive awareness and strategy refinement.

Faculty Forum

Integrating Deductive and Inductive Grammar Teaching through AI-Generated Stories in Chinese as a Foreign Language Classroom

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Grammar instruction in Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) classroom often faces a persistent challenge: learners may demonstrate explicit rule knowledge yet struggle to apply grammatical structures during reading and communicative tasks. To address this challenge, this article proposes an approach that integrates deductive and inductive grammar teaching through AI-generated storytelling, in which target grammatical structures were embedded in AI-generated narratives with controlled frequency and meaningful context. The approach was implemented over 30 grammar lessons with 16 adult CFL learners. Instruction followed a four-step sequence: (1) exposure to AI-generated stories as input, (2) guided inductive noticing and rule formation through highlighting and discussion, (3) deductive clarification by the instructor, and (4) targeted practice activities designed to support application and transfer. AI-generated storytelling functioned as a pedagogical amplifier by providing dense, level-appropriate input while preserving teacher control over instructional design.

Keywords: *AI-generated Storytelling, Grammar Instruction, Inductive and Deductive Learning, Chinese as a Foreign Language*

INTRODUCTION

Grammar knowledge is a foundational component of second language (L2) proficiency, as it enables learners to process sentence structure, establish syntactic relationships, and integrate meaning across clauses and extended discourse (DeKeyser, 2005; Hulstijn, 2015). Research has consistently shown that grammatical knowledge strongly correlates with L2 reading ability, particularly at lower and intermediate proficiency levels (Jeon & Yamashita, 2014; 2024). This relationship is highly relevant to CFL classrooms (Zhou, 2022), where learners, despite high motivation and cognitive aptitude, often enter with limited prior exposure to the target language and must develop grammatical control within an accelerated instructional timeline. In such

contexts, insufficient grammatical awareness can become a bottleneck that constrains language learning, even when learners possess adequate vocabulary knowledge.

Grammar instruction is particularly salient in CFL contexts. Although Chinese exhibits limited inflectional morphology (Sun, 2006), grammatical and syntactic knowledge plays a decisive role in meaning construction (e.g., Zhou, 2022). Interpretation in Chinese relies heavily on word order, function words, and constructional patterns rather than morphological marking, placing substantial demands on learners' syntactic sensitivity (Everson & Xiao, 2009). For CFL learners, who must often process written Chinese for analytic or operational purposes, misinterpreting grammatical relationships can lead to significant comprehension errors. Empirical research in CSL contexts supports this concern, showing that grammatical competence is a significant predictor of overall Chinese language proficiency (Xu, 2013). Zhou (2018) also revealed that grammatical competence and overall L2 Chinese language proficiency were highly correlated and shared a large amount of variance.

Within CFL classrooms, grammar instruction has traditionally leaned toward deductive approaches. Rules are explicitly explained, often through clear formulas or patterns, and followed by controlled practice activities (Ellis, 2006; DeKeyser, 2015). However, a recurring challenge in grammar instruction is that learners may become rule-aware without becoming form-sensitive. Learners can often articulate grammatical rules accurately yet fail to notice or process those same structures during real-time reading or listening.

Inductive grammar learning offers a complementary pathway by emphasizing exposure to input-rich examples through which learners infer grammatical patterns without receiving rules first. Such approaches align with the noticing hypothesis, which argues that conscious attention to linguistic form is a prerequisite for acquisition (Schmidt, 1990). Through repeated exposure to recurring forms in meaningful contexts, learners begin to connect grammatical form with meaning and use, strengthening their ability to process grammar during reading (Kumar & Ilankumaran, 2025; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Nevertheless, inductive approaches pose practical challenges in accelerated instructional settings. Without carefully designed scaffolds, such as controlled frequency of target structures, guided noticing prompts, or instructor mediation, inductive learning may overload learners cognitively, particularly when dealing with syntactically complex Chinese texts.

Recent advances in generative artificial intelligence (AI) offer new possibilities for addressing this challenge. Generative AI can produce grammatically rich, contextually coherent texts tailored to specific instructional goals, making it feasible to design materials that support both deductive explanation and inductive exposure (Chapelle, 2025; Fang & Han, 2025; Kasneci et al., 2023). AI-generated storytelling provides a flexible tool for creating input that foregrounds target grammatical structures while maintaining meaningful content. Importantly, research emphasizes that the effectiveness of AI in language learning depends on pedagogically guided integration. When AI-generated texts are carefully curated and paired with structured noticing activities, explicit explanation, and guided practice, they can enhance grammatical awareness and support deeper comprehension (Chapelle, 2025).

In this article, I report how AI-generated storytelling can be used to integrate deductive and inductive grammar instruction in CFL classrooms, with the aim of strengthening learners' grammatical awareness and improving their ability to process complex sentence structures while learning Chinese as a foreign language.

CONTEXT

This project was conducted in a CFL classroom at a higher education institute. The class consisted of 16 adult learners enrolled in an intensive Chinese language program. As is typical in the instructional settings, students needed to achieve rapid gains in language proficiency under time constraints. Grammar instruction in the teaching team's curriculum was routinely conducted during the first class period of the instructional day and was typically integrated with the introduction of key vocabulary items and idiomatic expressions. Instructional time was therefore limited, and grammar teaching needed to balance efficiency with depth of processing. Prior to the use of this system, grammar instruction primarily followed a deductive sequence, in which rules were explicitly explained by the instructor and followed by controlled practice activities. This project was therefore designed to support learners' grammatical acquisition in a way that promoted both explicit understanding and form sensitivity during comprehension, without increasing cognitive overload or disrupting established instructional routines. The project was implemented during regularly scheduled grammar lessons and replaced, rather than added to, existing grammar instruction. Altogether, 30 grammar lessons were designed and taught using the approach proposed in this paper. All DLIFLC policies regarding technology usage were followed.

Core Design Principles

I designed and implemented an instructional sequence that integrated deductive and inductive grammar teaching through AI-generated storytelling. The design was guided by four core principles, followed by a four-step instructional procedure implemented consistently across target grammar lessons.

Core Design Principle 1: Controlled Frequency

Each AI-generated story was designed to include one or more target grammatical structures a controlled number of times. Prior research suggests that repeated exposure is necessary for learners to notice grammatical form (Ellis, 2006). Controlled frequency ensured that the target structure recurred often enough to support noticing while remaining embedded in a meaningful narrative context. Although research indicates that 8 to 10 occurrences are ideal for the incidental learning of target grammatical or vocabulary items, a smaller number of occurrences of each grammatical item may also be acceptable considering the number of grammatical items and the time constraints.

Core Design Principle 2: Meaningful Narrative Context

All target grammatical structures were embedded in coherent, story-based texts rather than isolated sentences. Each story featured a clear storyline, realistic actions, and contextualized descriptions aligned with learners' proficiency level. This design choice ensured that learners' primary focus during initial reading was on understanding meaning rather than analyzing form. Grammar was thus encountered as a resource for meaning-making rather than as an abstract rule system, reinforcing form-meaning connections. The instructor usually specifies the topic or theme of the story when prompting GenAI tools (e.g., ChatGPT). The topic or the theme is usually closely tied to that of the texts students need to learn that week or to topics covered in previous lessons or units. This way, students possess relevant content or background knowledge.

Core Design Principle 3: Guided Inductive Summarizing and Discussion

Following initial reading, students were guided to notice grammatical patterns inductively. Rather than providing rules immediately, I required students to highlight or annotate instances of the target structure and discuss emerging patterns in pairs or small groups. Due to time constraints, sometimes the grammatical items were highlighted in bold in the story to facilitate noticing. Students were then asked to summarize the grammatical rule(s) in their own words, focusing explicitly on form, meaning, and use. Importantly, students were required to support their summaries with evidence drawn directly from the text, encouraging data-driven reasoning.

Core Design Principle 4: Targeted Follow-up Activities

Finally, targeted practice activities were used to consolidate learning and support transfer. These activities included fill-in-the-blank exercises, sentence transformation, matching tasks, translation, error correction, and more. The goal was not to recall rules, but the ability to apply the target structure appropriately in new sentences and communicative contexts. Activities were sequenced from more controlled to more open-ended, allowing learners to gradually increase independence.

A FOUR-STEP INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURE

Step 1: AI-Generated Story as Structured Input for Grammatical Noticing

The first step of the instructional sequence involved the use of AI-generated storytelling as structured input designed to foreground target grammatical forms within meaningful contexts. Prior to each grammar lesson, the instructor prompted a generative AI system to produce a short narrative text tailored to specific instructional objectives. The prompt was designed based on the guidelines proposed in Lima and Wallace's (2024) CTPSC Prompting Framework (Context, Task, Purpose, Sample, and Clarification). Each prompt explicitly specified four key parameters: (a) the topic or title of the story, (b) the target grammatical structure to be highlighted, (c) the required

number of repetitions of the target structure, and (d) the intended proficiency level of the learners (e.g., beginning, intermediate, or advanced).

Figure 1

Teacher GenAI Tool Prompt Template

Please act as an experienced Chinese language educator specializing in teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

Generate a story for Chinese language learners based on the following parameters: (1) the topic or title of the story: [insert topic/title]; (2) the target grammatical structure(s): [insert structure(s)]; (3) the desired number of occurrences of the target grammatical structure(s): [insert number]; and (4) the learner proficiency level: [beginning/intermediate/advanced]. The purpose of the story is to provide learners with meaningful and comprehensible input while reinforcing the target grammatical structure(s) through contextualized exposure.

The story should be engaging, coherent, and appropriate for the specified proficiency level. The target grammatical structure(s) should be integrated naturally throughout the story. If including the specified number of occurrences would reduce the naturalness or coherence of the text, you may use fewer occurrences while ensuring that the target structure(s) remain sufficiently represented.

Please ask for clarification if any of the required information is missing or ambiguous before generating the story.

This prompt design ensured that the resulting texts were pedagogically constrained rather than open-ended. By controlling the topic of the story, the frequency of occurrence, and the distribution of the target structure, the instructor was able to create input conditions that maximized the salience of grammatical form while maintaining narrative coherence. Importantly, the target structure was embedded naturally within the storyline rather than artificially repeated, allowing learners to encounter the form as part of meaning construction rather than as an isolated pattern. This approach aligns with research emphasizing that frequency effects in grammar learning are most beneficial when repetition remains meaning-driven (Ellis, 2006).

Figure 2 is an example of a story generated by AI for the grammatical structures 一.....一..... (reduplicated numeral-classifier construction), 一会儿..... 一会儿..... (alternating temporal construction), and the ABAB structure (Reduplicative verb pattern) on the topic of visiting an educational institute for intermediate level Chinese learners.

Figure 2
AI-Generated Story for Three Grammatical Structures

Lesson 39 Presentation 3 grammar 语法点： 一… 一… / 一会儿…… 一会儿……/ ABAB e. g., 一点一点 昨天上午，我和朋友两个人来到市中心的继续教育学院参观。门口有一男一女的工作人员，一会儿招呼来访的学生，一会儿向家长介绍课程安排，忙得不亦乐乎。 走进校园，我们看到教学楼一栋一栋地排列整齐，窗户一排一排地透着明亮的光。路旁的花坛里，花儿一朵一朵地开得正艳，树叶一片一片地在风中摇摆。走廊的墙上贴着一张一张的活动照片，记录着一趟一趟的学习之旅。 来到教室，我们看到一老一少两位学员正在讨论问题，一会儿翻书，一会儿在电脑上查资料。老师讲课的声音一声一声地传出来，听得人很想走进去旁听。黑板上写着一行一行的知识要点，整齐又清楚。 学院的图书馆更是令人惊喜。书架一排一排地立在大厅里，书本一摞一摞地摆放整齐。窗边的学习区里，学生们一会儿做笔记，一会儿和同伴讨论，一会儿又低头安静阅读。时间在这样的氛围中，一分一分、一秒一秒地流逝，却让人不觉得累。 参观的最后，我们来到招生办公室。工作人员一会儿介绍报名流程，一会儿展示往届学员的优秀作品，一会儿又带我们参观实验室。我的心情也一会儿激动，一会儿好奇，一会儿又有点迫不及待。走出学院时，我已经在心里一点一点地计划着，下个月一定要回来报名。	
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The story depicts a campus visit to a continuing education college (please see Appendix for the English translation). The numeral-classifier repetition pattern (一…… 一……; one... one...) appears eight times, the alternating temporal structure (一会儿……一会儿……; one moment..., the next...) appears five times, and the ABAB reduplication pattern occurs three times (一声一声, one sound after another; 一行一行, line by line; 一点一点, bit by bit).

During class, students were first asked to read the AI-generated story for overall comprehension, either individually or in pairs. At this stage, no explicit grammatical explanation was provided. Instead, learners were encouraged to focus on understanding the narrative and its events, characters, and outcomes. This meaning-first orientation was intentional, as it positioned grammar as a resource for comprehension rather than the primary object of attention. Following initial reading, students were instructed to reread the text and visually mark instances of repeated language forms they noticed, with particular attention to the target grammatical structure. Step 1 functioned as the foundation of the instructional sequence by creating optimal input conditions for grammatical noticing: dense but controlled exposure, meaningful narrative context, and learner attention oriented first toward meaning and then toward form.

Step 2: Guided Inductive Noticing and Rule Formation

Following exposure to the AI-generated story, the instructional focus shifted to guided inductive noticing and rule formation. At this stage, learners actively engaged with the input to identify,

analyze, and hypothesize about the target grammatical structure embedded in the narrative. This stage was designed to activate noticing and hypothesis testing processes central to grammatical development (Schmidt, 1990). By encountering recurring forms within a coherent narrative and being asked to reflect on their function, learners began to form preliminary hypotheses about form–meaning relationships before receiving explicit instruction. Collaborative discussion fostered interactional engagement and pushed learners to attend to subtle grammatical features through peer negotiation and metalinguistic reflection (Philp & Duchesne, 2016; Svalberg, 2009; Swain, 2000).

