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The Impact of a Four-Station Blended Learning Model of Differentiating Instruction on Student Engagement in a Middle School Chinese I Class in a Southeastern State

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THE IMPACT OF A FOUR-STATION BLENDED LEARNING MODEL OF DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN A MIDDLE SCHOOL CHINESE I CLASS IN A SOUTHEASTERN STATE

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DEDICATION

To my husband for loving me, believing in me, and doing the majority of housework for years and allowing me quiet time and space to complete my work.

To my daughter for hugging and kissing me when I felt tired and never complaining when I was unavailable because of schoolwork.

To my father and my four aunts, who are in China, for always being proud of me and raising me to be confident.

And, to my grandparents, who are now in heaven, for instilling in me the importance of education and the value of being a lifelong learner.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research was to examine the impact of the proposed Four-Station Blended Learning Model (FSBLM) on the engagement level of four middle school students in a Chinese as a foreign language class. For the purposes of the study, student engagement is defined by three aspects: (1) participation in class activities, (2) classwork completion, and (3) student perceptions of Chinese class. Incorporating an action research design, data was collected through utilizing Likert-scale pre- and post-surveys, pre- and post-interviews, observations and the taking of field notes, students' work samples, and classwork grades. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected during a total of eight weeks for a period of 50 minutes three times per week. Participants included a combination of four seventh grade students and the teacher of a Chinese I class in a public school in southeastern America. The result of the study revealed that the FSBLM worked effectively regarding its impact on student engagement via its structured collaborative learning and had a positive impact on students' affective factors, which resulted in a more positive perception and attitude toward Chinese learning in students, leading to the enhancement of student engagement. The results of the study were used to develop an action plan that aims to help effectively implement the FSBLM into Chinese instruction schoolwide by focusing on better engaging students via structured collaborative learning, technology use, and teacher support to individual students.

Keywords: Four-Station Blended Learning Model, student engagement, Chinese education, collaborative learning, technology usage, differentiated instruction

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAPPL ..... Assessment of Performance Toward Proficiency in Languages

ACTFL ..... American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language

BL ..... Blended Learning

DI ..... Differentiated Instruction

FSBLM ..... Four-Station Blended Learning Model

GBCIS ..... Golden Bridge Chinese Immersion School

L1 ..... Native or First Language

L2 ..... Second Language

PLC ..... Professional Learning Community

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Student engagement is one of the most important variables that can affect second language learning and is directly associated with achievement (Akbari et al., 2016; Asano-Cavanagh & Cavanagh, 2011; Hunton, 2015; Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Lambert et al., 2017; Lin, T. J., 2012; Nerenz, 1983; Qiu & Lo, 2017; Warschauer & Meskill, 2000; Zhang & Hyland, 2018; Zheng, 2018). However, each student in the same class can acquire the foreign language at a different pace. Students also differ regarding the language skills that they find easiest to learn. Some acquire oral communication easily and start to speak in the target language early, while others may learn how to read and write more easily than how to speak. Meanwhile, the school was a charter school. Some parents chose the school for the students because they did not want to go to their residency school, even if their child was not interested in learning Chinese. Hence, a foreign language classroom can be diverse regarding students' motivation and their proficiency levels in the four main language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Considering the diversity regarding students' different entry levels in various language skills in foreign language classrooms, it is almost impossible to engage all students in the same classroom with the same activity. Moreover, students also come from different cultures, have different learning styles and interests in topics, and have varied levels of emotional and social maturity (Tomlinson, 2001). Teachers effectively

implementing instructional strategies to handle the diversity in educational settings has a considerable impact on student performance.

In that light, researchers and educators have been seeking differentiated instructional approaches to increase the student engagement in diversified classrooms to improve students' performance. Research shows that differentiated instruction in foreign language classes can motivate and engage students more effectively because of the personalized contents, which are based on students' proficiency levels and interests (Blaz, 2006; Dörnyei, 1997, 2001; Ehrman, 2000; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Skehan, 1989; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Horwitz & Young, 1991; Oxford & Ehrman, 1993; Young, 1998). However, for many educators, implementing differentiation in a foreign language classroom is still a challenge.

The development of technology integration into the classroom provides new tools for educators to deliver differentiated instruction and brings the potential of delivering the differentiated instruction more effectively, efficiently, and productively by blending teachers' direct instruction with the assistance of technology. This blended instructional approach of direct instruction and technology assistance, also called blended learning (BL), has received increased attention in recent years. Many researchers and educators are exploring how to use it in foreign language education effectively and bring positive impact to students' language acquisition (Blake, 2013; Lai et al., 2005; Southgate et al., 2011; Yao, 2019).

Problem of Practice

The goal of this action research was to explore the impact of a proposed BL model, named Four-Station BL Model (FSBLM), on students' engagement in a diverse

middle school Chinese I class in a southeastern state. The participants for the study included four students in a Chinese I class at Gold Bridge Chinese Immersion School (GBCIS, pseudonym) and the teacher of that class. The Chinese I class in the study was a leveled Chinese as foreign language class, in which students were placed according to their Chinese proficiency levels. GBCIS is a Chinese immersion charter school in the southeastern United States. The school serves students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. To protect the identity of the participants and setting, pseudonyms were used throughout the study. As the assistant principal for Chinese immersion at GBCIS, it is part of the researcher's main duty to work closely with the Chinese teachers to make sure the Chinese instruction is going on according to the curriculum. It is also imperative to ensure the growth of the students' Chinese proficiency in the whole school. In pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, GBCIS adopted a 50:50 dual immersion model, which means the students study in a Chinese-speaking classroom for half of the school day, and switch to an English-speaking classroom for the other half of the school day. At GBCIS elementary school, math, science, music, dance, drama, art, and Chinese language arts are taught in Chinese, while English language arts, social studies, physical education, and media are taught in English.

In sixth through eighth grade at GBCIS, the immersion model changes. GBCIS middle school does not use the immersion model anymore, but uses the traditional foreign language class model in which Chinese is no longer the instructional language for the other subjects. The students only meet with their Chinese teacher for a 50-minute-long Chinese class per day. However, because students enrolled in GBCIS at different grade levels vary from kindergarten through eighth grade, a considerable range of

Chinese proficiency evidence can be found in almost every Chinese classroom across GBCIS middle school. For example, in a middle school Chinese I classroom, the students' past learning experience for Chinese can vary from one to eight years. In this study, the term *immersion student* refers to a student who has been learning Chinese since fifth grade or below, and the term *non-immersion student* refers to a student who began to learn Chinese in sixth grade or above.

Middle school students at GBCIS take the ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) each year. AAPPL is a web-based language proficiency and performance assessment of K-12 standards-based language learning held by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL, n.d.). It assesses four language skills of each test taker, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The AAPPL score indicates the test-taker's language performance and is organized in the following three ranges: Novice Range, Intermediate Range, and Advanced Range. There are sublevels in each range. As shown in the Table 1.1, the AAPPL measures performance score ranges from low to high, as follows: N1, N1, N2, N3, N4, I1, I2, I3, I4, I5, A1, and A2. To make the scores quantitative, in this study, the researcher converted them to numerical data as follows: 0=Below N1, 1=N1, 2=N2, 3=N3, 4=N4, 5=I1, 6=I2, 7=I3, 8=I4, 9=I5, 10=A1.

Table 1.1 *AAPPL Score Range and the Quantization in This Study*

AAPPL Score Range	AAPPL Measure Performance Score	Numerical Equivalent in This Study
Advanced	A2	11
	A1	10
Intermediate	I5	9
	I4	8
	I3	7
	I2	6

	I1	5
Novice	N4	4
	N3	3
	N2	2
	N1	1
No evidence of language proficiency shown in test	Below N1	0

As shown in Table 1.2, the Chinese I class in this study is diversified regarding students' sociodemographic characteristics, past years of learning Chinese, and the students' Chinese proficiency. There were 22 students in the class. Among the 22 students, 12 were female, and 10 were male; 11 were African American, six were white, one was Hispanic, and four were mixed-race students. In this class, 12 out of 22 students were immersion students, while 10 out of 22 students were non-immersion students. The students' years of experience learning Chinese extended from one year to eight years. Among the 22 students, eight had learned Chinese for six to eight years, four had learned Chinese for three to five years, and 10 had learned Chinese for one to two years. The students' language proficiency level in different language skills was varied in a wide range from 0 to 6. The average score of the four skills for each student varied from 1.5 to 3.25.

Table 1.2 *2020 AAPPL Test Score for the Chinese I Class in This Study*

Student	Speaking	Writing	Listening	Reading	Race	Gender	Years of Learning Chinese	Average Score
A	3	4	3	3	African American	Female	3	3.25
B	3	1	2	6	White	Male	6	3
C	3	3	5	1	African American	Female	7	3
D	3	3	2	3	White	Female	7	2.75
E	3	3	3	2	Mixed	Male	7	2.75

F	0	3	2	1	Mixed	Female	5	1.5
G	0	3	2	1	African American	Female	1	1.5
H	1	3	2	0	African American	Female	1	1.5
I	0	0	3	4	African American	Female	2	1.75
J	0	3	2	2	African American	Female	6	1.75
K	1	0	4	2	African American	Male	1	1.75
L	0	1	4	2	Hispanic	Male	1	1.75
M	0	3	2	3	African American	Female	2	2
N	1	2	2	3	White	Male	2	2
O	3	1	3	2	African American	Male	1	2.25
P	0	3	3	3	Mixed	Female	2	2.25
Q	0	1	4	4	African American	Male	1	2.25
R	1	3	2	4	African American	Male	3	2.5
S	1	3	4	2	White	Male	8	2.5
T	0	2	4	4	White	Female	6	2.5
U	3	3	1	4	Mixed	Male	5	2.75
V	2	3	3	3	White	Female	7	2.75
Aver-age	1.27	2.32	2.82	2.68			3.8	2.27
High-est	3	4	5	6			8	3.25
Low-est	0	0	1	0			1	1.5

These differences across four areas of language proficiency make it difficult for teachers to provide learning experiences that are well aligned with each student's proficiency level. The differences also hinder the students from being engaged to learn Chinese in traditional whole instruction mode, because the whole instruction is always either too hard or too easy for some students, even if it might be on the right level for some other students. Chamot (2012) indicated,

> While teaching the same class to the entire class may seem a practical instructional approach (especially for a large class), not all students will be equally successful; learners who are not successful tend to lose interest and motivation for learning the target language. (p. 115)

Thus, to educate all students from the 2017-2018 school year, GBCIS encouraged the Chinese teachers to deliver differentiated instruction to the students. However, how to implement different instruction in Chinese class has been a challenge for the Chinese teachers at GBCIS.

As the assistant principal for Chinese Immersion for GBCIS, the researcher's main duty is to make sure the Chinese immersion education runs smoothly and all the students can receive the effective language education according to their needs. The diversity in students' language proficiency in middle school was not that obvious when we started to serve our first group middle school students in 2015 because all the middle school students at that time were immersion students who learned Chinese since the second grade. But with the growth of our program, more non-immersion students enrolled in GBCIS middle school in the past two years. Thus, the diversity of language proficiency in the same classroom becomes more challenging.

Since 2017, we have worked hard in seeking professional development opportunities for the teachers in all the subjects to learn about differentiated instruction. Now all the teachers know we need to deliver differentiated instruction, but many of the Chinese teachers found themselves struggling in how to implement differentiation in teaching practice.

For example, Ms. Chen has taught seventh and eighth grade Chinese classes since 2016. She told the researcher in a professional learning community (PLC) meeting that she felt she has to "duplicate" herself in order to teach the class because if she used whole class instruction and spoke in Chinese, the non-immersion students did not understand, but if she switched to English, the immersion students would complain or get bored. Then she switched to small group to differentiate her instruction, but then she noticed that the small group of students with whom she would work in certain classes could engage and learn better; however, other students with whom she did not work directly but only assigned tasks for them to complete independently would feel frustrated or not stay on task because when they needed help, the teacher was not available. Ms. Chen said, "If I can duplicate myself, then one of me can teach the small group, and the other of me can be available to teach or help the other group."

Mr. Zhang, the Chinese teacher for sixth and seventh grade, was also struggling in getting all the students engaged. What mostly troubled Mr. Zhang was that many of his students did not complete assignments or participate in class activities.

> My students just do not want to learn. They did not participate in class activities claiming either the activity was too hard or too boring or just keeping deadly quiet. They acted out when I asked them questions and just said, "I do not know what you are talking about," or repeated, "What am I supposed to do?" even if I had said the direction for a couple of times. They did not do assignment even if it might be just copying the characters, which is a purely mechanical drill that can be done without any help. I know I need to work with small groups. But what do the other students do without me when I am working with a small group? I cannot

be with all of them at a same time. What assignments should I assign them to do by themselves without boring them or frustrating them?

In a PLC meeting, Mr. Zhang expressed in a frustrated tone, "If there is some teaching protocol for us to follow and tell us how to differentiate our instruction to cover all the students in a doable and practical way step-by-step, that will be a paradise."

All teachers realized that student engagement plays an important role in second language learning. "To teach is to engage students in learning" (Smith et al., 2005, p. 88). Engaging students in the learning process can increase their motivation and focus, and thus promote a meaningful learning experience. (Advance Education Inc., 2019; Akbari et al., 2016; Asano-Cavanagh & Cavanagh, 2011; Fredricks et al., 2004; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Lin & Bruce, 2013; Mahdikhani & Rezaei, 2015; Zheng, 2018). Yet, at this school, the teachers were struggling in implementing differentiated instruction and engaging all the students in Chinese classes.

According to Dörnyei and Schmidt (2001), "If this situation is traumatic and of a long duration, feelings of perpetual anxiety and eventually depression and apathy may occur (p. 49)." When students are not engaged, they feel that what happens to them in the classroom has no clear relation to an educational outcome, and they tend to disengage from the activities or quit the activities as soon as it is feasible. This disengagement was illustrated by the AAPPL test scores in 2020. The average score for the Chinese I class students was only 2.27, which was 1.6 lower than their goal of the year.

To address this issue at school and improve student engagement in Chinese classes, I created the blended learning model, FSBLM, which is a BL model specifically used for differentiating Chinese instruction, and implemented it in a middle school

Chinese I class at GBCIS. This study was designed to investigate the effectiveness of FSBLM.

There are a variety of definitions for BL. Some authors define BL as a mixture of online learning and face-to-face instruction (Dziuban et al., 2004; Graham, 2006; Hew & Cheung, 2014; Horn & Staker, 2011; Sharma & Barrett, 2007; Ward & LaBranche, 2003; Young, 2002) and regard it as a "pedagogical approach that combines the opportunities of face-to-face learning with the opportunities of online environment such as increasing the interaction between students and students, as well as students and instructors" (Hew & Cheung, 2014, p. 3). Meanwhile, other authors define BL more broadly as the integration of almost all multiple learning methods or techniques including laboratory sessions, face-to-face instructions, assigned readings, formal coursework, self-paced projects, collaborative learning for group assignment and/or conversation with peers, online courses and/or assignments, and supervised hands-on practice (Cucciare et al., 2008; Rossett & Frazee, 2006). For the purpose of this study, BL was framed in a broader definition, which combines multiple instructional approaches. The instructional approaches that were blended in this study included (a) teachers' face-to-face instruction, (b) students' self-paced online learning, (c) independent study with online support, and (d) collaborative learning. The proposed FSBLM is described in more detail in Chapter Three.

Engagement is a multidimensional construction (Christenson et al., 2012) and has multiple components (Appleton et al., 2006). Based on the literature review and conversations the researcher had with the teachers regarding the students at the school,

for the purposes of this study, student engagement was defined as (a) participation in class activities, (b) classwork completion, and (c) student perceptions of Chinese class.

Research Question

What impact will a blended learning model of differentiated instruction have on the engagement level of four middle school students in a Chinese I class?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of FSBLM on the engagement level of four middle school students in a Chinese I class.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study included engagement theory, progressivism, and constructivism.

Engagement theory is "a framework for technology-based teaching and learning" (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998, p. 20). Its fundamental underlying idea is that "students must be meaningfully engaged in learning activities through interaction with others and worthwhile tasks" (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998, p. 20). According to Kearsley & Shneiderman (1998), an important principle in engagement theory is collaboration, which involves "communication, planning, management and social skills."

According to Labaree (2005), progressivism is known as child-centered instruction, which fosters learning to learn, engages students in a process of personal discovery, and promotes a democratic learning community in the classroom. Inspired by progressivism, in this study, the researcher proposed the FSBLM, which emphasizes self-directed learning and a collaborative learning community.

Similar to progressivism, constructivism also states that students should be the

center in education. However, constructivists also believe that teachers should view students as individual learners who add new concepts to prior knowledge to construct for themselves (Henson, 2003). For the students to be taught according to their individual needs, a constructive learning environment must be built in the classroom, in which more educational options are offered, real-life problems are incorporated, and multiple perspectives are supported. Therefore, to create the constructive learning environment so that students' individual needs were met, the researcher designed the proposed FSBLM, which offers choices for students to achieve their learning goals.

Methodology

This study was conducted during the Fall 2020 semester at GBCIS, a public charter school in a southeastern state. Enrollment at the school was approximately 700 4K to eighth-grade students. The participants of the study included four students and one teacher in a middle school Chinese I class. To ascertain the different perspectives of the students and teachers, participants were chosen based on students' year of learning Chinese, gender, race, and Chinese proficiency. A more descriptive profile of each participant is provided in Chapter Three.

This study collected both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data were collected from interviews with students and teachers, the teacher-researcher's field notes, and the artifacts of students' classwork samples. Quantitative data were collected from students' pre- and post-surveys, and classwork grades from the PowerSchool, which was the online grading system that the teachers used on daily basis to record grades. Prior to the study, the participants were interviewed, and their responses were used to guide the implementation of FSBLM for the eight-week duration. The classwork varied in content

and was administered after topic-specific sessions of the FSBLM. The teacher-researcher's field notes from class observation were collected and organized after each FSBLM session. Each of these instruments was used to identify emergent themes regarding the participants' knowledge, perception, and use of FSBLM in their teaching and learning practices.

Significance of the Study

In an effort to provide meaningful and sustained professional learning opportunities for teachers, this interventional study sought to understand how the BL approach helps engage students in Chinese classes. The study was significant because it can benefit the students at GBCIS middle school in discovering a way to engage students in Chinese classes, hence increasing their performances in language learning. It also can benefit the Chinese teachers at GBCIS in promoting the usage of BL in their classroom to differentiate their instruction and allow them to improve as teachers.

This action research study focused on a local practice problem at GBCIS and was not intended to be generalizable or demonstrate external validity. The data collected and analyzed relate only to the selected school and cannot be generalized across time and locations. However, the responses from the surveys and interviews with teachers and students may assist in gaining insight from both teachers' and students' perspectives. The results from this study add to the existing related literature. The research findings of this study offered not only a new understanding of how differentiated instruction could be implemented in Chinese classes via BL, but also an effort in exploring how BL can help engage students in foreign language education.

Ideally, those reading this study, including but not limited to both foreign language educators and any educator whose classroom is diverse in any aspect, may be able to judge the applicability of the findings to their own situations. The findings can also offer insight for the leaders of immersion education programs as they refine their foreign language curriculum and provide professional development for teachers.

Positionality

Having been in the field of foreign language education for more than 20 years, promoting educational equality and equity has always been my career goal. Most of the students I have taught had no one at home who spoke the target language and therefore could not help them at home. I both experienced myself and saw in other teachers' classrooms that having only one foreign language teacher is difficult to instruct all the students in the same classroom when the teacher is the only resource for the students. Each time I saw a student who was struggling in learning foreign language because of insufficient support from both home and school, I knew that I needed to do something to lead the change so that everyone in the classroom could learn at their own pace according to their needs, get enough support from both teachers and peers, and also have some support even when they were at home.

