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THE EFFECTS OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING AND AUDIO-LINGUAL TEACHING APPROACH IN MANDARIN ORAL SKILLS LEARNING

CHUA HUI WEN

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Audio-Lingual Teaching Approach (ALTA) on oral skills learning and learning motivation among non-native Mandarin in Teaching Mandarin as a Third Language (TMTL). TBLT applied Adaptation of Willis's TBL Framework, while ALTA applied Sarıçoban's dialogue memorisation. Quasi experimental design was used in the study with convenience sampling of 21 students (TBLT) and 22 students (ALTA). Simulated conversation oral test and Motivational Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) were employed. Independent sample t-test was used to examine if there are any differences between the two groups, and paired sample t-test was used to identify the differences between Test 1 and Test 2 for both groups, in the aspect of students' performances. The findings showed that there was statistical significant difference in oral skills for TBLT: $t(20)=-2.32$, $p<0.05$; and statistical decrement in ALTA: $t(21)=4.11$, $p<0.05$. Although ALTA had out-performed TBLT in Test 1 ($t(30)=-1.95$, $p>0.05$), but Test 2: TBLT out-performed ALTA ($t(24)=4.06$, $p<0.05$) in Test 2. The result indicates that there is a significant improvement in students' performance for TBLT group. Descriptive analysis was conducted as aim to compare changes if any in the learning motivation and learning anxiety component for both groups before and after TBLT and ALTA were adopted in the learning. The descriptive analysis showed that there are changes in the aspect of learning motivation and learning anxiety component. The result indicated that there is an increment in the number of students in the group of very high level in learning motivation for TBLT, that is from 8 students (38%) to 11 students (52%); as for ALTA group remained unchanged as 11 students (50%) had high level of learning motivation and 11 students (50%) had very high level of motivation. As for the learning anxiety component, TBLT group showed a decrease in the number of students having very high anxiety, from 2 students (10%) dropped to 0 students (0%); meanwhile, for the ALTA group, the results indicated that anxiety level for students had increased, that is the number of students who experienced the very high level of anxiety had increased from 2 students (9%) to 6 students (27%). The study indicates that TBLT has positive effect in Mandarin learning performance. Moreover, the result in learning motivation indicates that TBLT might help in reducing students' learning anxiety but ALTA might on the other hand increases learning anxiety. The implication of the study is that TBLT might be a better approach for learning Mandarin and might promote better performance among non-native speakers.

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KESAN PENDEKATAN PENGAJARAN BAHASA BERASASKAN TUGASAN (TBLT) DAN PENDEKATAN PENGAJARAN AUDIO-LINGUAL (ALTA) DALAM PEMBELAJARAN KEMAHIRAN LISAN BAHASA MANDARIN

