Engaging Students to Chinese Language Enhancement Classes With Communication-Intensive Components

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Abstract

One of the University educational aims for undergraduate curricula in the University of Hong Kong is to enhance and promote communication and collaboration among students. The goal is to provide students with consistent and constant opportunities to communicate effectively in academic, professional, and social settings. Furthermore, the university is committed to the facilitation of environments in which students continually work with others and learn how to make constructive contributions in group work. The University approved the Communication-intensive courses initiative in 2018-19 by recognizing courses that provide HKU students with the core communicate competences needed for creative, economic, and social success on campus and in the workplace. In traditional classrooms, students learning Chinese are expected to listen to lectures and work on related assignments to strengthen their understanding and mastery of the knowledge gained in class. However, in CiC courses, the focus is on the four main areas of communication: (i) oral literacy, (ii) written literacy, (iii) visual literacy, and (iv) digital literacy. In our Chinese language enhancement courses, which are Communication-intensive badged, students gain communication skills through a variety of activities including in-class discussions, assessed and non-assessed tasks and/or assignments, guest workshops, and peer and teacher feedback on both speaking practice and written assignments. After completing the CiC courses, our students develop certain abilities and attributes of effective communicators. These courses enhance our students' communication skills, which was demonstrated by the results of the pre-course and post-course surveys.

Keywords: Communication-Intensive, Communication Competence, Oral Literacy, Written Literacy, Visual Literacy, Digital Literacy, Attributes of Communicators, Chinese Language Learning

Introduction

HKU Communication-intensive Courses (CiC) Initiative

At a formal meeting in November 2018, the Senate of the University of Hong Kong approved the Communication-intensive Courses (CiC) initiative. By doing so, the university acknowledged the need to provide courses that offer HKU students with the core communicate competences that are so important nowadays for their creative, economic and social success both on campus and in the workplace.

One of the University's educational aims for undergraduate curricula in HKU is to enhance and promote communication and collaboration among students. And it is exactly here where CiC outshine conventional courses. By implementing Communication-intensive practices in learning environments, students are consistently and constantly provided with opportunities to communicate effectively in academic, professional and social settings. Furthermore, in Communication-intensive courses, students continually work with others and learn how to make constructive contributions in group work.

Currently, HKU students' communication skills are addressed in three types of courses, namely language enhancement courses, common core courses and professional communication courses. With the introduction of the CiC scheme, all the aforementioned courses will be labelled as CiC courses. These courses are also called CI-badged courses and consist of a syllabus with components that explicitly develop communication-related knowledge, skills and attributes. Every CiC course must include communication-related course learning outcomes and communication-rich assessments and learning activities.

Requirements of CI-badged Courses

For a course to be CI-badged, it must contribute to the development of students' communication related knowledge, skills and attributes in at least two of the following four literacy areas.

Oral literacy: the ability to communicate through spoken texts that are constructed with the appropriate content, structures, and language features, fit for their intended academic or professional purposes and audience. These are some examples of practices or activities teachers may use in lessons to enhance students' oral communication skills: debates, simulations, role-play activities, teacher/student-led discussions, online training sessions/workshops, peer feedback, etc.

Written literacy: the ability to communicate through written texts that are constructed with the appropriate content, structure and language features, fit for their intended academic or professional purposes and audience. This could be achieved with written tasks in the form of blogs, journal entries, discussion boards, analysis of sample texts, etc.

Visual literacy: the ability to communicate in speech and writing through appropriate visual modes (e.g., diagrams, graphs, charts) and/or visual media (e.g., posters, 3-D printed objects, stage performance). Some activities teachers might be already using or may want to incorporate into their teaching include, but are not limited to, storyboarding, live/video lecture, early draft/planning, analysis of sample visuals, hands-on learning of software, teacher/student-led discussion of visual design, etc.

Digital literacy: the ability to use appropriate information and communication technologies to search, evaluate, create, and communicate information in speech and writing (e.g. wikis, websites, virtual reality projects). The options are many, teachers could better their student's digital literacies by giving them opportunities to have storyboarding, live/video lectures, online training session/workshop, analysis of sample websites/videos, learning software (e.g., Audacity), etc.

Moreover, teachers must assign at least 40% of the course grade to communication-rich assessment tasks. Students' expected learning outcomes will be described in the rubrics of the communication-rich assessments. The formative and summative assessments will be adopted in the courses and feedback will be given timely and effectively.

CiC Badge Symbol in Students' Academic Attainment Profile

Students can check whether a course is CI-badged or not by logging into the student information system (SIS) and searching for the course in question. A CiC symbol can be found next to the course title in their academic transcripts. As a result, students, teachers, and employers have access to data regarding the number of CiC courses a particular student completed to get an idea of his or her communication training.

