

Evaluating the Linguistic and Cultural Authenticity of a K-6 Chinese Literacy Curriculum

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Abstract

Textbooks play a pivotal role in systematically supporting instructors in teaching vocabulary, grammar, and cultural information within second-language (L2) instruction. However, it is important for an L2 curriculum to include meaningful linguistic and cultural input. Research has shown that exposure to authentic texts promotes L2 learners' linguistic, communicative, and cultural competencies. For those distanced from the environments of the target language and culture (e.g., many Chinese language learners), textbooks should present linguistic variety and cultural representations in a developmental sequence to cultivate learners' intercultural communicative competence (Weninger, 2021). This study evaluated the linguistic and cultural authenticity of a Grades K-6 Chinese literacy curriculum—*Mandarin Matrix*—designed for Chinese Dual Immersion and Chinese bilingual students, and used across schools in Asia, the UK, and North America. This investigation addresses the existing gap in research regarding the representation of authentic Chinese language use and Chinese culture in L2 curricula. The research included a detailed content analysis of the series. Coding indicated that the curriculum demonstrates high linguistic authenticity in word usage, word order, and situational representations (>90%). Over 92% of portrayed scenarios and character behaviors were coded as culturally authentic. Notably, overall linguistic and cultural authenticity increases across Grades K-6 books (82%-99%). However, coders agreed that the illustrated settings in K-5 books exhibit lower authenticity (45%-60%), while Grade 6 books' rich emphasis on Chinese history was deemed more authentic. These results offer valuable insights into the significance of highly authentic texts in supporting students' L2 learning.

Keywords: dual immersion; intercultural communicative competence; *Mandarin Matrix*, second language acquisition (SLA); textbooks