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini mengkaji kesan Pendekatan Pengajaran Bahasa Berasaskan Tugasan (TBLT) dan Pendekatan Pengajaran Audio-Lingual (ALTA) dalam pembelajaran kemahiran lisan dan motivasi pembelajaran berfokuskan Pengajaran Mandarin sebagai Bahasa Ketiga (TMTL) kepada pelajar Mandarin bukan penatur asli. TBLT menggunakan Adaptasi Rangka Kerja TBL Willis, manakala ALTA mengaplikasikan pengertian dialog Sarıçoban. Rekabentuk eksperimen kuasi telah digunakan, dan kaedah pensampelan konvenien melibatkan 21 pelajar (TBLT) dan 22 pelajar (ALTA). Ujian lisan simulasi dan Struktur Motivasi untuk Soal Selidik Pembelajaran (MSLQ) telah digunakan. Ujian t bebas telah digunakan untuk mengenal pasti perbezaan di antara kedua-dua kumpulan, manakala ujian t sampel telah digunakan untuk mengenal pasti perbezaan antara Ujian 1 dan Ujian 2 bagi kedua-dua kumpulan, dari aspek prestasi pelajar. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan terdapat peningkatan statistik dalam kemahiran lisan kumpulan $t(20)=-2.32$, $p<0.05$; manakala kumpulan ALTA mempunyai penurunan statistik: $t(21)=4.11$, $p<0.05$. Walaupun ALTA mempunyai keputusan yang lebih baik berbanding TBLT dalam Ujian 1 ($t(30) = -1.95$, $p> 0.05$), tetapi keputusan kemahiran lisan TBLT telah melintasi ALTA dalam Ujian 2 ($t(24)=4.06$, $p<0.05$) dalam Ujian 2. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam prestasi pelajar untuk kumpulan TBLT. Analisis deskriptif dijalankan bertujuan untuk membandingkan perubahan jika ada dalam motivasi pembelajaran dan komponen kecemasan pembelajaran untuk kedua-dua kumpulan sebelum dan selepas TBLT dan ALTA diaplikasikan dalam pembelajaran. Analisis deskriptif menunjukkan terdapat perubahan dalam aspek motivasi pembelajaran dan komponen kecemasan pembelajaran. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan terdapat peningkatan jumlah pelajar dalam kumpulan yang mempunyai tahap motivasi yang sangat tinggi untuk kumpulan TBLT, iaitu dari 8 orang pelajar (38%) hingga 11 orang pelajar (52%); Kumpulan ALTA kekal tidak berubah dengan 11 orang pelajar (50%) mempunyai tahap motivasi pembelajaran yang tinggi dan 11 orang pelajar (50%) mempunyai tahap motivasi yang sangat tinggi. Bagi komponen kecemasan pembelajaran, kumpulan TBLT menunjukkan penurunan bilangan pelajar yang mempunyai kecemasan yang sangat tinggi, dari 2 orang pelajar (10%) menurun kepada 0 orang pelajar (0%). Sementara itu, untuk kumpulan ALTA, keputusan menunjukkan bahawa tahap kecemasan untuk pelajar meningkat, iaitu bilangan pelajar yang mengalami tahap kecemasan yang sangat tinggi telah meningkat dari 2 orang pelajar (9%) kepada 6 orang pelajar (27%). Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa pendekatan pengajaran, TBLT memberi kesan positif dalam pembelajaran bahasa Mandarin. Tambahan pula, hasil dalam motivasi pembelajaran menunjukkan bahawa TBLT mungkin membantu dalam mengurangkan kecemasan pembelajaran pelajar tetapi ALTA mungkin pula meningkatkan kecemasan pembelajaran. Implikasi kajian ini berpendapat bahawa TBLT mungkin adalah pendekatan yang lebih baik untuk belajar bahasa Mandarin dan mungkin menggalakkan prestasi yang lebih baik dalam kalangan penutur bukan asli

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EFL	English as Foreign Language
L1	First Language
MEB	Malaysia Education Blueprint
MSLQ	Motivational Strategies for Learning Questionnaire
TBL	Task-based Learning
TBLT	Task-based Language Teaching
TL	Third Language
TESL	Teaching English as Second Language
TMTL	Teaching Mandarin as a Third Language

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preface

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This chapter will discuss the phenomena of Mandarin teaching and learning for non-native learners. The problem statement of this research is presented and the focused on the issues found in the teaching and learning of Mandarin among non-native speakers. At the same time, task-based language teaching (TBLT) and audio-lingual teaching approach (ALTA) are selected to cope with the current problems found in the Mandarin teaching and learning Hence, the two research objectives in this study emphasis on the effects of task-based language teaching (TBLT) and audio-lingual teaching approach (ALTA) in oral skills and learning motivation. Next, the definitions of the key terms are presented to better specify the focus of the research. The research is limited due to the fact that the study only focused on one of the tertiary institutes in Kelantan, and the two teaching approaches were explored. Finally, the significance of this study is to provide findings on the implication of TBLT and ALTA on oral skills and the learning motivation of non-native Mandarin learners.