Support from the CiC Committee

Course coordinators are not alone when implementing and delivering CiC courses in HKU. They are supported by the CiC committee in the following ways: short workshops, curated online resources and materials development.

1)   Short workshops/lessons on an aspect of writing/speaking/visual/digital communication (e.g., workshop on paraphrasing, audience awareness, using voice effectively, video editing, webpage design etc.). Workshop length is negotiable and depends on availability and lesson objective.

2)   The Committee can create a website that contains links to our database of online tutorials and/or learning materials. For example, if teachers want their students to learn video-editing skills, the Committee can create a website that has a list of video-editing online tutorials.

3)   There is a consultation service the Committee provides, which is ideal for those who prefer to teach communication elements in their courses themselves. If teachers need ideas on how to teach an aspect of communication or create communication-related teaching materials, they can seek assistance from the Committee.

Case Study: CBBA 9002 in 2021-22

Taking my course CBBA 9002 (Practical Chinese for BBA(IS) Students) in 2021-22 as an example, which students majoring in Business and Information Systems must complete this Chinese language enhancement course to fulfill the graduation requirement, the benefits of CiC courses are more than apparent.

The main objective of this course is to promote the professional use of Modern Chinese in the fields of business and information technology (IT). The course focuses on two areas of

literacy, oral and written. It familiarizes students with traditional and simplified Chinese characters, business and IT glossary, modern Chinese grammar and rhetoric, equips them with the ability to correct wrongly written characters, and requires from them to compose practical Chinese writings through outcome-based and communication-rich assignments and an examination. Special communication training (e.g., lectures, tutorials, guest workshops) that is intended to sharpen students' presentation skills is also provided.

At the end of the course, students are able to: simplify complex business and IT concepts for the general public; use appropriate features of language to convey meaning to the target audience; present ideas logically, concisely and professionally with cultural sensitivity; provide constructive feedback to peers; respond to constructive criticism from the teacher; improve the quality of their spoken and written communication in response to constructive feedback; present with confidence and in a concise, organized and articulate way; and be collaborative and open-minded to diverse perspectives. All the aforementioned abilities are those of an effective communicator.

Looking at how the course was taught in previous year, subject knowledge was clearly the main content of the course. For example, grammar of Modern Chinese language, correction of wrongly written characters, and traditional and simplified Chinese characters and comparison of Cantonese and Mandarin were all subjects solely focused on knowledge acquisition. In traditional classrooms, the general expectation is for students to attend lectures and later submit assessments that aim to solidify and strengthen the knowledge gained in class.

In my course 2021-22 schedule, we can see how, in some sessions, students can learn through the delivery of a CiC component and how, in other sessions, the content did not qualify as CiC ready. A similar trend can be observed in terms of tutorials. The following paragraphs offer a more detailed description of how my course addresses CiC components and tutorials.

First, in regards to CiC components, students enhance their communication skills by attending a guest workshop on presentation skills in the workplace. In the workshop, students develop specific communication skills with the help of two experienced media workers. They are asked to apply relevant communication strategies and deploy acquired presentation skills through in-class speaking practice, consisting of impromptu speech and a master of ceremonies role play. Students then receive comments and feedback from the guests, teachers and peers. In another lecture called "Business Writing", students discuss, analyze, and compare business and IT articles using communication tactics. They, among teachers and peers, make logical comments and constructive criticism on real examples of practical writing (e.g. memos/letters/proposals).Furthermore, they integrate appropriate technical terms from the fields of business and IT, aiding themselves with glossaries prepared by teachers and from relevant websites. Moreover, relevant terms must be used in their oral presentations and written reports, where they combine knowledge of the Chinese language with knowledge of the disciplinary subject by analyzing selected business and IT articles from Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China.

Second, concerning tutorials, a workshop for preparing context-based project is facilitated. Additionally, students hold in-class group discussions about the presentation topics. Proposals are drafted in class and feedback is given by teachers and peers. In two tutorials, students in groups give an oral presentation, making use of the presentation skills taught in class and present a business and IT related proposal to the general public through visuals and

within a particular context (e.g. product launch / press conference). They demonstrate their questioning and answering skills and provide constructive criticism and feedback among teachers and peers once the presentations have been given. At the end of the course, students have to master the format, organization, language, and style of expression of the genes of promotional Chinese writings (e.g. posters/press releases), which are related to the presentation topics, to then exhibit the writings in class for comments and feedback. (Appendix A)

Regarding the assignments, students are required to design posters and produce videos for their context-based projects, for which they receive support from the CiC committee. For instance, the CiC committee can guide them in the process of designing posters, producing short videos, and finally uploading their projects to the assigned website, on which they can later receive and provide feedback among peers. "Students may also use technology to improve their ability to communicate…compared with in-person discussions, an advantage of electronic discussions is that the contributions of each participant can be documented." (Bryant, 2005).