First, students were instructed to highlight or underline recurring instances of the target structure in the story, guided by questions such as:

- *What structure appears repeatedly?*
- *In what contexts does it occur?*
- *What meaning does it seem to express?*

These questions directed learners’ attentional resources toward form, making linguistic patterns perceptually salient. Such focused attention operationalizes Schmidt’s (1990) Noticing Hypothesis, which posits that conscious awareness of linguistic features is a necessary condition for acquisition. Highlighting or annotating was used as a concrete noticing activity to externalize learners’ attention to form. Next, learners engage in pair or small-group discussions to collaboratively analyze the highlighted structures. Through peer interaction, students articulate emerging observations and tested preliminary hypotheses. During discussion, learners address scaffolded guiding questions such as what repeated, the contexts in which it occurred, and what meaning it expressed.

In sum, Step 2 operationalizes a noticing-to-rule-formation sequence integrating attention, interaction, and reflection. This stage serves as a cognitive bridge between input exposure and output production in the AI-mediated instructional cycle.

Step 3: Deductive Clarification and Conceptual Consolidation

Following learners’ inductive noticing and hypothesis formation, Step 3 introduces deductive clarification, in which the teacher systematically synthesizes and refines students’ emerging understandings. At this stage, explicit instruction functions as conceptual consolidation rather than initial input, ensuring accuracy while preserving the cognitive benefits of inductive learning.

The teacher summarizes the grammatical target across three dimensions: form, meaning, and use (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). First, form is addressed through explicit description of morphological and syntactic features, including word order, inflectional patterns, and structural variations. Visual representations such as timelines and formulaic patterns may be employed to enhance clarity. Meaning is clarified by unpacking semantic functions and pragmatic implications conveyed by the structure in context. Examples drawn from the AI-generated story and supplementary input reinforce understanding. Finally, usage constraints are addressed, including

register, discourse context, collocational preferences, and common learner errors. Contrastive examples help delineate boundaries of appropriate use.

This stage also serves as a hypothesis verification process. The teacher confirms accurate generalizations and refines misconceptions, formalizing learner-generated rules while maintaining student agency. Theoretically, this step aligns with skill acquisition theory (DeKeyser, 2015), which posits that explicit declarative knowledge facilitates proceduralization when appropriately sequenced. Introducing rules after inductive exploration primes learners to integrate formal knowledge with experiential input. In sum, Step 3 operationalizes a strategic deductive phase embedded within an inductive–deductive instructional cycle, optimizing accuracy and metalinguistic awareness.

Step 4: Structured Practice and Proceduralization

Building on inductive noticing and deductive clarification, Step 4 focuses on systematic practice to facilitate proceduralization of the target grammatical structure. Learners engage in a sequence of tasks moving from controlled to semi-controlled production. Practice activities include sentence completion, matching exercises, fill-in-the-blank tasks, translation activities, and speaking tasks such as photo description. These formats scaffold production while maintaining attention to form. AI tools can be used to create activities at this stage as well. Figure 3 presents a prompt template.

Figure 3

Teacher Prompt Template for Post-Reading Activities

Thanks for generating the story. Now please prepare three post-reading activities based on the story. The activities can include: (1) one fill-in-the-blanks activity, (2) one error-correction activity, and (3) one role-play activity. Each activity should contain five items, and the difficulty level should match the proficiency level of the story. The activities should reinforce both comprehension of the story and understanding of the target grammatical structure(s). Please include both meaning-focused and form-focused elements where appropriate, and use vocabulary and sentence patterns primarily drawn from the story. Clear instructions and answer keys should also be provided.

The instructor can determine the types of activities to include in the prompt. Other examples of post-reading activities include comprehension questions, true/false questions, sentence rearrangement, translation, guided speaking, matching, grammar noticing, sentence creation, and sentence correction. Tasks can be sequenced from highly controlled to more open-ended, consistent with skill acquisition theory (DeKeyser, 2015).

Figure 4
An Example Post-Reading Activity

二、填空练习 (Fill in the blanks)

请用“不是……而是……”或“说到……”完成下列句子。

1. 现在的学校_____重视背诵课本, _____培养学生的批判性思维 (critical thinking)。
2. _____家庭教育, 很多父母已经开始注重与孩子的沟通和陪伴。
3. 中国的教育改革_____放弃 (give up) 考试制度, _____在传统基础上进行改革。
4. _____创新能力, 越来越多的学校组织学生参加各类科技 (science-tech) 比赛。
5. 这次课程改革 (reform) _____突然 (suddenly) 决定的, _____经过了长时间的研究和讨论。

This stage is grounded in Swain's (2000) Output Hypothesis, which emphasizes that production pushes learners to notice gaps in their interlanguage and test hypotheses about form and meaning. Through repeated meaningful practice, learners transition from declarative knowledge to proceduralized competence, enabling spontaneous and fluent use of the target structure. Pedagogically, Step 4 promotes automatization, transferability across contexts, fluency development, and communicative integration.

REFLECTION

This article explains the core principles and the steps of integrated deductive and inductive integrated grammar instruction in CFL contexts. Based on classroom observations and informal discussions with students, the approach was well-received by the students. I will discuss the rationales for adopting this approach from four aspects.

AI-Generated Input Creates Conditions for Noticing

AI-generated storytelling provided dense, consistent, and level-appropriate grammatical input that created strong conditions for noticing (Godwin-Jones, 2024). By systematically recycling target structures within meaningful narrative contexts, the instructional design ensured that learners encountered the same form multiple times without resorting to artificial drills or decontextualized examples. Research has demonstrated that frequency of exposure is a necessary condition for grammatical development, particularly when frequency remains meaning-driven rather than mechanically imposed (Ellis, 2006). Controlled repetition supports L2 Chinese learners' detection of recurring patterns while preserving narrative coherence. Learners reported that repeated exposure within a story encouraged attention to form as part of meaning construction, rather than as an isolated object of study. This supports prior work arguing that dense, contextualized input strengthens the salience of grammatical features and facilitates noticing (Godwin-Jones, 2024).

In intensive language programs, where instructional time is limited and learners must process complex texts efficiently, the ability to generate customized, high-density input represents a significant pedagogical advantage. AI made it possible to design texts that met precise instructional constraints, such as target form, frequency, and difficulty level, while maintaining communicative authenticity.

Inductive Noticing Promotes Engagement and Form–Meaning–Use Connections

Based on my observations, when students were asked to highlight recurring grammatical structures and discuss patterns collaboratively, they demonstrated active involvement in analyzing how form, meaning, and use interacted across contexts. Rather than passively receiving rules, learners treated the text as linguistic data from which generalizations could be drawn. This process aligns closely with the noticing hypothesis, which posits that conscious attention to linguistic form is a prerequisite for acquisition (Schmidt, 1990). In addition, the guided discussions supported interactional processes emphasized in Long's (1991) interaction hypothesis, as learners negotiated interpretations, tested hypotheses, and refined their understanding through peer dialogue. Noticing in this process was therefore not an individual, silent activity, but a socially mediated and cognitively engaged process.

Crucially, inductive noticing in this instructional design extended beyond surface-level pattern recognition. Because grammatical forms were embedded in coherent narratives, learners were able to infer not only structural regularities but also functional meaning and pragmatic constraints. This supports the view that grammar learning is most effective when learners attend simultaneously to form and meaning, rather than treating grammar as an abstract system detached from use. For adult learners in accelerated CFL programs, this engagement might be particularly valuable.

Deductive Clarification and Targeted Practice: Stabilizing Accuracy

Following the inductive noticing stage, explicit teacher-led explanation of form, meaning, and usage constraints helped consolidate learners' emerging hypotheses, leading to more consistent and accurate production across tasks (Norris & Ortega, 2000). This also supports Spada and Tomita's (2010) synthesis, which found that explicit instruction is particularly effective for complex and rule-based grammatical structures.

Moreover, asking learners to complete follow-up activities could improve their ability to transfer target forms to novel contexts. In speaking activities such as photo description, students increasingly deployed the target structure spontaneously and appropriately, indicating movement beyond mechanical practice toward functional use. This transition reflects Swain's (1995) Output Hypothesis, whereby pushed output encourages learners to notice gaps in their interlanguage and restructure linguistic representations. The practice resonates with Nassaji and Fotos (2011), who emphasize the importance of form-focused instruction and guided practice in preventing fossilization and supporting long-term retention.

Taken together, deductive clarification combined with targeted practice functions as a stabilizing mechanism in grammar acquisition. AI-generated input effectively initiated noticing, but it was the subsequent deductive clarification and targeted practice that stabilized accuracy and enabled transfer, thereby moving learners from awareness to application.

Teacher Mediation as a Stabilizing Pedagogical Anchor

Language teachers play a decisive role in maintaining instructional rigor and reliability throughout the AI-supported grammar activities. Although AI-generated stories provided rich and adaptable input, the effectiveness of instruction was fundamentally shaped by teacher-led mediation, particularly in prompt design, quality control, sequencing of activities, and feedback provision. Technology-enhanced learning remains pedagogically sound only when guided by principled instructional design (Kukulska-Hulme, 2020).

First, prompt design emerged as a critical mediating mechanism. The instructor strategically specified topic, proficiency level, target structures, and repetition frequency when interacting with the AI system. This ensured that generated texts aligned closely with curricular objectives and learner needs. Rather than relying on generic outputs, the instructor curated and refined prompts to maximize pedagogical value. Second, quality control was essential in filtering and adapting AI-generated content. The instructor reviewed outputs for linguistic accuracy, appropriateness of register, and cultural relevance. Ambiguous phrasing or unintended complexity was edited before classroom implementation, safeguarding instructional integrity. Third, the instructor maintained control over instructional sequencing, ensuring that activities followed a coherent progression from noticing to rule formation, deductive clarification, and structured practice. AI-generated materials were embedded within a carefully orchestrated pedagogical framework rather than used in isolation. Finally, feedback remained teacher-led. The instructor provided targeted corrective feedback and metalinguistic explanation.

Collectively, teacher mediation functions as a pedagogical anchor that stabilizes AI-assisted instruction. While AI enhanced efficiency and input diversity, it was the teacher's professional judgment that ensured instructional coherence and responsiveness to learner needs.

CHALLENGES AND PRACTICAL STRATEGIES

Implementing this integrated approach presents practical hurdles, primarily regarding instructional time constraints and the calibration of material difficulty. In accelerated curricula, the time required for a four-step inductive-deductive cycle can be substantial; teachers can mitigate this by pre-highlighting target structures to facilitate faster noticing. Furthermore, ensuring that materials are level-appropriate is a significant challenge. To address this issue, instructors can specify the vocabulary items that may appear in the story (e.g., words students have learned in previous units or lessons) and use even more precise prompt templates to control complexity. Additionally, instructors should actively collect student feedback through informal discussions or surveys to refine prompt engineering and ensure narrative engagement.

Limitations

The implementation of this grammatical instructional approach was limited to a single classroom and did not include a comparison or control group. Research into this approach could implement it with a control group to examine its effectiveness. In addition, no objective grammar assessments were administered to measure changes in learners' grammatical proficiency. Future studies could incorporate pre- and post-activity grammar assessments to provide more robust evidence of learners' grammatical development.

CONCLUSION

This article reports the integration of inductive and deductive grammar instruction through AI-generated storytelling in CFL classrooms. Pedagogically constrained AI narratives can create optimal conditions for grammatical noticing by combining controlled frequency with meaningful contextualization. Embedded within a four-step instructional sequence—input exposure, inductive noticing, deductive clarification, and structured practice—this design supported learners' progression from explicit awareness to proceduralized grammatical use. In addition, the pedagogical value of generative AI depends on principled teacher mediation. Instructor expertise in prompt engineering, material curation, instructional sequencing, and feedback provision functioned as a stabilizing anchor throughout the project. AI operated not as a substitute for instruction but as a pedagogical amplifier that enhanced input density and instructional efficiency while preserving teacher agency.

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APPENDIX

English translation of Figure 2

Yesterday morning, my friend and I came to the Continuing Education College in the city center for a visit. At the entrance, there was **a male and a female** staff member. One moment they were welcoming visiting students, and the next moment they were introducing course arrangements to parents. They were extremely busy.

After walking into the campus, we saw **rows of** teaching buildings lined up neatly, with sunlight shining through the windows **row by row**. In the flowerbeds by the road, flowers bloomed **one after another**, and leaves swayed gently in the wind **piece by piece**. Photos of activities hung along the hallway walls, recording **one learning journey after another**.

When we arrived at the classroom, we saw two students — **one older and one younger** — discussing questions. One moment they were flipping through books, and the next moment they were searching for information on the computer. The teacher's voice came through **sound by sound**, making people want to walk in and listen. **Line after line** of key knowledge points was written on the blackboard, all organized clearly and neatly.

The library of the college was even more impressive. **Rows and rows** of bookshelves stood in the hall, and books were arranged neatly **stack by stack**. In the study area by the windows, students were taking notes for a while, discussing with classmates for a while, and then quietly reading with their heads lowered. In such an atmosphere, time passed **minute by minute** and **second by second**, yet people did not feel tired at all.

At the end of the visit, we came to the admissions office. The staff members explained the registration process for a while, displayed excellent works from former students for a while, and then took us to visit the laboratory. My mood also kept changing — **at one moment** I felt excited, at another curious, and **at another** full of anticipation. As we left the college, I was already planning **little by little** in my heart to come back next month to register.

