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The Implementation of Dictation (Tingxie) in Chinese Online Learning For Beginner-Level Students

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Abstract – Dictation (tīngxiě) is commonly applied to evaluate students' ability to master Chinese characters. However, dictation is challenging to use in online learning because lecturers do not have full control over the conditions around students when dictation is carried out. Students tend to think more about a "strategic position" to putting notes during dictation than preparing and memorizing Chinese characters. Therefore, it is necessary to adjust the types of dictation questions in online learning. This study is a classroom action research which consists of 4 stages: planning, implementing, observation, and reflection. Researchers designed four types of dictation questions that applied to the Writing Proficiency course for beginner-level Chinese Language and Culture Study Program students at the University of Al Azhar Indonesia. Research data sources from observations, questionnaires and tests. The results showed that the design of the applied dictation question types effectively reduced the opportunity for students to cheat during dictation. In addition, this dictation method is also effective for practising Chinese writing skills and students' mastery of Chinese strokes and writing order.

Keywords - Chinese character; dictation; tingxie; online learning; Chinese language.

INTRODUCTION

Chinese characters or hanzi (汉字) is the character used in Chinese writing. Chinese characters contain components (specifically, phonetic and semantic radicals) carrying rich phonological and semantic information that play significant roles in their recognition (Leung, Lui, Law, Fung, & Lau, 2011). Chinese characters are written characters that combine form, sound, and meaning (表意文字) (Juan, 2020). Therefore, some Chinese characters can directly know how to read, and the meaning contained by looking at them. The total number of Chinese characters summarized in the book *Shuō wén jiě zì* during the Eastern Han dynasty reached 9353. In the "List of Common Characters in Modern Chinese" issued by the China State Language Commission, the total number of Chinese characters is 7000. However, the number of characters that are often used is only 3500 characters. (Commission, 2014)

In learning Chinese foreign speakers, the Chinese character is a unique part but also quite complicated

to learn (Mengge, 2015). Chinese learners, especially from countries that use Latin letters or the alphabet, are unfamiliar with letters in pictures or symbols such as Chinese characters, so they have difficulty recognizing, memorizing, and writing Chinese characters. At the basic level, the teacher can provide explanations and exercises for writing Chinese parts, for example, practice writing strokes (笔画 bǐhuà), writing order (笔顺 bǐshùn), components (部件) and its whole character (整字). (Yuanyuan, 2018).

Bihua, or so-called Chinese strokes are the smallest parts that make up a Chinese character. One Chinese character can consist of one stroke, for example, the character "yī", up to dozens of strokes, such as the character "龔 dá" which consists of 51 strokes. Bishun, or writing order, is the direction or sequence of writing stroke that makes up a Chinese character. Writing order is very important to be taught to students because learning writing order can increase the ability and speed of students to remember Chinese characters and make Chinese characters writing more neat and beautiful.

In addition, by studying writing order, students can understand the components and characteristics of a Chinese character and reduce the possibility of errors in writing (Yuhua, 2019). Chinese characters with a small number of strokes are easier to memorize. However, the more significant the number of strokes and components a Chinese character must be learned, the more students often make mistakes in writing the characters. Some errors that usually occur are the number of strokes that are less or more, the position of the strokes being incorrect, or all of them being wrong.

In learning to write Chinese, dictation is one of the essential forms of practice applied at both beginner and advanced levels (Yonghua & Jizhou, 2014). Dictation means “which is spoken or read aloud so that it is written by someone else” (Bahasa, 2016). The lecturer or teacher usually uses dictation in the classroom by reading Chinese vocabulary or sentences slowly and loudly. Then students write down the Chinese characters in their exercise books. Alternatively, it can also be done by asking several students to come to the front of the class and write down the Chinese characters read aloud by the lecturer or teacher on the blackboard. Although in practice, some students often feel afraid and complain when facing Chinese characters dictation, this method has been proven to improve the ability and motivation of students to memorize Chinese (Hongyan & Chunming, 2014).