In this study, I was an insider, researcher, and practitioner. I met with the Chinese teachers once a week in PLC meetings and conducted at least two walk-throughs and one observation per week in the Chinese-speaking teachers' classes. I meet with the mentees individually once a month and discussed their lesson plans for the coming month. My working experience provided me with knowledge about what the teachers needed and how the students learned. I also knew that the teachers were looking for solutions relative

to the challenges they encounter daily. After discussing with the teachers about their problems and reviewing literature, I created the FSBLM with the purpose of making it easier for teachers to do differentiated instruction and engage more students in Chinese learning. This BL model combines not only technology integration and traditional face-to-face instruction but also group collaboration and independent study, hence should be able to bring a positive impact on student engagement by changing students' attitudes and increasing their motivation in Chinese learning.

Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study showed that FSBLM had a positive impact on student engagement in Chinese classes. More specially, the quantitative data, including classwork grades and Likert surveys, showed that the students were more engaged when the FSBLM was implemented in the Chinese classes. The qualitative data analysis for the field notes, work samples, and interviews showed that the possible reasons for the effectiveness of FSBLM regarding engaging students might be found out from the following three prevalent themes: (1) student engagement via structured collaborative learning in FSBLM; (2) technology increasing teaching efficiency and helping engage students when the teacher is helping other students; and (3) student-participants' affective change process, which impacted their perceptions and attitudes towards the Chinese classes. Additionally, as a result of the study findings, an action plan was created, which involved the following three steps: (1) focusing on consolidating the language foundation of individual students, (2) identifying students' individual learning needs and styles, and (3) strengthening the teacher's support to individual students. The action plan will help effectively implement the FSBLM into Chinese instruction and better engage students.

Dissertation Overview

Following this chapter, Chapter Two includes a review of the literature based on historical context, theoretical context, and methodology in immersion education. The literature review helped determine the focus of the study.

Chapter Three provides an in-depth summary of the methodology of the study. It consists of the statement of purpose, problem of practice, research question, action research design, methods, procedures, and data analysis strategies. The plan for reflecting with participants and devising an action plan are also included in this chapter.

Chapter Four reports the research findings in relation to the research question. I, as the researcher, report the findings, analyze the data, and interpret the results systematically.

Chapter Five, the final chapter of this dissertation, includes a summary of the findings and discussion, analyzes the limitation of the study, and provides the implications of the study. It also includes an action plan to be considered and some suggestions for future research.

Glossary of Terms

50:50 Immersion Model: Also called Two-Way Bilingual immersion. It suggests that 50% of instruction is delivered in the target language and 50% in English throughout the elementary level (Olsen, 2014).

Blended Learning (BL): A system of learning that combines face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction (Bonk & Graham, 2006).

Differentiated Instruction: A teaching theory based on the premise that instructional approaches should vary and be adapted in relation to individual and diverse students in

classrooms. It suggests that teachers should recognize students' varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning, interests, and reactions (Hall et al., 2004)

Four-Station Blended Learning Model (FSBLM): A blended learning model, which was created by the researcher and implemented in the site school in this study. In this model, the students in the class were divided into four small groups according to their proficiency levels in listening, speaking, reading, and writing areas in Chinese. Then, they participated in different learning activities in each assigned station. Students rotated and visited all the four stations in the two classes each week.

Immersion Students: Students who are learning or have been learning a second language in immersion program (Baker & MacIntrye, 2000).

Language Immersion: A method of teaching language, usually a second language (L2), in which the target language is used as both curriculum content and media of instruction (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010).

Non-Immersion Students: Also called Foreign Language Students, refers to the students who learn a foreign language in traditional foreign language classrooms (Baker & MacIntrye, 2000).

PowerSchool: a web-based student information system platform, which is used to manage instruction, learning, grading, attendance, assessment, analytics, state reporting, special education, and student registration (South Carolina Department of Education, 2020).

Professional Learning Community (PLC): A group of people with common educational goals and beliefs (Morrissey, 2000).

Student Engagement: A term that shows "how involved or interested students appear to be in their learning and how connected they are to their classes" (Axelson & Flick, 2010, p. 38). For the purposes of this study, student engagement is defined in the following aspects: (a) participation in class activities, (b) classwork completion, and (c) student perceptions of Chinese class.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter is composed of sections that underscore the research and literature on the subject. Literature about BL tends to focus on our conceptual understanding of it, the strategies of its application, and its implementation in foreign language learning. Therefore, in this chapter, a discussion of theoretical perspectives from which blended learning has been formulated is presented, which includes engagement theory, progressivism, and constructivism. In the next section, this review will discuss the BL in differentiated instruction, including the benefits of differentiated instruction, the advantages of BL in foreign language learning, the challenges that teachers met in implementing BL, how to effectively implement differentiated instruction through the BL model in foreign language learning, and a brief description of BL models, which helped the author decide the proposed BL model and the intervention. Finally, this review concludes with a summary of the relevant research and literature used, and how they are related to this action research.

Theoretical Framework

It was necessary for the researcher to understand the theories that helped develop the conceptual understanding when implementing the proposed instructional model in the study. This action research primarily was framed by the understanding of engagement theory, progressivism, and constructivism.

Engagement Theory

The research on student engagement as a concept can be tracked back to the 1930s, when the educational psychologist Ralph Tyler did research on "how much time students spent on their works and tried to show its effects on learning" (Axelson & Flick, 2010, p. 40). Researchers and educators found that student engagement with school is significant for students to learn (Mosher & McGowan, 1985). A variety of definitions of student engagement can be found in the literature. Anderson and Guthrie (1996) believed that engagement theory falls under the wider umbrella of motivation theory and contains values such as "curiosity, social interchange, emotional satisfaction, and self-efficacy" (p. 1). Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) defined engaged readers as readers "in the classroom or elsewhere coordinate their strategies and knowledge within a community of literacy in order to fulfill their personal goals, desires, and intentions" (p. 404). Axelson and Flick (2010) believed student engagement was a "valid indicator of institutional excellence" (p. 38) and defined the term "student engagement" as "how involved or interested students appear to be in their learning and how connected they are to their classes" (p. 38).

Engagement is a multidimensional construct (Christenson et al., 2012) and has multiple components (Appleton et al., 2006). Some researchers think that engagement is comprised of behavioral (participation in class and school) and affective components (school identification, belong, valuing learning) (Finn, 1989; Marks, 2000; Newmann et al., 1992). According to Fredericks et al. (2004), engagement can be measured in the following three categories: (a) behavioral (e.g., effort, participation, and positive conducts), (b) cognitive (e.g., learning goals, investment in learning, and self-regulation), and (c) emotional (e.g., belonging, interest, and positive attitude about learning).

Fredericks et al.'s understanding of engagement components can also be seen in Jimerson et al. (2003) and was adopted in the eProve™ Student Engagement Survey (Advance Education Inc., 2019).

The eProve™ Student Engagement Survey was designed to measure elementary, middle, and high school student engagement through students' responses to items about their learning experiences. The survey was adopted by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) as part of the 2019 Student Engagement Survey for Accountability (Advance Education Inc., 2019). It consists of items categorized into three components or domains of engagement: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional, as indicated by Fredricks et al. (2004). Behavioral engagement refers to a student's efforts in the classroom (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Fredricks et al., 2004), cognitive engagement examines a student's investment in learning (Fredricks et al., 2004), and emotional engagement measures a student's emotions or feelings about the classroom and school in general (Finn & Rock, 1997; Fredricks et al., 2004; Voelkl,1997).

Research shows that student engagement is strongly related to academic and social outcomes and achievement (Appleton et al., 2006; Appleton et al., 2008; Christenson et al., 2012; Guthrie et al., 1996; Guthrie et al., 2001; Newmann et al., 1992; Zyngier, 2008). Specifically, in foreign language acquisition, student engagement also plays a significant role (Akbari et al., 2016; Consolo, 2001; Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Mahdikhani & Rezaei, 2015).

Since its early stages, the engagement theory has been connected with technology. Kearsley and Shneiderman (1998) described the engagement theory as "a framework for technology-based teaching and learning" (p. 20) and highlighted collaboration as the key

to engagement. This theory provided a strong base for this study, which focused on students' engagement in blended learning.

Progressivism

Progressive education can be tracked back to some works in the 18th century by John Locke, who believed that to learn, the child needed to have concrete experiences (Hayes, 2006). Later, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, a Swiss educational reformer, pointed out that children learned through experiences of objects and their own internal motivation. Additionally, he believed that a teacher's task was to help guide the students as individuals through their learning and allow it to happen naturally (Butts & Cremin, 1953). Dewey (1938) believed that students thrived in learning when they were allowed to experience and interact with the curriculum. His belief was that all students should have the opportunity to take part in their own learning, because they would not learn without motivation and engagement. He also expressed that a teacher should not be considered as an authoritative figure but a member of the community that assists students (Dewey, 1938). Progressivists believe that self-directed learning through active engagement and projects that incorporate socially relevant themes could result in effective learning (Gusky & Anderman, 2008; Hayes, 2006; Labaree, 2005). Hence, teachers should create an environment in which they could educate indirectly by engaging students in activities that "arouse and strengthen certain impulses" (Dewey, 1916, p.13). A curriculum that promoted diversity, projects, and many other aspects of progressive teaching and learning could help create educational experiences that connected the interests of students to life (Lin & Bruce, 2013; Nowell, 1992).

Constructivism

Constructivism is commonly approached as a learning theory which focuses on the students as learners. Constructivism states that knowledge is not passively accepted but actively built in the process of cognition and learning through learners' new experiences (Simonova, 2019). Piaget (1952) believed that learning should happen through play and lecture where construction of meaning could take place. Constructivists think that education should be learner centered. Teachers should view students as individual learners who add new concepts to prior knowledge to construct for themselves; hence, they should nourish and support learners' curiosity and interests, involve learners' emotions, and create a learning environment in which students feel safe and comfortable (Henson, 2003).

A constructivist learning environment should support multiple perspectives, allow a variety of educational needs to be met, offer students more educational choices, and incorporate real-life problems and realistic opportunities (Bryans-Bongey & Graziano, 2016). Constructivists believe that students should be the center of education; therefore, individual needs, capacities, interests, and habits of the child should be the guide in their educational experiences (Flinders & Thornton, 2017). Carey (1993) believed that a teacher's role should change from director to learning facilitator, which means their job includes observing students and diagnosing their individual needs and interests, creating a learning environment in which the students can thrive, and facilitating learning by intervening between the students and the environment (Schiro, 2013). Constructivism is primarily employed in math and science education; however, it also appears in the field of humanities, such as foreign language and literature (Hawkins, 1994; Simonova, 2019).

Both progressivism and constructivism have been implemented successfully in curriculum design and student achievement in modern schools. The combination of progressivism and constructivism were the origin for using the BL approach to differentiated instruction, which allows the educators to design the curriculum that meets the diverse needs of students and delivers their instruction with more choices for students to learn; thus, it incorporates individual students' interests, needs, and habits. The above-described theoretical background was also applied in this study to help design the FSBLM, which was developed for differentiating teachers' instruction in Chinese language learning to meet individual students' needs through a variety of learning activities (e.g., online games and learning, project-based and collaborative learning, independent reading and writing practice, and face-to-face small group instruction).

Blended Learning for Differentiated Instruction

Definition and Benefits of Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction or in education, simply differentiation, is not something new. It is a "blend of whole-class, group, and individual instruction" (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 9), and a framework for effective teaching in which teachers develop materials and assessment measures to provide all students within their diverse classroom with a range of different avenues to understand new information and learn effectively, regardless of differences in ability (Tomlinson, 2001).

Differentiated instruction is sometimes referred to as mixed-ability teaching, and it is a process-oriented approach that is most suited for classrooms in which students have a wide range of ability levels (Heacox, 2001; Winebrener, 1992). By considering the varied learning needs of students, teachers develop personalized instructions with

different teaching materials so that all children in the classroom can learn effectively (Lawrence-Brown, 2004; Tomlinson, 1999). Differentiated instruction allows students to have multiple options of "taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn" (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 1). To differentiate instruction and promote learning in all students, teachers create a student-centered learning environment that offers different approaches to what the students learn, how they learn it, and how to assess their learning (Tomlinson, 2017). The teachers blend whole-class, group, and individual instruction while they differentiate instruction in academically diverse classrooms. The teachers' roles switch from "keepers and dispensers of knowledge to collaborators with students and organizers of learning opportunities" (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 34).

Educators have been using differentiated Instruction for both gifted students and students with special needs for more than two decades, and it is widely recognized because of its effectiveness in an inclusive, mixed-ability learning environment (Iyer, 2015). Now educators and researchers are also exploring in using it in regular classrooms for all subjects, including but not limited to foreign language classrooms (Algozzine & Anderson, 2007; George, 2005; Heacox, 2002; Landrum & McDuffie, 2010; Lawrence-Brown, 2004; Levy, 2008; Morgan, 2014; Nunley, 2006; Rock et al., 2008; Smets & Struyven, 2018; Taylor, 2015; Tomlinson, 1999a, 1999b, 2001).

Differentiated Instruction has been beneficial for struggling students in many different subjects, including mathematics (Chamberlin & Powers, 2010; Cusumano & Mueller, 2007; D'Amico & Gallaway, 2008; Murray & Jorgensen, 2007; Patterson et al., 2009; Ysseldyke et al., 2004), reading (Ankrum & Bean, 2008; Broderick et al., 2005; De

Jesus, 2012; Gilbert, 2011; Knowles, 2009; Obiakor et al., 2012;), social studies (Lawrence-Brown, 2004; Van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006), and science (Simpkins et al., 2009; Tobin & Tippett, 2014; Waters et al., 2004). A study by Darrow (2015) also showed it can be applicable in music education because students with disabilities require the time and attention of skilled and sensitive music educators. When the instruction is more flexible and there are more options for learning and responding, teachers can communicate with students with disabilities more efficiently and productively in practice (Darrow, 2015).

Differentiated Instruction has been instrumental in narrowing the achievement gap associated with academic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity. One of the reasons for this was that it is more likely for the educators to determine what is appropriate to improve student achievement if they only focus on a particular group of students in particular classrooms in particular locales (Santamaria, 2009). Research showed that differentiated instruction is effective in engaging students from a variety of backgrounds, interests, and needs, as well as increasing the inclusiveness of the classroom (Avramidis et al., 2002; Grönlund et al., 2010; Lindsay, 2007; McLeskey et al., 2001). With differentiated instruction, the classroom becomes a "community to which age peers belong and can/should be nourished as individuals…[and] intended benefits of inclusion for both students with and without disabilities can be realized" (Lawrence-Brown, 2004, p. 59). In differentiated instruction, children with diverse abilities (that is, both giftedness and disabilities) are more likely to access and enjoy all aspects of schooling; they are more engaged and fully included (Loreman et al., 2005).

In addition to its tremendous support to struggling students, differentiated instruction also can benefit gifted students in various disciplines, increasing their motivation and achievement (Altintas & Özdemir, 2015; Coleman & Gallagher, 1995; Coleman & Hughes, 2009; Lawrence-Brown, 2004; Tomlinson, 2001; Troxclair, 2000; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005; Waters et al., 2004; Ysseldyke et al., 2004). In a quantitative research study that used a model with pre-test and post-test control groups among real experiment models, researchers studied 57 gifted and 60 non-gifted fifth and sixth grade students from a public school and a private school. The study used convenience and purposeful quantitative sampling of mathematics achievement, and it found a significant increase in the academic achievement of the gifted students in private school and non-gifted students in public school when differentiated approaches were used "based on elaboration, creative thinking and multiple intelligences" (Altintas & Özdemir, 2015, p. 209).

Because of the advantages of differentiated Instruction, educators also are seeking ways to implement it into foreign language education. Niculescu and Obilişteanu (2016) explored the use of differentiated and individualized instruction when teaching foreign language by using information and communication technology (ICT). Tzanni (2018) investigated teachers' beliefs and practices related to differentiated instruction to give an account of the status of the approach in Greece for teaching English as foreign language contexts and found generally promising teacher beliefs towards differentiation and relatively weaker differentiated teaching practices.

As reviewed above, differentiated Instruction is effective in a mixed-ability learning environment and can benefit both struggling and gifted students in different

subjects, including mathematics, reading, science, social studies, music, and foreign languages.

Blended Learning in Foreign Language Learning

BL, which is often used interchangeably in the literature with other terms, including "hybrid learning," "technology-mediated instruction," "web-enhanced instruction," and "mixed-mode instruction" (Martyn, 2003), has drawn wide attention in an educational setting and is being adopted in many schools around the world (Cheung & Hew, 2011; Dziuban et al., 2006; Hadjerrouit, 2008; Horn & Staker, 2011). However, there is currently no universally acknowledged definition of BL in the literature regarding its scope. Some authors define it as a mixture of online educational materials and opportunities for interaction online and traditional place-based face-to-face instruction (Dziuban et al., 2004; Graham, 2006; Hew & Cheung, 2014; Horn & Staker, 2011; Sharma & Barrett, 2007; Ward & LaBranche, 2003; Young, 2002) and regard it as a "pedagogical approach that combines the opportunities of face-to-face learning with the opportunities of online environments such as increasing the interaction between students and students, as well as students and instructors" (Hew & Cheung, 2014, p. 3; Dziuban et al., 2004). Nicolson et al. (2011) referred to BL as "a combination of forms of instructional technology, including traditional forms of learning used in conjunction with web-based, online approaches" (p. 5).

After further investigation, other authors defined it more broadly as the integration of almost all multiple-learning methods or techniques including laboratory sessions, face-to-face instruction, assigned readings, formal coursework, self-paced projects, collaborative learning for group assignments and/or conversations with peers,

online courses and/or assignments, and supervised hands-on practice (Cucciare et al., 2008; Rossett & Frazee, 2006).

Benefits of Blended Learning in Language Learning

The benefits of BL in language learning are numerous (Lai et al., 2005). For example, Santamaria (2009) found that the creation of hybrid pedagogies is critical in addressing the educational needs in an increasingly diverse country and global community. The world is becoming more and more diversified, and people are facing the economic, political, social, and cultural changes all over the world; hence, the educational needs in the same type of classroom are also getting more diversified and individualized. This demands flexible learning opportunities, since "learning has become part of the 'consumer culture'" (Southgate et al., 2011, p. 4), in which individual students tend to learn in their own way or in their own space. BL is an approach that can make the above flexibility practical. When teachers' computer literacy improves and teachers are better trained in technology in the classroom, BL will become more popular (Kirschner et al., 2006).

In language learning, BL can not only allow flexibility but also "offer support that goes beyond teach-yourself materials or self-study only options" (Southgate et al., 2011, p. 6). A BL approach showed a significant impact on students' academic performance in both English learners and non-English learners, who were identified as at-risk in reading (Kazakoff et al., 2018). Foreign language learners in BL environments significantly outperformed those who were in traditional learning environments, especially in writing abilities (Yao, 2019).

Effectiveness of Technology Integration

The use of technology and internet has produced an effective change in foreign language classes. Romeo et al. (2017) found that technology enabled the locating and display of material and tasks in a convenient way, making instruction more meaningful and engaging and class management easier. Similarly, Banditvilai (2016) showed that online practice was directly beneficial for students to enhance four language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing; additionally, it could increase students' motivation in conducting autonomous learning.

Danka (2017) conducted a qualitative study in which a questionnaire was given to explore participants' perceptions and acceptance toward the use of Quizlet, an online interactive program for foreign language learning, and explored a possible way to integrate interactive mobile technology within the classroom, which promotes effective learning in a light-hearted way. Danka's study (2017) found strong correlations between perceived ease of use and attitude, between perceived usefulness and attitude, and between attitude and intention to use; it also showed that using Quizlet on smart phones increased the students' engagement and motivation in language learning.

