An attempt to incorporate Moodle into Putonghua teaching
— A case study on Intermediate Putonghua Course in HKIEd

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摘要：「Moodle」是一個開放源代碼的電子學習軟件平臺，由馬丁・多基馬斯（Martin Dougiamas）開發，其原意是讓教師們建立一個教師和學生之間線上課程的支援互動。近年來，Moodle 引起了香港教育工作者的注意，因為在 2012-2013 學年，香港的大學所提供的本科學位課程從三年制改為四年制。基於雙軌制學年，以致香港教育學院的語言課程出現大班教學，導致普通話教師難以在課堂上照顧每位學生的需要，也造成很多其他問題。有鑑於此，香港的大學正在研究 Moodle 對於提高教學質量方面的潛力。本文將以香港教育學院的進階普通話課程為例，探討下列兩個問題：1) 在 Moodle 的平臺上，如何運用各種的活動和資源；2) Moodle 課程如何提升學生的學習經驗。

關鍵詞：Moodle　電子學習　自主學習

Abstract: Moodle is an open source eLearning software platform that was originally developed by Martin Dougiamas which enables teachers to create online courses supporting interactions between teachers and their students. In recent years, Moodle has drawn the attention of teachers in Hong Kong. This is because undergraduate degree courses provided by universities in Hong Kong have been changed from three-year degrees to more generalized four-year courses in academic year 2012-2013. Due to double cohort, big classes are formed in Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd), this has made it very difficult for Putonghua teachers to cater every student's needs in class and caused many other problems. In light of this, universities in Hong Kong are exploring the potentials of Moodle in enhancing teaching and learning. In this paper, with reference to Intermediate Putonghua course in HKIEd, we will deal with the following two problems: 1) How various activities and resources have been used in the Moodle; 2) How Moodle course can improve students' learning experience.

Key words: Moodle　elearning　self-learning

1. Introduction

Academic year 2012-2013 is crucial to Hong Kong's education system especially to Hong Kong's universities as they start to switch from three-year degree courses to more generalized four-year degree courses. Due to double cohort, big classes are formed with nearly 40 students in each class of Intermediate Putonghua Course in Hong Kong Institute of Education. As a result, it becomes harder for the subject teacher to cater every student's needs in class. In order to handle the challenge arising from the double cohort, the application of online learning (Moodle) is vital to guide students through structured learning paths. Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) (Rice, 2006) is an open source eLearning software platform that was originally developed by Martin Dougiamas which enables teachers to create online courses supporting interactions between teachers and their students. In this report, we will describe the following: 1) How to access our Moodle course; 2) How various activities and resources have been used in our Moodle course; 3) How the Moodle course [or just "Moodle"] can improve students' learning experience.

2. How to access Moodle course?

Registered students are assigned to the module of "Intermediate Putonghua". When they log in their personal accounts at Moodle Login page (http://moodle.ied.edu.hk), they can access the Moodle course we created (Figure 1).

Fig 1   The Moodle Login Page

Students have to read the "Scheme of Work", "Teaching and Learning Plan", and the "Regulations of Individual Behavior in Language Centre" posted on Moodle before they start. The instructions are written in a clear and concrete way so that a clear goal is set for students to follow. Also, they can understand their roles and permission when using the Moodle course (Figure 2).

Figure 2   Intermediate Putonghua Course Information

3. How various activities and resources have been used in the Moodle?

What can teachers do in Moodle to get the students actively involved in the course and have good learning experience? This Moodle course offers many different ways to communicate with the students:

3.1 Activities:

3.1.1 Discussion Forum

Discussion forums are fabulous tools that can engage students in collaborative projects, such as topic discussion, group project discussion and so on. In our Moodle course, students can gain marks by posting some "trendy phrases" (流行詞語追蹤示例) on forum (Figure 3). It is a part of the assessment and accounts for 5% marks of the whole module. The instructions are clearly stated in the forum. Moreover, students can gain peer feedback as they could respond to the thread. In this way, students' achievement is ensured not only based on the marks from teachers, but also feedback and comments from fellow classmates (Figure 4). Students can make use of their computers' usability options to overcome the difficulties in communication and they have time to research and think before replying which foster students' self-regulated learning.

