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Towards Meeting Elementary MFL Learners' Needs Through Audio-Visual Materials In Conjunction To Mandarin Drama Series & Movies

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Abstract

Among many learning resources, are Mandarin drama series and movies needed by elementary Mandarin as a foreign language (MFL) learners' in Malaysia in enhancing Mandarin learning? Nearly 70% of the respondents emphasised the importance of having 'audio-visual materials', and more than 50% of the respondents declared that they were interested in watching Mandarin drama series or movies. However, there is no suitable elementary level audio-visual materials available for use in conjunction to Mandarin dramas and movies. In regards to respondents' favourite Mandarin drama series or movies, top 10 Mandarin drama series or movies were identified. To fulfil the needs of elementary MFL learners in Malaysia who want to use audio-visual material, the material compiled should be focused on learners' interests. For this purpose, learners' favourite Mandarin drama series & movies could be used to determine which drama series or movie are suitable for selection. To propose ways to produce suitable audio-visual materials in conjunction to Mandarin drama series & movies favoured by majority of elementary MFL learners, the Framework of Developing Small Corpora for Mandarin Drama Series & Movies was proposed to provide guidance on how to derive high frequency vocabulary from learners' favourite Mandarin drama series & movies. Further effort could be carried out to compile audio-visual materials for teaching and learning purposes based on high frequency vocabulary from corpora of Mandarin drama series & movies.

Keywords: MFL learners, language needs, audio-visual materials, drama series, movies

Memenuhi Keperluan Pelajar Tahap Permulaan MFL Menggunakan Bahan Audio Visual Drama bersiri dan filem Mandarin

Abstrak

Di antara banyak sumber pembelajaran, adakah drama bersiri dan filem Mandarin diperlukan oleh pelajar bahasa Mandarin sebagai bahasa asing (pelajar MFL) di Malaysia dalam meningkatkan pembelajaran bahasa Mandarin? Hampir 70% daripada responden menekankan pentingnya mempunyai 'bahan audio visual', dan lebih daripada 50% responden mengisyiharkan bahawa mereka berminat untuk menonton drama bersiri atau filem Mandarin. Walau bagaimanapun, tiada bahan audio visual yang sesuai untuk digunakan berhubungan dengan drama bersiri dan filem Mandarin untuk pelajar Mandarin tahap permulaan. Berkenaan dengan drama bersiri atau filem Mandarin kegemaran pelajar Mandarin, 10 buah drama bersiri atau filem Mandarin telah dikenal pasti. Untuk memenuhi keperluan pelajar bahasa Mandarin sebagai bahasa asing di Malaysia yang ingin menggunakan bahan audio-visual, bahan yang dikumpulkan mestilah tertumpu kepada kepentingan

pelajar. Untuk tujuan ini, drama bersiri & filem Mandarin kegemaran para pelajar boleh digunakan untuk menentukan bahan audio visual yang sesuai untuk pemilihan. Untuk mencadangkan cara bagi menghasilkan bahan audio visual yang sesuai berhubungan dengan drama bersiri dan filem Mandarin yang disukai oleh pelajar Mandarin sebagai bahasa asing, “Rangka Kerja Membangunkan Korpora Kecil untuk Drama Bersiri & Filem Mandarin” dicadangkan untuk memberikan panduan mengenai bagaimana untuk mendapatkan kosa kata frekuensi tinggi daripada drama bersiri & filem Mandarin kegemaran pelajar. Usaha lebih lanjut dapat dilakukan untuk mengumpulkan bahan-bahan audio visual untuk tujuan pengajaran dan pembelajaran berdasarkan kosa kata frekuensi tinggi daripada korpora kecil drama bersiri dan filem Mandarin.

Kata Kunci: Pelajar MFL, keperluan bahasa, bahan audio-visual, drama bersiri, filem

1. Introduction

Many kinds of teaching and learning resources can be used to meet elementary MFL learners' language needs in Malaysia. Among many learning resources, are Mandarin drama series and movies needed by elementary MFL learners' in Malaysia in enhancing Mandarin learning? To improve MFL teaching and learning in Malaysia, the study aims to identify the learning resources that the respondents perceived as being important in fulfilling learners' Mandarin language needs. The importance of audio-visual teaching and learning as learning resources should be promoted as most of the audio-visual materials such as video clips, drama series and movies selected for students is generally compiled on the basis of 'the audio-visual teaching approach', 'the communicative approach', 'the full sensory approach' and 'foreign language acquisition theory' which will benefit learners (Yang, 2010, pp. 8–10; Gao, 2013, pp19-20). Hence, in this study, the researcher was keen to investigate if learners have the interest to watch Mandarin series and movies, with that, additional effort will be proposed to extract high frequency vocabulary of learners' favourite Mandarin drama series and movies for teaching and learning purposes.