Ateş Çobanoğlu (2018) did a study about BL with technology integration and found that (a) most of the students preferred BL over traditional instruction; (b) the extensive use of internet for educational purposes was important for students' satisfaction in BL; (c) students are more satisfied with BL as it enriched lessons with a variety of material and helped adoption of modern technologies; and (d) students with their first online learning experiences, as well as male students, were more satisfied with BL. Blake (2013) discussed how technology can be employed most effectively in foreign language

learning “in order to enhance and enrich the learners’ contact with the target language” (p. 3), thereby helping with foreign language learning. Instead of advocating new technologies as a replacement for activities that could be done equally well in traditional classrooms, Blake (2013) envisioned a radical change as teachers rethought their strategies and developed their competence in the effective use of technology in language teaching and learning. Blake (2013) described his belief that different technological tools have different advantages for foreign language learning, and online or distance foreign language instruction would not diminish an on-campus/face-to-face learning experience, but could cause it to be more appreciated.

Tsurutai and Imura (2016) detailed their “initial trial to incorporate oral-aural exercises into the online component of a course for Japanese language learners at an advanced level” (p. 21). They found that the blended learning approach benefited students and increased their confidence in language skills (Tsurutai & Imura, 2016).

BL, which integrates technology into traditional foreign language classes, can make the classes more flexible to meet individual students’ needs, as well as motivate and engage the students in foreign language learning. Hence, the proposed blended model in this action research, which combined both traditional face-to-face instruction and technology integration, should also be able to benefit Chinese learners with different proficiency levels regarding student engagement.

Challenges of Technology Integration

Technology integration definitely improves the effectiveness of instruction, but some challenges are also clear. The first challenge includes the budget and financial aspects. To equip the whole school with one-to-one technology requires additional funds

for the hardware and software; subscriptions for various online learning resources; wiring the school building to network computers and devices; purchasing and maintaining the technology network; cost for personnel to manage the devices, internet, and the online accounts of different online programs; and the professional development for teachers and staff (Ireh, 2010).

Another challenge can be the emotional and affective aspects. Research findings show that students generally were able to function in technology-integrated instruction and were positive towards technology; however, some students still preferred printed study materials, and some degree of computer anxiety was evident (Olivier, 2016). In another research study, Peachey (2017) found that students' challenges when studying online included "a sense of isolation, the need for self-discipline, and developing technical literacy" (p. 143). Additionally, the challenges that teachers could encounter when teaching online included the need of technical support; the limited tool set; and the demand of skills for transferring classrooms, building rapport, and paralinguistic communication.

Another challenge in BL is that it has a strong dependence on the technical resources or tools, which need to be reliable, easy to use, and up to date to be implemented meaningfully in learning experiences (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). This challenge demands school technology specialists examine the resources or tools in advance, carefully, and frequently. Moreover, compared to traditional instruction (e.g., paper-based, face-to-face), effective feedback on e-learning platforms is more time-consuming (Grieve et al., 2016). All of these challenges of technology integration call for the BL combination of multiple teaching approaches other than just online learning.

Considering the challenges involved with technology integration, the blended model that was designed in this action research not only combined online learning and traditional face-to-face instruction, but also blended group collaboration and independent study, aiming at diversifying the instructional approach in the Chinese class to better serve students with different proficiency levels, needs, learning goals, and learning styles.

BL Is Not Just Technology Integration

One thing that differentiates BL from sole online learning is that BL includes more than just using technology. BL has different models, which are described in more detail later in this chapter. These different models have different portions of face-to-face instruction and technology integration, which allows BL to serve a variety of students' needs and engage all students of different interests and habits. Hence, BL is widely appreciated for the possibility to study using individually preferred learning style and pace because of its wide range of delivery methods (Simonova, 2019).

Jee and O'Connor (2014) investigated the effect of BL combining traditional instruction and a self-study language learning software of tutoring sessions for 38 highly motivated adult learners on their performance and engagement. The research indicated that (a) on average, the learners who used synchronous language instruction in conjunction with self-study increased their proficiency scores more than those who only used the latter; (b) those who used the product more frequently were more engaged; and (c) the learners who had fewer tutoring sessions were far more engaged with the software autonomously (Jee & O'Connor, 2014). One important finding of this research was that the participants in this study cared most about face-to-face communication, valued most human interaction in their language learning, and viewed technology as a tool to make

management convenient, but not as a substitute for genuine teaching and learning (Romeo et al., 2017).

Karaaslan and Kilic (2019) conducted a case study in the School of Foreign Languages at Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University, which is an English-medium state university in Turkey, in the 2016-17 and 2017-18 academic years to investigate students' attitudes towards BL with reference to the following six learning aspects: (a) learning-flexibility, (b) online-learning, (c) study-management, (d) technology-use, (e) classroom-learning, and (f) online-interaction. Their study found that "high-achievers had a tendency to hold positive attitudes towards all learning aspects while low-achievers required more face-to-face in-class time, interaction and study management support" (Karaaslan & Kilic, 2019, p. 174), and that students' attitudes toward BL were possibly related to such variables as language proficiency and learner autonomy.

According to current literature, BL models, which combine not only technology integration and traditional face-to-face instruction but also group collaboration and independent study, should be able to bring a positive impact on student engagement by changing students' attitudes and increasing their motivation in Chinese learning.

Implementation of Differentiated Instruction Through BL

To implement differentiated Instruction through BL, teachers set different goals for task completion for students based on their individual needs and also use different teaching approaches (Lawrence-Brown, 2004). Students can also set goals collaboratively for what they want to accomplish during the class (Linder, 2016). According to a study by Tsurutai and Imura (2016), one of the key factors of the BL approach is the learners' willingness and readiness to learn. So, the communication regarding goals is important.

To motivate students, the goals need to be communicated with the students and indicate why a particular skill is relevant and important to the learner (Southgate et al., 2011).

Tomlinson and Imbeau (2013) provided a teacher's toolkit in their book *Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom*, which included some activities and ideas that can be used by teachers to differentiate their instruction. In the book, three ways for the teachers to differentiate their instruction were introduced by focusing on the following: (a) content, or the "what" of instruction; (b) process, or the "how" of instruction; and (c) product, or the "evidence" of instruction based on the individual learner in their teaching practice (Maker, 1982; Taylor, 2015; Tomlinson, 2001). When teachers differentiate content, they may adapt what they want students to learn or how students access the knowledge, understanding, and skills (Anderson, 2007). They must not lower performance standards or vary students' objectives in these instances, but use different texts, stories, or other reading materials at the individual student's reading level with different students, whether in pairs, groups, or individually (Anderson, 2007). Differentiating by process refers to the differentiation of how the objectives or skills are taught to the students so that they can process them in the way that is based on their own learning styles (Anderson, 2007). Differentiating by product allows students to demonstrate their mastery of the content in different ways, including but not limited to tests, evaluations, projects, reports, or other products (Anderson, 2007). In this action research, contents, process, and product will all be differentiated in FSBLM, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

In the book *Blended learning: Using technology in and beyond the language classroom*, Sharma and Barrett (2007) introduced some strategies of how to integrate

technology in language classes, including using the web as a source, evaluating the ELT materials found online, the use of online and electronic dictionaries, the use of whiteboards, the use of portable devices, computer-mediated communication, and web resources. According to research, methods of computer-mediated communication include emails and some synchronous modes (Herring, 1996) via social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Squires, 2016). Quizlet was also found to be an effective online interactive resource for foreign language learning (Danka, 2017).

Many researchers explored how to implement technology in BL and differentiated Instruction. Peachey (2017) introduced some techniques for teachers to make them more effective in online teaching, which included using the webcam as a teaching tool, using the text chat, setting up group and pair work, and using the interactive whiteboard. Moreover, Peachey (2017) introduced options in which teachers could evaluate students' learning online, such as recording classes, tracking course interactions, keeping class records, structuring student support, monitoring motivation, and giving feedback to students (Peachey, 2017).

Tsurutai & Imura (2016) found that, to implement differentiated Instruction more effectively, the educators needed to (a) develop suitable materials and assessment tasks to meet students' individual needs, and (b) scaffold learners so that appropriate material online can be selected and incorporated into their studies. For example, in the field of Chinese education, iChinesereader, which is an online Chinese leveled reading platform for K-12 Chinese learners with interactive activities, tasks and quizzes, is widely used by Chinese classes in the United States because of its large collection of books and its

embedded comprehensive class management system, which empowers teachers to deliver differentiated reading assignments (AppAdvice, n.d.).

Moreover, teachers' classroom management skills are important to implement BL effectively. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2013) also suggested that it was important for the teachers to develop and extend their comfort level by managing a student-centered classroom with flexible use of all the classroom elements. Increased complexity of classrooms with BL demands more complex views of classroom management, because while many tasks of learning-oriented settings overlap, teachers in student-centered classrooms must place additional emphasis on examining the social and academic task demands they create and their implications for learning at the same time (Randolph & Evertson, 1994). Roger and Frieberg (1994) suggested that teachers could adopt a student-centered, rather than a teacher-centered, orientation toward classroom management, which features shared leadership and community build.

BL Models

In practice, there are distinct BL models, which were suggested by some researchers. According to research (Beaver & Hallar, 2014), the following six BL models are used widely.

Face-to-face driver model. In this model, the teacher drives the instruction and augments with digital tools. The online instruction is decided on a case-by-case basis after the teacher diagnoses the student's needs, interests, and habits. This model is most helpful for the students who are struggling or working above their grade level.

Rotation model. In this form of BL, students rotate between different stations, with at least one being an online learning station. The rotation model motivated students to be more active in learning, and often challenged themselves to work harder.

Flex model. This model is often adopted by schools that are serving a large number of at-risk students. In this model, learning materials are primarily delivered online, while teachers are also in the room to offer on-site support as needed. New concepts are taught online to individual students independently. Students learn on an individual pace and with self-guided learning.

Online lab model. Students learn entirely online in the online lab model, but travel to a specific location, usually a computer lab, to complete the course. The teachers that supervise the lab might not be trained teachers. They do not offer support to students regarding subject-specific contents, but more often monitor students' behavior or offer technology support to protect the learning environment of the students.

Self-blended model. The self-blended model is often effectively used by highly self-motivated high-school students to take additional Advanced Placement courses, or some other online courses of their own interest, remotely.

Online driver model. This model is the opposite of face-to-face driver. In the online driver model, the students work remotely with most of the materials delivered online, and also can chat online with teachers as needed.

These models are not mutually exclusive and can also be blended together (Beaver & Hallar, 2014).

Summary

Foreign language instruction, in an era and society whose population is constantly changing, is faced with many challenges due to the diversity of the students' backgrounds, interests, habits, and learning styles. Whole instruction in teacher-centered learning mode cannot meet individual students' needs. Thus, the benefits of differentiated Instruction, the BL in foreign language learning, the implementation of differentiated Instruction through BL, and the different BL models are impending in the effort of meeting individual student needs. History guides educators to consider different theories when implementing BL in practice. This literature review highlighted the advantages of BL in foreign language learning, especially involving technology integration. It also discussed the challenges of technology integration in BL, the implementation of BL, and the different BL models. All these discussions led the way to the design of FSBLM, which was designed to promote student engagement in Chinese class, hence increasing student achievement in Chinese learning.

CHAPTER THREE: ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Problem of Practice

Students' Chinese proficiency levels are varied in the Chinese I class at GBCIS because of many factors, including but not limited to students' years of experience learning Chinese, learning styles, learning abilities, and family background. It is challenging for the Chinese teachers to differentiate instruction if they only rely on teachers' input without any assistance tools. Teachers are struggling in differentiating their instruction according to individual students' Chinese proficiency levels, which results in low student engagement in Chinese I class. It may be possible to implement differentiated instruction and increase the students' engagement level in the diverse Chinese classrooms, but the uncertainty of how to do this is an urgent problem at GBCIS. The Chinese teachers at GBCIS were seeking a set model of differentiated instruction so that they could implement the model in classes effectively and efficiently.

Research Question

What impact will a blended learning model of differentiated instruction have on the engagement level of four middle school students in a Chinese I class?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of FSBLM on the engagement level of four middle school students in a Chinese I class.

Action Research Design

Setting and Time Frame of Study

The setting of the action research study was GBCIS, which was an urban public charter school that served students in pre-K through eighth grades in a southeastern state. During the 2020-21 school year, the school had 705 students enrolled with a diverse student population regarding race and class. GBCIS was a Title I charter middle school. Four student participants and one teacher participant were selected from the Chinese I class at GBCIS. Because this was an action research study, it was important that the participants and the site were in close proximity and relatable to the problem of practice within the researcher's actual school.

The time frame for the study was eight weeks from November 2020 to January 2021 in the Chinese I classroom. All the pre-interviews and pre-surveys were completed during week one. In the second through seventh weeks, the researcher gathered data through field notes and artifacts of students' work samples. The data-gathering process occurred within the framework of the regular one-hour block period from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. Three observations were conducted each week. The final week of the study, week eight, formal post-interviews were conducted, surveys were completed, and data of students' classwork grades were extracted from the PowerSchool.

The time frame of the study changed slightly due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the following aspects. First, in the preliminary research plan, data collection was scheduled in the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year from August to November. After a discussion with the teacher-participant in August 2020, the researcher decided to collect data in the second quarter from November 2020 to January 2021. The students switched

to virtual learning from March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic; then when the school re-opened in August 2020, the school chose to use the mode of synchronous learning in which students could choose either study at home or on campus for all the five weekdays, while others were engaging in learning at the same time via live stream of the classes. In a classroom, some students were sitting there and learning as the teacher was teaching them in person, but the teacher was also wearing a wireless headset connected to an iPad with some students in a Google Meet who could see the white board, as well as see and listen to the teacher via a web camera. Both groups of students could hear the teacher well, but the teacher might not see or hear the students off-campus if the students choose not to turn on their cameras or muted their microphones. This was a new learning mode for both students and teachers, which took them some time to get used to, get familiar with all the technology and schedule, find a way for both to communicate smoothly and effectively, and feel more comfortable with the new learning environment and learning mode. Hence, to increase the validity of the data and reduce the impact that the new mode might bring to the results, the time framework was postponed to the second quarter when the new mode more likely became a norm for both teachers and students.

Another impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the timeframe of the study was that the study period did not take place over a consecutive eight weeks. The whole middle school switched to 100% e-learning before winter break for one whole week, during which no data could be collected. After students came back to school from winter break, they had two weeks of class, then three of the four participants were quarantined again for a week. Consequently, the study time was actually a 10-week period with two

separated weeks' breaks in the middle. However, there was no noticeable impact on students' engagement caused by the breaks.

Participants in the Study

The participants of this study were four students and the teacher of a Chinese I class at Gold Bridge Chinese Immersion School (GBCIS). The researcher chose to use this particular class because the students' proficiency levels in the class covered the widest range so far in the school's record with a variance from Below N1 to I2.

Due to the difficulty of data collection for off-campus students, with whom the teacher-participant and researcher could not observe in person or communicate during or after class, the researcher decided to only invite on-campus students to the study. Consent letters were sent to all 11 on-campus students and their families in the Chinese I class and were returned on a voluntary basis based on their desire to participate in the research study. Seven students returned the participation form. One of the seven original students withdrew and transferred to another school in the second week of the study, and the other two students switched to off-campus learning before winter break due to the pandemic. In the end, the following four students were included in the study: Mary, Bob, Jerry, and Emily. Although only four student participants were in the study, their struggles with engagement were typical, while the demographics of the class also were reflected in the sample. This allows the study to be meaningful, although a larger sample would have been better. A profile of each participant is provided below. Table 3.1 shows the AAPPL scores that each of them received in 2020 and some demographic information of the four participants.

- **Emily** was an African American female. She learned Chinese for one year in sixth grade. Emily was quiet in class, rarely asking questions aloud during class discussions. She liked to express her opinion by typing it in a Google doc instead of saying it aloud. Emily struggled with memorizing Chinese characters, which is pivotal for reading in Chinese.
- **Jerry** was an African American male. He started to learn Chinese when he was in the fourth grade. Jerry liked to read in Chinese. His favorite part of Chinese class was to do independent reading assignments in iChinesereader. He actively listened during class discussions but had difficulties with speaking.
- **Bob** was a mixed-race male. He started to learn Chinese when he was in second grade. The AAPPL score indicated that Bob needed to work on his listening. According to teachers' observations, Bob actually could understand proficiently in daily conversation with teachers and responses per teachers' directions in Chinese. However, he had difficulty in gathering the detailed information from oral communication.
- **Mary** was a White female. She began learning Chinese when she was in kindergarten. Mary had the longest experience with learning among the four student participants. Compared with her peers, who also started to learn Chinese in kindergarten and had advanced to Chinese 2 or 3, Mary expressed to me in her pre-interview that she felt frustrated in her Chinese learning even though her score was higher than other classmates in Chinese I class. She feels her Chinese learning was at a standstill and could not go higher if no solution was found. She

refused to do assignments and seldom participated in class discussion with the other students who had less experience learning the language than she did.

Table 3.1 *The Participants' AAPPL Scores in 2020 and Demographics*

Student	Speaking	Writing	Listening	Reading	Race	Gender	Year of Learning Chinese	Average Score
Emily	1	3	2	0	African American	Female	1	1.5
Jerry	1	3	2	4	African American	Male	3	2.5
Bob	3	3	1	4	Mixed	Male	5	2.75
Mary	2	3	3	3	White	Female	7	2.75

Another participant in the study was the Chinese teacher of the class, Ms. Chen. Ms. Chen was a Chinese native speaker with a teaching license for Chinese K-12, and had taught the Chinese I class for three years. Ms. Chen has a master degree in Teaching Chinese as Foreign Language, and is always willing to learn new things. Ms. Chen was one of the researcher's mentees and worked closely with her. The researcher provided support for her on a daily basis by meeting with her once a week to discuss about instructional strategies, sharing learning resources, discussing lesson plans with her each month, and disciplining misbehaved students, among other things.

Research Methods

To examine the problem of practice in this research, the study conducted a mixed-methods approach at GBCIS, which allowed different data to "complement each other by highlighting different aspects of the same questions" (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 46). The data overview can be found in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 *Data Overview and Their Relationship with the Research Question*

Data	Data Type	Collected in which week (s)	Research Question		
			Participation in class activities	Classwork completion	Student's feelings and perception of Chinese classes
Teacher's pre-interview	Qualitative	1	√		
Students' pre-interview	Qualitative	1	√		√
Students' pre-survey	Quantitative	1	√	√	√
Teacher's field notes	Qualitative	2-7	√		
Researcher's field notes	Qualitative	2-7	√		
Students' work samples	Qualitative	2-7	√	√	
Teacher's post-interview	Qualitative	8	√		
Students' post-interview	Qualitative	8	√		√
Students' post-survey	Quantitative	8	√	√	√
Students' grades for classwork in 2019-2020 school year	Quantitative	1		√	

Qualitative Data

Three different qualitative data were collected to gain information from teachers and students, which included (a) pre- and post-interviews with the teachers and students (see Appendix E and F), (b) the teachers' and researcher's field notes (see Appendix G), and (c) students' work samples. Schools are complex, socially constructed institutions. Students' educational experiences can be influenced by the uniqueness of the context, and each is perceived differently by the individual (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Everyone in the school system has a different perspective regarding the school experience. To better know

the specific context of the problem of practice in this research and make meaningful changes and improvements accordingly, it is important to understand how "the teachers and students make sense of their educational experience. The knowledge and insight serve as a base for bringing about needed change" (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 41).