Faculty Forum

Mapping the Message and Filling the Gaps: Using Mind Mapping and Cloze Listening to Support Arabic Listening Comprehension

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Students in intensive Arabic programs often report that they understand isolated words in authentic audio but struggle to identify the speaker's main message or hear important details. These difficulties reflect the complexity of listening, which requires learners to process spoken language at both global and detailed levels. This reflective classroom article examines two instructional techniques used to support Arabic listening comprehension: mind mapping and cloze listening. Mind mapping helped learners identify main ideas, organize relationships among ideas visually, and approach authentic audio through top-down processing. Cloze listening helped learners focus on specific words, phrases, forms, and discourse markers through bottom-up processing. Together, these techniques provided complementary forms of scaffolding: mind mapping supported global comprehension and confidence, while cloze listening strengthened accurate decoding of connected speech. Drawing on classroom observations and relevant second language listening research, the article argues that effective listening instruction should move beyond comprehension checks and explicitly teach students how to listen. The article concludes with practical recommendations for using mind mapping and cloze listening flexibly in Arabic classrooms and other second language listening classes.

Keywords: *Listening Comprehension, Arabic, Mind Mapping, Cloze Listening, Top-Down Processing, Bottom-Up Processing, Listening Strategies*

INTRODUCTION

"I understand some words, but I cannot get the main idea." "I know the topic, but I missed the details." "Arabic speakers connect everything together."

As an Arabic instructor who previously worked as a Student Learning Specialist, I have heard comments like these during and after listening lessons with some regularity. These comments are not excuses. Rather, they are useful windows into what students experience when listening to authentic Arabic. They often reveal not a lack of effort, but a mismatch between the speed and density of the input and the strategies students are using to process it.

Listening can be especially demanding for learners in intensive language programs, and this challenge is particularly noticeable in Arabic. Students must process authentic spoken language, often at natural speed, while also managing rich morphology, verb conjugation, dialectal or register variation, and the acoustic realities of connected speech. Assimilation, reduction, and blended pronunciation can make word boundaries less obvious. A learner may know a word in print yet fail to recognize it when the same word is attached to a prefix, followed by a suffix, or absorbed into a stream of neighboring sounds. For example, learners may know the phrase *في البيت* (*fī al-bayt*, “in the house”) in print but hear it as the connected unit *fīl-bayt* and fail to recognize the boundary between the preposition and the definite article. Learners may also hear *لم يوافقوا على الاقتراح* (*lam yuwāfiqū ‘alā al-iqtirāḥ*, “They did not agree to the proposal”) but miss the short negative particle *لم* (*lam*). Without recognizing this particle, learners may incorrectly understand that the individuals agreed to the proposal, reversing the intended meaning. They may also miss the plural marker *وا* in *يوافقوا*, which indicates that the subject is plural.

Vocal prosody adds another Arabic-specific challenge. Boulaares (2026) found that fast, weakly segmented speech was a major barrier for advanced Arabic L2 learners. The study also found that atypical or flattened intonation could weaken the discourse cues that listeners use to divide speech into meaningful units and predict what may follow. These findings reinforce the need to help learners first recognize meaningful chunks and then attend closely to the linguistic details within those chunks.

In this setting, instruction cannot merely ask whether students understood the recording. It must also help students understand how to listen. Research on second language listening distinguishes between top-down processing, in which listeners use context, prior knowledge, prediction, and discourse expectations to construct meaning, and bottom-up processing, in which listeners decode sounds, words, phrases, and grammatical structures from the speech stream (Goh & Vandergrift, 2018; Vandergrift, 2004). Effective listening depends on both. In classroom terms, learners need to understand the forest and the trees.

This instructor reflection describes my use of two practical techniques in an Arabic class: mind mapping and cloze listening activities. Mind mapping helped students capture the global idea of an audio passage through a visual, top-down process. Cloze listening activities helped students attend to details from the same or similar passages through a focused, bottom-up process. Together, these techniques functioned as subskills that supported the larger skill of listening. More importantly, they gave struggling students a way to approach listening without feeling that they had already failed after missing the first unfamiliar word.

The Listening Problems I Kept Seeing

During one listening lesson, I played an authentic Arabic audio passage about a regional social issue. The students had already previewed the general topic and had learned several key vocabulary items. After the first listening, I asked a familiar question: “What is the speaker trying to communicate?”

A few students could provide isolated words. One student identified the topic but could not explain the point of the passage. Another student caught a number and a place name but missed why either mattered. Several students were not simply confused by vocabulary; they were overwhelmed by the task itself. They were trying to hear every word and, because they could not, they lost confidence in their ability to understand anything.

This moment was instructive. The difficulty was not only linguistic; it was strategic. Some students listened as if comprehension meant producing an exact transcript in their minds. Others listened only for familiar content words and ignored relationships among ideas. Still others became so focused on the sound stream that they stopped asking what the speaker was doing with the language.

Vandergrift (2004) argues that learners must “learn to listen” so that they can later “listen to learn.” In other words, listening lessons should not function only as comprehension checks. They should develop the processes and strategies that make comprehension possible. Goh and Vandergrift (2021) similarly emphasize a learner-oriented approach to listening instruction that helps students understand and manage the cognitive demands of listening. These ideas resonated strongly with what I saw in my classroom.

USING MIND MAPPING TO REACH THE GLOBAL IDEA

One response to this problem was to use mind mapping. At first, some students were hesitant. A few seemed to think that drawing lines and circles in a military language classroom was too informal or perhaps too elementary. To reduce this hesitation, I modeled the process on the smartboard. I placed the topic in the center, wrote two or three branches as I listened, and showed students that the purpose was not artistic quality. The purpose was thinking made visible.

After modeling the technique, I encouraged students to draw, doodle, write key words, and connect related ideas with lines in their notebooks or on the smartboard. In practice, I used the following brief procedure:

1. Before listening, I introduced the topic, activated relevant background knowledge, and placed the central concept on the smartboard.
2. Before playing the passage, students predicted two or three possible subtopics or branches that might appear in the audio.

3. During the first uninterrupted listening, students recorded only key words, repeated ideas, and major concepts. I reminded them to set aside unfamiliar details temporarily and focus on the overall message.
4. During the second listening, students added relationships among ideas, such as cause and effect, contrast, examples, problems, and responses.
5. After listening, students compared their maps in pairs or small groups, explained the connections they had made, and revised the main idea when necessary.

For instance, if a passage focused on unemployment, the center of the map might read “unemployment.” Students could then create branches for “causes,” “effects,” “government response,” “youth,” and “economy.” They were not expected to capture everything they heard. Instead, they focused on identifying what the passage was mainly communicating and how its major ideas related to one another.

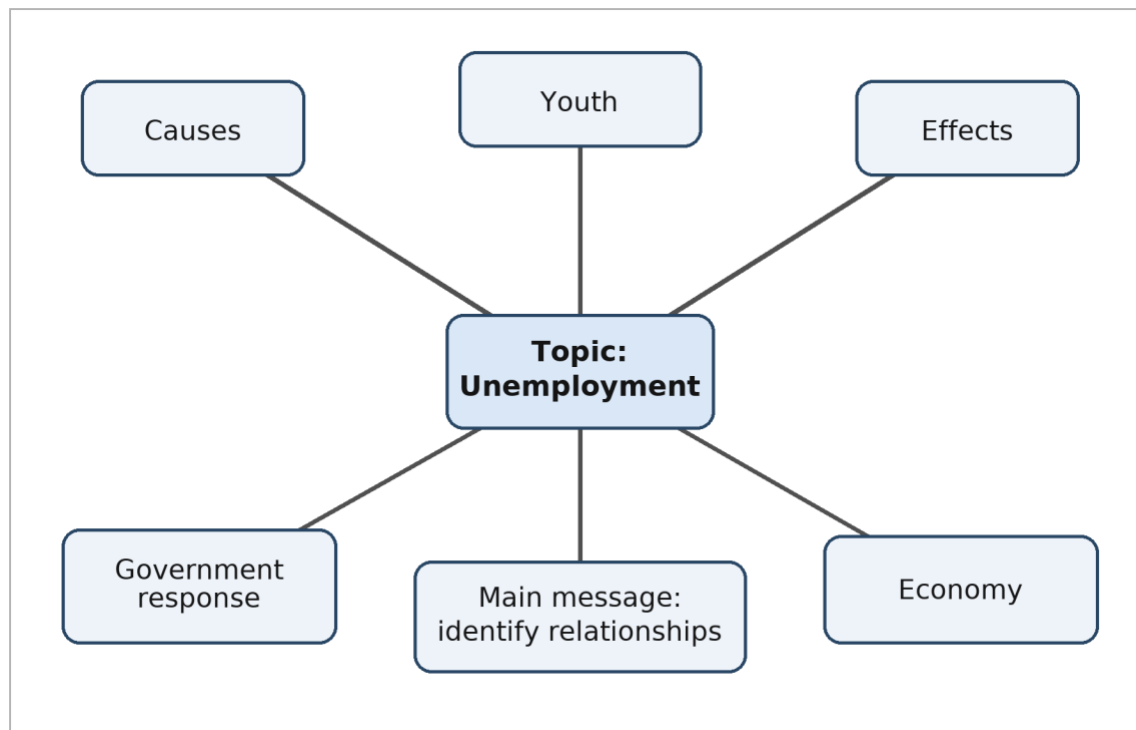
This technique supported top-down processing. It allowed students to use context, background knowledge, discourse clues, and repeated key terms to form a global understanding of the passage. Concept mapping and related visual organizer techniques have long been associated with helping learners represent relationships among ideas and organize knowledge meaningfully (Novak & Cañas, 2008). In listening instruction, concept mapping can provide scaffolding for learners who struggle to connect main points (Ebadi & Vakili Latif, 2015). More recent research on mind mapping in second language listening has also reported positive effects on listening comprehension and learner engagement (Jiang et al., 2026).

In my classroom, the most immediate benefit was affective as much as cognitive. Struggling learners appeared less anxious when they realized that missing a word did not mean losing the entire passage. A mind map gave students permission to listen for meaning first. It also gave me a quick visual way to see what students understood and where comprehension broke down. The activity also led to productive collaborative discussions. By comparing mind maps and discussing how ideas connected in logical ways, students practiced critical thinking and justification. As a result, they became more willing to connect details and use those connections to reach a main idea.

Mind mapping also has limitations. Some students may spend too much time trying to produce a perfect or highly detailed mind map, while others may record too many isolated words and create a list rather than a map. The activity works best when the instructor models a simple map, asks students to begin with only three or four main branches during the first listening, and reminds them that the map is a temporary thinking tool rather than a finished product. Students can add more branches and supporting details during the second listening.

Figure 1

Sample Mind Map for an Arabic Listening Passage



Note. The sample map created by the author is intentionally simple. Students may use English, Arabic, symbols, arrows, or abbreviations as long as the map helps them organize the speaker's main message.

USING CLOZE LISTENING TO HEAR THE DETAILS

Mind mapping helped students reach the global idea, or the speaker's overall message, but it did not solve every listening problem. Some students still needed practice hearing details accurately. In Arabic, those details often carry important meaning: tense markers, negation, pronoun suffixes, connectors, and words that signal cause, contrast, or result. When these details are missed, comprehension can become incomplete or even inaccurate.

For this reason, I incorporated cloze listening activities. In a typical cloze activity, students received a short transcript with selected words or phrases removed. As students listened, they filled in the missing items. I did not remove words randomly. I selected blanks based on the listening objective. Sometimes the blanks targeted unfamiliar Arabic sounds, and sometimes they targeted transition words. Other times, the blanks targeted verb forms, pronoun suffixes, or key content vocabulary that had been reduced or blended in connected speech.

For Arabic L2 learners, I organized the missing items around four practical areas. Lexical targets included important content words that students might easily miss. Grammatical targets included verb forms, negation, agreement, and attached pronouns. Discourse targets included connectors and expressions that signal cause and effect, contrast, sequence, or result. Finally, phonological targets included assimilated or reduced sounds and words that students might have difficulty

separating in connected speech. I usually selected one or two areas for each activity rather than including all four at once. This kept the cloze task manageable and ensured that the missing items supported the lesson's specific listening objective.

Unlike mind mapping, cloze listening directs attention to the sound signal itself. Students must notice word boundaries, recognize familiar forms in unfamiliar acoustic environments, and connect what they hear to what they know about grammar and vocabulary. This is bottom-up work. Field (2008) argues that listening instruction should include attention to decoding processes rather than relying only on general comprehension questions. Siegel and Siegel (2015) likewise make a case for explicit bottom-up activities in L2 listening instruction and report that learners can benefit from practice focused on dictation, perception, and word recognition.

At the beginning, some learners found cloze activities uncomfortable because the task revealed exactly where their listening broke down. Yet this discomfort became productive when the activity was framed as training rather than testing. Students could compare answers, listen again, and discuss why a particular word was difficult to hear. In Arabic, this often led to useful conversations about assimilation, attached pronouns, definite articles, or the way common words sound in natural speech.

COMBINING THE TWO TECHNIQUES

The greatest benefit appeared when I used the two techniques in sequence. First, students listened for the global idea and produced a mind map. Then, after a brief discussion of the main point and supporting branches, students completed a cloze listening activity focused on selected details from the same passage or a related passage.

This sequence mattered. If students began with the cloze activity, some immediately narrowed their attention to blanks and lost the overall message. If students only completed the mind map, they sometimes developed confidence about the topic but remained weak in recognizing precise details. Together, the two techniques created a balance: first meaning, then accuracy; first the whole message, then the parts that supported it.

Goh and Vandergrift (2018) explain that listeners draw on both top-down and bottom-up processes, depending on the listening purpose and the nature of the input. In my classroom, mind mapping and cloze listening made those processes visible. Students could see that different listening tasks require different kinds of attention. They also began to understand that missing a detail did not necessarily mean missing the message, and understanding the message did not excuse them from improving accuracy.

Table 1
Comparing Mind Mapping and Cloze Listening Activities

Feature	Mind Mapping	Cloze Listening	Classroom Value
Primary focus	Global idea and relationships among ideas	Specific words, phrases, forms, and details	Together, the two tasks move students from general comprehension to precise comprehension.
Student product	A visual map with branches, arrows, keywords, and categories	A completed transcript or worksheet with missing items filled in	The products give the instructor evidence of where comprehension succeeded or broke down.
Best used when	Introducing or reviewing the main message of an authentic audio passage	Training recognition of details, grammar, connectors, names, numbers, or reduced forms	The teacher can choose the activity based on the objective and available time.
Benefit	Reduces anxiety by showing that every word is not required for basic meaning	Builds accuracy by training learners to hear difficult details in connected speech	The combination supports confidence and skill development at the same time.

