

PART THREE

CONCLUSIONS

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Limitations of the Design

There are three limitations to the design of the course.

First of all, the needs analysis was not formally conducted. Information about students' wants, needs, preferences, and habits of using dictionaries were gathered from the source of former research. It might reflect some of the facts and problems which students face when they use dictionaries, but is not very precise. This makes the content of the design relatively general instead of having a specific focus.

Second, the final product of the design which included in part two of the project is an outline for teachers. There were content guidelines and sample lesson plans provided; ways of assessing students and evaluate the course were suggested; teaching methods and materials were discussed. All these were presented to help teachers to get ideas of what to teach and how to teach the dictionary skill training course. But because it is an outline, teachers who want to make use of the course need to put time and effort into preparing the lessons for their specific situations.

Third, but not least, the dictionary skill training course is still new because not many Chinese university teachers and curriculum designers have realized the importance of offering the course. Of the many universities which the writer knows, none have a dictionary skill training course. Because there is no such dictionary skill course in existence for the writer to investigate and consult, the present design may look immature. Still, the writer hopes that the design can serve as a pilot design that other teachers can develop and expand.

Recommendations for Implementation

All dictionary-related research shows the growing need for offering a dictionary skill training course because it can help learners to use their dictionaries efficiently and effectively. Although the present dictionary skill training course is specially designed for first year English major students in a Chinese university, it can be simplified or elaborated to fit the needs of lower- or higher-level learners. In designing the dictionary skill training activities, teachers need to consider learner factors, for example, age, language level, and learners' expectations; dictionary factors, for instance, types of dictionaries and presentation of the dictionary information; task factors, such as use a dictionary for reading, writing, speaking and listening.

The implementation of the idea of learner-centeredness in the dictionary skill training course is a suggestion for teachers. Teachers can adapt the teaching methods suggested in the course to fit their teaching styles and their students' learning styles.

Teachers also need to bear in mind that the use of dictionary is only one of the strategies in language learning. It should not be overemphasized. Teachers should be clear about the advantages and disadvantages of each type of dictionary and thus guide their learners to be successful dictionary users.

Recommendations for Future Investigation

Gu (2003) notes that with a handful of exceptions, little has been done empirically to find out what dictionary strategies are used by learners and whether and how these strategies influence their learning outcomes. Only when the learners'

mental process of employing certain strategies for decoding and encoding information by using a dictionary is understood, can we determine the relationship between dictionary use and learning outcome, so further work can be done on training learners to use the dictionary to its best advantage. More research needs to be done in the following areas to help teachers to further develop the present course:

1. The use of the bilingualised dictionary: this may include assessing its effectiveness, attitudes and expectations towards it, and its use for encoding and decoding activities.
2. The use of the electronic dictionary: this can be focused on the comparison between the traditional dictionary and the electronic dictionary in terms of user-friendliness, and strategies involved when using the electronic dictionary.
3. The use of the monolingual dictionary: for example, what strategies do less proficient learners adopt when they are using monolingual dictionaries?
4. Investigating the reference skills which users have developed, or need to develop, to use their dictionaries more effectively, and evaluating teaching programmes or aids designed to enhance such skills.

Studies of second language learners' dictionary use have involved questionnaires, analysis of filmed recordings, dictionary use observation, think aloud protocols, interview, and fill out self-report flow charts immediately after dictionary use. Case studies, experimental research, introspective, qualitative and quantitative research methods have all been used in these studies. Future research can benefit from their respective advantages and disadvantages in getting further data on dictionary use.