Interviews

One way to better know the participants' perceptions on their Chinese learning or instruction is to "explore informants' experiences and interpretations… [and] uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds" (Hatch, 2002, p. 91). Each participant was interviewed at the beginning of the study and at the end of the study (see Appendix B and C). The goal for the teacher's interview at the beginning of the study was to learn the biggest challenge that she encountered when she tried to address the students' differences in Chinese proficiency level, as well as what measurements she used most effectively when she taught Chinese I class before. The questions in the students' interview at the beginning of the study were about their feelings and/or perceptions of Chinese class based on their previous learning experience. The main purpose for these interviews was to better know the problem of practice and help the researcher adjust the action plan. The topics for the interviews at the end of the study were about the effectiveness of BL in a foreign language classroom and its impact on student engagement in this study. These interviews were used to obtain an insider perspective of the issues in question. The interactions between the participants and the researcher through the interviews also helped establish the relationship and promote the desire to understand (Fontana & Frey, 2005). All the interviews were semi-structured and allowed for follow-up questions. This interview approach allowed the interviewees to

engage in a more natural conversation and provide deeper insight (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Observation Field Notes

The researcher also collected qualitative data of the field notes for the student observations conducted by the teacher-participant, Ms. Chen, and me as the researcher in the study. Observations of the students allowed me to have a better understanding of the contexts of the problem of practice and "see things that would be less likely to come to the surface using interviewing or other data collection techniques" (Hatch, 2002, p. 73). The FSBLM was implemented by the teacher two days a week in the Chinese I class during the study period. The teacher-participant, Ms. Chen, observed the students during two class periods each week, one class with BL and the other one without BL. The researcher observed the students once each week and alternated between the class with BL and the one with no BL. The student observations were focused on how engaged the students are in classes. A template of observation field notes was used for data collection (see Appendix G). The goal of the observations was to capture naturally occurring activities. The researcher was aware that her presence in the classroom itself made the context unnatural to some degree and influenced the way that the students and teachers behaved (Hatch, 2002; Labov, 1972). To minimize the impact on the setting, the researcher tried to be a nonparticipant in the study.

Student Work Samples

The third type of qualitative data collected in this study were student work samples. Student work samples helped add depth to the study by offering a lens for examining the teaching (Mettetal, 2002). Work samples can be used as criterion measures

to validate learning outcomes (Callinan & Robertson, 2000); hence, these can help improve the validity of this study.

Quantitative Data

When employing the quantitative research, a more neutral, objective, and dispassionate position was possible, which helped prevent personal biases from influencing the research process and ensured scientifically accurate findings (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 44). To achieve an objective educational outcome that was independent of participants' feelings, perceptions, and beliefs, we could better discover and measure the effectiveness of the proposed BL model, and therefore enhance the quality of the teaching and learning to improve the academic achievements of all students (Efron & Ravid, 2013). In this study, student survey and classwork grade were collected.

Student Survey

One form of quantitative data, which were collected and analyzed, were from the students' surveys (see Appendix H). Two student surveys were conducted in this study. The first student survey was conducted in the first week of the study period. Its purpose was to know the students' feeling and perceptions on their Chinese class before the action plan was implemented. The questions in the survey were about students' perceptions of the instruction model and their self-examination of student engagement. In the survey, the students were asked to rate each question from 1 (least likely) to 5 (most likely). The second student survey was conducted in the end of the study period. The questions were the same as the one in the beginning of the school year. The data from the two surveys were used to compare and examine how the FSBLM impacts on student engagement in the Chinese I classroom. The reason for choosing surveys to collect data from students

was that a survey has the following advantages: “easy to acquire information from many people for a short time, informants can fill questionnaires at their convenient time, easy analysis of data from close questions, greater anonymity and privacy to informants, and no interview bias because the informant responds to the question on paper alone” (Mligo, 2016, p. 90).

Classwork Grades

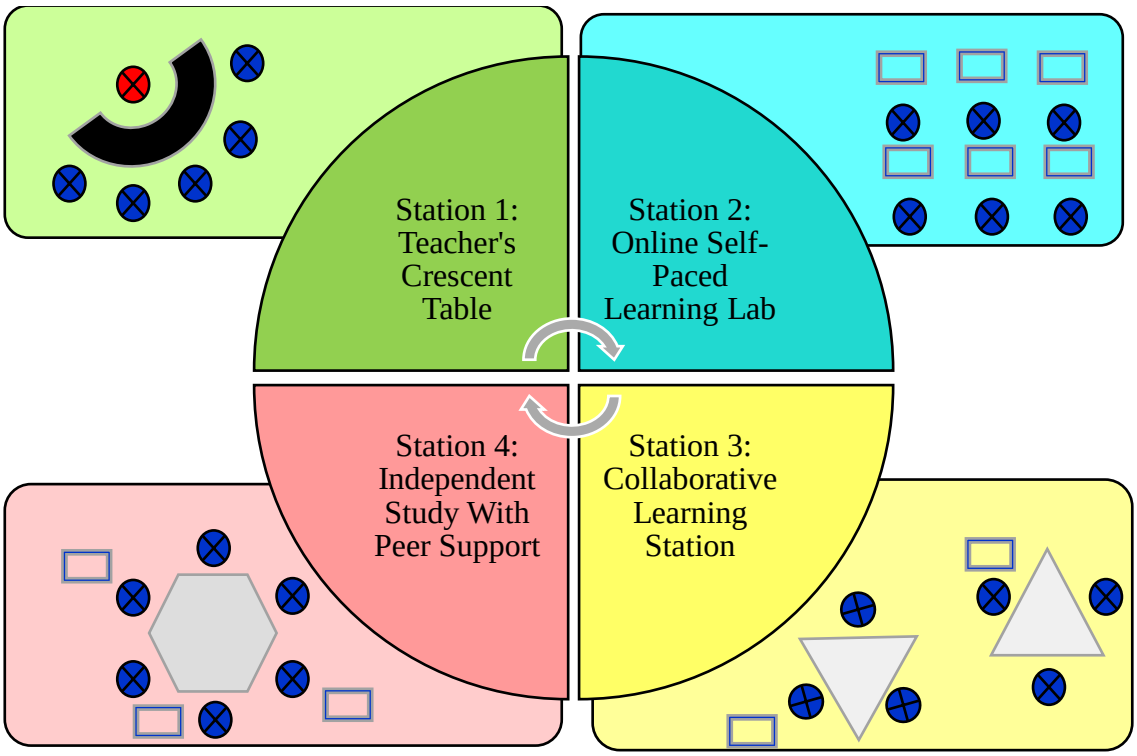
The other form of quantitative data in this study was the students’ classwork grades. By comparing the student participants’ classwork grades in the 2019-2020 school year and that in the study period, the researcher could find out how the FSBLM impacted on the student engagement in the aspect of classwork completion and students’ effort in Chinese learning. The grades were all rated based on completion. The full mark for each unit of classwork was five points.

FSBLM

Using elements of BL along with elements of differentiated instruction, I designed the FSBLM and teachers implemented it in all the Chinese classes. The Figure 3.3 shows how each station in the FSBLM worked.

In each FSBLM session, the teacher delivered 3-5 minutes of instruction for the procedural direction of BL on that day so that the students could have a general idea about what to do after they went to each station. Then the teacher divided the students into four small groups according to where the students were regarding the learning objectives for each week. Each group went to a different station during the BL time based on their needs. The students rotated to a different station after they complete the

task in their current station. This gave the students opportunities to work in all the four stations if needed and engage students with diversified activities.



Teacher	Student	Chromebook	Three-sided Table	Six-sided Table

Figure 3.3 *Four-Station Blended Learning Model (FSBLM)*

The first station was called the Teacher's Crescent Table, in which the teacher provided face-to-face instruction to a small group of students. The main activities in this station included teaching new content, reteaching previous content, checking students' learning pace by discussion with the students, and answering students' questions regarding knowledge content. In this study, the face-to-face instruction was delivered both in-person and online via Google Meet at the same time.

The second station was called Online Self-paced Learning Lab. The station utilized the Google Classroom as a platform, through which various online self-paced learning programs were linked and assigned to the students, including but not limited to iChinesereader, an online Chinese reading program with an e-library of Chinese books; Quizlet, an online vocabulary learning program; Formative, an app that allows teachers to embed listening and speaking learning resources and assignment in advance; and Google Form, in which students can do quizzes easily.

These programs all included some teaching functions, such as allowing teachers to put explanations of the questions in advance or teaching content with some interactive activities online and providing feedback for students automatically after the activities according to each student's performance in these activities. If students encountered some problems with the content when participating in these activities, they could make use of these teaching functions when the teacher was working with other students. The students could also leave private comments under each assignment in Google Classroom if they had any questions for the teachers. The teacher could receive a comment from students simultaneously when the comment is posted, thus the teacher can address it accordingly. This Online Self-Paced Learning Lab also provided the same support that FSBLM did for the students when they worked at home.

The third station was named the Collaborative Learning Station. Students in this station worked collaboratively. The tasks in the station were often either a group project, such as creating a poster, or to practice a Chinese drama with different roles. Another frequently used task in the Collaborative Learning Station was to practice reading aloud or speaking with one or two partners. The students could use Chromebook as a resource

for their project or send message to the teachers if they have question. In this study, the station sometimes included only students learning at school and sometimes included students both learning at school and at home, depending on the activities for that day.

The fourth station was called Independent Study with Peer Support. Students in this station sat together but did their own independent study. The tasks in this station included assigned readings or writing activities, self-paced projects, or sometimes just as simple as copying characters or text in their workbook. When the students encountered any questions in their study, they could seek help from their peers first before they reached out to the teacher via in-person communication, email, or Google Classroom. In this study, only the students learning at school had access to peers during independent study time because the students learning at home logged off the Google Meet if it was their independent study time, according to the school's synchronous learning model during the pandemic of COVID-19 to reduce students' working hours in front of the screen.

Procedure

The intervention FSBLM was implemented during eight weeks in the 2020 Fall semester at the middle school Chinese I classes in GBCIS. The data were collected from November 16, 2020, to December 12, 2020, and then from January 4 2021, to January 29, 2021. The three-week break in the data collection was because of the winter break from December 19, 2020, to January 3, 2021, and the week when the whole class was quarantined at home from December 14 to December 18, 2020, due to a positive COVID-19 case found in the class. Each weekly class session was five hours. During this time, two hours consisted of the implementation of the FSBLM. The teacher completed two

field notes each two weeks while observing one class session with FSBLM implemented, and one class session without FSBLM implemented. The researcher completed two field notes every week while observing one class session with FSBLM implemented, and the other class session without FSBLM implemented. The procedure for the eight weeks is outlined in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 *Research Procedure*

Week	Teaching Content	Description
1	Chinese Pinyin system, typing rules, resource introduction, and class procedures	1. Teacher participant completed the Pre-Interview (see Appendix E) 2. Student participant completed the Pre-Interview (see Appendix F) 3. Student participant completed the Pre-Survey (see Appendix H) 4. Researcher collected 2019-2020 school year's classwork grades of the student participants from the PowerSchool.
2	Self-introduction (1): Basic information and family introducing	1. Teacher participant implemented FSBLM on Tuesday and Wednesday. 2. Researcher participant observed students on Tuesday and Thursday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 3. Teacher observed students on Monday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 4. Researcher collected work samples: one classwork from each student participant.
3	Self-introduction (2): Hobbies	1. Teacher participant implemented FSBLM on Tuesday and Wednesday. 2. Researcher participant observed students on Friday and Wednesday and took field notes (see Appendix G)

		3. Teacher observed students on Tuesday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 4. Researcher collected work samples: one classwork from each student participant.
4	Self-introduction (3): Travel experience	1. Teacher participant implemented FSBLM on Tuesday and Wednesday. 2. Researcher participant observed students on Tuesday and Thursday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 3. Teacher observed students on Friday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 4. Researcher collected work samples: one classwork from each student participant.
5	Self-introduction (4): Future career	1. Teacher participant implemented FSBLM on Tuesday and Wednesday. 2. Researcher participant observed students on Monday and Wednesday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 3. Teacher observed students on Wednesday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 4. Researcher collected work samples: one classwork from each student participant.
6	School (1): Mandatory and elective course	1. Teacher participant implemented FSBLM on Tuesday and Wednesday. 2. Researcher participant observed students on Monday and Wednesday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 3. Teacher observed students on Thursday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 4. Researcher collected work samples: one classwork from each student participant.

7	School (2): School clubs and extracurricular activities	1. Teacher participant implemented FSBLM on Tuesday and Wednesday. 2. Teacher participant observed students on Tuesday and Friday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 3. Research observed students on Wednesday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 4. Research collected work samples: one classwork from each student participant.
8	School (3): How to learn Chinese	1. Teacher participant completed the Post-Interview (see Appendix E) 2. Student participant completed the Post-Interview (see Appendix F) 3. Student participant completed the Post-Survey (see Appendix H) 4. Researcher collected classwork grades of the student participants from the PowerSchool.

Data Analysis

The data in this study included both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data were collected from the interviews, observational field notes, and work samples. The quantitative data were collected from student surveys and students' classwork grades in PowerSchool for the 2019-2020 school year and the eight-week period of this research.

"Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning." (Hatch, 2002, p. 148) To shape the direction of future data collection better (Hatch, 2002) and ensure the validity of the results, the researcher began analyzing the data during collection, which was done using an inductive process.

Typological analysis (Hatch, 2002; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) was used on the qualitative data collected from interviews and observations. Hatch's proposed steps in typological analysis were adopted, which included the following:

> (1) identifying typologies to be analyzed, (2) reading the data and marking entries related to the typologies, (3) reading entries by typology and recording the main ideas in entries on a summary sheet, (4) looking for patterns, relationships, themes within typologies, (5) reading data, coding entries according to patterns identified and keeping a record of what entries go with which elements of your patterns, (6) deciding if the patterns are supported by the data, and searching the data for nonexample of the patterns, (7) looking for relationships among the pattern identified, (8) writing the patterns as one-sentence generalizations, and (9) selecting data excerpts that support the generalizations. (Hatch, 2002, p. 153)

The researcher organized, coded, and arranged the qualitative data, including the observational field notes. Coding the data involved searching for repeating terms or phrases used by the participants. Recurring terminology were separated by themes or categories. The researcher used coding to interpret the data per participant and then as an overall analysis. Synthesized data is displayed in Chapter Four. It is here that similarities as well as contradictory data will be noted. Both similarities and contradictions were valuable in determining the answer to the research question. Similarities in data pointed to an affirmation of the FSBLM's effectiveness, while contradictory data indicated the FSBLM was not effective.

During the study, the work samples were also analyzed by looking at patterns, trends, and consistency in students' efforts and engagement. These documents were important because they were forms of data that occur naturally in the learning process.

The pre-interviews were compared with the post-interviews for each participant, with the researcher noting any changes in student perspectives about Chinese class and the teacher's feelings about the FSBLM. Then, the researcher made notes of themes, patterns, similarities, or differences that surfaced from the data, which indicated the impact of FSBLM on student engagement in the Chinese I class.

Statistical analysis was utilized for the quantitative data, including the responses to the student surveys and classwork grades extracted from the PowerSchool. Quantitative data was imported to Excel and analyzed to find out the highest, lowest, and average scores of each set of data.

With all data analyzed using appropriate descriptive, inferential, and inductive statistical analysis methods, both quantitative and qualitative data led me to answer the research question. The final step in the data analysis process was to describe the data in a narrative form. Through the action research study, it was determined how the FSBLM impacted student engagement in the middle school Chinese I class.

Plan for Reflecting with Participants on Data

With this study focusing on improving classroom instruction, it was not only fitting but crucial for me to reflect on the process and findings with the teacher participant. As a researcher and an educational administrator, it is important for the researcher to encourage teachers to be reflective practitioners as part of the action research study. The researcher reflected on data with the teacher participant, Ms. Chen,

during the study. The researcher met with Ms. Chen every week to discuss the implementation of FSBLM and our observations.

At the end of the study, the researcher met with the student participants as a group. The goal of the interaction was to challenge students to dig deeper into their Chinese learning and also gain feedback for future studies.

The researcher thoughtfully considered the ethical implications of the study. First, careful consideration was given to the safety of students and the guidelines of the school. The potential for harm to the participants was at no risk to a very low risk level. To protect the identity of the participants and setting, pseudonyms were used throughout the study. Participants and their parents/guardians were informed of all study considerations and signed a consent form prior to the initiation of the study period (see Appendix A, B, and C). Participation in this research was conducted on a voluntary basis. There were also no course grade enhancements or reductions due to participation for students and no teaching evaluation relation for teachers. Consent letters were given to all students in the Chinese I class and were returned within a week's time.

Meanwhile, the researcher worked to ensure students were not singled out or embarrassed in any way, which was an attainable goal as all students were participating in the blended learning strategy at the same time as part of regular class instructional time. The student participants did not know who else was selected to participate in the study either until the group meeting at the end of the study.

I contacted the school about any guidelines or review process policies that may need to be followed during the research project. The principal gave approval for the research study to be conducted (Appendix D).

Plan for Devising an Action Plan

This action research study was conducted by a school administrator with the goal of improving instruction and learning in Chinese classes. The action plan of this study was based on the results of this study and implications of the impact of FSBLM on student engagement in Chinese I class. After the follow-up meeting with participants, the researcher plans to prepare a PowerPoint presentation with additional handouts for the teachers and the principal within GBCIS for the Fall 2021 semester during the teachers' annual orientation week. The presentation will outline the purpose of the study, its process, and the findings, as well as the information received from the participants during the follow-up meeting. The handouts for faculty members will include the FSBLM graphic with narratives of its function and implementing methods. The purpose of this step is to encourage teacher-educators to continue reflective practices and model such practices throughout the GBCIS. Protection of participant privacy will be maintained throughout the sharing process.

Conclusion

The purpose of this action research study was to examine the impact of FSBLM on the engagement level of four middle school students in a Chinese I class in a public charter school in a southeastern state. The BL model action research study was perceived as a means of improving student engagement that was appropriate for middle school Chinese classes who were diversified regarding students' language proficiency level. The researcher hoped to see a positive change in the Chinese classes regarding students' interest and confidence in learning Chinese. As a school administrator, the researcher should take every opportunity to employ action research strategies to assist teachers in

any subject area, especially those teachers who struggle with differentiated instruction. A more effective differentiation can impact students by providing education according to their needs. Future action research cyclical studies should be conducted, which could expand the knowledge of how to support teachers, who tend to struggle with meeting needs from all the students, and students, who all deserve a better education.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDING FROM THE DATA ANALYSIS

This study examined the blended learning model referred to as the Four Station Blended Learning Model (FSBLM) and its impact on student engagement with four student-participants in a seventh-grade Chinese I class. The identified problem of practice for the study was that students in the Chinese I class appeared not to be engaged because their different Chinese proficiency levels impacted students' confidence level to engage. The study took place during regular class time to observe student-participants in an authentic classroom environment. Through a polyangular examination of multiple sources of data, the researcher was able to provide a rich description of student-participants' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about their Chinese classes.

During the 8-week period of data collection from November 16, 2020, through January 29, 2021, the teacher-participant and researcher recorded field notes three times per week during class sessions from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. in the second through seventh week. Student-participants took the pre- and post-surveys in the first and last week, and both teacher- and student-participants' interviews were administered at the beginning of the data collection period and repeated at the end to detect any possible changes in perceptions as reported by members of the class. Lastly, student-participants' classwork grades and samples were collected throughout the entire data collection period.

Research Question

What impact will a blended learning model of differentiated instruction have on the engagement level of four middle school students in a Chinese I class?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of FSBLM on the engagement levels of four middle school students in a Chinese I class.

Findings of the Study

In reporting the findings of this study, the researcher first examined each data source. Once the individual data sources were discussed and with relevant commentary from the field notes, the researcher then presented the overarching patterns and themes that emerged when the data sets were conflated.

The researcher examined each instrument for student-participants' change in their engagement level in the Chinese I class. To reiterate, the engagement level in this study was measured using four parameters: (a) student-participants' surveys and interviews in which they self-reported individual improvements on engagement; (b) researcher's and teacher-participant's observations of improved student-participant engagement in class; (c) teacher-participant interviews on class performance and engagement; and (d) student-participants' classwork grades and samples. By first examining each source of data, the researcher extrapolated student-participants' perceptions about the Chinese I class and their engagement and identified common responses among the student-participants. Subsequently, the researcher compared these data to observations, field notes, classwork samples, and grades to determine if the FCBLM was effective in Chinese class and if

there was a perceived increase in the student-participants' engagement levels when FCBLM was implemented.

