

Research Article

“Bite-Sized Mandarin: Skip the Textbook, Speak the Language” Flipbook: Do They Like It?

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Abstract: Cross-border mobility between higher learning institutions in Malaysia and China requires efficient linguistic preparation especially for the short-term academic and cultural-exchange programs. This innovation project named “Bite-Sized Mandarin: Skip the Textbook, Speak the Language”, is a bilingual visual communication tool explicitly designed for non-native Mandarin speakers at the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kelantan Branch, as well as the native speaker of Mandarin language when conversing with each other. Developed through an iterative design process that evolves from a physical booklet to PowerPoint slides, and ultimately into a digital flipbook, the innovation integrates expert-curated bilingual phrases with relevant visual graphics. Results demonstrate strong user satisfaction from three aspects namely ease of use, portability and engagement upon the introduction of the digital flipbook. This cost-effective and accessible resource serves to enhance mutual effective communication and academic collaboration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Within higher education, short-term study abroad and cross-cultural exchange programs play a crucial role in fostering intercultural competence (Mduwile, 2024). At the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kelantan Branch, this internationalisation pathway is highly active especially with institutions from China, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines. In the context of those countries, where partner universities are located, English language is taught and learned as a foreign language, an opposite situation in Malaysia where the language plays as a second language. Local Malaysian students are frequently invited to universities in China for short courses, workshops, and cultural events. Reciprocally, inbound cohorts from China regularly travel to Malaysia to participate in programs hosted by the UiTM Kelantan Branch.

To ensure the effectiveness of these short-term cross-cultural interactions from the aspects of academic and social, it is crucial to come up with suitable and viable solutions that equip non-native Mandarin speakers with baseline communication skills. When students lack access to interactive, up-

to-date linguistic survival tools, everyday operations become limited, restricting professional and social connections intended by international exchange aims to happen in depth.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The strategic frameworks built around university student mobility program have somehow proven that linguistic barriers impact a persistent wall upon arrival. This language gap often leads to upsetting miscommunications between visiting international students, local host students, and institutional facilitators, which elevates cultural anxiety and hinders collaborative enthusiasm (Mduwile, 2024; Xie & De Dios, 2024). Traditional language learning methods such as textbooks and formal university curricula are poorly aligned with the real-life needs specifically during short-term exchange visits as they prioritise complex syntax over immediate utility, requiring extended study with little practical payoff in real life.

To address this, modern pedagogical trends focus on Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and interactive visual media to bridge language divides dynamically (Hasumi & Chiu, 2024). Grapin, (2020) and Zahara, (2025) agreed that synchronised bilingual text and intuitive graphics enable educators to efficiently build students' linguistic confidence without overburdening their working memory.

Therefore, this innovation project explicitly aims to narrow down the communication gap by exposing students from both countries, Malaysia and China to essential situational everyday expressions in both Mandarin and English. The exposure does not only open the horizon in which more real-life expressions will be shared, it also gives awareness to the kind of language gestures that are not textbook-like. In doing so, this kind of innovation lowers anxiety, prevents cross-cultural conflict, and establishes a strong communicative foundation for expanding consensual, collaborative initiatives between Malaysia and China (Cong-Lem, 2025; Ransanz Reyes et al., 2025).

3. METHODOLOGY

The development of the "*Bite-Sized Mandarin: Skip the Textbook, Speak the Language*" project followed an iterative, user-centric instructional design methodology that is aimed at maximising student accessibility anywhere at any time. The project transitioned through three distinct operational phases since its first invention in 2020:



Figure 1. Development Phases

1. Phase 1 (The Booklet): Developed initially as a lightweight, physical printed pocketbook distributed to outgoing and incoming cohorts.
2. Phase 2 (PowerPoint Presentation slides): Upgraded into digital presentation slide decks to facilitate mass classroom orientations, group tutorials, and pre-departure briefings led by language facilitators.
3. Phase 3 (The Digital Flipbook): Migrated into a cloud-hosted, mobile-responsive e-flipbook format.

The innovation utilises a dual-language conversational framework, presenting high-frequency survival phrases concurrently in Mandarin and English. To provide cognitive scaffolding and maximise immediate real-time retrieval under pressure, each language pairing is directly integrated with a vivid, contextual graphic that are suitable for users at all walks of life. Developed directly by language pedagogy experts, the novelty of *"Bite-Sized Mandarin: Skip the Textbook, Speak the Language"* rests on its cognitive simplicity and colourful, uncluttered interface. The sophistication and originality lie in the simplicity of the realistic content. It replaces dense grammar rules with situational, highly interactive visuals that comfortably accommodate diverse learner profiles and backgrounds (Zahara, 2025).