REFLECTIONS AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon sustained reflection on these lessons, I identified several beliefs and principles embedded in my approach to teaching listening.

1. Many struggling listeners are working hard but using inefficient strategies. Struggling listeners are not passive or careless learners. Some attempt to process every word equally. Others give up when the first few seconds of an audio passage move too quickly. Instructors should not interpret these reactions as a lack of motivation. They are often signs that learners need a more manageable way into the text.
2. Visual support can reduce cognitive load and support comprehension. Mind mapping gave students a practical structure for organizing ideas. It also helped me avoid turning every listening lesson into a sequence of comprehension questions. When students mapped the passage, they demonstrated understanding in a way that was visible, flexible, and easy to adjust.

3. Bottom-up listening needs explicit practice. Students often need repeated opportunities to hear how words behave in natural speech. Cloze listening activities provided that practice. They trained attention to word boundaries, forms, connectors, and details that can disappear for learners inside the sound stream.
4. Time limitations require flexibility. These techniques do not need to consume an entire lesson. When class time was limited, I used mind mapping during the main instructional hours to support comprehension of the day's authentic text. Cloze activities could then be used as a shorter review task, homework preparation, or afternoon reinforcement. The point is not to add more work for its own sake, but to select the technique that best supports the listening objective at that moment.
5. Artificial intelligence can assist preparation, but it cannot replace teacher judgment. Tools such as Microsoft Copilot or ChatGPT can help instructors save time by generating first drafts of cloze worksheets from a transcript. However, such materials require careful editing. The instructor must check the transcript, choose blanks aligned with the lesson objective, ensure that the answer key is accurate, and verify that the activity is appropriate for students' proficiency level.

CONCLUSION

Teaching listening is a complex instructional task because listening itself is complex. This is particularly true in Modern Standard Arabic, where morphology, attached forms, and connected speech can make spoken language difficult for learners to segment and interpret. My classroom experience suggests that students benefit when listening instruction separates, and then reconnects, global comprehension and detailed comprehension.

Mind mapping helped learners identify the main idea, organize information, and build confidence through top-down processing. Cloze listening activities helped learners notice words, forms, and details through bottom-up processing. Used together, the techniques created a practical bridge between understanding the message and hearing the language accurately.

Ultimately, the goal of listening instruction is not simply to test whether students understood an audio passage. The goal is to help students become stronger, more independent listeners. For struggling students especially, mind mapping and cloze listening activities can transform listening from an intimidating event into a process they can manage, practice, and improve.

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Faculty Forum

Teacher Enthusiasm Matters to Faculty and Student Performance in the DLIFLC Learning Context

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Enthusiastic teachers, driven by intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, transform classrooms into dynamic environments that boost student engagement and academic success. This article examines the influence of teacher enthusiasm as a predictor of faculty wellbeing and academic achievement, providing practical strategies to enhance teacher passion and student outcomes within the DLIFLC learning context.

Keywords: *Student Engagement, Academic Success, Teacher Enthusiasm, Faculty Wellbeing, Practical Strategies*

INTRODUCTION

Teacher enthusiasm is essential for teacher wellbeing and student engagement, and it is linked to improved instructional quality, higher faculty self-confidence, and greater job satisfaction (Kunter et al., 2011). Driven by genuine interest in teaching and supported by institutional benefits and rewards, enthusiastic teachers often demonstrate superior classroom management, encourage deeper thinking, and offer stronger support for students (Kunter, 2013).

How does teacher enthusiasm affect faculty wellbeing and student performance? What are some actionable steps to develop it? This article is intended for DLIFLC faculty and supervisors seeking practical strategies to strengthen teacher enthusiasm and improve student outcomes.

WHAT IS TEACHER ENTHUSIASM?

According to Keller et al. (2016), teacher enthusiasm is a two-dimensional construct that combines a teacher's internal enjoyment with its external manifestation and is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Within language pedagogy, this enthusiasm serves as a powerful, contagious positive emotion that cultivates student motivation, reduces classroom

boredom, and boosts engagement for improved academic success. Enthusiastic teachers leverage nonverbal immediacy, subject passion, and constructive feedback to cultivate a supportive, proactive environment that enhances language acquisition.

Teacher enthusiasm is a key driver of student confidence and classroom engagement (Brigham et al., 1992, as cited in OECD, 2019). When teachers are highly enthusiastic, it can foster student engagement for students who have both fixed and growth mindsets (Lei, 2026). Furthermore, sustained teacher enthusiasm enables faculty to maintain the long-term empathy necessary to support student achievement (Santana-Monagas et al., 2025).

Intrinsic Drives

Motivation from within to fulfill career and life goals offers deep psychological benefits. Curiosity, aspiration for professional development, and a sense of accomplishment have lasting impacts on fostering teacher enthusiasm. Teachers find intrinsic motivation in witnessing their students' growth and active engagement (Stenlund, 1995, as cited in Keller et al., 2016). Conversely, disruptive and underachieving students can dampen teacher enthusiasm and drain their motivation (Kunter et al., 2011).

Extrinsic Motivators

Teacher enthusiasm is closely related to contextual school conditions. Incentives like bonuses, time off, and flexible work schedules motivate teachers to stay enthusiastic. Teachers are more motivated and enthusiastic when working in a respectful, transparent, and supportive environment that offers genuine appreciation, a healthy work-life balance, and a respect for teacher autonomy (Zhou et al., 2024).

Faculty Wellbeing

As a critical element of pedagogical competence, teacher enthusiasm elevates job satisfaction and makes job performance both more enjoyable and sustainable. Enthusiastic teachers maintain high motivation, creating a lively classroom atmosphere that actively drives student engagement and learning outcomes. Research has found that teachers who experienced higher levels of enthusiasm reported higher levels of job and life satisfaction and lower levels of emotional exhaustion (Kunter et al., 2008, 2011, 2013, as cited in Keller et al., 2016).

FOSTERING FACULTY ENTHUSIASM AT DLIFLC

To foster faculty enthusiasm at DLIFLC, schools and supervisors must cultivate a supportive work environment that offers ample professional development opportunities, while instructors simultaneously commit to regular reflection on their pedagogical purpose for ongoing growth. Here are some practical strategies:

Cultivating a Productive Work Environment

To cultivate a collaborative work environment and provide practical classroom solutions, schools should offer targeted workshops and conferences addressing instructors' real-world needs, focusing on immediate challenges such as burnout and skill gaps. Supervisors should implement the following strategies:

- Cultivate a culture of trust: establish an environment built on open communication where teachers feel safe sharing ideas and providing feedback.
- Invest in professional growth: provide actionable training, effective mentorship, and a clear career path to boost skill development, dedication, and engagement.
- Recognize and value contributions: promptly and consistently acknowledge both instructors' small wins and major milestones to ensure they feel valued and refreshed in their roles.

Fostering Intrinsic Motivation

Teachers are intrinsically motivated to enhance skills they personally value. To foster this drive, instructors can set small achievable goals and incorporate rejuvenating activities. Effective strategies include actively engaging in professional development—such as workshops, conferences, and webinars—along with self-directed pursuits such as reading, writing, volunteering, and exercising.

Here is an example of selfless, passionate teaching driven by intrinsic motivation. Dr. Donna Maurer is an experienced educator known for her genuine assistance and dynamic engagement with students (Dempsey, 2024). I value the eight-week online course I took with her a decade ago. It was a model of structure and engagement that featured explicit guidelines, empathic online interactions that validated student concerns, rapid inquiry responses, and fair, actionable feedback on assignments. During a recent email exchange regarding teacher enthusiasm, she shared that her motivation stems from the opportunity to learn new things herself and, “if fortunate,” to engage with the one or two students each term who are genuinely enthusiastic and appreciative.

Using Reflective Journaling

Reflective journaling fosters teacher balance and resilience. By tracking classroom behavior and experiences, instructors can more clearly identify areas for improvement and set more effective goals. These journals serve as a comprehensive record, covering pedagogical adjustments, key workplace interactions, students' challenges and achievements, the teacher's emotional highs and lows, and critical incidents, to facilitate professional growth.

I maintain a daily reflective journal to analyze student academic and emotional data, synthesize professional development insights, and process workplace experiences. This practice enables me

to proactively address pedagogical challenges, cultivate a proactive classroom environment, and increase job satisfaction.

Navigating Learner Behavior Challenges

Student misconduct, ranging from disruption to blatant disrespect, compromises the learning environment and stifles instructional passion. I've faced challenging management situations in my classes—such as a student putting on makeup and another placing their feet on the desk—and immediately addressed them. However, the students' subsequent disengagement and sullen attitudes created a challenging environment that gradually diminished my enthusiasm. To deal with these challenges, I revamped classroom management to sharpen student focus with a more composed, intentional style:

- De-escalation: use subtle non-verbal cues to lower tension.
- Private chats: hold private chats to maintain student dignity.
- Positive redirection: utilize positive framing to redirect behavior.
- Team collaboration: collaborate with teaching team members, supervisors, and MLIs to enforce consistent behavior expectations.

By implementing these strategies, I've successfully mitigated minor disruptions, including slouching, talking out of turn, technology misuse, and occasional lateness, resulting in increased student engagement, heightened classroom focus, and revitalized teacher enthusiasm.

Analyzing Student Feedback

Constructive student feedback regarding lessons and guidance significantly boosts teacher enthusiasm, whereas unfair or unfounded comments can rapidly erode it. Like other DLIFLC instructors, I receive anonymous student feedback through sensing sessions, the Mid-Course Student Questionnaire, and the End-of-Program Student Questionnaire. In feedback from a recent class, one student commented on my teaching style as “very well-tailored to myself specifically. I very much enjoy his teaching style and feel that it has [been] a big help for me”; whereas another briefly wrote, “He’s very cut and dry about our downfalls.” While the first student’s positive review was motivating, the latter’s ambiguous feedback proved difficult to address effectively.

It is natural for instructors to feel unsettled by student comments that express opportunities for professional development. However, professional resilience requires separating student feedback from their immediate emotional state. Often, these comments reflect external stressors—such as personal, situational, or military-related pressures—and learning difficulties, rather than an accurate reflection of the actual classroom environment. To sustain teacher enthusiasm, supervisors should employ a constructive, calm, and open-minded approach that helps instructors process the feedback by:

- Objectively analyzing feedback: fairly evaluate both praise and criticism to identify strengths to maintain and areas for growth.
- Consistently demonstrating confidence: regularly express trust and support in the teacher's work ethic and abilities.

TRANSLATE TEACHER ENTHUSIASM INTO STUDENT OUTCOMES

Enthusiastic teachers cultivate a lively, inviting, and well-managed classroom through empathetic, positive engagement to improve academic achievement. Here are some actionable, research-backed strategies for translating teacher enthusiasm into improved student outcomes.

Displaying Enthusiasm

Students feel higher levels of enjoyment and engagement when teachers visibly display enthusiasm (Keller et al., 2018). When teachers show passion for their subjects and related inherent values, it inspires students to explore them further. Enthusiastic teachers utilize emotional regulation to project a positive attitude despite their personal, pedagogical, or classroom challenges. According to Collins (1978, as cited in Keller et al., 2016), enthusiastic teachers boost student engagement through nonverbal immediacy, including:

- Vocal animation: employing varied intonation and pitch
- Consistent eye contact: making direct, engaging eye contact with students
- Demonstrative gestures: using hand and arm movements to emphasize points
- Active body movements: moving around the classroom or changing postures
- Dynamic facial expressions: smiling, nodding, and displaying expressions that show interest
- Precise word choice: utilizing clear and engaging language
- Validation of input: being responsive to student ideas and feelings
- High energy level: maintaining a lively, dynamic classroom presence

Using Positive Reinforcement

Strategic positive reinforcement significantly enhances classroom engagement and behavior outcomes, establishing a reciprocal cycle that improves student motivation and professional satisfaction. Focusing on praising desirable actions rather than merely addressing mistakes, enthusiastic teachers use this approach to foster a safer, more productive environment that strengthens teacher-student relationships.

Recently I was touched by a thank-you sent by a student on the day he was disenrolled, expressing his appreciation and interest in continuing to learn the language. The student was facing challenges and required tailored support and additional study time. As his mentor, I recognized his dedication to high-quality homework submissions, which took him a considerable amount of time to complete, while advising him to stay calm, be motivated, and improve time

management and test-taking skills. After two more quiz failures, for the first time he passed the subsequent three vocabulary quizzes in a row with impressive scores. Despite the teaching team's final decision to disenroll him, he kept a positive, hopeful attitude and expressed a desire to continue learning the language on his own.

In the high-pressure DLIFLC learning environment, positive reinforcement is vital for managing student stress, enhancing engagement, and boosting learning confidence. By providing genuine, timely, and specific feedback that rewards student efforts, instructors can cultivate a growth mindset and significantly improve academic outcomes.

Showing Empathy

Teachers who balance dynamic enthusiasm with empathetic understanding are better equipped to enhance student engagement and maintain an inviting learning environment. Santana-Monagas et al. (2025) argue that while teacher enthusiasm provides indirect emotional support for student motivation, empathic teaching fosters a stronger sense of school belonging and higher student outcomes. Their findings suggest that educators who truly understand students achieve superior results in both instructional efficiency and classroom management. To alleviate learning pressure and boost engagement, instructors can use the following strategies to cultivate empathy:

- Get to know students: take time to understand each student's unique background, interests, and strengths.
- Adapt to personalities: respect individual personalities and tailor interaction style to suit different students.
- Support emotional needs: normalize language learning anxiety and provide personalized coaching on areas such as time management and test-taking.
- Reframe sensitivity: shift the narrative for highly sensitive students to help them view their deep attention to detail and high empathy as an indicator of academic potential rather than setbacks.
- Provide a tailored environment: offer quiet, independent spaces or small group settings for students overwhelmed by larger classroom dynamics.
- Alleviate pressure: offer extra time to students with slower processing speeds to reduce performance pressure.