Figure 3 (screenshot)

進階普通話

您以IIT5079CHOW, WAI NEI身分登入 (登出)

回到首頁 ▶ 個人所參與的課程 ▶ 周慧妮、黃建芝 & 李黃萍 ▶ 線上活動 ▶ 流行詞語追蹤　　搜尋討論區

Navigation

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　　　流行詞語追蹤
　　　「進階普通話」課程聊天室
　　　？「進階普通話」教材及學習資源問卷調查
　　　普通話Wiki
　▶ 課程資訊
　▶ 「進階普通話」教材及參考資料

學習任務：

請各位同學選擇其中一個流行詞語追蹤，具體做法參考「流行詞語追蹤示例」（請按一下紅色字進入）。

作業要求：

1. 有詞語/事件的簡介、背景資料、發展過程、結果及個人觀點（先將搜集的資料放在mahara上，然後在課堂上介紹。）

2. 時間3-5分鐘

3. 注意使用文明語言

請注意：

1. 本項任務將作為學生參與課堂表現分，佔5%

2. 每個流行詞語要開一個新的主題。

3. 同學之間可以互相補充內容，發表意見。

4. 每幫一個同學回應加0.5分，最多加2.5分。

新增一個討論主題

Figure 3　Discussion Forum "流行詞語追蹤示例"

Figure 4 (screenshot)

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　　　你對普通話診所的服務滿意嗎
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　▶ 課程資訊
　▶ 「進階普通話」教材及參考資料
　▶ 第一講
　▶ 第二講

河蟹
由IIT5079LEE WONG, PING發表於2013年 02月 2日(周六.) 17:11

「河蟹」，即「和諧」的諧音，是出自並經常出現在中國大陸網路上的網路語言。
「河蟹」一詞代指......

1. 封鎖、掩蓋負面消息、控制新聞和言論自由以及屏蔽少量非文明用語的行為
2. 有螃蟹「『橫行』（語帶雙關）霸道」的意思
3. 「水產」有時意思和「河蟹」相同
4. 有逮捕之義，如河蟹你（類似神隱），指中國大陸用有關部門等相關權力將一些會因公職（如律師）和盤逐露出真相，或當局不想公布的信息公布出來的人拘捕，並給予其須有之罪

編輯 | 刪除 | 回應

Re: 河蟹
由IIT5079WONG, KIN CHI發表於2013年 02月 2日(周六.) 17:17

- 原本的「和諧」二字在大陸部分主流網站與論壇被封禁，故以同音異字「河蟹」以隱晦地躲避審查。
- 後來有些大陸主流網站與論壇也將「河蟹」二字封禁，並有了新的用法「水產」，因為河蟹是一種水產；另外水產二字的漢語拼音開頭為SC，也借指刪除之意。

Figure 4　Discussion Forum "流行詞語追蹤示例－河蟹"

3.1.2　Chatroom

Chatting is synchronous communication, which is a tool allowing teachers and students to hold a text-based discussion in real time. In a chatroom "「進階普通話」課程聊天室" (Figure 5), students need to log in to the session at the same time. Students can raise questions regarding the Intermediate Putonghua course and they can collaborate to answer the queries and teacher will also provide guidance.

Figure 5　Chatroom "「進階普通話」課程聊天室"