Pre-Course and Post-Course Survey Results of CBBA 9002 in the Academic Year of 2021-2022

CiC courses enhance our students' communication skills, which can be demonstrated by the results of the surveys organized by the CiC committee and powered by Survey Monkey. A survey was offered to my students (11 respondents in a class of 14 students) at the end of the first and final lecture of my course in September 2021 and December 2021 respectively. Here are the findings of the study, divided into three main areas: students' self-assessment of communication competence, students' attitudes towards development of communication competence, and the course elements that students perceive to promote communication competence development. (Appendix B)

For the first area, students were asked to evaluate their oral, written, visual and digital ability both at the start and at the end of the course. They were prompted to do so by assigning a value ranging from 1-5, where 1 represented "extremely weak" and 5, "exceptional".

For the following two areas, they had to express their levels of agreeance with a number of statements. These levels were measured with a five-point scale, in which 1 accounted for "strongly disagree" and 5, for "strongly agree".

Once this data was collected, Cohen's d was calculated as the effect size index and was categorized into Negligible ($d<0.10$), Small ($0.10 \leq d < 0.30$), Medium ($0.30 \leq d < 0.50$), and Large($d \geq 0.50$).

Deeper insights into the findings of each area can be found below:
Table 1   Students' self-assessment of communication competence
The results in this area showed a medium effect according to Cohen's d for oral, written and visual communication competence. A large effect was recorded for digital communication competence, which showed that most students felt a significant improvement in this area after taking this CI- badged course.
Table 2   Students' attitudes towards development of communication competence
The results in this area varied from negligible to medium in size in accordance with Cohen's d. A medium effect was recorded for two items. The survey showed that after taking this CI-

badged course, students attributed more importance to both their need of spending time to develop their communication competence and developing communication skills for their academic life. In addition, a small effect was observed for another two items. Namely, the students' belief that learning communication skills had lifelong benefits and their understanding that the development of their communication skills was just as important as the development of their subject knowledge. Lastly, a negligible effect was noted in the students' belief that developing communication skills was important in their future career. However, it is worth mentioning that this is mostly because students had already given this item a very high value in the pre-course survey.

Table 3   Course elements that could promote communication competence

In this area, a large effect was accomplished for all items but one. The latter only seeing a small increase. Again, it is important to remark that it was this item, namely the belief that teacher feedback helped students develop their communication competence, the one that had reported the highest value during the pre-course survey.

Of special significance was the increase seen in the students' idea that formal assessments had helped them to assess their communication competence level, growing from being the item deemed the least important in this area to being the second highest ranked item in the whole survey. Moreover, students stated that they had clearly understood the communication objectives of this course and expressed that they had had multiple opportunities within their course to develop their communication competence. Needless to say, the results of the surveys were more than satisfactory.

Conclusion

To conclude, one of HKU's educational aims for undergraduate curricula is to enhance and promote communication and collaboration among students. HKU's university educational aims and institutional learning outcomes for undergraduate curricula, one of the aims is communication and collaboration, which aims at enhancing our students' communication skills. At present, HKU students learn communication skills, by either taking language enhancement courses (English and Chinese), which are general and discipline-specific, selecting common core courses, which are cross-discipline, and some professional communication courses, which are discipline-specific. With the development of the CiC initiative, students will enhance not only their productive and creative skills in relation to the above literacies, but also their receptive skills to understand, interpret and critique texts. According to the CiC Committee's recent record (last updated on 6 February 2022), there are 30 faculty courses, 24 common core courses, 34 English enhancement courses, and 10 Chinese enhancement courses, for a total of 98 courses which have successfully attained CiC certification. Students can be well benefited from CI-badged courses which help them communicate effectively in academic, professional and social settings, while making appropriate use of available technology and working with others to make constructive contributions.

Appendices

Appendix A- CBBA 9002 21-22 Course Schedule

<u>**Course Schedule**</u>

<u>*Lecture*</u>

Session	Theme	CiC component
1	Introduction and Pre-course Test	
2	Grammar of Modern Chinese Language	
3	Traditional and Simplified Chinese Characters and Correction of Wrongly Written Characters	
4	Comparison of Cantonese and Mandarin	
5	Business Communication	
6	Guest Workshop - Presentation Skills in Workplace	✧ Develop specific communication skills from guests' sharing (e.g. media workers) ✧ Apply relevant communication strategies and deploy acquired presentation skills through in-class speaking practice: impromptu speech and role play of master of ceremonies ✧ Receive comments and feedback from guests, teachers and peers
7	Business Writing	✧ Discuss some business and IT articles ✧ Analyze and compare the articles with communication tactics ✧ Make logical comments and constructive criticism on the real examples of practical writings (e.g. memos / letters / proposals) among teachers and peers
8	Revision	