Establishing Inviting and Well-Managed Classrooms

An inviting and well-managed classroom can transform disengaged students into self-driven learners. To ensure a fair learning environment, I uphold consistent standards for every student in class regardless of their military rank or academic standing. In one instance, I worked with a student who struggled with engagement, seldom taking class notes and frequently requesting bathroom breaks even five minutes before a lesson ended. The student's confidence and motivation began to improve as we worked on active mentoring with detailed feedback and

fostering a growth mindset where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities. Gradually, the student stopped requesting breaks and moved from minimal participation to self-driven mastery, including the additional study of Chinese characters and authentic materials available through GLOSS.

To establish an inviting and well-managed classroom, instructors can:

- Establish clear protocols: set transparent expectations at the outset to ensure equitable classroom management and reduce behavior disruptions.
- Prioritize psychological safety: allow students to feel safe to make mistakes, viewing errors as learning opportunities.
- Build authentic rapport: balance professional boundaries with authenticity to help foster a sense of belonging.
- Tailor individual support: provide individual pedagogical support to mitigate student anxiety and strengthen academic resilience.

CONCLUSION

This article explores teacher enthusiasm as a primary driver of classroom engagement and academic success, while simultaneously examining its role in faculty wellbeing. By synthesizing empirical research with reflective practice, the paper provides practical strategies for leveraging teacher enthusiasm to enhance DLIFLC student outcomes. These approaches include:

- Building a supportive work culture: foster an environment of trust and collaboration with sufficient professional development opportunities to boost teacher motivation.
- Practicing reflective journaling: use regular journaling as a tool to process professional experiences and maintain mental clarity.
- Leveraging student feedback: analyze student comments to pinpoint specific, actionable areas for growth.
- Creating inviting and well-managed classrooms: combine enthusiasm and empathy to build a learning environment where positive reinforcement improves student outcomes.

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Faculty Forum

Pedagogy First: Collegial Conversations about Large Language Models, Cognitive Debt, and Language Teaching

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The growing emphasis on using generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) at DLIFLC has led to experimentation, discussions, and presentations to develop appropriate practices for adopting this technology for teaching and learning. The 2025 Holiday Professional Development Program (HPDP) was an opportunity for teachers to build our capacity to integrate large language models (LLMs), such as ChatGPT and Copilot, and to discuss other matters of importance to the institute. This faculty forum article is a collegial conversation arising from one HPDP presentation that led to deeper discussions about the problem of minimally guided approaches to integrating GenAI into second language learning (SLL). As we work towards developing guiding principles for the productive use of GenAI, teachers are instrumental in supporting proficiency gains, cognitive development, and intellectual growth. From broad guiding principles, we may eventually generate LLM microstrategies of engagement grounded in a deep understanding of second language pedagogy and macrostrategies for language teaching. The challenge of meeting the changing needs of our students requires collegial dialogue and the continuous collection of empirical and anecdotal evidence to support the next generation of military linguists.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Cognitive Debt, Large Language Models, Experiential Learning, TPACK, AI Literacy, GenAI, Machine Learning

INTRODUCTION

During the Holiday Professional Development Program (HPDP) in December 2025, I attended the presentation “Artificial Intelligence and Cognitive Debt” by Dr. Jawad Khan, Faculty Development Specialist in the Persian Farsi School. The presentation about cognitive debt and large language models (LLMs) led to insightful conversations with Dr. Khan about the implications of using ChatGPT and Copilot for language learning and teaching. As explained in the presentation,

cognitive debt is “a cumulative deficit in critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and professional judgement that arises from offloading cognitive tasks” (Watts, 2025, Abstract). In an article about the cost of LLM-augmented knowledge work (such as machine-generated summaries), Ruttenberg (2026) argued that cognitive debt results from attentional erosion and effort displacement and is more likely to occur when AI use is chronic, unreflective, and rewarded by institutional policies that promote AI use for the sake of efficiency.

Contextualizing AI Within a Broader Social Context

After the HPDP, I embarked on a commitment to read seven books on artificial intelligence (AI) to increase my knowledge of the promises and pitfalls of these tools. These books address critical concerns about generative AI (GenAI) and predictive AI and aim to balance the hype surrounding the tech industry’s claims about the capabilities of “anthropomorphized machines” (Bender & Hanna, 2025). Just as Dr. Khan’s discussion of cognitive debt caused me to think about the consequences of an over reliance on AI in second language learning (SLL), my new book collection (*The AI Con*, *Atlas of AI*, *Unmasking AI*, and *Empire of AI*, among other titles) gave me reasons to develop an informed skepticism regarding predictive and GenAI integration in society. Among other topics, the authors addressed issues related to algorithmic bias, copyright infringement, and intellectual property violations (Bender & Hanna, 2025; Buolamwini, 2023; Crawford, 2021; Hao, 2025). While there is substantial research on these broader social concerns of AI use, there is room for more discussion on the cognitive and ethical implications for using large language models (LLMs) in second language learning (SLL).

Elevating Pedagogy Over Technology

The purpose of this article is to further the conversation on common pitfalls of LLMs, like ChatGPT and Copilot in SLL. By focusing on developing broad guiding principles for LLM adoption in SLL, teachers can feel empowered to innovate microstrategies for using GenAI. I will ground my discussion in a principle I learned from the late Dr. Leo van Lier at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies (MIIS). Pedagogy first. Curriculum second. Technology last. By relating this principle (illustrated in Figure 1) to insights gained from two articles included in Dr. Khan’s presentation: *Paying the Cognitive Debt: An Experiential Learning Framework for Integrating AI in Social Work Education* (Watts, 2025) and *Your Brain on ChatGPT* (Kosmayna et al., 2025), I offer some considerations for teaching with LLMs. I do not propose a panacea of macro or microstrategies for LLMs in SLL, only a thoughtful contribution to the ongoing dialogue about AI in SLL.

Figure 1

Pedagogy First, Curriculum Second, Technology Last

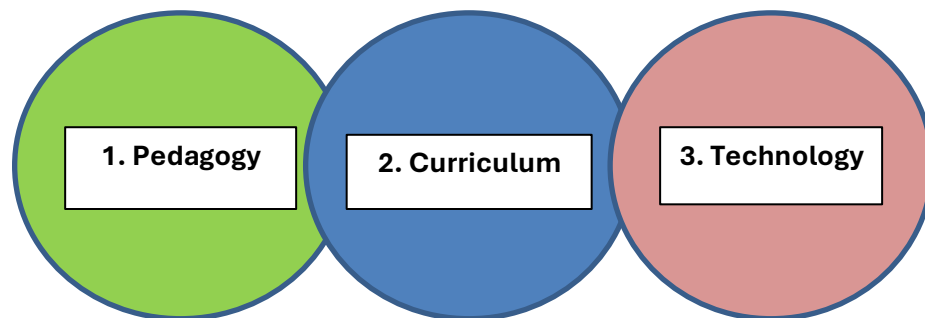


Figure 1 highlights the importance of teaching and learning by placing technology in service to curriculum and pedagogy, not the reverse.

UNDERSTANDING AI CAPABILITIES AND ACKNOWLEDGING PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGES

Given the versatility and multiplicity of AI, it is essential to define key terms relevant to the current discussion to ensure a shared understanding of specific AI tools. GenAI refers to a type of technology that, via user prompts, can create new content (e.g., images, text, code) by mimicking patterns from large data sets. Under the umbrella of GenAI are LLMs, which are advanced GenAI systems that predict words in a sequence and can perform a range of human-like language tasks; for example, they can interpret text or summarize an article “with varying degrees of autonomy ... [performing] tasks that would otherwise be performed by humans” (Stryker, 2024, para. 3). Examples of LLMs include public interfaces such as Microsoft’s Copilot, Google’s Gemini assistant, or Open AI’s ChatGPT.

Pedagogical problems abound in the age of AI. Perhaps the most pressing challenge is the minimally guided integration of LLMs in higher education. According to the Digital Education Council (2025), 80% of faculty reported a lack of clarity in applying AI to teaching. In addition, many institutions lack clear AI policies (Ng et al., 2025), which has led to a pedagogical vacuum where teachers lack expert guidance or the ability to create structured learning objectives (Batista et al., 2024). Research indicates that a lack of guidance and criticality in AI educational use leads to skill erosion, cognitive atrophy, decreased critical thinking, diminished problem-solving, reduced empathy, and compromised professional judgment (Kosmayna et al., 2025; Perkinson, 2025; Watts, 2025). Moreover, the consequences of AI misuse in SLL represent a critical risk factor for developing competence as a (military) linguist, but risks can be mitigated by developing productive AI engagement strategies to support language proficiency gains, cognitive development, and intellectual growth.

As Dr. Khan emphasized, when teachers model responsible use of AI, the pitfalls of misguided use can be minimized. Teacher leadership in LLM adoption is critical because students tend to choose the path of least cognitive resistance (Kosmyna et al., 2025). For teachers to lead in the age of AI-assisted learning, we need macrostrategies (broad guiding principles) for AI engagement to guide students and ourselves in leveraging LLMs to support learning rather than detract from it. We may also need to consider curricular (or programmatic), modifications to achieve this goal.

PRIORITIZING TARGET LANGUAGE PRODUCTION

Dr. Khan used Kolb's experiential learning theory to propose six AI-assisted activities grounded in concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Watts, 2025). He aimed to highlight that machine output has faults and that students must be trained to view synthetic content with skepticism to minimize the risk of drawing incorrect inferences. The suggested activities involved vocabulary building, pronunciation, descriptions, and speech acts. One vocabulary activity involved giving students AI-generated sentences to review and improve spelling, synonyms, and context. The description activity involved students uploading a picture to a GenAI tool and getting a synthetic description of facial features that students would improve and rewrite. In a post-presentation conversation, Dr. Khan and I discussed how these AI-centered activities could be improved to align with the foundational tenets of second language acquisition, such as providing opportunities for students to create original language, to personalize vocabulary and grammar learning, and to negotiate interaction with peers, teachers, and the target language community.

Although Dr. Khan's intent was to provide opportunities for students to recognize flaws in synthetic language, we can broaden the application of cognitive-debt-reducing activities to ensure pedagogical alignment with principles of SLL. One strategy is to instruct learners to perform a proficiency-oriented activity, such as describing a person/image, before prompting the machine to do the task. Subsequently, students can compare their original descriptions with synthetic texts by categorizing comparisons in a multi-column table to analyze linguistic features, such as lexical choice, verb forms, discourse features, and socio-cultural elements. Additionally, as language-specific LLMs are starting to emerge, it will be interesting to see how these regional LLMs made by and for a specific cultural and linguistic audience compare to an English-based LLM when describing a person.

Regardless of the activity, teachers can consider having students contrast their original descriptions with those of classmates and target language (TL) speakers in the broader community to preserve the importance of human-centered, meaningful interactions to describe a person/image. Communicative exchanges with speakers of the TL community to describe physical characteristics of people related to skin color, hair textures, and facial features would typically involve idiosyncratic language use, cultural nuances, and negotiated interaction. Analyzing differences between human-generated and synthetic descriptions promotes cognitive engagement without sacrificing the benefits of creating with the TL. Furthermore, for lower

proficiency learners, the language generated by LLMs is often beyond $i + 1$, meaning that the language is not considered comprehensible input, which is a cornerstone of effective language teaching. However, engaging with peers of similar proficiency levels and experienced teachers creates an environment more conducive to level appropriate language learning and cognitive engagement. Although teachers and learners can adjust prompts to vary the level of complexity of machine output for specific imagined interlocutors, synthetic descriptions lack unique individual experiences and idiosyncratic cultural knowledge that TL speakers and language learners bring to communicative encounters.

Aspiring military linguists need to engage in the creative process of combining newly acquired and recycled vocabulary and painstakingly choosing verb conjugations to convey original meaning rooted in lived experiences. Evaluating synthetic content before creating meaning is a passive exercise. Furthermore, the ability to evaluate mechanical language is limited if learners do not possess the linguistic ability to perform the task unassisted. Pairing Dr. Khan's cognitive-debt-reducing activities with front-loaded student-centered language production gives teachers and students more options for using LLMs effectively. This approach to SLL in the age of AI has the potential to increase language proficiency and learner awareness of the promises and limitations of LLMs.

ALIGNING AI-ASSISTED STRATEGIES WITH LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Although it is imperative to experiment with different strategies for integrating AI into SLL, it is equally important to align strategies with sound pedagogical decisions. For example, AI-assisted (rather than AI-centered) activities can be aligned with learning objectives in the following ways:

- *Learning Objective*: Students will be able to accurately orally describe a person, using basic grammatical structures and vocabulary for clothing, accessories, facial features, and other physical characteristics in culturally appropriate ways at the ILR level 2.
- *Activities*: Working in pairs or small groups, students will orally describe a person and then write down their description. Students will then evaluate descriptions produced by LLMs, by their classmates, and by TL speakers based on lexical choice, verb forms, discourse features, and socio-cultural elements. Students will discuss differences and write an improved description incorporating the best elements of human and machine language. As a culminating activity, students will give an oral description of a different person without any notes. Feedback provided by the teacher should focus on accuracy as described in the learning objective. Teachers should explain the rationale for the activity, emphasizing the benefits of preserving adequate cognitive load throughout the learning process and the risks of over-reliance on AI tools.

As a basic guiding principle for using LLMs in SLL, I offer a five-step model for responsible classroom use. See Table 1.