In Chinese learning, dictation is commonly used to evaluate and test students' writing skills. (Muliani, Saud, & Junaeny, 2021) research on seventh-grade students of SMP Kalam Kudus Makassar stated that the implementation of dictation in the classroom made students experience an increase in mastery of Chinese vocabulary and changes in learning behaviour in a positive direction. (Nathania, 2020) in her research on students of the Teng Swie Bio Chinese Temple stated that students who were given dictation experienced an increase in their ability to read and recognize Chinese when compared to students who were not. (Rahayu, 2016) in her research on class X APK SMKN 01 Turen stated that the application of dictation could motivate students to be more motivated, happy and active in learning Chinese vocabulary.

To prepare for dictation, students inevitably learn and use their memorization skills to get good grades. However, since classroom learning has been transformed into online learning, applying dictation has become more challenging. The main

obstacle is that the lecturer or teacher does not have full control over the activities of the students/students during the test, including dictation (Qadriani, 2022). In the author's observations in preparation for this research, some students were caught looking at notes on books, walls, tables, or the devices they used.

This condition reduces the effectiveness of dictation as one of the best methods to improve students' memorization of Chinese characters. Students seem to focus more on finding a “strategic position” to put their notes down rather than memorizing them. If this condition continues, it will undoubtedly impair their memorization ability and mastery of Chinese characters. Therefore, an evaluation is needed to apply the dictation from offline to online.

To solve this problem, we designed a dictation question design that is specifically applied in Chinese online classes. This study aims to test the effectiveness of the dictation question design to train students' skills in mastering Chinese character, *bihua* and *bishun*, as well as reduce the possibility of students cheating during dictation.

METHOD

The subjects of this study were 17 first-semester students of the Chinese Language and Culture Study Program of the University of Al Azhar Indonesia (UAI). 13 of them (76.4%) had never studied Chinese before entering UAI, four others (23.6%) had studied Chinese, but their Chinese abilities were still at the basic level.

This research is a classroom action research that contains four stages: planning, implementing, observation, and reflection. The research data sources are questionnaires, tests and observation sheets.

At the planning stage, the lecturer observes and evaluates student learning conditions for half a semester (7 weeks). The lecturer then prepares a dictation design more suitable for online learning. The dictation design is as follows.

At the implementation stage, the lecturer gave dictation four times through virtual face-to-face meetings. The number of Hanzi dictated is 174 characters, taken from students' handbook: *Road*

to Success - Lower Elementary 1, published by Beijing Language and Culture University Press.

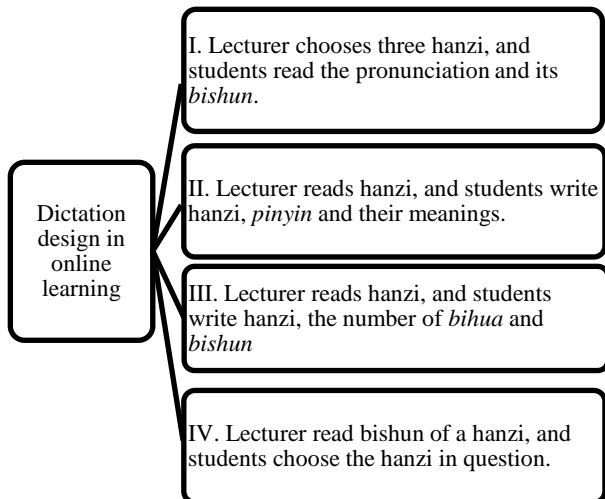


Figure 1. The design of dictation questions in online learning

In the observation stage, the lecturer observes the student's learning progress and motivation to prepare for dictation. The lecturer analyzed the questionnaires and students' dictation sheets in the reflection stage.

Before the implementation of dictation in online learning is applied, students are first taught the basic rules in Chinese writing, including Chinese strokes (笔画), writing order (笔顺), rules for the composition of Chinese components (汉字组织结构) and radicals (部首). Students are also introduced to several web pages or smartphone applications that can be used for self-learning, such as hanzi5.com, quizlet.com, and Pleco. In addition, students have also participated in several writing exercises and two times of general dictations. During dictation, the lecturer reads several hanzi aloud. Then students are asked to write down the hanzi and pinyin the same as during face-to-face learning.

Through observations in a virtual room during dictation and comparing the results of dictation with students' daily progress, it was found that students were suspicious of looking at notes or dictionaries, which gave rise to ideas for evaluating and adapting the dictation design for online learning.