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1.2 Background Research

Mandarin has become an important global language. This condition can be explained as the language has an official status in China and Taiwan, which consist of 1,284 million Mandarin native speakers worldwide. Besides that, China recently has shown its prominent growth in world economy and political status. Due to the large numbers of native speakers, and its economy and political influences, there is a phenomenon of an increase in the number of non-native Mandarin learners worldwide. Malaysia has also taken note on the importance of the Mandarin language. Thus, there are implementations and initiatives for Mandarin learning in Malaysia's education plans in recent years, such as in the National Higher Action Plan 2007-2010, Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) (MEB) and the iCGPA Rubric Learning Outcomes Assessment Guide.

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The teaching of Mandarin in tertiary education has started in the year 2007 as it has been mentioned in the National Higher Action Plan 2007-2010 as one of the global languages mentioned in the education plan. The National Higher Action Plan 2007-2010 prioritises the "mastery of *Bahasa Malaysia* and English, and at least one other global language". (p. 13) The teaching of Mandarin is continued, where language proficiency is one of the six student aspirations in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (MEB) (Higher Education). MEB has stated that students need to be "proficient in *Bahasa Melayu* and English, and they are encouraged to learn one additional global language. It is also prioritising being operationally proficient in at least *Bahasa Melayu* and English". (p. 19)

The iCGPA Rubric Learning Outcomes Assessment Guide is served to drive the practices of constructive alignment in ensuring quality curriculum design, delivery

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and assessment at the course level and programme level. The reports in the iCGPA illustrates the attainment of the attributes outlined in the six student aspirations stipulated in the MEB. Communication is a part of iCGPA attributes that learners have to master as it mentions “the communication refers to the ability to communicate effectively in both *Bahasa Melayu* and English as well as a third language in varied communication contexts that involve diverse participants”. (p. 159) The third language mentioned here refers to global language that includes Mandarin.

As a result of the implementation of the National Higher Education Action Plan from 2007 until 2011, there are 20 local universities in Malaysia which have offered Mandarin courses (Hoe & Lim, 2013). The enrolment of non-native Mandarin learners among local universities students is gradually increasing in number as there are more than 150 non-native Mandarin learners who enrol in Mandarin course every semester in each local university. It makes a total of at least 6000 students every year (Lau, Ng & Lee, 2011; as cited in Lau, Ang, Soon, Law & Wong, 2012).

According to an unofficial interview conducted in Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK), students gave feedbacks that mastering the Mandarin language by enrolling in a Mandarin course could help them in their future prospects and enable them to communicate in Mandarin with Chinese friends. However, at the same time, the learners also talk about their fear in mastering the Mandarin language. This is because, they felt like they are unable to achieve their desired outcomes, which is the ability to communicate.

The same condition was recorded by Naimah (2005) whereby the learners are unable to communicate effectively in the language they learned (Tan, Ooi & Hairul, 2016). This could be due to many causes such as the interference of their mother

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tongue and insufficient learning time (Cheun, 2006, as cited in Tan, et al, 2016), as well as limited opportunities to use the target language on a daily basis (Jeon, 2005). These factors make the learners become less motivated to learn the language. Thus, it may be helpful for non-native Mandarin learners to be provided with an authentic pragmatic use of the language for exposure in the classroom (Chua, Lin & Mohammad Affiq, 2018).

At the same time, to solve the problem of limited Mandarin practice, a Mandarin lecturer prefers to practice an audio-lingual teaching approach (ALTA). The approach firstly requires students to read on language models acting in certain situations. Later, students tasked to practice with a variety of drills and the teacher emphasises the use of the target language at all times. However, the teaching approach is questionable as to whether it is effectively influencing learners' Mandarin proficiency and communication skills. This is because Alemi and Tavakoli (2016) pointed out that ALTA's emphasis was not on the understanding of words, but rather the acquisition of structures and patterns in common everyday dialogue.