Table 1

Five-Step Model for Responsible Classroom Use of GenAI Tools

Step	Student/Teacher Action	Purpose
1. Student Performance	Students engage in the cognitive process to produce language (in writing or a transcript of speaking) according to proficiency standards, such as describing a person or thing, narrating in the past, present, or future, reporting facts, and writing original sentences with unit vocabulary words	Students benefit from producing or interpreting language before they use an AI tool
2. Peer Comparison	Students compare their production with what a peer produced. This can be done in pairs or small groups. Teachers should set clear guidelines on what students should compare (e.g., grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, cultural nuances, etc.)	Engaging in peer interaction to negotiate meaning is where language learning occurs. The give and take of human interaction contributes to the development of fluency, grammatical competence, and lexical development as well as fostering trust and confidence building among learning communities.
3. GenAI Tool Comparison	Students work individually or in pairs/small groups to compare their product with what a GenAI tool such as Microsoft Copilot produces. Teachers can either share a GenAI-created product for students to compare, or they can train students on how to write prompts so they can compare products.	Having students compare their product with what a GenAI tool creates provides learners with an alternative source of TL input and develops not only their critical thinking skills but also their language proficiency.
4. Guided Linguistic Analysis	Students go back to their original product and analyze it, focusing on opportunities for revision based on the comparisons they made and feedback and discussions from peers and/or their teacher. Teachers should provide clear guidance on what students should focus on (e.g., linguistic accuracy, cultural nuances, lexical variations).	Having students re-visit, analyze, and revise their product contributes to greater depth in language learning.

5. Revised Performance without Notes	Students deliver a presentation or revise their original product without using notes. In other words, this should be spontaneous verbal or written production.	Providing opportunities for students to produce the target language by gradually reducing the number of scaffolds contributes to improved learning outcomes and helps teachers and students to identify progress made and gaps to be addressed in subsequent lessons.
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These five steps represent an approach that preserves cognition, human interaction, critical thinking, and discourse analysis.

PRESERVING NEGOTIATED HUMAN INTERACTION

As we comprehend the idiosyncrasies of LLMs in multiple languages, we can benefit from refreshing our understanding of Kumaravadivelu's (2003) 10 macrostrategies for language teaching: 1) maximizing learning opportunities, 2) minimizing perceptual mismatches, 3) facilitating negotiated interaction, 4) promoting learner autonomy, 5) fostering language awareness, 6) activating internal heuristics, 7) contextualizing linguistic input, 8) integrating language skills, 9) ensuring social relevance, and 10) raising cultural consciousness. Of the 10 macrostrategies discussed in the book *Beyond Methods: Macrostrategies for Language Teaching*, a foundational and seminal text for anti-prescriptive language instruction, I will highlight facilitating negotiated interaction, the third macrostrategy, as being relevant to the example of using GenAI tools for practicing the task of describing a person.

Kumaravadivelu's chapter on facilitating negotiated interaction begins with the following quote from Dick Allwright (an influential applied linguist who co-authored a book with MIIS's former professor Kathleen Bailey) in 1984. "The importance of interaction is not simply that it creates learning opportunities; it is that it constitutes learning itself" (in Kumaravadivelu, 2003). This quote encapsulates the centrality of (human) interaction and (human) negotiation as key to (language) learning. As is well known in SLA and is also common practice at the DLIFLC, learning opportunities are maximized when there are multiple negotiated interaction points (between students, students and teachers, small groups, and with the broader community of target language speakers). To maximize interactional language learning opportunities, LLMs must be relegated to the role of assisting in language learning and teaching rather than being the direct focus of language production and analysis.

Halliday (1985, as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2003) proposed three types of interaction: textual, interpersonal, and ideational. Textual interaction refers to modifying messages based on the interlocutor's responses and reactions, while interpersonal interaction refers to sociolinguistic aspects such as roles and relationships among speakers. Ideational interaction refers to the ideas and emotions participants bring to a communicative encounter based on lived experiences (past and present), cognitive awareness, and sociocultural sensitivity. In synthetic exchanges with the

machine, true interaction does not take place because the three types of interaction are not fully present. GenAI cannot differentiate between how humans interact in different contexts. Although through crafty prompting, users can simulate interactions from various perspectives and with multiple imagined interlocutors.

EMBEDDING AI LITERACY IN PROGRAM PLANNING

Given students' tendency to use GenAI as a shortcut rather than as a support tool, language learning materials could be expanded to include AI literacy. These digital skills would be grounded in augmenting cognitive, intellectual, and linguistic development and reinforcing academic integrity. According to Watts (2025), academic policies and guidance are central to preserving academic integrity and safeguarding the learning process in the age of GenAI. Suggested policies include requiring students to justify AI use and offering guiding principles for AI adoption in the curriculum or program goals, for example considering any risks related to academic integrity, learning, data privacy, or human interaction. Teaching students to recognize these risks when using AI in various learning scenarios increases their AI literacy and opportunities for learning. In addition to teaching AI literacy, we can lean on evidence-based approaches for using LLMs to support learning in various contexts while also documenting our experiential knowledge. Valuing active experimentation rather than hurried implementation will likely lead to more favorable outcomes. While some teachers may prefer to teach without LLMs, others may be overly enthusiastic about these tools. Perkinson (2025), a critic of LLMs in education, posited that AI rejection is not realistic because students are using AI to complete even the lowest of stakes assignments requiring minimal effort. He demonstrated that teachers could design AI exercises that guide students to uncover limitations of these tools. His AI literacy exercise was successful because it led students to experience the fallacies of machine output and to develop "an informed skepticism with which to confront utopian claims about the AI-driven future" (p. 35).

ELEVATING TEACHER EXPERTISE

With a firm pedagogical foundation and learning materials that include AI literacy, we can focus on broad guiding principles for teachers using LLMs to enhance learning. Watts (2025) discussed effective technology integration based on the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, which demonstrates that pedagogical goals and content knowledge must guide the integration of new educational technologies. In other words, teachers must understand how the tools work, how people learn, as well as possess deep content knowledge. As we continue to experiment with LLM integration into SLL, we will understand more about how this technology works and, better yet, how it does not. By researching LLMs in multiple languages and developing experiential knowledge, we will comprehend the possibilities and limitations of AI in intensive foreign language programs. We can also identify pedagogical problems as the starting point for strategizing how to integrate LLMs in SLL. This approach aligns with Buolamwini's (2023) view on a problem-centric approach for using AI to solve issues that affect humanity, rather than creating new issues that arise from the pursuit of efficiency and maximizing tech use for tech's sake.

As we focus on identifying problems of practice, our language-specific and AI knowledge will grow. We will be equipped to guide learners to observe the fallacies of machines and to appreciate human expertise and thought processes. Applying knowledge of discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, critical language awareness, sociopolitical consciousness, and intercultural competence, our role as teachers, linguists, and SLL experts becomes more significant as we guide learners to leverage the possibilities and limitations of LLMs.

Upon reflecting on a DLIFLC teacher's comment about the impending obsolescence of the language teaching profession, I believe our expertise will become more important as we lean into our depth of pedagogical knowledge and scrutinize LLM output in our respective languages. We can ask ourselves if the waves of tech upgrades have significantly improved learning outcomes. Although we cannot think in terms of a binary relationship between technology and pedagogy, we can assert that pedagogy should guide the implementation of LLMs. We may be on the brink of the pendulum oscillating toward innovation of educational structures, pedagogical techniques, and curricular frameworks. This shift could lead to a productive integration of AI in SLL or to restrict its use to certain contexts.

CONCLUSION

May this collegial conversation between Dr. Khan and myself serve as a model for future dialogue focused on pedagogical and curricular innovation as well as critical language awareness in the age of GenAI. I hope this article encourages teachers to nurture that inner voice, warning us to proceed with caution during this pivotal moment of rapid acquisition of LLMs in SLL, and inspires us to continue experimenting, scrutinizing, researching, and generating creative solutions to pedagogical problems. These solutions can align with the following principles: prioritizing the human need to create language, comparing multiple linguistic features of human and synthetic content, aligning AI-assisted strategies with learning objectives, embedding AI literacy in program planning, preserving meaningful human interactions, reducing automation bias, and elevating teacher expertise. By using LLMs to help solve pedagogical challenges in SLL, we can indeed honor the ideology of Pedagogy First. Curriculum Second. Technology Last.

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Faculty Forum

Teaching Students How to Study: A Structured Preview Framework for Chinese Language Learning

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Many students in foreign language classrooms struggle with weak academic performance not because of a lack of intelligence or motivation, but because they have never learned how to study effectively. This article proposes a rigorous, time-managed six-step preview assignment designed to transform students from passive recipients to self-regulated, autonomous learners. By addressing systemic inefficiencies—such as improper dictionary skills and excessive pinyin annotation—this methodology facilitates a successful flipped classroom model in which instructional time is reallocated to reinforcement and practical application. The approach is grounded in classroom experience and informed by self-regulated learning (SRL) literature emphasizing time management, metacognition, and efficient tool use (Lyu, 2024). Practitioner experiences indicate that the structured preview routine not only improves comprehension and classroom efficiency but also fosters self-regulation and long-term independent learning skills.

Keywords: *Self-Regulated Learning (SRL), Learner Autonomy, Flipped Classroom, Study Skills Instruction, Learner Development*

INTRODUCTION

In many language classrooms, teachers frequently observe students who struggle academically despite spending significant time studying. These students often rely on teachers for explanations and expect the instructor to provide all the key information during class. When asked to read the lesson text aloud or provide key details in the target language, they may hesitate, lack confidence, or demonstrate weak comprehension. Research on Chinese language learners shows that these difficulties frequently stem from weak SRL strategies rather than lack of effort or motivation (Lin et al., 2021; Sun, 2024). Many students have never received explicit instruction on how to study a foreign language. Without guidance, they may spend excessive time looking up words, annotating characters inefficiently, or engaging in activities that do not meaningfully support

comprehension. This issue is especially pronounced in Chinese, a language that demands high levels of metacognition and strategic behaviors (Zhang, 2019).

To address these challenges, teachers must shift part of their instructional focus from content delivery to learning strategy development. One effective approach is a structured preview routine—a guided process that prepares students before class, allowing classroom time to focus on meaningful practice, interaction, and reinforcement. Accordingly, homework design should shift from simply answering questions to emphasizing the quality of the learning process and strengthening the preview routine. This approach provides a clear instructional model grounded in research on flipped-classroom effectiveness (Lau & Qian, 2025; Zhang, 2019).

Common Study Problems Observed in Chinese Language Learners

Academic struggles in the language classroom often stem from a lack of foundational study skills. Many students enter the classroom without the necessary tools to engage with complex material, leading to a culture of waiting for teachers to provide all information directly. Based on classroom observations, advising sessions, and Diagnostic Assessment interviews conducted across multiple Chinese language cohorts, several recurring patterns of ineffective study behaviors emerged.

1. Surface-Level Completion of Preview Worksheets

The most common type of preview assignment is completing a worksheet, and even when students have answered comprehension questions and completed translation tasks, they may still have difficulty recalling the text, recognizing key words, or expressing the main ideas during class. This gap suggests that worksheet completion does not necessarily indicate genuine engagement with the material.

2. Vocabulary Lookup During Reading

Students often begin reading a new passage without previewing the vocabulary. When they encounter unfamiliar words, they stop immediately to look them up in the glossary. Frequent interruptions in the reading process prevent students from developing the ability to process information as they would in real-life situations or to grasp the overall meaning of a text. Instead of understanding the passage, they become trapped in word-by-word decoding.

3. Inefficient Dictionary Skills

Many students draw characters to look up words and their pronunciations, or use tools such as Google Translate to understand entire sentences. While these approaches can help students complete tasks, they may be time-consuming and offer limited support for deeper learning. In particular, relying on full-sentence translation may limit the development of chunking skills in language processing.

4. Listening-First Approach Among Weak and Visual Learners

Many students begin their preview routine by listening to the lesson text. However, if they already struggle with listening, this approach can be discouraging and unproductive. Without knowing the new words or sentence structures beforehand, the time spent on listening yields very little learning benefit. Instead of supporting their learning, the experience reinforces the belief that Chinese is simply too difficult.

5. Improper Pinyin Annotation

Another common behavior is writing Pinyin (a phonetic transcription system used for pronunciation and typing, not as a standard writing system) above every character or avoiding Pinyin altogether. Excessive reliance on Pinyin can interfere with character recognition, chunking, and visual processing skills. In contrast, not using Pinyin at all often results in difficulty reading aloud and prevents learners from forming strong connections between written forms and their corresponding sounds. This limits their ability to develop reading and listening skills in a balanced way.

6. Passive Learning and Dependence on Teachers

These issues may create a cycle of low confidence: students struggle to read aloud or summarize the material, and despite significant effort, gains remain limited. As a result, they may adopt a passive approach, relying on instructors for explanations rather than preparing in advance. Class time then becomes focused on basic instruction rather than practical language use. A systematic approach to pre-class preparation is therefore needed to address these challenges collectively.

FROM TASK COMPLETION TO ACTIVE LEARNING: THE SIX-STEP PREVIEW SOLUTION

To address the challenges described above, a structured, time-bound preview protocol is implemented. The goal is to shift the focus of homework from finishing assignments to building good study habits. Under this model, the daily lesson text preview is the primary homework requirement and is expected to take approximately 30 to 50 minutes. Estimated times are provided as self-regulated learning benchmarks, helping students manage their study time and work towards greater efficiency if they initially require more time. This approach works especially well in programs where one class period covers one lesson text per day, because it ensures students arrive prepared and ready for practical language use. The following sequence is designed to build comprehension and confidence progressively. The implementation and rationale for each step are described below.

Step 1: Grammar Foundation (5 minutes)

The process begins with reading the English explanations of the grammar points in the lesson text, without completing the exercises or studying the example sentences in detail. The goal is to

help students recognize new structures in context and develop an initial understanding of their use. Therefore, this step is limited to approximately five minutes, with the focus placed on identifying the structures rather than mastering the grammar independently. If students recognize a structure but cannot fully understand its meaning or use, they may mark it with a question mark as a note for discussion during the following day's grammar session. Students are not expected to spend additional time teaching themselves grammar concepts, as detailed explanation and practice will take place in class.