The conduct of this study is quantitative using questionnaire. A total of 110 students from UiTM Kelantan Branch participated in this study. The respondents consisted of students who had participated and would potentially participate in short-term academic courses and programmes involving students from institutions of higher learning in China.

The study compared students' satisfaction towards two Mandarin learning tools:

1. *"Mandarin is Fun"* PowerPoint slides.
2. *"Bite-Sized Mandarin: Skip the Textbook, Speak the Language"* flipbook.

The evaluation focused on three main aspects which are i) Ease of Use, ii) Portability and iii) Engagement.

4. FINDINGS

The assessment of *"Bite-Sized Mandarin: Skip the Textbook, Speak the Language"* flipbook involved a two-stage user validation stroke to measure ease of use, portability, and engagement.

- i. Initial Stage Validation
- ii. Digital Flipbook Deployment

The comparative analysis of students' satisfaction towards the two Mandarin learning tools is presented in Figure 1. The findings revealed that students showed considerably higher satisfaction towards the *Bite-Sized Mandarin: Skip the Textbook, Speak the Language* flipbook compared to the *Mandarin is Fun* PowerPoint slides.

4.1 Comparison of Students' Satisfaction Towards the Two Learning Tools

Table 1: Comparison of Students' Satisfaction Towards the Two Learning Tools

Evaluation Items	"Mandarin is Fun" PowerPoint Slides (%)	"Bite-Sized Mandarin" Flipbook (%)
Ease of Use	76%	93%
Portability	68%	97%
Engagement	71%	95%

In terms of ease of use, 93% of respondents shared positive perceptions towards the flipbook, whereas only 76% responded positively towards the slides. The students found the flipbook easier more organised and to navigate, enabling smoother learning experiences.

From the aspect of portability, the flipbook achieved the highest percentage at 97%, significantly surpassing the slides at 68%. This finding suggests that students highly appreciated the convenience and accessibility of the digital flipbook, as it could be accessed at anytime and anywhere through mobile devices and laptops. The portability aspect is particularly crucial for students from China or Malaysia to prepare and join the short-term international programmes.

The engagement dimension also demonstrated a significant difference between the two learning tools. The flipbook recorded 95% satisfaction, while the slides achieved 71%. Students indicated that the visually appealing and interactive features of the flipbook boost their motivation and increase their interest in learning basic Mandarin phrases and expressions for the purpose of an effective communication.

Table 2: Percentage Difference Between the Two Learning Tools

Evaluation Items	Difference (%)
Ease of Use	+17%
Portability	+29%
Engagement	+24%

5. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the *"Bite-Sized Mandarin: Skip the Textbook, Speak the Language"* flipbook outperformed the *"Mandarin is Fun"* PowerPoint slides across all evaluated aspects.

Overall, the findings confirms that the interactive flipbook provided a more flexible, engaging, and user-friendly learning experience compared to the traditional slide-based material. The findings suggest that digital flipbooks can be a useful and effective support tool for short-term Mandarin language preparation programmes at UiTM Kelantan Branch.

6. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the “Bite-Sized Mandarin: Skip the Textbook, Speak the Language” flipbook demonstrated superior performance in terms of ease of use, portability, and engagement compared to the Mandarin is Fun slides. This is further supported by Rizki, (2025 and Zou, (2020) that users reported that the tactile feel of the interactive turning pages, the vivid colour palette, and the highly relatable conversational scenarios significantly sustained learning motivation compared to traditional static handouts.

It highlights the importance of integrating interactive and portable digital learning materials to enhance students’ motivation and readiness for intercultural communication programmes involving international students.

Furthermore, aligning this resource with modern student preferences for micro-learning ensures high long-term retention. By giving students immediate communicative agency, the tool acts as an institutional bridge that helps convert brief cross-border visits into long-term collaborative projects between Malaysia and China (Cong-Lem, 2025).

The innovation of “Bite-Sized Mandarin: Skip the Textbook, Speak the Language” flipbook successfully addresses an acute operational challenge within higher education internationalisation workflows and collaboration. By replacing intimidating grammatical textbooks with an expert-curated, vibrant, and interactive digital flipbook, the project effectively eliminates the conversational immobilisation frequently experienced by exchange students worldwide.

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