EDUCATIONAL ANIMATION ON CHINESE CHARACTERS FOR CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The research investigates the essential attributes of animation in teaching basic Chinese characters to children. The objectives of this research are to identify the evolutionary history and definitions of the Chinese characters, to analyze animation techniques which fascinate the children, to propose visual elements that can be used in the educational animation, and lastly to validate the proposed educational animation to the target audience. In this animation, the researcher includes a short animation of storytelling that integrates magical visual elements in order to attract the children's attention.

ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini adalah mengkaji tentang sifat-sifat suatu animasi yang mengajar kanak-kanak mengenai tulisan Cina. Objektif penyelidikan termasuklah mengenalpasti sejarah evolusi dan takrif tulisan-tulisan Cina, menganalisis teknik-teknik animasi yang mempesonakan untuk kanak-kanak, mencadangkan elemen-elemen visual yang boleh digunakan dalam animasi pendidikan, serta membuat validasi ke atas animasi pendidikan yang telah dihasilkan. Animasi pendek ini turut menerapkan sedikit unsur ajaib untuk tujuan ini.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The research investigates the essential attributes of animation in teaching basic Chinese characters to children, especially non-Chinese children. This animation would help the children to understand how the Chinese characters have evolved to nowadays' forms, to understand the meaning of each character, and to learn how to read and write the characters. The three main languages in Malaysia, which are Bahasa Malaysia, English and Chinese, will be used in this animation so that all races of Malaysia can understand it.

1.2 Background of the research

Chiinese writing system is the world's most ancient writing system that is still in use today. A Chinese character is a logogram used in writing Chinese (*hanzi*), Japanese (*kanji*), less frequently Korean (*hanja*), and formerly Vietnamese (*hán tự),* and other languages. Another name of it, the Han character, also suggests the greatest development of the characters used today came from the Han Dynasty. The several derivative types of it include a handful which are pictographic (象形 *xiàngxíng)* in origin, and some which are ideographic (指事 *zhǐshì)* in origin, but the majority originated as phono-semantic compounds (形声 *xíngshēng).*

Figure 1.2 shows a few Chinese characters that have changed over time from their earliest known pictographic forms, to the versions used today. The evolutionary history of the Chinese characters can be observed from the figure below, starting from the oracle bone script to simplified script.

Figure 1.2 Evolution of Chinese character

Chinese characters were first invented base on the ancient Chinese's observations on human, animal, object, action, or nature surrounding them. This is why majority of the earliest Chinese characters portraying the thing they signify which means each character resembles the object it refers to. After many years, Emperor Qin of Qin Dynasty, the first Emperor of a united China unified all Chinese characters in writing. This unifying act has contributed to a strong foundation for the subsequent Chinese characters evolution took place during the Han Dynasty. However, evolution of Chinese characters did not just stop after the Han Dynasty but it continues until today.

Referring to Figure 1.2 on page 2, clerical script, standard script, running script and grass script are still well known as the art of writing, while the simplified script is the style of the Chinese characters we often see and use today except in Taiwan. According to Tan Huay Peng (2008, p.11, 12 & 13), the Chinese characters are simplified for three reasons: to make writing simpler and faster, to aid learning effectively, and to make knowledge accessible. Besides that, amazingly with only 3,500 most frequently used basic characters, there are now more than 1,000,000 words formed where the meanings of these words are closely related to the basic characters.

As the Chinese characters have been developed through such a long history and are still developing, there are a vast of interesting stories, culture and wisdom hidden in every character which becomes the treasure of Chinese. Yet, it is not easy to learn Chinese as the Chinese idiom said, “Learning has no end”.

1.3 Definition of key terms

During the research, there are linguistic terms that needed to be understood to have a better comprehension so that the message is clearly conveyed.

1.3.1 ***Pictographic*.** Pictographic is an adjective which means consisting or characterized by the use of pictographs. (Lewis, A., 2008)

1.3.2 ***Ideographic*.** Ideographic is an adjective relating to symbol used in a writing system that represents the idea of a thing. (Hornby A., 2002)

1.3.3 ***Phono-semantic.*** Phono-semantic is a compound adjective relating to sound and meaning. (Lewis, A., 2008)

1.3.4 ***Compound*.** Compound means noun, adjective and etcetera composed of two or more words or parts of words (written as one or more words). (Hornby A., 2002)

1.3.5 ***Radical*.** Radical is the form of a word after all affixes are removed. (Lewis, A., 2008)

1.4 Problem statements

1.4.1 Most educational animations on learning the Chinese characters use Chinese language only.

As it is a different writing system from English, French and the other spelling languages (Dashan, 2006-2007), it gives a certain difficulty for non-Chinese to learn it. Other races also tend to get confuse with other similar languages like Japanese and Vietnamese.