The dictation design in online learning consists of four parts. In the first type of question, students are asked to recite the strokes (*bihua*) and writing order (*bishun*) of the three Chinese characters (*hanzi*)

displayed by the lecturer. In the second type, the lecturer asked the students to write down *hanzi*, *pinyin* and the meaning of the vocabulary read by the lecturer. In the third type, the lecturer reads several *hanzi*, students write down *bishun*, the number of *bihua* and *pinyin*. In the fourth type, the lecturer reads the *bishun* of a *hanzi*, students are asked to choose the most appropriate *hanzi* according to the *bishun* they heard.

From the four types of dictation questions applied in this study, the second and third types are usually applied when dictating face-to-face in the classroom. The first and fourth types of questions are the adjustment of dictation in online learning. In the first part, each student has to read three *hanzi* in a limited time so that the student cannot see the notes.

Literally, the first type of question does not fall into the "hearing" and "writing" categories, which are the basis of dictation activities. However, this question is designed to test students' understanding of "oral writing of *bihua* and *bishun*". If the student does not understand the pronunciation of *bihua* and its *bishun*, then the student may not necessarily be able to write *hanzi* in the proper order. Moreover, if students do not understand how to recite *bihua* and *bishun*, they cannot get points on this part. Likewise, in the fourth type of question, students must also understand the *bihua* and *bishun* of the *hanzi* dictated to choose the right *hanzi*.

The analysis technique in this research is descriptive quantitative. The researcher explained the results of the students' dictation tests in each section by analyzing errors and combining the data with the results obtained from questionnaires and observations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the dictation carried out in four virtual face-to-face meetings, the percentage of correct answers are stated in Table 1.

Based on Table 1, it is known that the lowest percentage of students' answer accuracy is in dictation question type I: reciting *bihua*, then question type III: writing *hanzi*, *bihua*, *bishun* and *pinyin*, then question type II: writing *hanzi*, *pinyin* and its meaning and then question type IV: writing *hanzi* from recited *bishun*.

Table 1. Percentage of correct answers in each type of dictations

	Dictation question types			
	II	II	III	IV
Number of hanzi	56	33	41	44
First dictation	64,9%	82,35%	85,6%	92,9%
Second dictation	61%	85,4%	81,9%	95,3%
Third dictation	59%	90,6%	82,8%	96,4%
Fourth dictation	68,9%	77,2%	76,6%	96,4%
Average percentage	63,45%	83,9%	81,8%	95,25%

Dictation part I: Reciting *bihua*

In this section, the teacher asked students to recite the *bihua* of three hanzi according to their order. Students recite errors are divided into: (1) errors in *bishun*; (2) errors in *bihua*; (3) errors in both *bishun* and *bihua*; (4) recited *bihua* are less; (5) recited *bihua* are more. The error percentage in part I can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Percentage of Dictation Errors Part I

	First dictation	Second dictation	Third dictation	Fourth dictation
Error in <i>bishun</i>	17,64%	15,6%	7,8%	3,9%
Error in <i>bihua</i>	9,8%	15,6%	31,3%	21,5%
Error in both <i>bishun</i> and <i>bihua</i>	5,8%	7,8%	0%	1,9%
Recited <i>bihua</i> less	1,9%	0%	1,9%	1,9%
Recited <i>bihua</i> more	0%	0%	0%	1,9%

In *bishun* errors, students often reversed in reciting the order of writing of *hanzi*. For example, in the character ' 车 ' , the correct order is *héng* (一), *piězhě* (丿), *héng* (一), *shù* (丨), but some students mistakenly recite the order to be *héng* (一), *piězhě* (丿), *shù* (丨), *héng* (一). In error in reciting *bihua*, students did not say the correct *bihua*, for example, the first *bihua* of the character '后' is *piě* (丿), but some students called it *héng* (一).

In the case of errors in both *bishun* and *bihua*, students are incorrect in the writing order and incorrect in reciting the *bihua*. In less *bihua* or more *bihua* errors, the error rate is shallow. Usually, they unknowingly miss a certain hanzi or two or say it repetitively.

Interestingly, based on the questionnaire results distributed to students, 41.2% thought that part I was easier to do than the other parts. It is probably because most students did not realize they had made a small mistake while reading the *bihua* and *bishun*. Therefore, they felt pretty confident completing the first part of the dictation. However, from the questionnaire results, students said that they often went back and forth in reciting the *bishun*, had trouble distinguishing similar *bihua* and did not memorize the names of the strokes. In addition, being too nervous is also the reason why students make mistakes in reading *bishun*.