Overall Results of Student Surveys

Results of the student surveys (see Appendix H) indicated that three of the four student-participants perceived improvements in their perceptions of the Chinese class and self-reported engagement levels from the beginning of the study to the end (see Figure 4.1). Results from the fourth student-participant showed a decrease. The average score also showed an increase from 67.25 to 71. The objective of the study was to identity the potential changes in student perceptions about their Chinese class and the activities. To that end, data from the student surveys indicated that the implementation of FSBLM brought some positive changes in three out of the four student participants' perceptions of Chinese class.

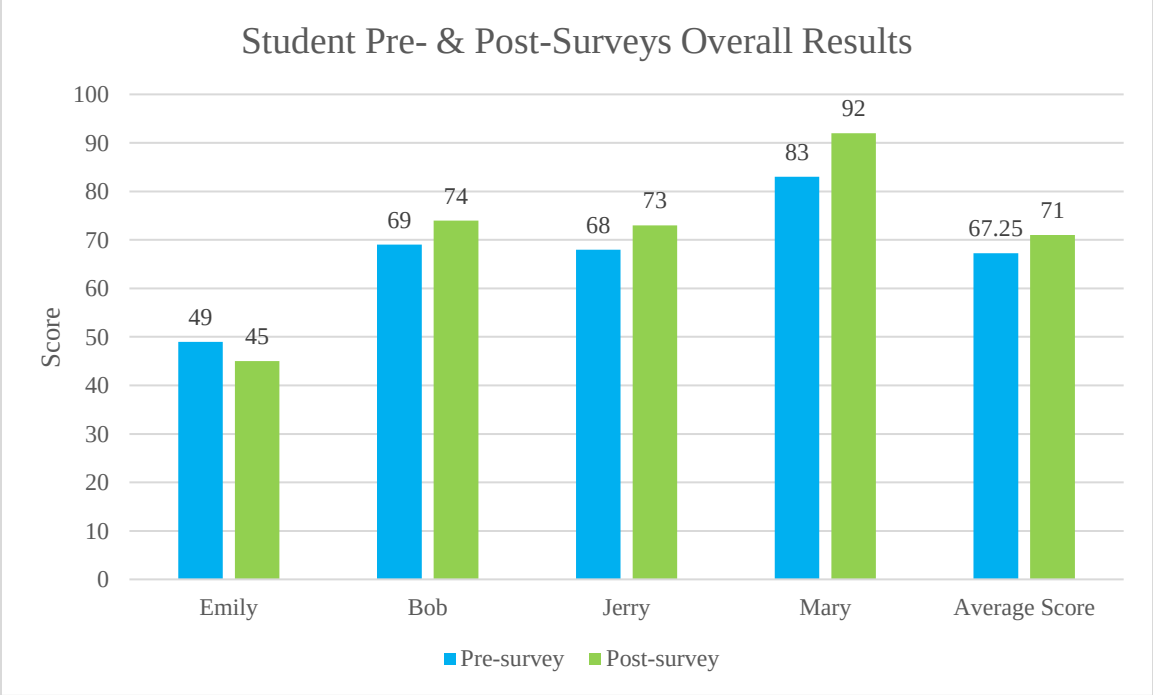


Figure 4.1 *Overall Results of Student Pre- & Post-Surveys*

Analysis of Subsets of Student Surveys

To provide a more detailed analysis of the data, the researcher individually examined three subsets of the survey: (a) students' perceptions, feelings, and confidence for Chinese class, (b) students' self-reported engagement levels, and (c) students' feelings of the class activities.

Subset A

The subset A of the survey about students' perceptions, feelings, and confidence for Chinese class included seven questions:

- Question #1: I like my Chinese class;
- Question #8: My teacher knows what I need to learn and how I can learn well in Chinese;
- Question #13: I am eager to learn Chinese;
- Question #14: In order to learn Chinese well, I will put as much effort as I need;
- Question #18: The teacher took care of every student in class so everyone could learn;
- Questions #19: The teacher was available to help me when I needed her; and
- Question #20: I am confident that I can learn Chinese well, as long as I work hard.

The results of subset A (see Figure 4.2) showed that three student participants perceived a positive change in their perceptions, feelings, and confidence in Chinese class. The average score increased 2.75 points from pre-survey to post-survey. One student participant's score remained the same. Mary, who rated five in six questions and

four in the seventh question in subset A, remarked that "the teacher knows what we need, and also gives us opportunity to work with each other, so now the class is much more interesting." This may indicate that student-participants were more engaged when they felt the teacher cared about their individual needs, and they could learn via collaboration with peers. Collaborative learning has numerous benefits including but not limited to helping "develop a social support system for learners," "establish a positive atmosphere for modelling and practicing cooperation," and "develop positive attitudes towards teachers" (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012, p. 487)

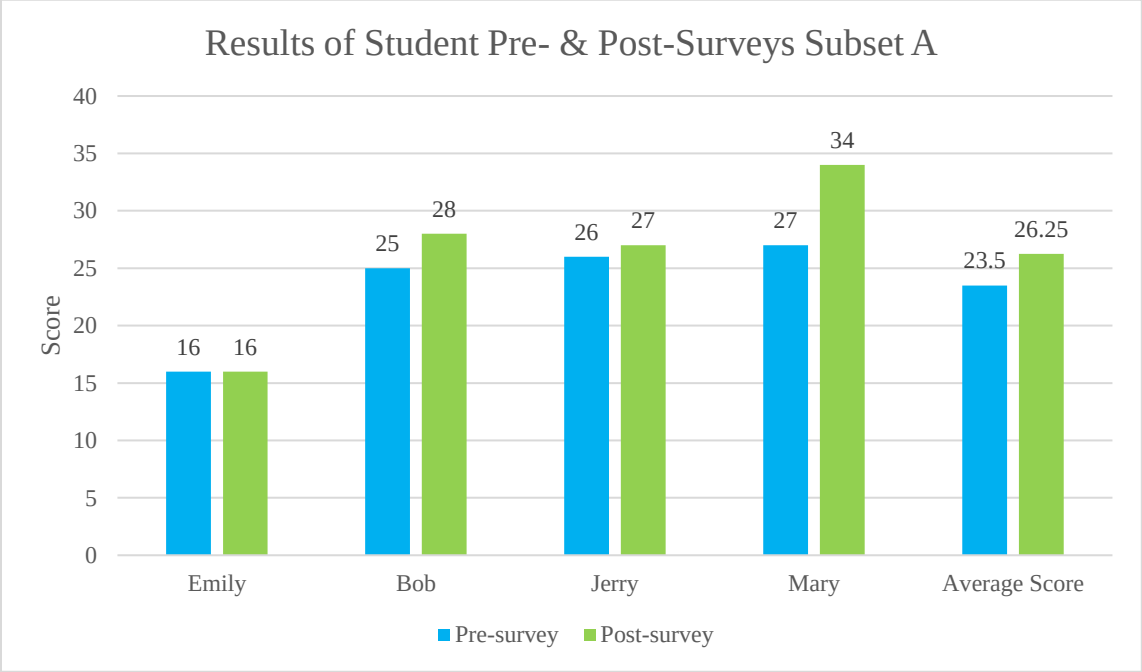


Figure 4.2 *Results of Student Pre- & Post-Surveys Subset A*

Subset B

The subset B of the survey about students' self-reported engagement levels included five questions:

- Question #2: I am very focused in Chinese class;

- Question #5: I ask help from the teacher when I have questions in Chinese class;
- Question #6: I seek help from classmates when I encounter questions in Chinese class;
- Question #7: I just let it go and forget about it if I encounter questions in Chinese class; and
- Question #12: I participated a lot in the class discussion.

The results of the subset B (see Figure 4.3) showed that three student-participants thought they were more engaged in class, and one student participant had a decrease in her self-reported engagement level. The average score increased 1.25 from pre-survey to post-survey. A notable decrease in Question #5 (3.25 in pre-survey to 2.75 in post-survey) and increase in Question #6 (2.25 in pre-survey to 3 in post-survey) were shown in this subset, which indicated that student-participants more often sought help from peers than before. Jerry, who had the highest increase in subset B, commented the following:

> Each time when I encounter a question, I'll try to figure it out by myself; and if I can't figure it out by myself, then I will ask the classmates, because I feel more comfortable and less stressed when I talked to them. I don't mean the teacher makes me uncomfortable, but I prefer to go to the teacher with the question that nobody in the class can figure out, which saves the teacher's time too. You know that we have so many students in the class and teacher does not have that much time.

These results indicated a positive impact that FSBLM might bring to the class regarding promoting collaborative learning, hence "reduc[ing] anxiety" and "developing a learning community," which are benefits of collaborative learning (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012, p. 487).

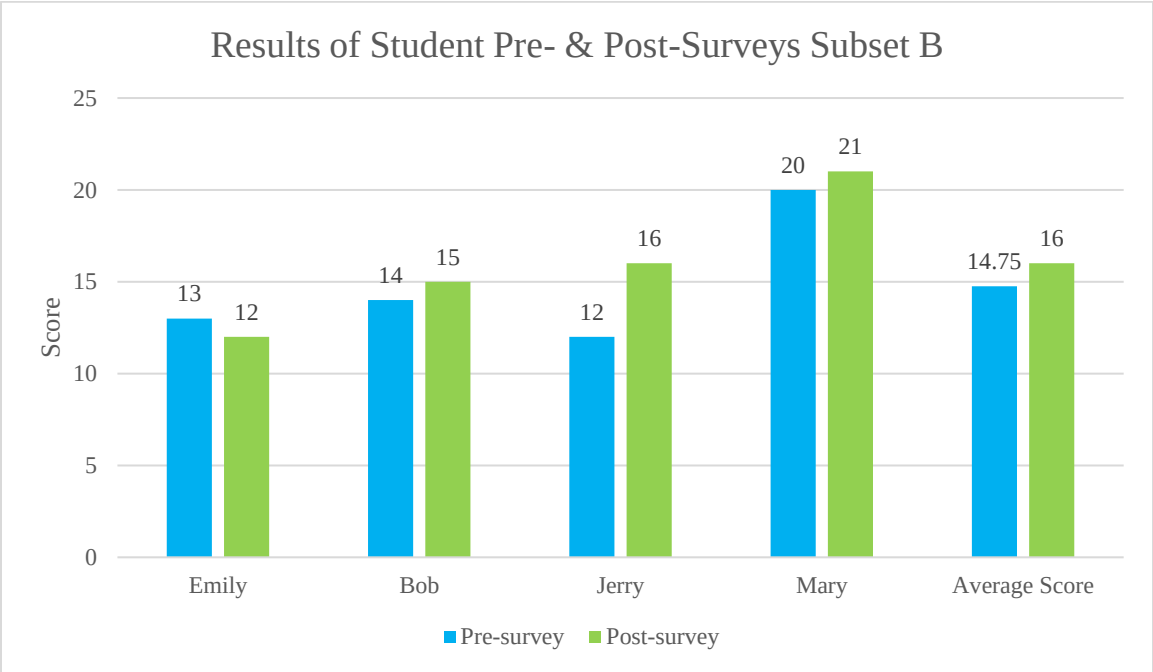


Figure 4.3 *Results of Student Pre- & Post-Surveys Subset B*

Subset C

The subset C of the survey about students' feelings of the class activities included seven questions:

- Question #3: I complete my classwork before class ends;
- Question #4: I like the activities in Chinese class a lot;
- Question #9: I can do something on my own Chinese proficiency level during the independent work time or small group work time;
- Question #10: The activities in Chinese class are right on my level;
- Question #11: I am challenged all the time academically in Chinese class;
- Question #15: The classwork is tailored to my interest and my needs; and

- Question #16: The class activity is fun and allows me to learn.

The results of subset C (see Figure 4.4) indicated a positive change in three student participants regarding their feelings about class activities, and one student-participant remained at the same score. The average score increased 1.25 from pre-survey to post-survey. Mary, who had the highest increase in both subset C and subset A, mentioned that "the class was kind of boring before but now it's much fun, and I can learn a lot, and I feel more challenged." This was evidence that FSBLM allows the teacher to tailor the class to meet individual student needs so that faster learners or more advanced students can be challenged, while other students are learning on their own levels. Teachers need to "find out what advanced students have mastered. Nothing's worse than twiddling thumbs over lessons already learned" (Smutny, 2011, p. 33). Mary also said,

> I also got more time in helping others now, which is good to me and to my friends too, because I feel when I help them, I also review the content for once, which strengthens my understanding and makes my mind clearer and more logical.

According to Smutny (2011), "For advanced learners, working with peers is critical" (p. 32).

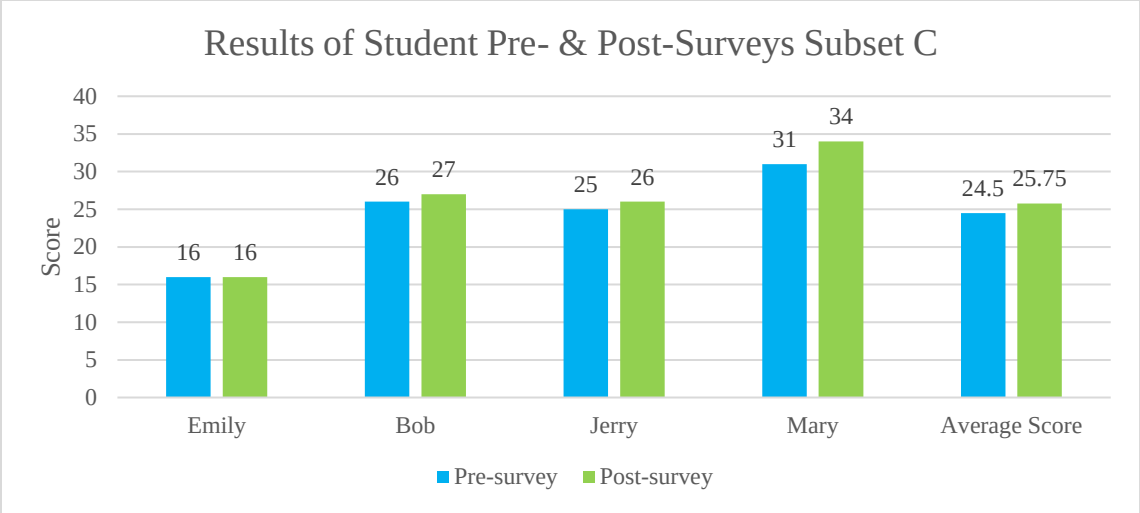


Figure 4.4 *Results of Student Pre- and Post-Surveys Subset C*

Besides the three subsets in the survey, there was also a question (Question #17) about students' perception about the online learning materials and resources. The student participants' answers to this question showed a significant decrease from 4.5 to 3. The reason for the drop-off might be that students engaged in more discussion and other collaborative work in class when the FSBLM was implemented. The collaborative learning helped satisfy students' social needs, although it reduced their learning time on the online programs, which they regarded as the most fun part of the Chinese class before.

Observation Field Notes

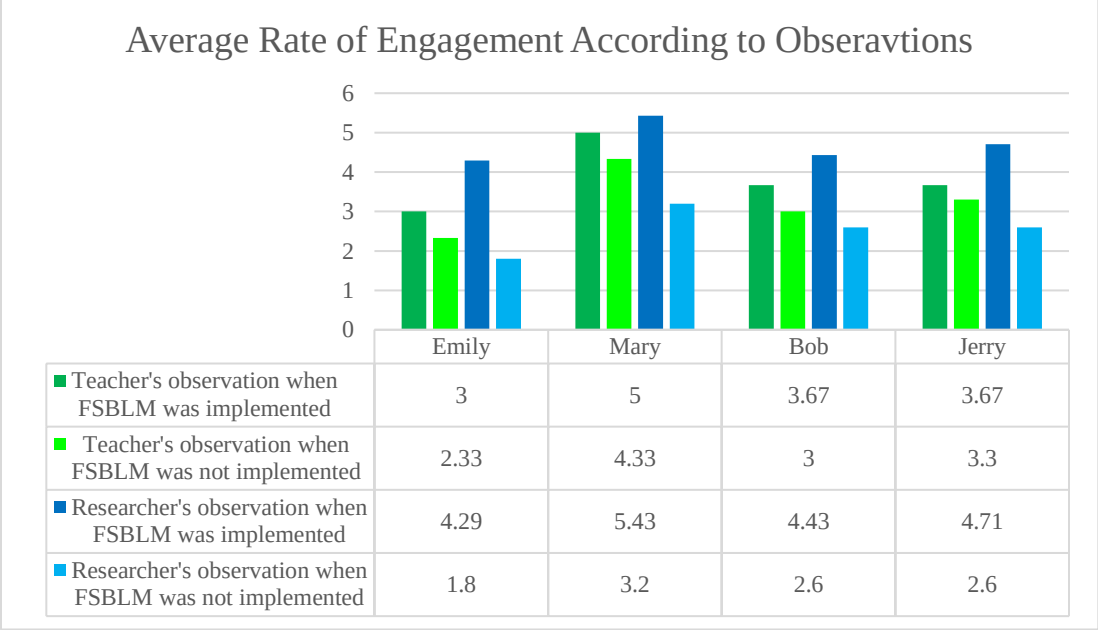
Student-participants were observed three classes each week during the six-week observation period, twice by the researcher and once by the teacher. The observation field notes recorded by both the teacher-participant and the researcher allowed the opportunity to "capture talk that occurs naturally in the classroom" (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014, p. 105) and see verbal and non-verbal behaviors and patterns of engagement in the Chinese classes. These field notes played an important role in creating a full profile of each

student-participant, providing valuable commentary to other data and helping in the evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of the proposed FSBLM.

The field notes included the following main parts: (a) general rate for engagement of each student, (b) evidence of being engaged, (c) evidence of not being engaged, and (d) observer's comments.

General Rating for Engagement of Each Student

Both the teacher-participant and the researcher gave a general rating for each student regarding student engagement. As Figure 4.5 showed, both the teacher-participant and the researcher observed that students were more engaged when FSBLM was implemented.



	Emily	Mary	Bob	Jerry
Teacher's observation when FSBLM was implemented	3	5	3.67	3.67
Teacher's observation when FSBLM was not implemented	2.33	4.33	3	3.3
Researcher's observation when FSBLM was implemented	4.29	5.43	4.43	4.71
Researcher's observation when FSBLM was not implemented	1.8	3.2	2.6	2.6

Figure 4.5 *Average Rate of Engagement According to Observations*

Evidence of Being Engaged and Evidence of Not Being Engaged

In all the nine field notes of observations for the classes when FSBLM was not implemented, both the teacher-participant and researcher wrote in the column of

Evidence of Being Engaged comments like “read aloud with teacher,” “the student raised hand to answer questions,” “answered questions when called by the teacher,” “took notes on notebook,” “looked at the teacher and listened carefully,” etc. Only once, the researcher wrote “asked questions to the teacher.”

In the column of Evidence of Not Being Engaged during the classes when FSBLM was not implemented, both the teacher-participant and researcher wrote several times, “silent,” “quiet,” “slept all classes,” “not respond for questions from teacher,” “did not do assignment until was called out by the teacher,” or “did other things (i.e., drawing on workbook, or playing a toy under desk).”

In the field notes for the classes when FSBLM was implemented, both the teacher- participant and researcher took notes that the students “talked to (or discussed with) peers actively,” “volunteered to answer questions in group time,” “asked teacher questions for two (or three) times in individual work time,” “read aloud in by herself when doing individual work,” “talked a lot when practicing oral speaking with teacher one-one-one,” “asked peer questions in group time,” or “helped peers with questions” as evidence of being engaged.