1.4.2 China's visual elements are often used in the animation, yet visual elements used are either too complicated or not attractive.

The educational animations on learning the Chinese characters that are offered in the local market are often not smooth, and lots of static pictures are used. Besides, there is no relation to the local content in the animation. This makes the audiences would not think of relating what they have learnt to the application in the real life.

1.5 Objectives

In order to make sure the research is always kept in track, four objectives have been identified and listed. The objectives are:

1.5.1 To identify the evolutionary history and definitions of the Chinese characters.

1.5.2 To analyse animation techniques that arouse and retain children's interest in learning Chinese characters.

1.5.3 To propose visual elements that can be used in the educational animation.

1.5.4 To validate the proposed educational animation to the target audience.

1.6 Hypothesis

The animation will be designed to help children in mastering Chinese language by using attractive animation and visual elements.

1.7 Significance of the research

Having the largest population in the world, Chinese is significant for the exchange of culture and knowledge, and the expansion of business seeing the openness of China today. Malaysia is one of the countries that contain the most population of Chinese citizen besides China. It would be a benefit to learn Chinese characters to understand this race in Malaysia because the Chinese characters reveal their culture.

So, this research is significant as a strong foundation for the children to learn and master one more language. This language, which will be learnt through the educational animation produced after the research, will be a great tool for them to understand the Chinese culture and knowledge, and even a great help in their future careers.

1.8 Conceptual underpinnings for the study

This research is expected to be carried out for eight to ten months (refer to the conceptual framework in Appendix A on page 54 and the Gantt chart in Appendix B on page 55). A conceptual framework is an outline of a preferred approach to an idea or thought while Gantt chart is a chart that illustrates the schedule of a research project. The research process is divided to several stages as the following:

1.8.1 Proposal and research (month 1)

This is where the first step is defined to ensure the territory of the research after gaining some knowledge on the topic. It is an important stage like a signpost along the road of research.

1.8.2 Collecting data (month 2)

This is a stage of "get as many as you can" to obtain the maximum amount of data to have a deeper research after the topic of research and the proposal is approved. Data will be collected through primary and secondary sources. Qualitative method is chosen to do this job. Moreover, testing of the animation would be done to gain feedback from the target respondents.

1.8.3 Analysing data (month 2-4)

This is a "converting" stage where the researcher interprets all the findings into words, graphics and storyboard so that the readers have a better understanding. Everything that needs to be done in the preproduction is completed in this stage.

1.8.4 Process of producing an animation (month5-7)

In this stage, all relevant information and knowledge are applied to the making of the animation with the researcher's hard work.

1.8.5 Finishing of the animation (month 7)

This stage is to carry out all the steps of post production. Again, obtaining feedbacks is necessary to perfect it.

1.8.6 Analysing feedback (month 8)

The researcher needs to revise her production, and also understand what improvements need to be made via the gained feedbacks, advices or criticism.

1.8.7 Making correction or improvement (month 8-9)

This stage comes along to finalize the production in limited time.

1.8.8 Launching (month 10)

Since all is well and done, the preparations are made to present the researcher's animation in CIPTA 2010 held in UNIMAS.

1.9 Limitation

The limitation in this research is communication with the children aged 3 to 6 years old. They are the target audiences. In this age range, the children have not learnt many words yet, and cannot think logically and deeply enough. Thus, the researcher needs to speak in simple sentences and ask simple questions which the children can understand. However, the details are difficult to obtain from the children's answers because they cannot reason specifically.

1.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, the research introduction portrayed in this chapter is necessary to grab a better idea towards the next few chapters. This chapter has introduced the history of the Chinese characters' evolution and the significance of their use today. It is clear that the Chinese characters have become a meaningful cultural heritage to the world yet is still functioning and evolving today. However, Malaysia lacks of educational animation on this language and relies much on the imported learning method. There are still some problems to be solved with the available educational animation in the current market. Solving these problems along the way through the research would help the locals see that they can also communicate well with the Chinese and appreciate the Chinese characters, despite of the diverse races in Malaysia, starting from the young age.

The next chapter would be the literature review. This would be a chapter where the researcher expresses her thoughts, knowledge and understanding through the literatures she has read. The reviews of related literatures within the next chapter would be a great assist in recording what the researcher gains, for further use of brainstorming and application to the animation.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, introduction of the research has been presented to show the significance of the Chinese characters and the entire research plan on the Chinese characters' educational animation. Thus, introducing an educational animation on the Chinese characters, equipped with full knowledge in terms of evolution, meaning, sequence of strokes and pronunciation, will be a fun way for the local children to learn more on its writing and culture.

In this chapter, review would be made to every related literature the researcher has read. What the researcher has learnt and been inspired through the literatures would be stated in this chapter.