2. Literature Review

Various studies suggested that the use of technology in teaching & learning will benefit learners of a foreign language (Mohd Sukki Othman et al, 2013; Muhammad Alif Redzuan Abdullah & Sanimah Hussin, 2019). A study conducted at South East European University (Ismaili, 2013) revealed that using movies in the EFL classroom was effective. Its' effect was mainly on developing students' listening and communication skills. Significant differences were identified between the experimental and control group of students where the movies used as teaching materials had attracted students' attention by offering visual context aids in helping students understanding and improving their learning skills.

With respect to vocabulary acquisition through informal activities as mentioned above, Milton (2009, p. 250) points out that learners are able to acquire a sizeable number of words after watching films in the foreign language. Three studies were conducted to test the vocabulary gained by elementary to intermediate foreign learners of Dutch and Greek after the subjects watched an English DVD with Greek subtitles which contained 2,390 word tokens (with 382 word types) (Milton, 2009, p. 228) for several weeks. The findings show that the subjects achieved a good vocabulary growth after going through the planned activities.

Learners' interest in learning Mandarin through video watching was also identified in the field of MFL. A strong interest in learning Mandarin through audio-visual materials was reported by Zhong (2006), who found that the MFL learners, particularly the Indonesian MFL learners, ranked audio-visual learning through dramas and movies as the most effective way to learn Mandarin. However, the MFL teachers in China gave a low rating for the effectiveness of using dramas and movies in the classroom. The main reason, as indicated by nearly 80% of teachers, was that a lot of effort is needed to prepare the material because there is no suitable audio-visual material available for

use. However, the teachers highly rated using the ready-made audio-visual material attached to the teaching materials for intensive courses. The effectiveness of audio-visual learning, and the great interest shown by MFL learners in learning Mandarin through the teaching materials of dramas and movies was also reported through an experiment conducted in a university in China (Zhu, 2006).

In recent years, ‘audio-visual courses’ (shiting ke 视听课) have been offered in addition to listening courses (Gao, 2015). In one Mandarin course, Advanced Chinese 2, offered in the Chinese programme at the University of Otago, New Zealand, the MFL students focus on learning Mandarin through a Mandarin drama series entitled *Fuhua Beihou* 浮华背后 (Behind the Extravagant Life) from episodes 1 to 9. The new vocabulary of each episode is taught in the class, and the written scripts are available for learners to help them better understand the series.

3. Problems of Statement

Although elementary MFL learners had performed great interest in learning Mandarin through audio-visual materials especially on Mandarin dramas and movies, there is no suitable elementary level audio-visual materials available for use either locally or in mainland China in conjunction to Mandarin dramas and movies.

For instance, *Kan Dianying Xue Hanyu* (Watching Movies and Learning Mandarin) is a collection of audio-visual materials that was compiled based on 20 Mandarin movies. However, in order to use this material, learners are required to have a minimum vocabulary size of 3,000 Chinese words and some background knowledge of Chinese history and culture (Yang, 2010). In short, Currently there is not as much audio-visual teaching material in China in terms of Mandarin drama series and movies for elementary MFL learners as there is for intermediate and advanced learners. Hence, in this paper, the researcher aims to propose ways to produce suitable audio-visual materials in conjunction to Mandarin drama series & movies favoured by majority of elementary MFL learners.

4. Research Objectives

The present study aimed to propose a direction on how to meet elementary MFL learners’ language needs through audio-visual materials in conjunction to Mandarin drama series & movies. For this purpose, this study intended to achieve following objectives:

- 1) To identify to what extent elementary MFL learners will select audio-visual materials as their most preferred learning resources.
- 2) To investigate elementary MFL learners’ interest in watching Mandarin drama series & movies.
- 3) To propose ways to produce suitable audio-visual materials in conjunction to Mandarin drama series & movies favoured by majority of elementary MFL learners.

4.1 Research Questions of the Study

The research was conducted to seek answers for following questions:

- 1) What are elementary MFL learners’ preferences for various Mandarin learning resources?
- 2) To what extent are elementary MFL learners interested in watching Mandarin drama series or movies?
- 3) What are elementary MFL learners’ favourite Mandarin drama series or movies?