On a different note, task-based language teaching (TBLT) seems to offer several advantages to cope with the issue in Mandarin practice. This is because TBLT is specifically used for the teaching of a second and foreign language. The TBLT emphasises on the use of authentic language and demands learners to do meaningful tasks using the target language. The focus of the task is primarily based on the task outcome that stimulates real world tasks rather than on the accuracy of prescribed language forms. The application of TBLT is popular in the teaching English as a second language or foreign language. However, most of the studies to date were conducted on non-beginning learners of English as the target language in controlled settings. The feasibility of TBLT in the teaching of foreign languages, such as Mandarin in Asia or

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other international setting has not been demonstrated convincingly at the moment (Carles, 2009). Therefore, there is a need for research in the application of TBLT in teaching Mandarin to non-native Mandarin learners to look into its effectiveness.

Thus, there is a need to investigate the effectiveness of TBLT and ALTA to identify how both teaching approaches can improve Mandarin learning.

1.3 Problem Statement

Non-native learners in Malaysian tertiary education encounter limited Mandarin practice environment as most of the programmes in the universities are delivered in English or *Bahasa Malaysia.* This condition could be further explained by the population of Chinese in Malaysia, which only consist of 21.4 percent (Ho, 2016). Furthermore, there is approximately 19 percent of Chinese students who enrol in Malaysia's local universities every year (Tan & Shaman, 2013), and, the number of Chinese students varies according to the programmes offered in the universities. Thus, the condition does not provide a conducive environment for non-native Mandarin learners to practice the language. This situation becomes worse as Mohd Rizal and Thay (2010) in their research, discovered that most of the students are more inclined to socialise with friends of the same race and religion. The limited Mandarin practice is worsened by the fact that most Chinese prefer to communicate in *Bahasa Malaysia* and English instead of Mandarin when they communicate with other races as *Bahasa Malaysia* is their national language. Therefore, the Mandarin learning environment only centralises in classrooms (Wong, 2005; as cited in Hoe & Lim, 2013).

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To communicate in Mandarin, non-native Mandarin learners firstly need to master the tonal phonetic system of the language. It is a challenging experience for them to master the four tones of Mandarin. This is because their native language, such as *Bahasa Malaysia*, *Tamil* and other languages in Malaysia are lacked in tones. This situation makes the mastering of Mandarin vocabulary more difficult and it will influence their speech's fluency and accuracy. The condition deteriorates due to their limited learning environment which makes them unable to fulfil their desired outcomes that in turn, will influence their learning motivation.

Tan, Ooi and Nizam Ismail (2012) in their research has suggested that Mandarin teachers should adopt a suitable teaching approach to take full advantage of the learning orientations, which are to fulfil language proficiency and communication skills as mentioned in MEB and iCGPA. In addition, to motivate learners, they have also suggested three conditions that teachers should create for the Mandarin course: (1) design communicative tasks and opportunities for their students to practise Mandarin and to apply the language by communicating with the Chinese community outside the campus, (2) encourage students to find suitable Mandarin-speaking peers as close friends to practise Mandarin, and (3) apply motivational strategies and learner-centred teaching methods to encourage students to participate more actively and collaborate in the learning process.

The results of existing empirical studies have reported that the usage of TBLT has positive outcomes in foreign language learning. This is because TBLT provides learners with opportunities to speak which help them to practise, shape and improve their oral skills to become more fluent in the target language (Chacón, 2012). It is also believed that TBLT increases the use of target language (Tinker Sachs, 2007) and promotes learners' ability to apply what they have learned in the classroom in real

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world situation (Macías, 2004). Thus, this shows that TBLT can fulfil the conditions mentioned by Tan, et. al (2012) in which teachers should incorporate in a Mandarin course.