The teacher-participant and researcher also noticed some evidence of not being engaged when FSBLM was implemented, mainly in two class activities. One was in whole instruction time when the teacher led the whole class to read aloud before she sent students to stations. In the whole instruction time, the evidence of not being engaged included “did not read aloud with the teacher,” “played a ball when reading,” or “sat there day-dreaming for a while when asked to read aloud with classes.” The other evidence of not being engaged when FSBLM was implemented was mainly in individual working

time. The evidence included “slept (or did nothing) during independent time,” “very quiet not sure what he was doing,” “played a painting brush then slept during independent time,” and “played with binders when waiting for the teacher’s help (in independent time).”

Student-Participant Interviews

Individual student-participant interviews occurred at the beginning of the data collection period and were repeated at the conclusion of the period. These interviews provided an in-depth narrative of student-participants’ perceptions and attitudes about Chinese class and class activities.

Emily

In Emily’s pre-interview, Emily rated 3 in the question of “Do you like your Chinese class?” but rated 1 in the post-interview. In the pre-interview when Emily was asked, “Why you like or don’t like your Chinese class?” she said, “I don’t like Chinese class because I failed all the time, and there is too much work to do.” But in the post-interview when she was asked the same question, she responded that “I don’t like Chinese class because it is boring. I do not know other students that much. They are not in the same class with me in other subjects. Maybe they don’t like me. I seldom got help from them. They don’t like to talk to me.” In the pre-interview, Emily said that “Chinese class is extremely hard.” In the second interview, Emily responded, “It is a little hard.” Emily’s responses indicated that before the FSBLM was implemented, Emily struggled in Chinese mainly because of the content, but after FSBLM was implemented, she might also struggle with the lack of social support from peers, which hindered her from benefiting more from the collaborative learning in the FSBLM.

In the post-interview, Emily shared that she liked the part when the teacher asked her questions individually and she answered, because it was easy for her and helped her remember. Meanwhile, she also thought the class discussion was good because Mary helped her a lot, even if Mary was the only one whom she talked to during class. However, she also said that she seldom seeks help from others in both interviews because Mary was not available all the time. She said she just wrote down her question and then just let it go "because I have too many things to do in a day. Math, science, ELA are all important, so I have to take care of those subjects first." This was aligned with what I observed in the class. I noticed that Emily was quiet most of time and the only student whom she was seen to talk to was Mary, but Mary also worked with other students sometimes and was not always with Emily, hence when Mary was not with Emily, Emily sometimes either sat there doing nothing or pulled out work of other subjects.

Jerry

Jerry rated 4 in the question of "Do you like your Chinese class?" in both pre- and post-interviews. In the pre-interview when Jerry was asked why he liked or did not like Chinese class, he responded, "I feel I am favor other subjects than Chinese because Chinese is boring." But in the post-interview, he responded that "the interactive part I really like."

In the pre-interview, Jerry shared that he liked to email the teacher for his question or go to the teacher after school for his question. (Author Note: Jerry stayed in the afterschool program and the Chinese teacher was one of the supervisors of the afterschool program, so Jerry had access to the teacher easily after school). Meanwhile, in the post-interview, Jerry indicated that "when I have a question, most of the time, I asked

classmates during collaborative learning time. I like to work with classmates and now I feel I have more opportunities to ask peers questions in class. I like it a lot."

In the post-interview, Jerry mentioned five times "I like to work with classmates," and "it helps a lot" in his responses to different questions. He said,

> I think I spend less time in Chinese learning now because it is much better than before. Especially when she (the teacher) told us what to do first, then we can help others and work with teacher individually. I don't really know whether individual work with teacher helps or not. But definitely working with peers helps.

Bob

Bob rated 4 to show how he liked the Chinese class in both the pre- and post-interviews., but his responses to the reason why he liked the Chinese class were totally different in these two interviews. In the pre-interview, Bob said "I like the Chinese class because the teacher this year is much better than the teacher last year, and we learned more although it is still kind of boring. It is not hard, but not fun." However, in the post-interview, Bob responded, "Why do not like it? I can learn in the class, can talk to the classmates and discuss, and the Chinese culture is amazing, and the language is so cool!"

Bob shared that he usually asked for help from his teacher if he had any questions. In the pre-interview, he described, "I usually ask teacher in class for my question. I will see whether I can manage it on my own, if the teacher is not available." Meanwhile, in the post-interview, he said, "I ask teacher, or figure it out by myself. But recently it seems that [the teacher] is more available to help us with our questions than before. Super!"

When talking about his efforts and willingness of learning Chinese, Bob indicated in the pre-interview that "I just complete the assignments, and got 5 or 7 out of 10; I am fine with that. It is not hard, but not fun." But in the post-interview, Bob said "I spent more time and efforts than before, because the more I work, the more I can learn. I'm willing to learn more than before."

Regarding the FSBLM, Bob shared,

> I do like it. It is helpful, especially working with peers is my most favorite. The switching stations, I like the order in this way: teacher, then peers, then independent. I don't know why, I just feel this order is more effective and better, and we can learn more. Of course, it also needs to depend on the contents.

Bob also mentioned,

> I felt the whole instruction part is very important because I can learn what I need to do clearly in each station. So now I seldom sleep when the teacher is teaching. I am sorry but I did sleep a lot before because I thought it was boring. I know if I focus in whole instruction time, then when I work with my classmates, I can be a leader and helper. That's good!

Mary

Mary's rating of the Chinese class increased from 4 in the pre-interview to 5 in the post-interview. Mary felt "Chinese class was a little bit hard but I'm confident I can do it" in the pre-interview but felt "it is not hard but challenging" in the post-interview. Mary was calm in the pre-interview, but was excited in the post-interview, and repeated constantly, "This is the best, I do like it!"

Mary mentioned in the pre-interview that she did not like individual work. Her reasoning was because

> I do not have anyone to help me during individual work time, so I need to figure out the classwork only by myself, or wait for teacher when she is available, oh, she is really busy, after all we have so many students in our class and she is by herself.

However, in the post-interview, she said,

> When we broke down to individual work time, I was surrounded by classmates and each time when I or other students had question, we could ask each other. Although we need to keep social distancing, we can still talk to each other either by raising our voice a little bit, or via Google Meet on our Chromebook. I usually completed classwork three to five minutes before class ends, then I like to help others. I can also go to Google Classroom and pick up the Chinese songs to listen by myself, which is fun and helps me learn.

When Mary was asked about how much effort she put in Chinese learning, she said in the pre-interview "not a lot energy needs to be in (Chinese learning)," but "I spent more time focusing than before" in the post-interview.

Teacher-Participant Interviews

Teacher-participant interviews provided a rich source of data by asking about what the teacher-participant thought about the FSBLM and how she felt the model could be improved and made more effective for the future. The semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewee to be treated as an equal and express her personal feelings in a

method that could enhance the richness and integrity of the communication (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

As shown in Appendix E, interview questions asked of the teacher-participant were designed to explore her personal perceptions. Ms. Chen gave 5 points when asked to rate her feelings on the effectiveness of the FSBLM regarding helping engage students and explained why she gave the rating from six perspectives. Ms. Chen described it as the following:

> First, from teacher's perspective, after both me and my students got familiar with the model, the students can practice at the same time by themselves, and the pressure on teacher became much less. Second, from students' perspective, students became more willing to speak aloud, in reading-aloud, conversation, and listening practices, because now there are less students in a group so each of them can engage more, and each group has a small leader, this helps them more focus in practice. Third, the FSBLM makes it easier for the teacher to differentiate and gives the teacher more freedom in deciding small groups according to students' proficiency level. Fourth, every student has things to do in this model. Fifth, the model makes it much easier to engage the students who study at home, which helped solve a big problem that I faced in the synchronous learning model. Last but not least, the model gives students more opportunities to practice because after practicing with teachers in whole class instruction time, they can go to their classmates for collaborative learning and practice with them, no matter whether they are studying at home or at school, or how far their seats are from each other. This is important now when we have to keep social distancing in classrooms.

> Sixth, the model helps save teacher's time so that the teacher can help several students at a same time. When students are doing independent study or collaborative learning with small groups, they can send questions to the teacher through internet either via Google Classroom, online meeting room, Google Doc, or Jam Board. It makes it possible for the teacher to help with several students at a same time by typing answers to them via internet. On another hand, because students can also use internet to talk to each other or to the teacher, which requires lower voice than talking directly to each other, so it will allow more students talking at the same time while still keeps the classroom's noise level lower enough to maintain a sound and organized learning environment.

When asked how she perceived the FSBLM helping or not helping with students' classwork completion, Ms. Chen responded,

> Because most of my Chinese I class is for speaking, in this model [of FSBLM], students can practice for three times, including listening to others' speaking, speaking with classmates, and speaking in Formative platform online. This increases their speaking practice time, which was a big problem before when they only spoke with me in class.

In the post interview, Ms. Chen said,

> I can see the students' speaking skills improved a lot during the past two months because of the blended learning. This also helps with their writing, because as long as they can speak, they can type out in computer. For example, Bob seldom spoke before, but now he speaks much more than before and can also write very long and complete essay, because he practiced a lot in classes now. Another

example is Emily. She did not even try to learn and was always shut-down in Chinese classes before. But now, although she still does not turn in any work, which you can see from her grades too, but during individual time, she reads with me and has started to read with louder and louder voice. You can see she is trying to learn now. I am confident that with time goes by, after she starts to see some improvement in her Chinese because of more practice, she will become more interested in Chinese learning soon.

Classwork Grades and Work Samples

The students' classwork grades (see Table 4.1) were extracted from Powerschool. All the classwork examined in the study was graded for mastery. Two units of classwork were graded each week. One unit of classwork was assigned for the class when FSBLM was implemented; the other unit of classwork was assigned for the class when FSBLM was not implemented. The full mark for each unit of classwork was 5 points. The full mark for each week was ten points. The score of zero was used for missing assignments. The lowest score for turned-in assignments was 1.

Table 4.1 *Students' Classwork Grades During the Data Collection Period*

Student	Grades	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Total Score
Emily	With FSBLM	5	5	3	3	1	0	0	17
	Without FSBLM	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	Weekly Total	7	5	3	3	1	0	0	
Bob	With FSBLM	5	5	4	3.5	5	5	4.5	36.5
	Without FSBLM	2	0	0	0	5	5	5	22
	Weekly Total	7	5	4	3.5	10	10	9.5	

Mary	With FSBLM	5	5	5	5	4.5	5	5	39.5
	Without FSBLM	5	5	3.5	5	5	5	4.5	37.5
	Weekly Total	10	10	8.5	10	9.5	10	9.5	
Jerry	With FSBLM	0	1	3.5	2	5	5	5	26.5
	Without FSBLM	0	0	5	0	0	3	3	14
	Weekly Total	0	1	8.5	2	5	8	8	

As shown in Figure 4.6, there was no obvious trend found in students' grades over the seven weeks. Emily's classwork grades kept declining each week. Mary's classwork grades over the seven weeks were always high. Bob's classwork grades declined in the first three weeks, then went up in the next four weeks. Jerry's classwork grades went up and down in the first four weeks and went up consistently in the last three weeks.

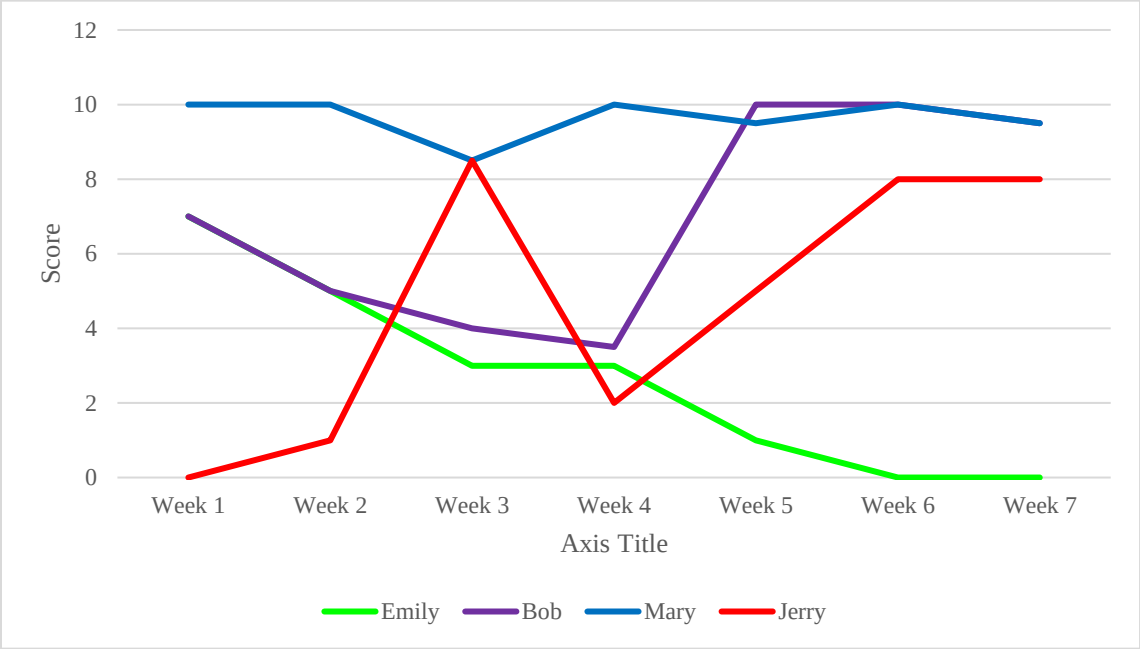


Figure 4.6 *Students' Classwork Grades Over the Seven Weeks Presented in Line*

Although no trend was found in each student's grades over the seven weeks, it was identified that the FSBLM had a significant impact on students' classwork

completion. As shown in Table 4.1, in the classes when FSBLM was not implemented, in all 28 units of classwork from all the four students, there were 13 missing assignments. While in the classes when FSBLM was implemented, in all the 28 assignments of classwork from all the four students, there were only three missing assignments. Students' grades for the classes when FSBLM was implemented were much higher than that for the classes when FSBLM was not implemented.

When examining the students' classwork samples, the researcher noticed that the students' attitude towards the classwork and Chinese learning changed gradually over the eight weeks. In the beginning of the implementation of FSBLM, if a student did not know how to answer a question, he or she just left it blank if it was a writing assignment or said nothing if it was a speaking assignment. For several times on students' worksheets, students drew pictures or just scratched when they did not write anything for the questions; however, with more classes of FSBLM implemented, even struggling students like Emily tended to at least try, which could be identified on her worksheets, on which she did write something and tried to answer the question then erased it while still leaving some trace of previous tries, even if most of the time, she did not re-write anything after she erased the first try.

In the work samples of Jerry, the higher and higher quality of his answer was notable as more FSBLM sessions happened, especially in his speaking assignments recorded on Formative. In the first two weeks' speaking assignments, Jerry either did not say anything, or only responded with a few words or phrases. But in his work sample from the last two weeks, he could use complete sentences to answer questions with a much more confident voice. This echoed what Ms. Chen shared in her post-interview

about her observations to Jerry that he became more confident in speaking in Chinese after more speaking practices in classes with classmates.

Bob's work samples in FSBLM sessions did not show significant changes over seven weeks, but Bob's work samples in non-FSBLM sessions showed a big change. In the first four weeks, Bob had a low grade of 2 or did not turn in classwork, while he got a 5 on all but one of the assignments of classwork during the last three weeks.

Mary was the student who had the highest proficiency level in the four studied students. Her work samples did not show an obvious improvement or decrease in quality. But, according to what the researcher observed and what Mary shared in her post-interview, she had more time in classes to help others because she completed classwork faster than before.

Interpretation of Results of the Study

Upon reviewing the data collected from the various instruments used, the researcher identified the following two prevalent themes: (1) student engagement via structured collaborative learning in FSBLM, (2) technology increasing teaching efficiency, and (3) student-participants affective change process, which impacted their perception and attitude towards the Chinese classes. Each of the themes offered a unique perspective in response to the research question about what impact FSBLM had on student engagement in Chinese I class. The findings of this study showed that FSBLM had a positive impact on student engagement in Chinese classes. The quantitative data, including classwork grades and Likert surveys, showed that the students were more engaged when the FSBLM was implemented in the Chinese classes. The qualitative data analysis for the field notes, work samples, and interviews, which "involved a process of

inductive analysis" (Mertler, 2014, p. 163), helped the researcher investigate and find out why the FSBLM was effective in engaging students.

Theme One: Student Engagement via Structured Collaborative Learning

When considering the data collection results as a whole, the first theme that stood out was student engagement via structured collaborative learning.

In the field notes that the teacher-participant and the researcher wrote for the classes with FSBLM, the phrases that were associated collaborative learning, such as "worked with peers," "worked in group actively," "helped others," and "asked group for help proactively" appeared 10 times out of the 12 "evidences of being engaged" of teacher's notes, and 18 times out of 24 "evidences of being engaged" of researcher's notes. In the student-participant post-interviews, all four students mentioned the interactive part that they could work with peers in small group was their favorite, which made them like the Chinese class. These all showed that when the FSBLM was implemented, although it included four stations, the key to its success was in collaboration with peers. Collaboration allows peer interaction to happen and supplies "data of considerable quality, particularly in the area of feedback" (Sato & Ballinger, 2016, p. 3)

When the teacher delivered whole class instruction, all the students were receiving the same information, which either made them bored because the content was too easy or made them feel frustrated because the content was too hard. However, when students worked with peers in small groups, each of them was assigned activities with content at their own level, then the diversity of their proficiency levels in all four skills became an opportunity for them to seek help from each other or offer help to others. In

this kind of collaborative exercise, every student could help others because each of them had strengths in some area.

The station of individual work with peer support served the purpose effectively. Ms. Chen said in post-interview,

> [The station of individual work with peer support] was the best part, because it reduced a lot of pressure from me. I hate to see students struggling but I only have myself. Now they can seek help from each other, they know how to figure out the answers. If you see their work samples, you will see they are doing great and some of the work you can see that they figured out by working with peers. So, everyone is studying even if I only worked with a few or sometimes just one student each time.

For example, Mary had the highest levels of all four students, but she wanted to be challenged, which got boring often in whole class instruction. But in FSBLM, she was assigned alternative work on a higher level than others, which made her feel challenged and much more motivated. In FSBLM, she also got a lot of chances to help others, which made her feel proud. When helping others, she also practiced speaking one additional time. As she said in the post interview, "I like to help others because I feel I am needed, and they like me. To help other students also gives me one more opportunity to practice and helps a lot with my speaking." As indicated by Wang and Eccles (2013), peers are an important part of a student's self-identity and a strong connection to a peer group usually relates to higher levels of engagement.

Although the collaborative part appeared to be the students' favorite part, both teacher and student-participants realized that all the four stations were important to

forming an effective class, especially the teacher's role. "The teacher is an essential part of the effective peer interaction" (Sato & Ballinger, 2016, p. 20). In the teacher's post-interview, Ms. Chen shared with me how her understanding of the FSBLM changed and how she adjusted her classes according to her new understanding. Ms. Chen shared the following:

> The crescent station works best when I worked with them one-on-one instead of one-on-four, because it has to be one-on-one for me to answer their individual question or re-teach them. But when I sat with four or three of them beside the crescent table, even though I only talked to one student each time, the others were listening very carefully and very focused because they were thinking the other student's question might also be their question.

When talking about the small group part, Ms. Chen said,

> It is important for me to decide who goes to which station first, and who partners with whom. I need to make this decision according to students' proficiency, learning objective for that day, their personality, and also their relationship with other students, according to my observation. So, the knowledge of student is important for the teacher in FSBLM.

The students also noticed that all the four stations were designed to help their learning from different perspectives with different functions. Emily shared in post-interview that "I like the teacher could work with me individually because I could remember better when she only talked to me." Bob was shy and seldom talked in classes or raised his hand for questions before. But he talked a lot when the teacher worked with

him individually. He said in post-interview that "I have to talk if the teacher asks me question individually, because that is how respect should be used in front of teacher."