4.2 Significance of the Study

The importance of audio-visual learning through dramas and movies as the most effective way to learn a language has been recognised widely. However, there is a lack of suitable audio-visual learning materials through Mandarin drama series and movies for elementary MFL learners. The effort to present a framework in this paper on how to extract high frequency vocabulary of learners’ favourite Mandarin drama series and movies is significant in guiding MFL instructors to develop small corpora to meet elementary MFL learners’ language needs.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive and quantitative method by conducting the research survey with a questionnaire. The questionnaire drawn focuses on learners' preferences on learning materials, learners' interest in watching Mandarin drama series and movies, and learners' favourite Mandarin drama series and movies.

5.2 Participants/Respondents

A total of 249 respondents (209 female & 40 male) of different faculties of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam, Selangor had responded to the questionnaire. The respondents (78.7%) were mainly made up by Mandarin students of Computer & Mathematical Sciences (34.5%), Accountancy (25.7%) and Communication & Media Studies (18.5%). Mandarin students of Chemical Engineering and Architecture (5.6%), Planning & Survey (4.8%), Akademi Pengajian Bahasa (3.2%), Applied Sciences (2.8%), Civil Engineering (2%), Art & Design (2%) and Sports Science (0.8%) had also participated in the survey. In regards to Mandarin study levels (Figure 1), Mandarin students level 2 formed the biggest group (45.8%), while the number of Mandarin level 1 & 3 students who responded to the questionnaire were quite similar (26.9% & 27.3%) respectively.

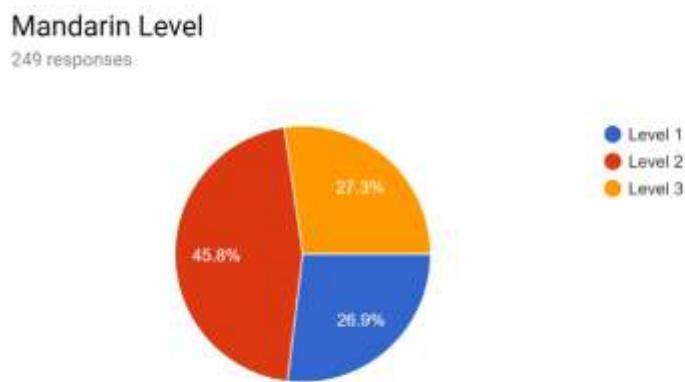


Figure 1 Respondents' Mandarin levels

5.3 Instrument

In identifying learners' preferences on learning materials, 9 items of Mandarin learning resources were proposed. Among them are 'more suitable textbooks', 'more useful vocabulary', 'audio-visual materials', 'dictionaries', 'workbooks', 'story books', 'reference books', 'grammar books' and 'reading materials on Chinese culture'. Learners' interest in watching Mandarin drama series and movies was investigated by learners' frequency (the scales of '1' for 'never watch' to '5' for 'watch very often' were given as options) on watching Mandarin drama series and movies. Besides, learners were invited to inform about any favourite Mandarin drama series and movies that they may have.

5.4 Data collection & Analysis

Data was collected in the semester of September 2019-Mar 2020 through google form. The link of the google form was distributed to different whatsapp groups of Mandarin students as below: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1_eS9RxeveTpvhK992k_nkn7SPynBee8EGg8eFdaueI/edit?usp=sharing

All data were analysed using descriptive statistics to provide frequency information in terms of percentages. Respondents' perceptions were gathered and ready for further discussion.

6. Findings

This section draws attention to learners' preferred learning resources by MFL learners in Malaysia such as 'textbooks', 'dictionaries', 'more useful vocabulary', and so on. Learners' interest (in terms of frequency) in watching Mandarin movies or TV drama series and their favourite audio-visual learning material were also investigated in the belief that the learning of the high frequency words in famous movies or drama series will help learners to improve their language proficiency.

6.1 Audio-Visual Material as the Most Preferred Mandarin Learning Resources

Among the items proposed, 'audio-visual material', 'more suitable textbooks' and 'more useful vocabulary' were identified as the top three learning resources most needed for MFL learners in Malaysia based on all respondents' perceptions (Figure 2). Based on the frequency data presented in Table 1, 68.7% (171) UiTM students recognised 'audio-visual material' as the most important learning resources for MFL learners in Malaysia. 'More suitable textbooks' were placed as second (57.4% or 143) while 'more useful vocabulary' (53.4% or 133) as the third most important. Their responses imply that the current available textbooks have yet to be improved, and 'more useful vocabulary' should be taught as a solution to improving Mandarin learning. Overall, the students did not show a high demand for other learning resources proposed. Only one third of students (31.3% or 78) ranked 'dictionaries' as an important learning resource for themselves. Note that the importance of audio-visual material as learners' first priority will be discussed in conjunction with Mandarin TV dramas and movies.