3.1.3 Survey

The Moodle survey includes a set of questions installed in Moodle (Figure 6). Students can give comments to the Putonghua clinic, and also provide some feedback of the course content and the teaching materials.
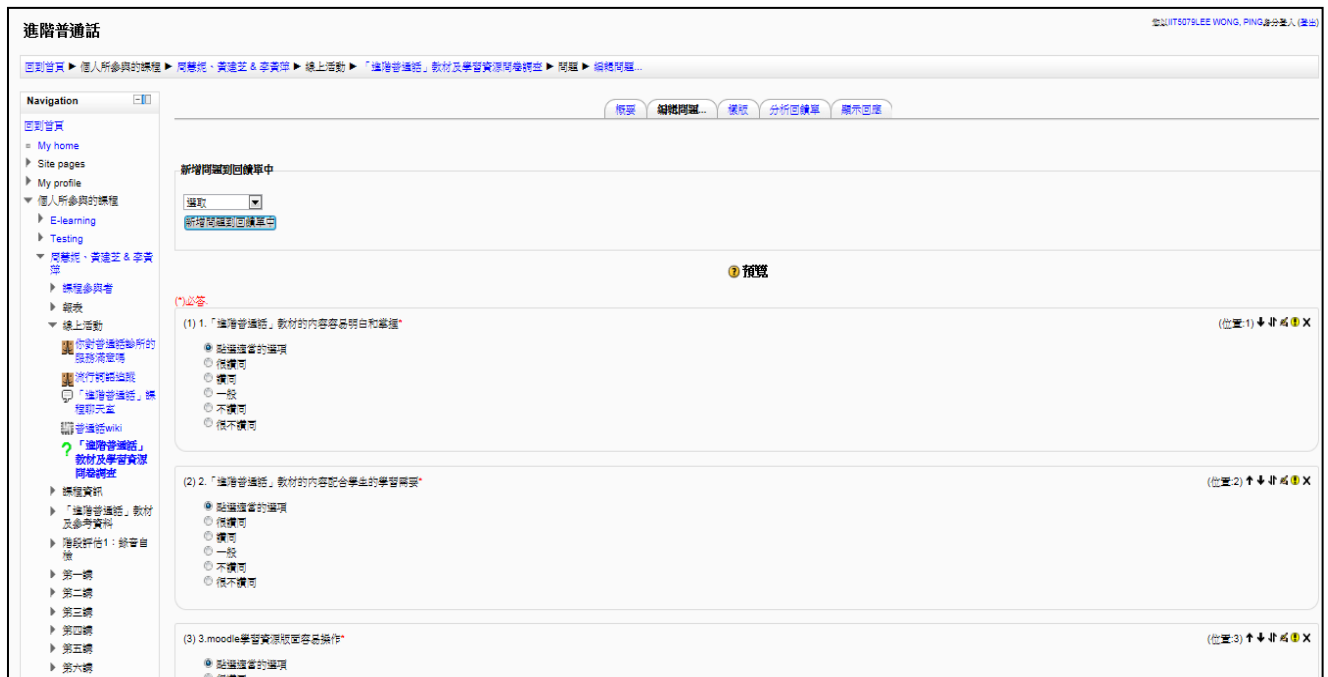

Figure 6   Intermediate Putonghua Course Survey

3.2 Resources

3.2.1   Audio and Video Resources

This Moodle course meets the demand by encouraging and supporting the use of multimedia (Figure 7). Students can self-learn and revise by listening and watching the instructional videos repeatedly and practice by themselves at home. This can enhance their knowledge perceived in class.

Figure 7   Audio Resources

3.2.2　Putonghua Wiki

Wiki is powerful for collaborative activities because its structure helps coordinating information provided by class members. In this course, students can enter items defining different Putonghua terms related to the course onto Wiki. There is a table of content listing out the hyperlink of each entry for students to select (Figure 8). Students are also encouraged to upload images and files, share links to resources and lecture notes, manage group projects and add video clips as appropriate for the course.

Figure 8　Putonghua Wiki

4. How Moodle course can improve the learning experience of the students?

Moodle also provides a platform for teachers to offer extra help including tutorials, self-learning materials, discussion platform, quizzes, and questionnaires to suit different needs of students. It accumulates a large amount of valuable information for analyzing students' behavior (Mostow & Beck, 2006), such that teachers can evaluate the structure of course content and its effectiveness in the learning process and classify students into groups based on their needs for guidance and monitoring. It also provides a platform for students to interact and ask questions. Not only the teacher can act as a guide, but also the peer influence is essential during language learning. As their confidence of using the language would be reinforced by gaining senses of success from peers.

The learning process is no longer passive like traditional one-way teaching in lectures. Apart from face-to-face lessons that students can learn through teacher's words and different kinds of learning activities, they can also act as peer tutors or editors in the virtual learning environment. For instance, they can answer questions from classmates on the forum; edit an item in Putonghua Wiki; provide information of a trendy phrase after doing research on the internet; and most importantly, give feedback to teacher on the course and Putonghua clinic so that it can be improved to cater students' needs.