Step 2: Contextual Reading (10 minutes)

In Chinese Basic Course textbooks, each lesson text is provided in audio format and written in both traditional and simplified characters. In our instructional context, students usually find it easier to transition from traditional to simplified characters than the reverse. Therefore, homework assignments require previewing the traditional-character version to build early familiarity with the more complex forms.

Students are instructed to read the entire lesson text without using a dictionary. During this reading, they underline unfamiliar words but do not stop to look them up. Instead, they rely on contextual clues to infer possible meaning. The goal of this step is to develop tolerance for ambiguity and maintain reading flow.

It is important to note that students should not assume vocabulary learning begins after the preview routine. In fact, inferring meaning from context depends on a solid vocabulary foundation. Vocabulary study for each lesson text should precede the preview routine. The section “Pedagogical Benefits and Long-Term Impact” explains how vocabulary previewing is structured.

Step 3: Targeted Annotation and Grammar Recognition (10-15 minutes)

Only after contextual reading do students look up unfamiliar words. They are instructed to add Pinyin with tone marks specifically above the words they do not know or cannot pronounce confidently. Additionally, they must underline sentences containing the grammar points identified in Step 1. As they annotate, students are encouraged to read aloud the words, phrases, or sentences they are marking. This process connects visual recognition, oral production, and auditory feedback.

To further support this process, students must also be able to use learning tools efficiently. In particular, effective dictionary use is essential for maintaining the flow of learning and avoiding excessive time spent searching for definitions. Rather than assuming students already possess these skills, explicit instruction in dictionary and learning tool use is provided before students begin this preview routine.

Step 4: Oral Fluency and Tone Mastery (5-10 minutes)

Students read the entire lesson text aloud at least once. If pronunciation remains uncertain, they must look up and annotate the Pinyin with tone marks. The objective of this phase is to develop fluent oral reading and reinforce the connection between visual characters and spoken sounds. This process supports pronunciation accuracy, reading fluency, and familiarity with the lesson content, allowing students to engage more effectively in subsequent classroom activities.

Step 5: Global Comprehension and Summarization (5 minutes)

Students write a summary in English following a specific format: “This passage is about XXX, including detailed information A, B, and C.” This step ensures that students understand the main idea and supporting details. It also supports students in moving beyond surface-level completion of the preview assignment toward a clearer overall understanding of the lesson text.

As students progress into Semester II, when lesson texts become longer and more complex, they complete not only a whole-text summary but also paragraph-level gist statements. These tasks help students move beyond individual word recognition toward understanding how information is organized and how meaning is developed across a passage.

Step 6: Auditory Reinforcement (5-10 minutes)

This final listening phase trains students to stay focused for extended periods while identifying gaps between their reading and listening comprehension. For students who benefit from auditory input, this listening stage can be placed before they begin reading the text. However, students are generally encouraged to read the text first during the preview routine so that they can become familiar with the vocabulary and content before listening. With this familiarity, the focus shifts to recognizing key phrases within the natural flow of speech and confirming comprehension through listening rather than rote memorization. Ultimately, this step strengthens real-time processing and helps learners notice nuances such as blended sounds.

While working with audio, students can self-assess whether difficulties stem from unfamiliar vocabulary, speech rate, or gaps in text understanding. This step is placed at the end of the framework because listening remains especially challenging for many students. Given time constraints, it may be assigned as optional homework or omitted, since the relevant skills will be reinforced in class. This approach helps strengthen listening comprehension and build confidence.

PEDAGOGICAL BENEFITS AND LONG-TERM IMPACT

A structured, time-bound preview routine supports the development of learners’ self-regulated learning (SRL). Through consistent practice, students learn to monitor their progress, manage their study time, and process input more efficiently, aligning with research that identifies SRL as

essential for maximizing out-of-class learning (Lau & Qian, 2025; Lyu, 2024; Sun, 2024). As the routine becomes internalized, learners demonstrate greater autonomy, improved comprehension, and reduced preparation time. Consequently, students arrive in class better prepared and ready to engage in language application activities.

A common preview practice involves completing a preview worksheet that requires students to answer content questions and translate selected sentences. Verifying the accuracy of these assignments is time-consuming, often requiring approximately one hour for an instructor to review the work assigned to a group of students. A structured preview routine reduces this workload by shifting homework review from detailed answer verification to monitoring completion of the preview routine.

As students arrive better prepared, instructors can implement a flipped classroom model, in which class time shifts from explaining basic lesson content to supporting proficiency development through language practice, reinforcement of key concepts, and discussion of questions that extend beyond vocabulary-based understanding. Consistent with research on flipped learning, this shift enhances learner engagement and optimizes the use of instructional time (Lyu, 2024; Zhang, 2019). Although initial implementation requires training and guidance, it ultimately leads to greater long-term efficiency.

This structured preview routine was implemented across multiple cohorts at different stages of learning, from the beginning of the first semester to the beginning of the second and third semesters. Across these implementations, classroom observations and instructor reflections suggested greater willingness to use the target language, as well as perceived improvements in accuracy, confidence, and communicative ability. In addition, vocabulary test results generally met or exceeded program expectations and remained stable over time. These observations suggest that the structured preview routine may support vocabulary retention. When implemented consistently, the structured preview routine appeared to serve as a bridge toward greater learner autonomy. Higher-performing students often developed self-regulated learning skills early in the first semester, while lower-performing students gradually developed similar habits by the end of the first semester. By the third semester, many students who successfully adopted the routine demonstrated greater independence in managing their own learning process and pacing.

Beyond language acquisition, the structured preview routine may contribute to the development of lifelong learning habits. Working through each step within a set time encourages students to develop time-management skills. They also learn to recognize what they know and what they still need to work on, which develops their self-awareness as learners. Perhaps most importantly, when students come to class well-prepared, they feel less anxious and more confident. Over time, this sense of readiness may influence how learners approach challenges beyond the classroom by fostering independence, self-awareness, and continued growth as language learners.

Guidelines for Classroom Implementation

Teachers play a crucial role in supporting students' development into self-regulated learners. The successful implementation of this framework requires teachers to focus on the key practices outlined below.

Redesign Homework as a Strategic Learning Plan

To maximize learning outcomes, homework assignments must move beyond checking for completion or correct answers and be structured as a comprehensive learning plan that focuses on study habits and the quality of the preview routine.

Spaced repetition is strategically incorporated into vocabulary learning to enhance retention. Students begin their initial preview two to three days before a new lesson and review the vocabulary again on the day before their preview routine. This sequence provides multiple exposures, so that by the time class begins, students are encountering the same set of vocabulary for the third or fourth time. This deliberate scheduling facilitates the transition from short-term to long-term memory.

Hold Homework Preview Strategy Training Sessions

To support this process, teaching teams are encouraged to schedule a dedicated "Homework Preview Strategy Training Session" early in the course. This session serves as a collective orientation for both instructors and students, establishing a unified standard. During this session, instructors provide explicit training in the preview protocol by leading each step and explaining the rationale behind it. (See Figure 1 for explicit implementation guidelines.)

Figure 1

Guidelines for Conducting a Homework Instruction Session

When to Implement

Homework instruction sessions should be introduced at the beginning of the program (Lesson 2 in the Chinese Basic Course), even when learners are still at ILR Level 0, to establish foundational learning skills. These sessions should be revisited at the beginning of each semester as material complexity increases and learning requirements evolve. Additionally, the guidelines can be implemented at any point throughout the program before assigning new homework to reinforce effective learning habits and achieve the desired outcomes.

Before the Session

All instructors meet to agree on homework requirements and evaluation criteria. This alignment ensures that students receive consistent guidance regardless of which teacher they work with.

During the Session

One instructor (preferably the team leader) leads the class through the preview steps one at a time, managing the pace and explaining the purpose of each step. A completed preview assignment is shown at the beginning so students know what the final product should look like. While the lead instructor guides the process, other instructors circulate in the classroom to ensure that all students are following along.

Students tend to ask comprehension questions during their preview. In such cases, instructors should refrain from giving answers. Instead, they encourage students to use available tools or to mark the question for discussion in the next class. This keeps the focus on independent problem-solving rather than teacher-dependence.

Important Considerations

The goal of the session is not to complete an entire lesson. Instructors may select a single paragraph or section to walk through in detail. This focused approach ensures that students understand each step and the expectations of the process, while also giving instructors a chance to observe differences in students' work pace and use of learning strategies.

Evaluate Preview Quality and Instructional Impact

In a flipped classroom, the instructor's primary role during the initial phase of the lesson is to evaluate the depth of students' out-of-class preparation. This is achieved through integrated classroom activities that provide immediate feedback on student readiness.

Teachers first perform a rapid check of students' annotated texts. Key indicators of effective previewing include the marking of unfamiliar vocabulary, grammar highlights, and Pinyin annotations. In particular, the accuracy of word segmentation serves as a vital diagnostic tool, demonstrating a student's ability to correctly identify linguistic boundaries and phrase groupings.

To complement the visual check, instructors utilize oral reading and targeted inquiry:

- **Fluency Monitoring:** By randomly selecting segments for students to read aloud, teachers can gauge preparation through pronunciation accuracy and the appropriateness of pauses. Students' transition from an annotated text (in Traditional Characters) to a clean version (in Simplified Characters) further tests their familiarity with the materials.
- **Questions and Answer (Q&A) Assessment:** A structured Q&A format is employed to verify reading comprehension, ensuring students have moved beyond mere decoding to conceptual understanding.

This diagnostic phase typically requires 10 to 20 minutes, adjusted according to the complexity of the text, leaving at least 25 minutes—approximately half of the total class time—dedicated to reinforcing and applying skills in a social, teacher-supported environment.

Sustain the Preview Routine

Building a new learning habit requires time and consistent support. During the first two weeks, teacher monitoring and guidance are essential to help students understand the purpose of the preview routine and develop effective preparation strategies. Consistency across the teaching team is critical during this stage; when all instructors reinforce the same expectations and regularly check preparation, students are more likely to recognize the routine as an integral part of the learning process.

Students are more likely to discontinue the routine when they perceive that preview preparation does not influence classroom instruction. If classroom activities focus primarily on teacher explanation of lesson content rather than applying and extending the prepared materials, students may gradually view previewing as unnecessary. Therefore, classroom activities should consistently build upon students' preparation and use lesson materials as the foundation for interaction, practice, and deeper learning.

In mixed-ability classrooms, instructors can also leverage student resources through peer learning. Rather than relying solely on teacher explanation, students can support one another during activities, allowing stronger learners to reinforce their own understanding while assisting classmates. This approach increases opportunities for interaction and creates a more learner-centered classroom environment.

Although most students gradually adopt the routine and come prepared, occasional cases will occur in which individual students do not follow the process or submit insufficient preparation. These cases require timely intervention based on careful examination of the underlying causes. When the issue is procedural, instructors can provide one-on-one guidance on how to complete the preview effectively. When nonacademic factors affect students' ability to prepare, instructors can identify barriers and provide appropriate support to help students regain focus. By addressing these individual cases early, instructors can maintain the effectiveness of the routine while ensuring that all students benefit from the approach.

Together, these practices connect learning preparation, classroom instruction, and learner development. By redesigning homework, explicitly teaching learning strategies, assessing preparation, and sustaining consistent support, instructors create the conditions for greater learner independence and self-regulation.

CONCLUSION

Teaching students how to learn is just as important as teaching the language itself. The structured preview framework presented in this article integrates study strategy instruction into regular homework, giving students a clear and manageable process for preparing before the class. By establishing consistent expectations for previewing and connecting preparation with classroom

practice, instructors can create a more efficient learning environment while gradually supporting students' development as independent learners.

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Faculty Forum

Supporting Arabic Language Learners Experiencing Test Anxiety

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Test anxiety can be a concern for some Arabic language learners and may influence their performance, even when they are highly motivated. This Faculty Forum article describes an established instructional practice designed to support students' target-language learning and preparation for major assessments. After the Unit One assessment, eight students completed selected scales from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ). The responses revealed that several highly motivated students also reported high test anxiety. To address this concern, the teaching team provided structured support for two months before ICPT 101. The support included zero-hour reviews, scheduled low-stakes quizzes targeting specific and measurable skills, test-taking strategies, focused language practice, and individualized feedback. Although classroom observations indicated that students benefited from clear routines and consistent support, the results cannot establish that these practices reduced anxiety or improved test performance. Test anxiety was not measured a second time, and the two assessments measured different outcomes under different conditions. Despite these limitations, the practice offers a reasonable and practical response to an important student need. The article encourages DLIFLC instructors to use structured preparation, targeted practice, and individualized support to help learners approach assessments with greater confidence.

Keywords: *Test Anxiety, Arabic Language Learning, Formative Assessment, MSLQ, Reflective Practice*

INSTRUCTIONAL CHALLENGE

In an intensive language program, assessment performance affects instructional decisions, learner confidence, and progress toward proficiency goals. In this class, several students participated actively, prepared consistently, and demonstrated course knowledge during daily instruction, yet performed less strongly than expected on the Unit One assessment. Post-

assessment conversations and classroom observations suggested that timed conditions, unfamiliar item formats, and the perceived consequences of formal testing made it difficult for some students to concentrate, manage time, and retrieve language they had used successfully during instruction.

This discrepancy prompted a practical question: How could the teaching team prepare students for assessment demands without turning instruction into repeated high-stakes testing? The concern was especially relevant because the same eight students would take ICPT 101 approximately two months later. The goal of the response was not to prove that particular activities or approaches reduced anxiety. Rather, it was to make assessment preparation more predictable, provide repeated opportunities to practice under manageable conditions, and help students develop strategies for approaching demanding language tasks.