Mary shared in post-interview with me her new finding, as follows:

> If I work individually by myself first, then work with the peers, then work with the teacher, I feel the class can be much more effective for me. I do not know why, but that is just how I feel be the best routine for me to learn.

Jerry only liked to work with Mary, and not the teacher or any other students. However, she also liked to work by herself after working with Mary. She said in the post-interview,

> I need to work with Mary first because she can help me with the questions that I did not get from the teachers, then I like to work by myself for a while so that I can think quietly and make my knowledge kingdom in my brain organized.

From both the class observations and the interviews, the researcher noticed that most of the students referred to collaboration more for fun and for questions, the Teacher's Crescent Table station for learning new content or making up previous content, and the individual work time as "self-reflection time," which was the phrase that Mary and Jerry used a lot in classes. Nouwen (1996) stated, "Reflection is essential for growth, development, and change" (p. 27). Hence, collaborative learning can be more beneficial if it is structured and implemented with all the other stations in the FSBLM.

Theme Two: Technology increased teaching efficiency

In this study, technology was blended with traditional face-to-face instruction in Chinese classes and was observed to help increase teaching efficiency and improve student engagement in classes. When the FSBLM was implemented, except for the

students who were working with the teacher in Station 1, all the other students were using Chromebook either for online learning module, or as a communication tool with peers or teachers. The usage of technology made it possible for all the students in the class engage in the learning activities on their own level, even if when the teacher was helping other students. All the four student participants mentioned in their post-interview that they felt busier in Chinese class now or they always had something to do.

Theme Two: Student-Participants Affective Change Process

The findings of the data sets also suggested an affective change process in student-participants with the FSBLM's implementation gradually. As previously stated in the discussion of findings from the surveys, students had a more positive perception toward Chinese learning and Chinese class after the FSBLM implementation. Students' attitudes toward Chinese classes and Chinese learning also changed a lot at the end of the study compared with that in the beginning of the study. However, after examining the qualitative data, the theme emerged that the affective change did not happen all in one day but arose gradually when more FSBLM sessions were delivered so that students were more familiar with the model and started to enjoy and benefit from FSBLM. As one of the three main engagement factors, students' positive or negative experience of learning, which is called emotional-affective engagement, can change as students move into a new classroom environment and different learning tasks (Wang et al., 2019). Therefore, with more experience with FSBLM, students' affective change will also happen gradually, and hence impact student engagement.

At the beginning of the data collection period, student-participants were not familiar with the model or the collaborative learning that was embedded in it. The

students shared in their pre-interview that they felt Chinese classes were boring and they had never had collaborative learning before in Chinese classes, not even a whole class discussion. Hence, in the eight "evidences of being engaged" that the researcher wrote in Week One, none of them had an obvious association with collaborative learning or the FSBLM itself. Most of the eight notes were for general learning attitudes or study habits, such as "taking notes carefully," "looking at the teacher carefully," or "cheered for other students' success in answering teacher' question correctly." These observations of being engaged were either because of students' self-motivation or self-discipline of "knowing what they should do" or "knowing she was observed, so became very focused in learning," as recorded by the researcher in the one of notes.

It was also notable that it took students several classes to figure out what to do and how to collaborate after they first encountered FSBLM, in which collaborative learning was embedded. In a note of Week One, the researcher said that "Jerry played a lot with peers during collaboration." Teacher also observed the similar thing in the first week. Ms. Chen wrote only one note of "evidences of being engaged" that was associated with FSBLM, which was "Bob talked more than in the whole class when he could talk to me individually." But in the same class, Ms. Chen also noticed Bob "was very silent when working with peers."

Since the second week, the students became familiar with the FSBLM and showed more enthusiasm in classes and eagerness for the FSBLM to be implemented. Emily was another good example of how students' attitudes changed with the FSBLM implementation. Emily was consistently struggling in Chinese learning and had a lack of confidence in learning. She did not talk at all in Chinese classes or communicated with

classmates. When the researcher first met with her and asked whether she wanted to participate in the study, she told me the following:

> I am the worst one not only in Chinese but also in all the other subjects. Why you want to study me? I don't think I can help you because I don't understand what the teacher says in Chinese at all, and I never ask help because they can't help me.

Then when the researcher told her, "I want to help you and find out a new teaching method that our teachers can use in the class so that everyone can learn," she seemed more interested in the study and finally signed the consent form. Emily also struggled in making friends with other students in the Chinese class. She told me in the pre-interview that " [the other students] are not in the same class with me in other subjects, so they do not want to be friend of me."

In the first week, Emily was extremely focused in classes although she was still silent, because she knew she was being observed by the teacher and the researcher. But by the second week, after assigned to work with Mary several times, Emily began to be much more active in the collaborative station when she could work with Mary. She became more engaged in classes and started to finish and turn in classwork. Although she shut down again in the last two weeks and did not turn in classwork because of something that happened outside of Chinese class, it was still evident that she was more active and engaged when she worked with Mary and another student, who was not participant of this study. Emily told me in post-interview that "I like to ask classmates, especially Mary, questions." After several weeks, Emily was observed starting to ask the teacher questions, which had never happened before, according to the teacher. She said in the post-

interview, “I like to work with teacher individually because she can explain it to me more clearly when it is just me and her.”

Furthermore, in FSBLM, the differentiated activities allowed students to be challenged and learn what they need to learn on their proficiency level on their own pace. Students also felt the teacher cared more about their study individually and got more instructional and emotional support from the teacher in the FSBLM. All of these helped create a more engaging class environment and served as an external factor that enhanced student engagement.

More and more positive perceptions and attitudes were evident in the last several weeks of the study. In the last two weeks, the students even requested the teacher to implement FSBLM. The researcher wrote this on a field note that Jerry asked the teacher one day, “Ms. Chen, are we going to do the small group again tomorrow? We should do it more! We love it.” Then the other students in the class echoed Jerry’s request and told Ms. Chen, “We should do this every day!”

Conclusion

Overall, themes of student engagement enhanced by structured collaborative learning and students’ affective change were key aspects of the data collection. The data collected from the participants demonstrated that the FSBLM worked effectively regarding its impact on student engagement via its structured collaborative learning. Structured interactivity with peers and teacher promoted active collaborative learning, and in turn, enhance student engagement (Blasco-Arcas & Buil, 2013).

In addition, while more research on how FSBLM impacts student engagement from cognitive and behavioral aspects is needed, the data collected in this study

demonstrated a positive impact that FSBLM had on students' affective factors, which resulted in a more positive perception and attitude toward Chinese learning in the students and led to the enhancement of student engagement. As one of the internal processes that mediates and precedes academic and behavioral engagement, affective engagement plays vital role in the learning process (Halverson & Graham, 2019).

The results of this study will be used to create an action plan for improving student engagement in the Chinese classrooms with the goal of engaging more students with different proficiency levels and improving students' perceptions and attitudes toward Chinese learning. As student engagement, students' perceptions, and attitudes toward Chinese learning improve, the researcher anticipates the FSBLM will have a positive impact on students' proficiency in Chinese.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Five of the dissertation begins with a summary of the findings of the study, including a description of the problem of practice and the research question. Following this description, there is a brief discussion of the data collection and a summary of major points of the study, what was revealed, and implications. Finally, there is a discussion of an action plan developed by the researcher in conjunction with the teacher-participants to share with the Chinese teachers at the site school and the other schools in the state. Following the action plan are some suggestions for future research and the conclusion of the study.

This mixed methods research was conducted to observe the impact of a blended learning model of differentiated instruction on the engagement level of four middle school students in a Chinese I class. The researcher observed that many students at the site school were not engaged in their Chinese class due to a lack of an effective differentiated instruction that could meet individual students' learning needs according to their different Chinese proficiency levels. These disengagements in the Chinese classes were evident in student work, especially classwork, and were also noticeable to teachers and the researcher in class observations. The problem of practice that prompted this study was the students' low engagement levels in Chinese classes due to their different Chinese proficiency levels.

Research Question

What impact will a blended learning model of differentiated instruction have on the engagement level of four middle school students in a Chinese I class?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of FSBLM on the engagement level of four middle school students in a Chinese I class.

Overview/Summary of the Study

Chapter Four thoroughly described and interpreted the data collected during the study, such as participants surveys and interviews, field notes recorded by the teacher participant and researcher, students' classwork samples, and students' classwork grades. The research question was addressed and related to each theme found in the analysis of the date. The final chapter discusses the major points of the study and what was revealed, presents an action plan based on the implications of the findings, and suggests areas of future research.

Summary of Major Points

Point One: Structured Collaborative Learning Increases Engagement.

Collaborative learning is important to the learning of Chinese and has a positive effect on the interactions and engagement of students. Several times during the interviews, the students expressed that the collaborative learning part embedded in the proposed model, FSBLM, was their favorite part of Chinese class, and they learned a lot from each other and felt supported through collaborative learning.

While students in this study demonstrated strong engagements in Chinese learning mainly because of the collaborative learning, the positive impact was limited if the

interactivity was not well-structured. In this study, the teacher-participant implemented the FSBLM twice a week. On the days when FSBLM was not implemented that week, the teacher mainly used a direct instruction and whole-class-discussion teaching approach and focused on the basic and/or new language skills, such as new vocabulary and grammar, of which most of the students need to learn or strengthen their understanding.

Then, on the days when FSBLM was implemented, she structured the collaborative learning by assigning students to different stations in the model according to their individual needs and learning goals for each class. By doing so, the teacher helped prepare students for the collaboration in advance regarding improving their basic language skills so that they could feel more comfortable and confident when working with other students in the target language, and thus benefit more from the collaboration.

The combination of independent study, collaboration, and the teacher's direct instruction in FSBLM allowed students to study in a structured collocative learning environment; therefore, the environment promoted active collaborative learning and, in turn, enhanced student engagement (Blasco-Arcas & Buil, 2013).

Point Two: Technology Increases Teaching Efficiency

Technology plays an important role in blended learning and is also a tool that gets more and more attention in foreign language education because of its positive impact on students' language acquisition (Blake, 2013; Lai et al., 2005; Southgate et al., 2011; Yao, 2019). In this study, technology was blended with traditional face-to-face instruction in Chinese classes and was observed to help increase teaching efficiency and improve student engagement in classes.

To work with all of the students one-on-one is a challenge to the teachers because of the limited time for each class. In this study, several students indicated that they often hesitated or did not find the chance to ask teachers questions in class because many other students had questions and needed the teacher to help them individually too, so the teacher was always busy and was not available to help all the students within a class. Throughout the study, the researcher noted that the teacher and students used the internet as a communication tool and exchanged ideas via emails, online meeting rooms, and some tools of Google Suites such as Jam Board and Google Doc. By using technology, the teacher could easily offer one-on-one support to several students at the same time, which helped increase teaching efficiency tremendously in this study. Because it was easier for the students to reach out to the teacher online for their oral or written questions, the students felt they received more support from the teacher, and hence became more engaged in the class as well.

Point Three: FSBLM Brings Positive Affective Change in Students

A challenge in blended learning is on the emotional and affective aspects. For example, if they study in blended learning mode, some degree of computer anxiety can be found in students (Olivier, 2016), or they might feel isolated while working on the computer (Peachey, 2017). All these emotional and affective aspects can have impacts on student engagement because emotion is one of the main components of engagement (Appleton et al., 2006; Christenson et al., 2012; Finn, 1989; Fredericks et al., 2004; Marks, 2000; Newmann et al., 1992). However, in this study, the researcher did not note any obvious anxiety or feelings of isolation in the students but noted a significant positive affective change in them. The students' perceptions of their Chinese class changed a lot

between the pre- and post-interviews. The reason for this may be that the FSBLM both allows students to do self-reflection through independent study on their ow pace, which is not only a way for the students to "value personal and intellectual development of oneself and of the other" (Kirylo, 2016, p. 25), but also helps reduce anxiety caused by the pressure from comparing their own to their peers, and gives them opportunities to collaborate with peers, which helps them feel connected even if they work on the computer.

The FSBLM was also helpful for the students in this study to feel connected. The students in this study were on campus five days a week during the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2020-21 school year. They had a hard time meeting their social needs because they needed to strictly follow the safety protocol of social distancing on campus, and it was hard to talk to each other while staying six feet away from each other. FSBLM gave them the opportunities to communicate with each other in class via internet. At the beginning of the study, some of the students felt "weird," according to the teacher's field notes, because they were all in the same classroom, but still needed to keep distancing all the time, but they talked to each other via internet on the computer. However, a few days later when they were more used to the FSBLM, they were observed more comfort to talk to each other via internet than face-to-face. By the end of the study, the students were observed to be pleased with all the technology tools that they used in FSBLM.

To Summarize

It was revealed through the present study that the proposed blended learning model has a positive impact on student engagement in this Chinese I class. Three major points summarize the findings of the study. It was evident that FSBLM did impact

student engagement in their Chinese class via structured collaborative learning, technology usage, and affective change. However, the research exposed some factors that hindered students from engaging in Chinese class, such as the structure of collaboration and the order of the rotation within stations. These factors were considered and were used to develop an action plan for classroom instruction.

Implications

The researcher began the study with the goal of improving classroom instruction with the ultimate result of increasing student engagement in their Chinese classes. The following notes the implications of the study and, thereafter, an action plan.

Focus on Consolidating Language Foundation During Whole Instructional Time

While the study indicated that students were more engaged in FSBLM, the researcher did notice that it is important for teachers to focus on consolidating language foundation during whole instructional time. The students were much more confident after studying the language knowledge points from the teacher's direct instruction during whole instructional time. The classes in which FSBLM was not implemented did put more focus on consolidating language foundations than the classes in which FSBLM was implemented. Hence, putting more emphasis on the key language points during whole instructional time to help consolidate students' language foundation is one of the keys to the effectiveness of the FSBLM.

Identify Students' Individual Learning Needs

Although the study indicated that structured collaborative learning is effective to engage students, without identifying students' individual learning needs, it would be difficult for the teacher to place students in the right order of stations that allow the

students to produce the best learning outcomes because each of the four stations in FSBLM serves different learning goals. Randomly assigning students to the stations sometimes can interest or motivate the students, but purposefully assigning them to different stations according to their learning needs can increase students' confidence in learning. Students should also know their individual needs in order for them to better select appropriate activities by themselves in the FSBLM. Thus, teachers are encouraged to not only consistently and intentionally identify students' needs, but to guide students to self-identity their learning needs, which can help create self-directed and self-motivated learners (Shannon, 2008).

Strengthen Teacher's Support to Individual Students

The student-participants in the study verbally stated that the teacher's support to individual students was important in Chinese learning. According to student interviews, all four student-participants did not think they could learn Chinese without the teacher's individual help, although their favorite part of the Chinese class was the collaborative learning with peers. Although an obvious trend was shown in the study from the observations, interviews, and surveys, that students became more likely seek help from peers instead of teachers when they needed help in the class, the students still needed the teachers to teach new contents, which they could not teach themselves because, relatively speaking, they were still in preliminary stages of Chinese learning and their Chinese proficiency level was not high enough for them to teach themselves efficiently and effectively. Teachers need to manage their class time and get familiar with different technology tools so that they can serve more students individually within the limited class time, even with the implementation of FSBLM. Hence, the researcher plans to schedule

some professional development opportunities for the teachers to improve their technology skills so that they can implement the FSBLM in a more effective way.

To Summarize

This mixed method research was conducted using the action researcher model described by Mertler (2014). The goal of the research was to collect data that can be used to foster positive change in the Chinese classrooms of the site school. The implications will help effectively implement the FSBLM into Chinese instruction. The FSBLM will better engage students via structured collaborative learning, technology usage, and teacher support to individual students.

Action Plan

The results of this study support the notion that FSBLM may effectively increase student engagement in Chinese classes. Using this information in conjunction with the teacher-participant, the researcher developed an action plan comprised of four specific steps to (a) share the findings with all the Chinese teachers at the school in a professional development session, (b) implement FSBLM in all the middle school Chinese classes, (c) conduct the same research in elementary Chinese classes, and (d) share the findings with Chinese teachers from other schools in a statewide professional development session and/or in a national or international academic conference specially focusing on Chinese learning. The action plan outlines how the research will be used and what will be done in the future as a result of the research findings.

The first step of the action plan is to share the findings with all the Chinese teachers at the researcher's school. There are 28 Chinese teachers at the school. By sharing the findings of the study with them in a professional development session during

the annual orientation week in August 2021, the researcher will introduce the details of the FSBLM to them and encourage them to try it in their own classrooms and provide their thoughts regarding the effectiveness of the FSBLM.

Beginning in September, the researcher will push the implementation of FSBLM into all the middle school Chinese classes at her school. In the 2021-22 school year, there will be 13 Chinese classes in the sixth through eighth grade at her school taught by three different teachers, including the teacher-participant of the study. The researcher will lead the professional learning community of the middle school Chinese team to teach teachers how to use the FSBLM in their classrooms with the goal of increasing student engagement in all the middle school Chinese classrooms. An improvement in student engagement is an administrator goal and a school-wide focus, especially at this school which is aiming to enroll more new students in middle school.

After the professional development session in which the researcher introduces the FSBLM to all the Chinese teachers at the school and shares what the study found, the researcher will also start to recruit volunteer teacher- and student-participants on the elementary campus at school for additional research to explore how the FSBLM can impact on student engagement in elementary Chinese immersion classrooms.

Finally, the researcher plans to present the data findings and conclusions in a statewide professional learning session, or a national or international academic conference specially focusing on Chinese learning. With a personal goal of increasing student engagement and motivating more students in Chinese learning nationwide, the researcher plans to present the concept of blended learning as a tangible strategy that can be incorporated into Chinese classrooms and the FSBLM as a practical tool that can be

used effectively to increase engagement with little increase in the teachers' workload. In addition, other teachers may wish to participate in action research at their individual schools or grade levels, which could further the knowledge pertaining to increasing student engagement.

Suggestions for Future Research

The present study was limited by grade level, a small sample, time constraints, learning with COVID-19 safety protocols, and a focus only on novice level Chinese instructions. Future research is needed to discover ways teachers can engage students in Chinese learning and better address individual students' learning needs and styles. The following pages provide four suggestions for future research that may be considered.

Research Suggestion One: Large Participant Size

One major limitation of the present study was the small participant size. The participant group included only four students, including two males and two females. Future research should consider using a larger group of participants.

Research Suggestion Two: Grade-Level and Proficiency Level

In this study, the participants were all seventh-grade students whose proficiency levels were at novice level. By replicating the present study with a different grade level or students with different proficiency levels including intermediate and advanced, one could gain a better understanding of how FSBLM impacts student engagement. By identifying how FSBLM impacts student engagement in other grades and/or with students at higher proficiency levels, educators in the field of Chinese education could see the value of blended learning in the classroom regarding improvement in student engagement.

Research Suggestion Three: Longer Study Frame

The present study occurred over an eight-week period. Future studies could be conducted using the same methods of data collection but over a whole semester or even a whole academic school year. The longer time frame would help researchers examine if consistent use of FSBLM impacts student engagement to a greater degree.

Research Suggestion Four: More Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis for Achievement

The present research found that FSBLM had a positive impact on student engagement regarding changing their perceptions to Chinese class, completing classwork, and participating actively in class discussion. In this study, students' classwork grades were collected only for the purpose of examining the completion of classwork. In the future, mastery-based pre- and post-tests can be included, so that both classwork grades and the pre- and post-test scores can be analyzed to help researchers examine the impact of FSBLM on students' Chinese learning achievement.

Research Suggestion Five: Other Foreign Language Classrooms

The present research focused on the implementation of FSBLM in Chinese classrooms. In the future, the same research can be conducted in other foreign language classrooms to see if the FSBLM can have the same impact on student engagement in other language learning, and therefore generate a more generalized understanding of the FSBLM and its impact on foreign language learning.