Moodle provides a chance for students to practice self-regulated learning. For example, by using the forum, students can reinforce their knowledge by answering questions posted by classmates, that is, to achieve mastery of knowledge and achieve the intrinsic goal orientation. For extrinsic goal, students can prove their abilities to their classmates by posting different threads; this also works when students are answering queries in the chatroom. Moreover, through the learning platform, students can learn from peers by enhancing ability to clarify doubts with the power of collaboration, especially for the "trendy phrases" (流行詞語追蹤示例) on forum. Help seeking, elaboration and critical thinking also take place when students ask questions, think of what they have learned, and apply their knowledge to everyday life, by relating the knowledge to some up-to-date trends and slangs.

For Wiki, it is easy for students to use, even if they are not very advanced technical users; the information can be shared, collaboration is practiced as students work together to do research and complete an entry. Also, experienced students can correct mistakes made by beginners, such as the

format or referencing. Students can also improve their learning attitude indirectly as they want to gain positive feedback and achieve their intrinsic and extrinsic goal.

To add on, as a lesson duration is limited, students always need more practices to enhance their knowledge building-up, especially for language learning. Therefore, it would be important to provide some multimedia resources in the Moodle course too. Students can practice or explore different sources according to their own needs. This can perform rehearsal for enhancement of knowledge perceived. Lastly, different activities in Moodle can correspond to each other to maximize the advantage of this interactive platform. For example, students can share the Wiki link they have created in the chatroom when they are discussing certain topics (Figure 9); or they could be inspired to construct new entries in Wiki when they are asking or answering questions on the forum. They can utilize the use of this electronic platform, and strengthen their self-regulated learning in this way.

Figure 9　Chatroom"「進階普通話」課程聊天室"

5. Feedback from students

    After the implementation of the Moodle system, we did a survey to collect the opinion of the students on it. We have interviewed 32 students from the course "Intermediate Putonghua", below are some of the results.

The online learning materials helped in your Putonghua learning

0% — 0%
25%
22%
53%

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Table 5.1

Moodle is easy to use

0%
6%
25%
38%
31%

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
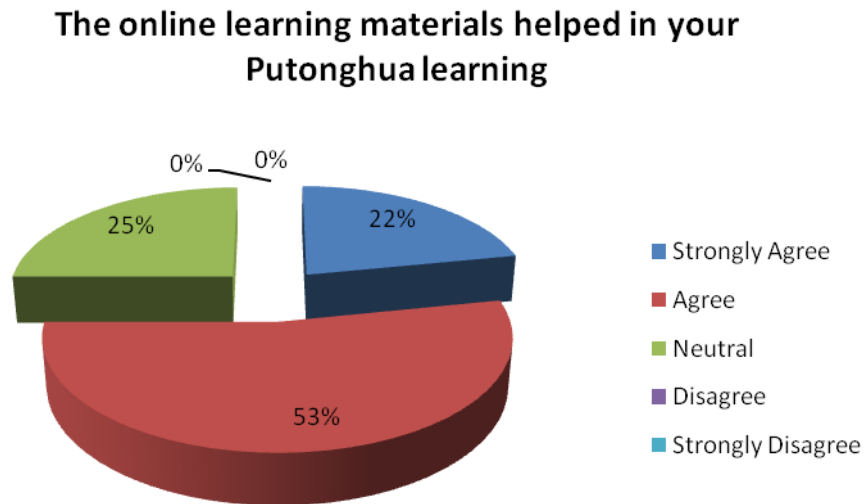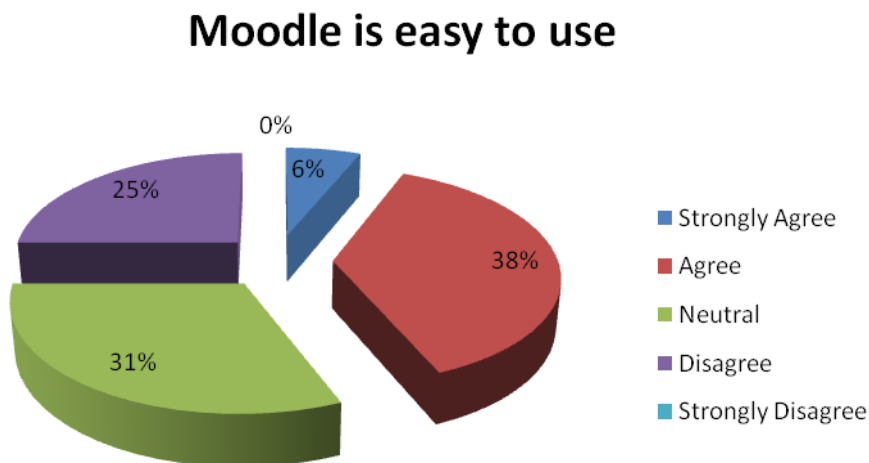
Table 5.2