RESEARCH-SUPPORTED DISCUSSION

Test anxiety involves thoughts, feelings, and physical reactions that can interfere with performance (Zeidner, 1998). Anxiety may reduce the attention and working memory students need for demanding tasks (Eysenck et al., 2007). This concern is important in language assessments because learners must understand new input, recall vocabulary, monitor accuracy, and often respond within a limited time. Research has also linked foreign language anxiety with weaker performance and greater self-consciousness during evaluation (Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1986).

Strong motivation does not always prevent test anxiety. The MSLQ measures motivation, self-regulation, and test anxiety as separate but related areas (Pintrich et al., 1993). A student may work hard, value the course, and prepare carefully but still have difficulty during an assessment. Therefore, instructors should not automatically view low test performance as evidence of low effort or weak motivation.

This issue is especially relevant at DLIFLC, where students learn complex languages in an intensive program. They must develop several skills quickly and demonstrate both achievement and proficiency. Clear preparation, scheduled practice, and practical test-taking strategies may help students approach assessments with greater readiness. These supports are intended to complement regular language instruction, not replace it.

Classroom Evidence That Informed the Response

Immediately after the Unit One assessment, the eight students completed selected MSLQ scales using a 7-point response format. Four students reported test-anxiety scores between 6.0 and 6.6, whereas four reported scores between 2.0 and 2.8. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation scores were generally moderate to high, although individual variation was present. These descriptive results reinforced the teaching team's observation that motivation and test anxiety could coexist. They were used as a needs-assessment snapshot, not as a pretest in an experimental design.

Unit One grades and later ICPT 101 results provided additional classroom context, but they were not treated as equivalent pre- and post-assessments. Unit One measured achievement in taught content across listening, reading, speaking, and translation/transcription, while ICPT 101 assessed proficiency under different conditions and did not include the same set of constructs. Although students reporting higher anxiety often showed weaker or less consistent performance patterns, the small group, one-time MSLQ administration, and assessment differences prevent causal conclusions. The appropriate interpretation is that the combined information identified a learner-support concern and guided instructional planning.

THE TEACHING RESPONSE

During the approximately two-month period between Unit One and ICPT 101, the teaching team used five connected practices that form part of the instructional routine in every course: zero-hour review, low-stakes quizzes, explicit strategy instruction, structured review, and targeted practice with individualized feedback. Regular lessons continued to follow the course curriculum. These recurring supports were designed to make assessment processes visible, provide more brief retrieval opportunities, and use learner-specific performance patterns to plan follow-up practice. Research suggests that retrieval practice may support durable learning when learners actively recall information rather than only restudy it (Karpicke & Blunt, 2011; Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). Formative assessment may also inform later instruction when evidence of learning is used to adjust teaching activities (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Replicable Eight-Week Implementation Model

The schedule below provides a consistent eight-week structure for implementing this established course practice (see Table 1). Instructors should adapt the dosage to course schedules, proficiency levels, student needs, available zero-hour time, and local policy. Adaptation is an expected part of responsive instruction, but the purpose of each component should remain clear and its implementation should be documented.

Table 1
Eight-Week Implementation Model

Component	Frequency	Duration	Procedure	Evidence for Adjustment
Zero-hour review	Three Times weekly	45 min	Review one listening or reading task; pre-teach/recycle vocabulary; model one strategy; complete timed practice; debrief errors.	Attendance, error patterns, student questions
Low-stakes quiz	Three Times weekly	10-15 min	Use 5-8 ungraded or completion-graded items on recently taught vocabulary, listening, reading, spelling, or transcription.	Item-level responses determine reteaching groups
Targeted practice	Three times weekly	15-20 min	Assign short tasks by need: decoding, key-word listening, contextual vocabulary, spelling patterns, pacing, or oral response planning.	Individual feedback log and next task
Structured review	Weekly	30 min	Mixed-skill spiral review in individual, pair, and whole-class phases; end with a two-minute reflection.	Reflection notes and common misconceptions

Zero-Hour Review

A repeatable session follows five steps. First, the instructor states a narrow objective, such as identifying transition words in a short listening passage. Second, students complete a brief diagnostic item independently. Third, the instructor models the target process aloud, including how to preview directions, identify key information, eliminate implausible options, and move forward when uncertain. Fourth, students apply the process to a parallel item individually or in pairs. Fifth, the class reviews why each answer is supported and records one strategy for the next assessment. Materials may include a one-page review guide, short audio or reading excerpts, vocabulary-in-context cards, practice questions, a timer, and an error-analysis form.

Low-Stakes Quizzes and Feedback

Brief quizzes should be scheduled and communicated to students in advance; they should not be administered as surprise quizzes. Before each quiz, the instructor clearly states the content and skills that will be assessed so students know what to review. The quizzes focus primarily on previously learned material, such as vocabulary, structures, listening or reading content from the previous day's lesson, or key material from a previous chapter. This transparent and predictable approach is intended to keep the quizzes focused on retrieval, review, and feedback rather than add uncertainty. A practical format is five to eight items completed in eight to ten minutes. Quizzes may be ungraded or recorded for completion so that their purpose remains practice and feedback. Research suggests that retrieval attempts may support later retention, particularly when practice requires learners to reconstruct knowledge (Karpicke & Blunt, 2011; Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). The instructor reviews item-level patterns the same day. A misconception shared by most students becomes a short whole-class reteach; a pattern affecting two or three learners becomes a small-group task; an isolated error receives individual feedback. Students correct answers and explain the evidence or process that supports each correction. This cycle is consistent with formative assessment because evidence of learning is used to guide later instruction (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Feedback may be most helpful when it clarifies the learning goal, current performance, and a possible next step rather than merely identifying an error (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Targeted Practice: Strategies Taught Explicitly

Strategy instruction may be more useful when the teacher models, guides, and then gradually releases responsibility. Strategy support can connect affective needs to concrete language-learning behaviors while taking account of individual differences in anxiety, motivation, and self-regulation (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; Oxford, 2017). The recurring course practice emphasizes behaviors that students may apply across tasks:

- *Pacing*: Divide available time by sections, mark a halfway checkpoint, and move past one difficult item rather than allowing it to consume the assessment.
- *Goal setting*: Use scheduled quizzes with specific and measurable target skills. Set reasonable deadlines for projects and presentations and consistently share reminders about upcoming assessments.
- *Direction and item analysis*: Underline the action required, identify what information is being requested, and distinguish main idea from detail questions.
- *Listening*: Preview options when permitted, listen for discourse markers and key words, and record brief notes rather than attempting full transcription.
- *Reading*: Survey the passage, use headings and connectors to predict organization, locate textual evidence, and infer unfamiliar vocabulary from context.

- *Productive tasks*: Pause to plan, use a simple response frame, prioritize a clear message, and reserve time for a final accuracy check.
- *Anxiety management*: Students to seek available resources at DLIFLC.

Structured Review

The same schedule need not produce identical assignments. Differentiated instruction requires teachers to monitor readiness and performance, then adapt content, process, grouping, or support in response to demonstrated needs (Deunk et al., 2018; Tomlinson, 2014). The teaching team can create a simple learner profile from quiz errors, classroom performance, and student reflection. A learner struggling with listening may receive shorter audio segments and note-taking practice; a learner with reading-pacing difficulty may complete timed paragraph searches; a learner with spelling or transcription errors may practice sound-symbol patterns and immediate correction. Language learners also differ in anxiety, motivation, strategy use, and willingness to communicate, so tailoring should respond to the individual pattern rather than a single test score (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). Pairing should be purposeful: students can explain strategies to one another, but individual practice remains necessary so the instructor can see whether each learner can apply the strategy independently.

REFLECTING ON THE RECURRING PRACTICE

What Appeared to Work

One promising feature of this recurring practice was its shift from general encouragement to concrete routines. Instead of telling students simply to study more or relax, instructors could point to a repeatable process for previewing a task, allocating time, identifying evidence, and recovering after a difficult item. Frequent short practice appeared to make student thinking more visible. Error review gave the teaching team opportunities to respond to specific needs rather than provide the same additional worksheet to every learner. Continued participation and engagement suggested that students accepted the added support in this course. However, these observations were not collected with a validated post-course measure and do not establish effectiveness.

What Did Not Work as Expected

The evidence collected in this course was not strong enough to determine whether anxiety changed. The MSLQ was administered only once, after Unit One, so claims that motivation remained stable or that test anxiety decreased are not warranted. The later ICPT 101 results could not serve as a posttest because ICPT 101 and Unit One differed in constructs, content, purpose, and testing conditions. In addition, a multi-component practice makes it impossible to identify whether zero-hour review, quizzes, strategy instruction, feedback, or ordinary language growth was most helpful.

Implementation also required balancing added support with an already intensive schedule. Zero-hour participation may vary because of student responsibilities and fatigue, and students do not all need the same amount or type of practice. A future cycle should protect instructional time, document attendance and dosage consistently, and avoid overwhelming students with excessive assessment-like work. Low-stakes practice should remain brief, purposeful, and followed by usable feedback; otherwise, it risks becoming another source of pressure.

What I Would Keep and Change

I would retain the predictable review routine, brief retrieval practice, same-day error analysis, and individualized follow-up. I would change the evidence plan from the outset. Students would complete an appropriate anxiety measure before and after the support period, and the teaching team would use a brief weekly reflection to capture confidence, strategy use, and perceived difficulty. I would also maintain a simple implementation log recording the date, duration, focus, materials, attendance, and student response for each activity. Finally, I would introduce strategies earlier in the course so that students practice them before anxiety becomes associated with a major assessment.

Applying this practice across courses has strengthened my understanding that visible effort and motivation do not rule out serious difficulty under evaluative conditions. It has also reinforced that learner support is most actionable when it connects affective concerns to teachable behaviors. Instructors cannot remove every source of pressure, but they can make expectations clearer, provide graduated practice, and help students develop routines for directing attention to the task. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that test anxiety is associated with educational outcomes and supports attending to both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of assessment preparation (von der Embse et al., 2018).

IMPLICATIONS FOR DLIFLC INSTRUCTORS

This recurring practice, together with research on retrieval, formative assessment, feedback, differentiation, and learner variability, suggests several practical changes that instructors can make while exercising professional judgment (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Roediger & Karpicke, 2006):

- *Screen early and interpret cautiously.* Use an appropriate needs-assessment tool near the beginning of the course and repeat it later if change over time will be discussed. A questionnaire should inform support, not label students.
- *Normalize strategy instruction.* Model how proficient test takers allocate attention, manage time, and recover from uncertainty instead of assuming that students already possess these skills.
- *Use short, low-stakes retrieval opportunities.* Keep them aligned with taught content, provide prompt feedback, and use response patterns to plan reteaching. Retrieval should

be effortful but manageable and should be followed by correction when errors occur (Karpicke & Blunt, 2011; Roediger & Karpicke, 2006).

- *Differentiate the support.* Adapt task length, modality, scaffolding, grouping, and feedback to learner profiles rather than assigning identical remediation. Research suggests that differentiation is more responsive when it uses ongoing assessment and purposeful instructional adjustment rather than fixed labels (Deunk et al., 2018; Tomlinson, 2014).
- *Protect the language-learning mission.* Assessment preparation should be designed to support listening, reading, speaking, vocabulary, and self-regulation; it should not narrow the curriculum to test rehearsal.
- *Document implementation.* Record frequency, duration, participation, materials, and adjustments so later reflection is based on more than memory.

These recommendations can be adapted across DLIFLC languages and proficiency levels. Beginning learners may need more modeling, shorter texts, and stronger language scaffolds. Advanced learners may benefit from realistic time constraints, complex authentic texts, and metacognitive analysis of performance. Because language learners vary in affective, cognitive, and strategic characteristics, adaptation should be based on multiple sources of evidence rather than a single score (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). Class size, schedule, available zero-hour time, student fatigue, and local assessment requirements should determine the dosage. Although the practice is used in every course, the descriptive evidence discussed here comes from one class of eight students; therefore, the approach should be applied through instructors' professional judgment rather than treated as a universally validated program.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE INQUIRY

This reflection has several limitations. The classroom evidence came from only eight students, although the teaching practice is used in every course. The MSLQ was given only once, after Unit One, so it cannot show whether students' anxiety changed. In addition, Unit One and ICPT 101 measured different outcomes under different conditions and cannot be used as matching pre- and post-assessments. Classroom observations were not collected through a formal observation process. Finally, several instructional supports were used together, so the evidence cannot show which practice was most helpful. For these reasons, the classroom evidence cannot prove that the practices reduced anxiety or improved performance.

Future research could measure test anxiety before and after the instructional period and include several student cohorts. Researchers should use comparable assessments given under similar conditions. They should also collect attendance records, quiz results, student reflections or interviews, classroom observation notes, and clear implementation logs. Examining other DLIFLC languages and proficiency levels could indicate whether similar patterns appear in different settings. Future studies could also examine zero-hour review, low-stakes quizzes, strategy instruction, and targeted practice separately.

CONCLUSION

This Faculty Forum reflection began with a familiar instructional concern: motivated students did not always demonstrate their classroom capabilities during formal assessment. A one-time MSLQ administration and related classroom observations suggested that test anxiety warranted an instructional response. The teaching team therefore added predictable review, low-stakes practice, explicit strategies, targeted language work, and individualized feedback. Students appeared to respond positively to the additional structure, but the available evidence does not show that anxiety decreased or that the approach caused later performance.

The practical value of this recurring course practice may lie in its shift in instructional attention. Test anxiety can be considered alongside language knowledge, motivation, and preparation when instructors interpret performance and plan support. At DLIFLC, instructors may respond by making assessment processes visible, practicing them under manageable conditions, tailoring feedback, and documenting what occurs. Existing research provides a rationale for retrieval practice, formative use of evidence, actionable feedback, and differentiated support. However, stronger local pre/post measurement, comparable assessments, multiple cohorts, and systematic student feedback are necessary before conclusions about effectiveness at DLIFLC can be drawn (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Deunk et al., 2018; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Roediger & Karpicke, 2006).

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