Conclusion

This study focused on examining the impact that the proposed blended learning model, FSBLM, had on student engagement in Chinese classrooms. The participants

included four seventh grade students in a Chinese I class with varying Chinese proficiency levels and their Chinese teacher. The FSBLM was implemented twice a day each week. During the study, both the student-participants and the teacher-participant were asked to participate in pre- and post-interviews and surveys to share with me their perceptions on their Chinese learning or teaching and their experiences with FSBLM. The teacher-participant and the researcher also recorded field notes about their observations of the student-participants. Students' classwork samples and classwork competition status were also analyzed in the study to better examine FSBLM's impact on student engagement.

The data analysis revealed three major themes: (1) student engagement via structured collaborative learning in FSBLM, (2) technology increasing teaching efficiency, and (3) student-participants' affective change process, which impacted their perception and attitude towards the Chinese classes. These two themes were apparent in surveys, interviews, recorded filed notes, and work samples, and they revealed many notions about student engagement in their Chinese classes.

The present study revealed that FSBLM had an impact on student engagement in the Chinese I class; however, further research studies are needed to continue to examine FSBLM in Chinese classes in different grade levels and/or with students of different Chinese proficiency levels, to find its potential benefits to students' Chinese learning achievement. Along with further research studies, it needs to focus on the consolidation of students' language foundation through whole class instruction on the days when FSBLM is not implemented, identify students' individual learning needs and styles before implementing FSBLM, and strengthen teachers' support to individual students using

technology tools. An action plan was created based on the results and implications to maximize the impact of FSBLM on student engagement in Chinese classes.

While this study focused on FSBLM and students' perceptions on Chinese learning and their engagement in Chinese classes, a significant non-Chinese theme emerged: students' affective change through collaborative learning. The one statement that caused the researcher to reflect on the affective change process was made by a student in the post-interview in the study. The researcher asked Emily if the FSBLM helped her Chinese learning, to which she responded, "Yes, because I can ask the teacher questions or ask the teacher to teach me individually, and I can also ask Mary, although I still do not like Chinese class that much because it is so hard." After further discussion with Emily and other students, the researcher realized how significant the collaborative learning with peers and individual work with teacher were to the students. This led the way to understanding that it was not about the Chinese content but about the feeling of being connected with peers and being supported by teachers.

The better communication through collaboration with peers and individual time with teachers provides a sound learning environment for the students, in which they can be more confident and comfortable to learn because of the good relationship built in FSBLM classrooms; hence, their attitude toward Chinese learning and Chinese class changed, and they became more voluntary in seeking help through dialogue with peers and teacher when they encountered questions. Kirylo (2016) indicated that "attitude does not necessarily forecast behavior or action; rather intentionality, a thoughtful voluntary act of the will, does" (p. 14).

As the researcher observed students throughout the study and met with students for interviews, a significant change took place regarding students' perspectives on Chinese learning. As the study progressed, the researcher observed the student-participants gaining confidence and becoming more comfortable and relaxed in Chinese class, especially when they tried to communicate with the teacher and their peers in Chinese. The researcher noticed that students were more willing to seek help when encountering questions and to practice their Chinese speaking skills with peers. This observation is linked back to the affective change brought by collaborative learning.

During the study, the more the teacher was available in helping students individually, either verbally or in written via internet, the teacher could better meet students' individual needs, which seemed to lessen students' anxiety in Chinese class, hence improving their confidence in Chinese learning. The more individual communication between the teacher and students during class time promoted the relationship between teacher and students, and therefore, helped create trust and confidence in students and establish a sound learning environment.

As FSBLM is implemented with an emphasis on consolidating key language points learning during the whole class instruction, identifying individual students' learning needs, and strengthening teachers' support to each individual student, there are some potential challenges that the teachers may encounter, such as (a) time management, and (b) class size. The FSBLM has a requirement for teachers to manage the time of each class wisely so that they can serve more students individually, while keeping other students staying on task and engaged in different stations. Thus, time management must be kept in perspective as the FSBLM is implemented schoolwide with the action plan.

Although the FSBLM was created with the purpose of engaging diversified students in a relatively large class size by breaking down to different stations and utilizing various technology tools; if class size becomes too large, it will be difficult for teachers to invest in identifying individual students' needs and styles and serve them more individually. This study only used four student participants, which was manageable for the teachers. Additionally, this year, some students studied from home because of COVID-19, and there were approximately 15 students in the class who studied in-person on campus. If not for COVID-19, the class size could be up to 25 students at the site school. So, the FSBLM must be monitored and adjusted as the research plan for what works best for the students, while not overburdening the teachers.

In conclusion, all the four stations in FSBLM have some function to improve students' perspectives on Chinese learning and, therefore, help increase student engagement in Chinese classes by promoting collaborative learning, self-reflection, and more effective and efficient communication between teachers and students. If educators focus on more structured collaborative learning with technology support, then students could be more engaged in Chinese classes, and potentially achieve Chinese acquisition in a more effective and enjoyable way.

During the process of the research, the researcher had a lot of conversations with the teachers and administrators at the school about what they could do to address the big gap between students' Chinese proficiency levels in a same class, and some ideas came to us. One of her colleagues said they should not enroll new students after second grade, which is a common way that some other Chinese immersion programs in the United States are doing it, so that the students in the same class basically have the same entry

level. But then this idea was rejected by the researcher and principal immediately, because they both thought it was not what they could stand for as advocators for educational equity, and they both thought every child should have rights and opportunities to learn the language if they want to learn, no matter their age or grade level.

There also were some heated discussions about whether to provide a school bus or not. As a charter school, the school needed to manage their finances. The school did have a school bus, but mainly for activities like field trips. Currently, the school does not have the manpower or budget to afford daily transportation for students between home and school. This means all of the students rely on their parents to drive them to school every day. This hinders the students who want to learn Chinese but live too far away, or if their parent or guardian cannot drive them to school for any reason from enrolling at the school and learning Chinese, regardless of their grade level. From this perspective, a student's family background shows a direct impact on their access to educational resources and opportunities. This problem might not be solved until all the elementary and middle schools in the United States offer foreign language classes in the future.

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APPENDIX A: PARENT CONSENT LETTER

11/15/2020

Dear Parents/Guardians:

My name is Junlan Li. I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of South Carolina. As part of my degree, I am conducting a research study, and I would like to invite your child to participate.

My research is designed to improve Chinese teaching practices with the goal to observe how blended learning impacts student engagement over time. If your child decides to participate, he/she will be asked to complete two surveys about their feelings and perceptions on their Chinese classes. The surveys should last about 5-10 minutes. The students do not have to answer any questions that they do not wish to answer. The students' answers in the surveys will only be reviewed by me and destroyed upon completion of the study. **All identifying information will remain strictly confidential and be changed when reporting results in the research write-up.**

Participation, non-participation or withdrawal will not affect your child's grades in any way. If a student begins the study and later decides to withdraw, it is completely fine.

Your consent to use your child's work samples and have your child complete the surveys is completely voluntary. I do appreciate you thinking about allowing your student to participate in the study. If you would like your child to participate in the study, please complete the bottom of this form, and return the letter to me by November 23rd, 2020. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me or my faculty advisor, Dr. James Kirylo at kiryloja@mailbox.sc.edu.

Sincerely,

Junlan Li, Doctoral Candidate

Email: jlli@eastpointsc.org

Cell Phone: 980-335-9812

- By signing below, I give my permission for my child to participate the research. I understand that this is a completely voluntary project, and my child can withdraw if needed without any penalty or conflict.

  Parent/Guardian's name: _____Child's name: _____

  Parent/Guardian's signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B: STUDENT PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

The Impact of a Four-Station Blended Learning Model of Differentiating Instruction on Student Engagement in a Middle School Chinese Class in a Southeastern State

Dear students:

I am working on a study about the Impact of a Four-Station Blended Learning Model of Differentiating Instruction on Student Engagement, and interested in learning more about how the blended learning model helps engage you in Chinese class. I hope to see an increase in student engagement in Chinese classes as a result of the implementation of blended learning, thus improve students' performance in Chinese learning.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. Your parent/guardian has already said it is okay for you to be in the study, but it is up to you if you want to be in the study. If you would like to participate in the study, please complete the bottom of this form, and return the letter to me by November 23rd, 2020. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

If you want to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Answer some written questions about your feeling and perception on Chinese classes before and after the research. The process will take about 5-15 minutes

Any information you share with me (or study staff) will be private. No one except me will know what your answers to the questions.

You do not have to help with this study. Being in the study is not related to your regular class work and will not help or hurt your grades. You can also drop out of the study at any time, for any reason, and you will not be in any trouble and no one will be mad at you.

Please ask any questions you would like to about the study.

Junlan Li
Doctoral Candidate, University of South Carolina

◯ My participation has been explained to me, and all my questions have been answered. I am willing to participate.

_____ _____

Print Name of Student | Age of Student

Signature of Student | Date

APPENDIX C: TEACHER PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

The Impact of a Four-Station Blended Learning Model of Differentiating Instruction on Student Engagement in a Middle School Chinese I Class in a Southeastern State

Dear teachers:

My name is Junlan Li. I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of South Carolina. The University of South Carolina, School of Education is sponsoring this research study. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of four-station blended learning model on student engagement in Chines class. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a teacher of Chinese classes. This study is being done at East Point Academy and will involve approximately five volunteers. I would like to invite you to participate in my study.

The following is a short summary of this study to help you decide whether to be a part of this study. The study will last for eight weeks. If you agree to participate in this study, you will complete two surveys before and after the study, implement the proposed model in your courses twice a week, and complete two field notes accordingly each week. I will come to your classes for student observation twice a week, and collect some student class work samples. The detailed research procedure will be as shown in the chart below.

Week	Teaching Content	Description
1		1. Teacher participant completed the Pre-Interview 2. Student participant completed the Pre-Interview 3. Student participant completed the Pre-Survey 4. Researcher collected 2019-2020 school year's classwork grades of the student participants from the PowerSchool.
2		1. Teacher participant implemented FSBLM on Tuesday and Wednesday. 2. Researcher observed students on Monday and Tuesday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 3. Teacher observed students on Thursday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 4. Researcher collected work samples: one classwork from each student participant.

3		1. Teacher participant implemented FSBLM on Tuesday and Wednesday. 2. Researcher observed students on Wednesday and Thursday and took field notes (see Appendix G) 3. Teacher observed students on Monday and took field notes. 4. Researcher collected work samples: one classwork from each student participant.
4		1. Teacher participant implemented FSBLM on Tuesday and Wednesday. 2. Researcher observed students on Friday and Thursday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 3. Teacher observed students on Tuesday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 4. Researcher collected work samples: one classwork from each student participant.
5		1. Teacher participant implemented FSBLM on Tuesday and Wednesday. 2. Researcher observed students on Tuesday and Friday and took field notes (see Appendix G) 3. Teacher observed students on Wednesday and took field notes. 4. Researcher collected work samples: one classwork from each student participant.
6		1. Teacher participant implemented FSBLM on Tuesday and Wednesday. 2. Researcher observed students on Monday and Tuesday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 3. Teacher observed students on Thursday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 4. Researcher collected work samples: one classwork from each student participant.
7		1. Teacher participant implemented FSBLM on Tuesday and Wednesday. 2. Researcher observed students on Monday and Thursday and took field notes (see Appendix G). 3. Teacher observed students on Friday and took field notes. 4. Researcher collected work samples: one classwork from each student participant.
8		1. Teacher participant completed the Post-Interview (see Appendix E) 2. Student participant completed the Post-Interview (see Appendix F) 3. Student participant completed the Post-Survey (see Appendix H)

		4.	Researcher collected classwork grades of the student participants from the PowerSchool.

There is no risk if you choose to participate in or not participate in the study. Taking part in this study is not likely to benefit you personally. You will not be paid for participating in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free not to participate, or to stop participating at any time, for any reason without negative consequences. In the event that you do withdraw from this study, the information you have already provided will be kept in a confidential manner. If you wish to withdraw from the study, please call or email me. Your participation, non-participation, and/or withdrawal will not affect your relationship with the researcher, site school, or the University of South Carolina. Participation in this research study is voluntary.

Your participation in the study will be confidential. Results of this research study may be published or presented at seminars; however, the report(s) or presentation(s) will not include your name or other identifying information about you.

If you would like to participate in the study, please complete the bottom of this form, and return the letter to me by August 22nd, 2020. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

A more readable observation schedule is as below (R for researcher, T for Teacher):

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
With/without FSBLM	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Week 2	R	R		T	
Week 3	T		R	R	
Week 4		T		R	R
Week 5		R	T		R
Week 6	R	R		T	
Week 7	R			R	T

Sincerely,

Junlan Li, Doctoral Candidate

Email: junlan@email.edu.sc

◯ I have been given a chance to ask questions about this research study. These questions have been answered to my satisfaction. If I have any more questions about my participation in this study, or a study related injury, I am to contact Junlan at 980-335-9812 or email junlan@email.edu.sc

◯ Concerns about your rights as a research subject are to be directed to, Lisa Johnson, Assistant Director, Office of Research Compliance, University of South Carolina, 1600 Hampton Street, Suite 414D, Columbia, SC 29208, phone: (803) 777-6670 or email: LisaJ@mailbox.sc.edu.

◯ I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form for my own records.

If you wish to participate, you should sign below.

Signature of Subject / Participant	Date

APPENDIX D: PRINCIPAL'S APPROVAL LETTER

08/15/2020

Dear Mr. Bounds:

I am currently working toward my Educational Doctorate from the University of South Carolina. As part of my degree, I am planning my research dissertation. My research is designed to improve EPA's Chinese teaching practices with the goal to observe how blended learning impacts student engagement over time. Thus, I will be observing and collecting data from the students and teachers in Chinese classes this fall as part of a research study. I hope to see an increase in student engagement in EPA Chinese classes as a result of the implementation of blended learning, thus improve students' performance in Chinese learning.

I would like to seek your approval for me to do the research at our school. If I can have the honor of getting your approval, please complete the bottom of this form, and return the letter to me by August 21st, 2020. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,
Junlan Li, Doctoral Candidate
Email: jlli@eastpointsc.org

- By signing below, I give my permission to Ms. Junlan to conduct the research at East Point Academy, and collect data from students and teachers who are voluntary to do so.
- I understand that participants' participation in this study is completely voluntary.
- I understand that the school and participant will not be identified by name on the surveys, work samples, or within any reports related to this study.
- I understand that participants' participation in the study will not affect students' course grade or teachers' teaching evaluation.
- I understand that any work samples or other personal information that participants share and submit related to this study will be kept strictly confidential.
- I understand that there are no known risks as a participant or a site in this study.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw my permission at any time for this study.
- I understand that the findings of this study will be published in dissertation at the completion of Ms. Junlan Li's doctoral program.

- I understand that if I have any questions about this research study and its procedure, I can contact Mr. Junlan Li or her U.S.C. faculty supervisor, Dr. James Kirylo.

Principal's Name: Mark A. Bounds

Principal's Signature: _____ Date**: _____**

APPENDIX E: TEACHER'S PRE- AND POST-INTERVIEWS

Teacher's Pre-Interview Teacher's Signature: _____

Teacher's Name: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

How many years have you teach middle school Chinese I classes? _____

How do you feel about the Chinese I class students' differences in their Chinese proficiency level? Do you feel easy or difficult to engage all the students in a same activity with the differences? What is the biggest challenge that you encountered when you tried to address the differences?
When you taught Chinese I class, what measurements you took before engaged students more effectively?
When you taught Chinese I class, what measurements you took before engaged students less effectively?

Teacher's Post-Interview Teacher's Signature: _____

Teacher's Name: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Please rate your feeling of the effectiveness of the blended learning model in Chinese classes regarding helping engage students with different proficiency levels? (1 for least likely, 5 for most likely)
◯ 1 ◯ 2 ◯ 3 ◯ 4 ◯ 5
Please describe how you see the blended learning model effective or not effective in your classes regarding engaging students in class discussions, activities, and/or seeking help from peers and/or teachers when needs?
Please describe how you see the blended learning model help or not help with students' classwork completion?
What difficulties did you encounter when you implemented the blended learning model in your classes?

If possible, how would you adjust the model to make the blended learning model more effective to engage students in the future?

APPENDIX F: STUDENTS' PRE- AND POST-INTERVIEWS

Student's Pre-Interview Student's Signature: _____

Student's Name: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Do you like your Chinese class? (1 for least likely, 5 for most likely)
◯1 ◯2 ◯3 ◯4 ◯5
Why you like or not like your Chinese class?
Do you think the Chinese class is too easy or too difficult or right on your level?
What activity in Chinese class did you like most? Why?
What activity in Chines class did you like least? Why?
When you had some questions in Chinese class, how do you address it?

How do you feel about classwork in Chinese class? How much efforts did you put in your classwork? Did you usually complete your classwork in class or need extra time after school?
If you complete your classwork before others, what did you usually do when other students were still working on their classwork?
How do you feel about class discussion in Chinese class? Do you like it or not? Why?
How do you feel about the various Chinese learning programs/apps/websites/platforms? Do you think they are helpful? Do you feel they are fun? Do you like them or not? What is your favorite Chinese learning programs/app/websites/platform and least favorite Chinese learning program/app/websites/platform?

Student's Post-Interview Student's Signature: _____

Student's Name: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Do you like your Chinese class? (1 for least likely, 5 for most likely)
◯1 ◯2 ◯3 ◯4 ◯5
Why you like or not like your Chinese class?
Do you think the Chinese class is too easy or too difficult or right on your level?
When you had some questions in Chinese class, how do you address it?
How do you feel about classwork in Chinese class? How much efforts did you put in your classwork? Did you usually complete your classwork in class or need extra time after school?
If you complete your classwork before others, what did you usually do when other students were still working on their classwork?
How do you feel about class discussion in Chinese class? Do you like it or not? Why?
Do you feel you spend more time in Chinese learning than before, both in class and after school?

APPENDIX G: FIELD NOTES

Observer's Name: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

	General rate for engagement of this class	Some evidence of being engaged	Some evidence of not being engaged	Observer's comments
Student A	1 2 3 4 5			
Student B	1 2 3 4 5			
Student C	1 2 3 4 5			

Student D	1 2 3 4 5			

APPENDIX H: STUDENTS' SURVEY

Date: _____

In all the questions below, 1 is for the least likely, and 5 is for the most likely. Circle the number that indicates your feeling of the statement.

1. I like my Chinese class.	1 2 3 4 5
2. I am very focused in Chinese class.	1 2 3 4 5
3. I complete my classwork before class ends.	1 2 3 4 5
4. I like the activities in Chinese class a lot.	1 2 3 4 5
5. I ask help from the teacher when I have questions in Chinese class.	1 2 3 4 5
6. I seek help from classmates when I encounter questions in Chinese class.	1 2 3 4 5
7. I just let it go and forget about it if I encounter questions in Chinese class.	1 2 3 4 5
8. My teacher knows what I need to learn and how I can learn well in Chinese.	1 2 3 4 5
9. I can do something on my own Chinese proficiency level during the independent work time or small group work time.	1 2 3 4 5
10. The activities in Chinese class are right on my level.	1 2 3 4 5
11. I am challenged all the time academically in Chinese class.	1 2 3 4 5
12. I participated a lot in the class discussion.	1 2 3 4 5
13. I am eager to learn Chinese.	1 2 3 4 5
14. In order to learn Chinese well, I will put as much effort as I need.	1 2 3 4 5
15.The classwork is tailored to my interest and my needs.	1 2 3 4 5
16. The class activity is fun and allows me to learn.	1 2 3 4 5
17. The online programs/websites/apps that I used in Chinese class are helpful.	1 2 3 4 5

18. The teacher took care of every student in class so everyone could learn.	1 2 3 4 5
19. The teacher was available to help me when I needed her.	1 2 3 4 5
20. I am confident that I can learn Chinese well, as long as I work hard.	1 2 3 4 5