Furthermore, researchers have found that TBLT can boost learners' learning motivation (Park, 2012) by increasing their confidence, and at the same time, decrease their learning anxiety (Lopes, 2004). The results of TBLT application can make learners have positive feelings in language learning as TBLT promotes fun and lively classroom atmosphere. According to NamazianDost, Bohloulzadeh and Pazhakh (2017), the increase of learning motivation is influenced by learners' successful learning experience as it meets their expected outcome. Hence, how they perceive successful learning experience is through the learning strategies that help them to consciously control how they learn so that they can be efficient, motivated, and independent language learners (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999; as cited in NamazianDost, Bohloulzadeh & Pazhakh, 2017) to improve their language learning performance. Hence, it is believed that TBLT can influence learners' learning motivation efficiently and motivate them to learn successfully.

There is a need to research on whether the current ALTA application in Mandarin teaching and learning is suitable for non-native Mandarin learners, or that whether the application of TBLT can improve the current teaching and learning method. Therefore, non-native Mandarin learners' oral skills and learning motivation should be taken into consideration in this research to look into the effectiveness of both teaching approaches.

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1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the research:

a) To compare the differences in oral skills of non-native Mandarin learners between Group A (TBLT) and Group B (ALTA) in Test 1 and Test 2 as well as between Test 1 and Test 2 in Group A (TBLT) and Group B (ALTA).

b) To compare the changes in the learning motivation of non-native Mandarin learners between pre-treatment survey and post-treatment survey in Group A (TBLT) and Group B (ALTA).

1.5 Research Questions

The research question for oral skills is about comparing the differences between Group A (TBLT) and Group B (ALTA), and also between Test 1 and Test 2 of Group A (TBLT) and Group B (ALTA). Whereas, the research question for the learning motivation includes two parts related to the learning motivation and learning anxiety. Learning anxiety was included because some researchers have found that learning anxiety is negatively associated with foreign language motivation (Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft, & Evers, 1987; as cited in Hashimoto, 2002). Besides that, Lopes (2004) also mentioned that TBLT could boost learning motivation and at the same time decrease learning anxiety. Hence, the research question for learning motivation includes a part on learning anxiety. The research questions are as follows:

1) a) Are there any significant differences in non-native Mandarin learners' oral skills between Group A (TBLT) and Group B (ALTA) in Test 1 and Test 2?

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b) Are there any significant differences in non-native Mandarin learners' oral skills between Test 1 and Test 2 of Group A (TBLT)?

c) Are there any significant differences in non-native Mandarin learners' oral skills between Test 1 and Test 2 of Group B (ALTA)?

2) a) Are there any changes in non-native Mandarin learners' learning motivation between pre-treatment survey and post-treatment survey of Group A (TBLT)?

b) Are there any changes in non-native Mandarin learners' learning motivation between pre-treatment survey and post-treatment survey of Group B (ALTA)?

c) Are there any changes in non-native Mandarin learners' learning anxiety between pre-treatment survey and post-treatment survey of Group A (TBLT)?

d) Are there any changes in non-native Mandarin learners' learning anxiety between pre-treatment survey and post-treatment survey of Group B (ALTA)?

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1.6 Operational Term Definition

1.6.1 Mandarin

Mandarin refers to Standard Chinese or Standard Mandarin which is based on the particular Mandarin dialect spoken in Beijing. It is the most commonly spoken language amongst the Chinese around the world.

According to Tan, Ooi and Hairul (2016, p.1), there are many synonyms used for Mandarin in different countries as shown as below:

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It is called as “Putonghua” (generally spoken language) and “Hanyu” (Chinese language) in China, “Guoyu” (national language) in Taiwan and “Huayu” (Chinese language) in South-east Asian countries, such as Malaysia and Singapore. Mandarin functions as the official language of the People's Republic of China, the official language of the Republic of China (Taiwan), one of the languages of Singapore, and it also functions as the lingua franca amongst the Malaysian Chinese who speak different Chinese dialects (Tan, et al, 2016).