Dictation part II: Writing hanzi, pinyin, and the meaning

Compared with the results of part I, the accuracy of answers in the dictation part II is higher (83,9%). In this section, the lecturer first reads the hanzi, and then the students write down the hanzi, *pinyin*, and its meaning. This question type II is a type of dictation question that is usually applied in classrooms. In the second part of the dictation, the students' answer errors were divided into three groups: writing errors in hanzi and *pinyin*, writing errors only in hanzi, and writing errors only in *pinyin*. The error in meaning is not discussed in this research because this research only focuses on Chinese writing elements.

The percentage of error answers in part II are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Percentage of Dictation Errors Part II

	First dictation	Second dictation	Third dictation	Fourth dictation
Writing errors both in <i>hanzi</i> and <i>pinyin</i>	7%	1,1%	0%	2,3%
Writing errors in <i>hanzi</i>	8,8%	13,5%	9,4%	16,4%
Writing errors in <i>pinyin</i>	1,7%	0%	0%	4,1%

Table 3 shows that the error rate in writing hanzi is higher than in writing *pinyin*. The errors in hanzi writing are students writing down characters with similar pronunciation or written to the read character. For example, the lecturer reads the word ‘房间’, but students write it down as ‘旁边’. The teacher asked to write the word ‘书架’, but the students wrote it as ‘暑假’; the teacher asked to write the character ‘东’, but the student wrote into character ‘乐’. Some students did not answer because they did not know what recited *hanzi* was. In *pinyin* writing errors, the most mistakes were that students only wrote consonants and vowels but did not write tone (声调) in *pinyin*.

In line with the dictation results, part II was considered the most challenging part for students to do based on the questionnaire results. 47.1% of students said that part II was the hardest. Students find it challenging to memorize hanzi and are often confused about which hanzi the lecturer reads, considering that hanzi has a homophone character with the same sound but different writing and meaning. In addition, students also feel rushed, making them often forget to write their tone in *pinyin*.

Dictation part III: Writing hanzi, *bihua*, *bishun*, and *pinyin*

In dictation part III, the lecturer read a word consisting of one syllable, for example, ‘茶’、‘贵’、‘挤’ and others. Students must write down the hanzi, *pinyin*, the number of *bihua* and *bishun*. Based on Table 1, the percentage of accuracy of student answers, part III ranks second with the lowest level of accuracy. Based on the questionnaire, this type of question III is also the second most difficult part, with 35.3%. The categorization of errors is divided into (1) hanzi writing errors, (2) *pinyin* writing errors, (3) *bishun* order errors, and (4) *bihua* miscounted. The percentage of errors in the dictation part III is as follows in Table 4.

Based on table 4, the most common errors are errors in *bishun*. The *bishun* are incorrect; some *bihua* are lacking, and some are more in number. *Bihua*, which is written more or less affects the calculation of its number, so the number of *bihua* written is also incorrect. In addition, many words appear that are not written as required. For example, the lecturer says the word “几 jǐ”, but students write the word “骑” or “汽”. The error in *pinyin* is that

students forget to write down the tone or *pinyin* as a whole.

Table 4. Percentage of Dictation Errors Part III

	First dictation	Second dictation	Third dictation	Fourth dictation
<i>Hanzi</i> writing error	2.9%	1.8%	2.9%	4.4%
<i>Pinyin</i> writing error	2.1%	2.6%	3.5%	4.4%
<i>Bishun</i> error	4.7%	7.9%	5.5%	7.6%
<i>Bihua</i> miscounted	4.7%	5.8%	5.3%	7%

The questionnaire data filled out by aligns with the data analysis above. However, students find part III difficult because they often forget the writing order or the *bishun*. They are often confused about which character was read by the lecturer and often miscount the number of strokes. In addition, the time limit also becomes an obstacle for some students. It makes them in a hurry to complete the dictation.

Dictation part IV: Writing hanzi from recited *bishun*

In dictation part IV, the lecturer read *bishun* from several hanzi, and students write down the hanzi in question. In the dictation of this section, the presentation of the accuracy of student answers is the highest compared to the other sections, which is 95.25%.