How difficult do you think the online learning materials are?

- Very Easy
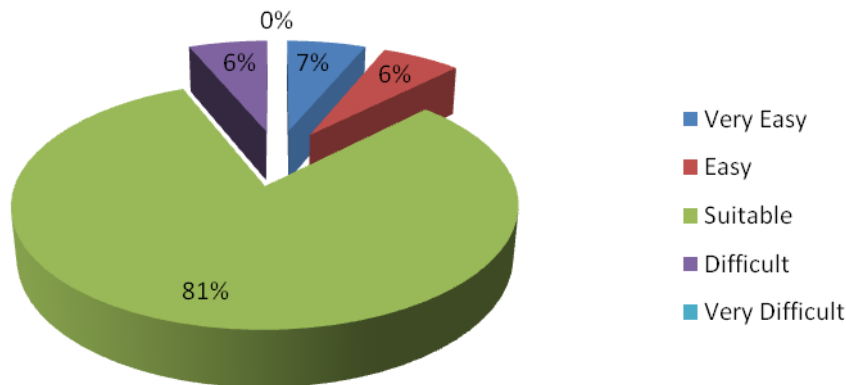- Easy
- Suitable
- Difficult
- Very Difficult

Table 5.3

Table 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 showed the results of the three interview questions. First of all, three quarters of the interviewees agreed or strongly agreed that the online materials provided in Moodle helped their Putonghua learning. The rest of them answered "neutral" while none of them disagreed with the statement. It proves that students somehow could use the materials to assist their regular learning and the materials were effectively designed to meet students' learning needs.

Next, when asked if Moodle was easy to use, 6% of them strongly agreed, more than one third agreed, less than one third replied "neutral" and a quarter of them disagreed. This may be due to the fact that Moodle has different functions and users need time to learn to handle the functions. We believe that students will find it convenient and useful to use after a period of time.

Lastly, the majority, 81%, of the interviewees found the difficulty of online learning materials suitable. It shows that the learning materials were designed to cover the learning need of most of the students. However, there were also students who thought the materials were too easy or too difficult, we may need to include materials of higher and lower levels to suit all students' needs.

Apart from the survey questions, some students also said that they were more accustomed to the traditional classroom teaching. Some of them thought that Moodle was a burden for them, forcing them to take "extra lessons" after class. It was surprised to find that students had such negative comments on Moodle. We would suggest more

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guidelines to be given in the first lesson to ensure students understand the purpose of including Moodle in the curriculum.

6. Conclusion

Based on the arising need of providing extra support to students, Moodle is being applied in this course by involving different interactive learning activities so as to enhance students' learning experience. No one will disagree that language learning depends greatly on practices and application. Therefore, online teaching grants a great opportunity to both teachers and students in the way exploring more about Putonghua and to reinforce the knowledge gained in lesson and daily life.

Teachers involved in online education are expecting their students to have good learning experience. Nothing is more rewarding than seeing students excelling and enjoying an online course and that's worth all the hours teachers slaved to put the course together and deliver it. Moodle is a place that goes beyond the syllabus. More real-life related materials can be used as examples. It is very essential to language learning while students can apply what they learned in their daily lives.

7. <u>References</u>

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