1.6.2 Non-native Mandarin Speaker

To understand the definition of a non-native speaker, there is a need to gain a clear idea of what defines a native speaker. According to Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2000), there are several views on what being a native speaker means as shown below:

> They are (1) native speaker by birth (that is by early childhood exposure), (2) native speaker by virtue of being a native user, (3) native speaker (or native speaker-like) by being an exceptional learner, (4) native speaker through education in the target language medium, (5) native speaker through long residence in the adopted country. (as cited in Davies & Elder, 2008, p.438)

Hence, according to these characteristics of a native speaker, the Mandarin learners in tertiary education are non-native speakers because they do not experience Mandarin learning in early age and they do not live in the target language environment.

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1.6.3 Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)

TBLT is firstly introduced by Prabu in the 1980s, where it is a branch of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an approach applied in the teaching of a second or foreign language.

TBLT is a teaching approach that promotes tasks which require learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allows teachers to control and regulate that process (Bygate, 1987). Therefore, it engages learners in an interactional authentic language environment by having them to perform a series of tasks (Tareq Mitib Murad, 2009). In other words, Prabu (1987), strongly advocate that “structure can best be learned when attention is focused on meaning” and adopted meaning-focused activities. In conclusion, TBLT stresses learning by doing (Ling & Kai, 2010) or in other words, it is student-centred.

Researchers and methodologists have proposed several sequence tasks or to sequence elements within tasks in order to make TBLT more effective. The sequence tasks from different researchers and methodologist will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

1.6.4 Audio-lingual teaching approach (ALTA)

Audio-lingual teaching approach (ALTA), also known as Army Method or New Key, as it was first used by the United States army for “cash” instructions in a foreign language during World War 2. The approach firstly requires students to listen to or watch recordings of language models acting in certain situations. Later, students who have

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acquired the models are required to practice with a variety of drills and the teacher emphasises the use of target language at all times. Henceforth, it can be said that this approach is used for the purpose of teaching foreign language based on behaviourist theory that illustrates the development of oral skills through habit formation, fostered by the use of repetition.

The principles of ALTA can be divided into two parts, involving the role of teacher and learners where the nature of interactions between learners and teacher play a role as well as learners and their peers. The role of a teacher is like an orchestra leader who directs and controls the language behaviour of learners. Hence, it can be said that it is a teacher-centred teaching, where teachers have the responsibility to provide their learners with a good model for imitation. In contrast, students are the imitation of teachers' model or video supplies of the accurate model speaker. The nature between learners' interaction happens in chain drills or in dialogues when they take different roles and it is directed by the teacher. For most of the situations, the interactions between teacher and learners are initiated by the teacher.

1.7 Limitations of Study

In this research, the subject that the researcher observed is the non-native Mandarin learners who are in their tertiary education in Malaysia. These non-native Mandarin learners are students who enrol in Mandarin courses in one of the universities in Kelantan.

This research was only conducted with the focus on the learning of the Mandarin language. The two teaching approaches applied in this research are TBLT

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and ALTA. Both teaching approaches were compared to look into their effectiveness toward learners' oral skills and learning motivation.

1.8 Importance of Research

This study aims to discover whether TBLT or ALTA can be the one to work better in improving non-native Mandarin learners in terms of oral skills and learning motivation.

The results of this study can provide valuable information for teachers and learners. This is because knowing more about the impact of the application of these two different teaching approaches can help them improve Mandarin teaching design and lesson delivery. Hence, this research investigated how the application of the two different teaching approaches can boost learners' oral skills and learning motivation.

1.9 Chapter Summary

This study was carried out mainly to find out the effects of TBLT and ALTA in Mandarin oral learning as to fulfil the requirement of communication found in iCGPA attributes and language proficiency aspiration in MEB for higher education. Hence, the study was mainly to compare the two teaching approaches in term of their effects in oral skills and learning motivation among non-native Mandarin learners. Their learning anxiety was included in learning motivation because some researchers have found that learning anxiety is negatively associated with foreign language motivation. Therefore, the next chapters discuss on literature review, research methodology, research findings and conclusion of the study.

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