Table 5. Percentage of Dictation Errors Part IV

First dictation	Second dictation	Third dictation	Fourth dictation
7.1%	4.7%	3.6%	3.6%

The questionnaire results also showed that 52.5% of students thought part IV was the easiest part to do, and 64.7% stated they had no difficulty doing part IV. However, some students who found it a little challenging to do the dictation of part IV reasoned that the lecturer was too fast when reading *bishun*. Others stated that they were still unfamiliar with the name of *bihua*, so they were often confused when following the dictation part IV.

Reflection

From the results of the dictation analysis and questionnaires in the four dictation sections, we can

see that the error that occurs lies in the students' mastery of *bishun* and *bihua* still needs to be improved. Therefore, it is necessary to practice to enhance students' understanding and knowledge of *bihua* and *bishun*. Providing a strong base for their Chinese characters learning at the next level is important. If they already have a good understanding at the primary level, it will help reduce writing errors at the next level.

In addition, in part I of dictation, many students must realize that they have made minor mistakes in mentioning *bihua* and *bishun*. Therefore, teachers must evaluate the results of dictation, explaining common mistakes students make after dictation is complete so that students can be more careful and thorough in the future.

Overall, through observations made face-to-face with Zoom during dictation and aligning with students' daily learning development, this online dictation design effectively improves students' Chinese writing skills. Evaluation of the dictation design can also reduce the opportunity for students to cheat during dictation. Students no longer focus on writing hanzi on cheat sheets or looking for "strategic positions" to view dictionary applications on their phones, but try to memorize hanzi and store it in their brains.

Based on data from the questionnaire, 100% of students thought that this online dictation design motivated them to recognize and memorize hanzi along with the *pinyin*, *bihua*, and *bishun* they had learned. Students also feel increasingly interested in learning and repeating lessons regularly to get high grades. They are also encouraged to use various online learning media such as Youtube, Chinese learning applications, and websites. On the questionnaire question, "Do you agree that this dictation method will continue in the next semester?" All students agreed with the reason that this dictation method helped them in learning Chinese characters and vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

Dictation (*tingxie*) is one method teachers, and lecturers often use to teach Chinese face-to-face. Dictation effectively motivates students to recognize and memorize Chinese characters and vocabulary. The teacher or lecturer fully controls monitoring students during dictation in the classroom. However, teachers or lecturers have

limitations in monitoring and controlling students in online learning. At the beginning of online learning, students often have found cheating during dictation. Before dictation begins, they have prepared small notes or devices that can be accessed when they do not know how to write the Chinese character or look for a "strategic position" to easily view the cheat sheets posted on the wall or other media. This condition certainly reduces the effectiveness of dictation in learning, encouraging the author to evaluate the dictation model and apply it in the classroom.

The results of this study indicate that the dictation adapted for online learning has proven to be effective in improving student's writing skills. Students focus on memorizing Hanzi and strokes (*bihua*) and how they are written (*bishun*). Students are also motivated to memorize and explore the Chinese characters they have learned through online media to increase their understanding of Chinese. Some students also think that dictation made regularly makes their study schedule regular and tends to be encouraged to understand better the lessons that have been taught. In addition, the dictation method applied can reduce cheating during dictation. It is because, to get good grades, students are not only required to be able to write but also be able to recite and understand the strokes and the order of the hanzi writing.

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Appendix:

The design of dictation questions (听写设计) Third Dictation

Part I: Read the *bihua* according to its writing order 说汉字的笔顺 (3 题, 满分 15 分)

坐	迎	果	种	要	香	面
喝	饭	块	贵	共	蕉	包
茶	饺	毛	便	钱	怎	欢
还	条	元	宜	咖	咱	样
找	啡	吧	给	啤	酒	别

Part II: Listen to the teacher, write down *hanzi*, *pinyin* and its meaning 听老师说词，写汉字、拼音和意思 (10 题, 满分 30 分)

比如：你们 *nǐmen*: *kalian*

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

Part III: Listen to the teacher, write down *Hanzi*, *pinyin*, *bishun* and *bihua* 听老师说字，写汉字、拼音、笔顺和笔画 (5 题, 满分 30 分)

比如：支 *zhī* → 

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Part IV: Listen to the teacher, choose the proper *hanzi*. 听笔顺，写汉字 (5 题, 满分 25 分)

空 挤 换 室 忙 路 每 体 借 电

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.