Tutorial

Session	Theme	CiC component
1	Grammar of Modern Chinese Language	
2	Traditional and Simplified Chinese Characters	
3	Comparison of Cantonese and Mandarin	
4	Business Communication	✧ Integrate appropriate technical terms in business and IT areas from the glossaries prepared by the teachers and from websites ✧ According to the presentation topics, relevant terms will be used in oral presentations and written reports ✧ Combine knowledge of the Chinese language with knowledge of the disciplinary subject by analyzing some selected business and IT articles from Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China
5	Workshop for Preparing Context-based Project	✧ In-class group discussions about the presentation topics ✧ Proposals will be drafted in class and feedback will be given by teachers and peers
6	Students' Presentation 1	✧ Deploy the presentation skills taught in class and present a business and IT related proposal to the general public through visuals and with the communicative competence in a particular context (e.g. product launch / press conference) ✧ Demonstrate questioning and answering as well as providing constructive criticism and feedback among teachers and peers ✧ Master the format, organization and language and style of expression of the genes of the promotional Chinese writings (e.g. posters / press releases) which are related with the presentation topics, exhibit the writings in class for comments and feedback
7	Students' Presentation 2	
8	Assignments' Feedback	

Appendix B- CBBA 9002 21-22 Pre-Course and Post-Course Surveys

CiC Pre- & Post-Course Survey Summary Report 2021-2022

Course: CBBA Practical Chinese for BBA(IS) students
Pre-course: 11 respondents
Post-course: 11 respondents

Profile: 11 local
Profile: 11 local

A. Students' self-assessment of communication competence

Table 1
Summary results of students' self-assessment of communication competence

Items	Pre-course		Post-course		Effect Size
	M	SD	M	SD	(Cohen's d)
1 My oral communication competence (e.g., oral presentation, contributing to a discussion) is	3.00	0.45	3.36	1.03	+M (0.45)
2 My written communication competence (e.g., essay writing, report writing) is	3.00	0	3.45	1.04	+M (0.45)
3 My visual communication competence (e.g., poster design, creating an infographic) is	3.00	0	3.45	1.04	+M (0.45)
4 My digital communication competence (e.g., making a video, creating a website) is	3.27	0.79	3.82	0.75	+L (0.71)

Note: Students' communication competence measured on a 5-point scale (1= extremely weak to 5 = exceptional). Cohen's d was calculated as the effect size index and was categorised into Negligible ($d < 0.10$), Small ($0.10 \leq d < 0.30$), Medium ($0.30 \leq d < 0.50$), and Large ($d \geq 0.50$).

B. Students' attitudes towards development of communication competence

Table 2
Summary results of students' attitudes towards development of communication competence

Items	Pre-course		Post-course		Effect Size
	M	SD	M	SD	(Cohen's d)
5 I need to spend time developing my communication competence.	3.73	0.65	4.09	0.83	+M (0.48)
6 Developing my communication skills is just as important as developing my subject knowledge.	4.00	0.77	4.09	0.83	+S (0.11)
7 I believe that developing communication skills is important in my academic life.	4.00	0.45	4.18	0.60	+M (0.34)
8 I believe that developing communication skills is important in my future career.	4.18	0.60	4.18	0.75	N (0)
9 Learning communication skills is important because my ability to communicate is a lifelong skill.	4.09	0.54	4.18	0.75	+S (0.14)

Note: Students' attitudes measured on a 5-point scale (1= strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree). Cohen's d was calculated as the effect size index and was categorised into Negligible ($d < 0.10$), Small ($0.10 \leq d < 0.30$), Medium ($0.30 \leq d < 0.50$), and Large ($d \geq 0.50$).

C. The course elements that students perceive to promote communication competence development

Table 3

Summary results of the course elements that could promote communication competence development

Items		Pre-course		Post-course		Effect Size
		M	SD	M	SD	(Cohen's d)
10	I clearly understood the communication objectives of this course.	3.91	0.30	4.27	0.65	+L (0.71)
11	I believe teacher feedback helped develop my communication competence.	4.09	0.30	4.18	0.60	+S (0.19)
12	I had multiple opportunities within a course to develop my communication competence.	3.73	0.47	4.18	0.60	+L (0.83)
13	Formal assessments helped me to assess my communication competence level.	3.45	0.67	4.18	0.60	+L (1.15)

Note: Course elements measured on a 5-point scale (1= strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree). Cohen's d was calculated as the effect size index and was categorized into Negligible ($d < 0.10$), Small ($0.10 \leq d < 0.30$), Medium ($0.30 \leq d < 0.50$), and Large ($d \geq 0.50$).

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Resources

https://cics.hku.hk/ (Communication-Intensive Courses, The University of Hong Kong.)

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