

Project Summary for IAL Website

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Project Title:	An Investigation of Pedagogical Approaches in the Acquisition of Language for Low-Waged, Low-Skilled Adult Learners of English
Project Number:	GA17-06
Year of Approval:	2018
Funding Source:	WDARF
Objectives and intended outcomes of the project:	<p>This project seeks to conduct an investigation and evaluation of the pedagogical approaches adopted in the acquisition of English language literacy for low-waged, low-skilled adult learners of English in Singapore.</p> <p>The research focuses on the pedagogical approach undertaken in the curriculum and training programmes that have been delivered under Singapore's Workplace Literacy Programme through the approved Workplace Literacy Training Providers, and further determines the pedagogical approaches which would be most effective in enabling lowwaged and low-skilled adult learners to acquire English literacy and meet programme outcomes.</p>
Project Team	
Principal Investigator:	Dr Hong Huaqing (Jul'18 to Dec'20) / Prof Annabel SH Chen (Dec'20 to Mar'21)
Summary of Project (up to 300 words)	
<p>The Workplace Literacy (WPL) programme aims to equip low-wage and low-skilled workers with the essential English skills to enhance their employability and eligibility. This study gathers information on the design and delivery of the programme, and the needs and experiences of learners to inform programmatic and strategic changes. The data are collected through a survey questionnaire, some focus group discussions (FGD), interviews, and classroom observations. The data are analysed using mixed methods to address four major research questions such as 1) What are the pedagogical approaches, curriculum design and delivery methods used in the programme? 2) Are there certain areas of literacy competence and skills presenting greater challenge or opportunity? 3) What impact have it had? 4) What are some strategies and recommendations to make?</p> <p>The survey results provide insights on the learners' backgrounds, feedback, and perceptions of the programme, and their learning approaches. Using curriculum materials and classroom observations, we identify gaps in the expected approaches and the actual practices and learning outcomes. To answer the four research questions, content analysis and thematic analysis are applied to the qualitative data to establish themes or categories relating to the subject's experiences and evaluations of the programme. The essentialist or realist inductive thematic analysis procedure is used in analysing trainers' FGD transcripts to identify themes related to the trainers' experiences in using approaches. An amalgamation of discourse analytical approaches is applied to the FGD transcripts involving learners' responses to generate desirable educational outcomes by the learners.</p> <p>In addressing the research questions, our analysis highlights several findings and particular areas</p>	

of concern relating to WPL programme's course content and delivery, as well as the constraints faced by adult learners and trainers. Some recommendations are also provided in accordance with the four research questions. Please refer to our full report for the details. (296 words)

Summary of Project Findings, Deliverables and Impacts (up to 500 words)

The study yielded several significant findings regarding the implementation and effectiveness of the Workplace Literacy (WPL) programme:

Key Findings:

1. Pedagogical Approaches and Curriculum Design:

- Current classroom practices are predominantly trainer-centered with minimal learner interaction;
- The WIPPEA lesson plan and Gagne's Instructional Design Theory were implemented but with limited authentic communication opportunities;
- Trainers successfully contextualized learning through tailored materials and multi-level instructional approaches;
- Chat groups were effectively used for continual learning and reinforcement outside the classroom.

2. Learning Challenges:

- Adult learners struggle with Chinese-to-English translation and code-switching between formal and informal language;
- Time constraints due to work and family commitments affect learning consistency;
- Varying levels of digital literacy among learners impact the effectiveness of blended learning approaches;
- Limited contact hours (90 hours) versus extensive curriculum requirements across all language modalities.

3. Programme Impact: Learners reported improvements in:

- Digital literacy skills (51.1%)
- Writing skills (27.7%)
- Grammar proficiency (25.5%)
- Speaking confidence (17.0%)
- Job application skills (14.9%)
- Social communication abilities (12.8%)

Deliverables:

1. Comprehensive analysis of current pedagogical approaches in WPL programme;
2. Evaluation of learning needs and challenges faced by adult learners;
3. Assessment of programme effectiveness and impact;
4. Evidence-based recommendations for programme enhancement.

Key Recommendations:

1. Adopt dialogical teaching approaches to enhance learner engagement and knowledge construction;
2. Transform mother tongue interference challenges into learning opportunities through bilingual pedagogy;
3. Implement a structured band-level grammar acquisition framework with form-focused task-based learning;
4. Integrate differentiated digital literacy training based on learner proficiency levels.

Impact: The research has significant implications for workforce development in Singapore:

- Provides evidence-based insights for improving adult English language education;
- Contributes to enhanced employability of low-wage workers through improved language skills;
- Supports Singapore's SkillsFuture movement objectives;
- Informs policy decisions regarding workplace literacy training;

- Enhances understanding of effective adult learning approaches in a multilingual context.

The findings and recommendations from this study serve as valuable inputs for policymakers and practitioners to refine the WPL programme's design and delivery, ultimately supporting Singapore's workforce development goals and improving employment outcomes for low-wage, low-skilled workers.

(333 words)