What Mandarin learning resources are best for you? (Choose UP TO THREE of the following)

249 responses

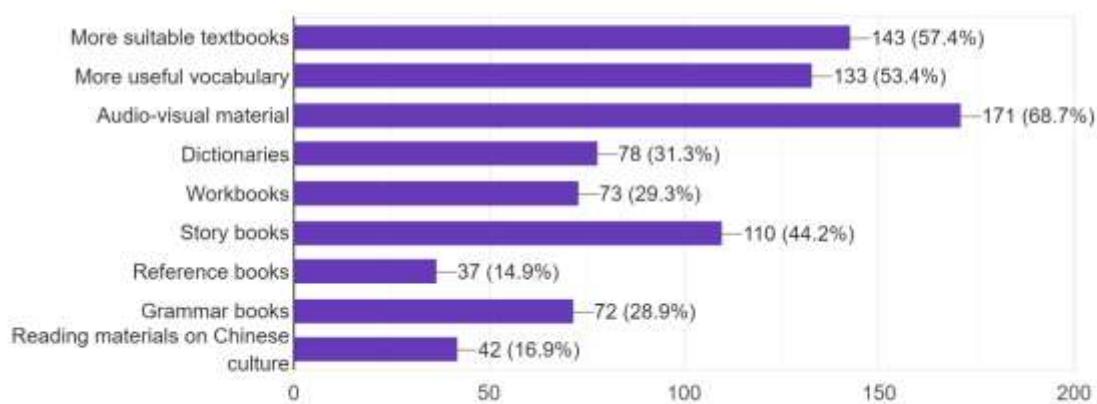
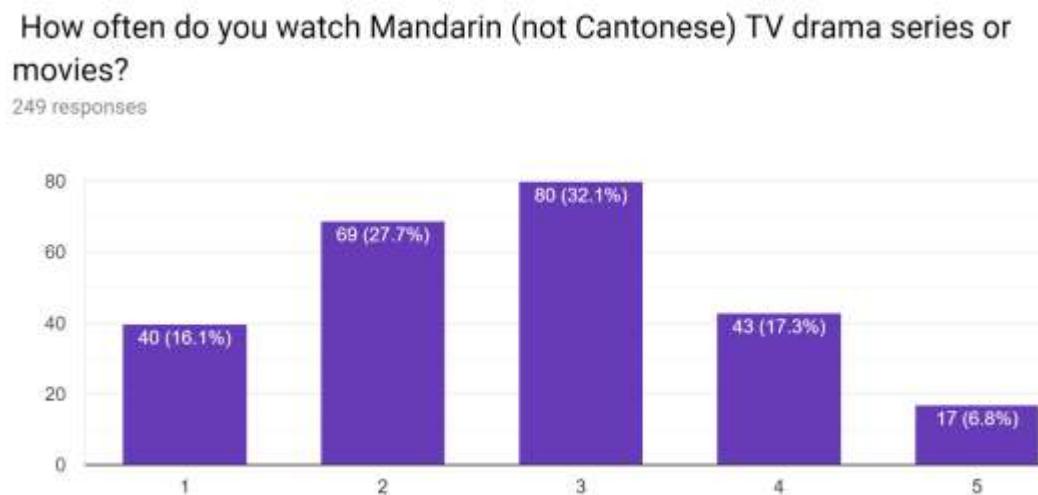


Figure 2 All respondents' preferences on learning resources

6.2 Learners' Interest in Watching Mandarin Drama Series or Movies

In this section, learners' interest in audio-visual material or more particularly, interest in watching drama series & movies was quantified. Although the effectiveness of learning a foreign language through audio-visual material has not been discussed widely in MFL teaching, it is reasonable to identify learners' interest in terms of frequency in watching Mandarin drama series or movies. In investigating the students' interest in watching Mandarin drama series or movies, the results presented in Figure 3 show that a small number of students (6.8% or 17), declared that they watched Mandarin drama series or movies 'very often'. Near one fifth (17.3% or 43) and another one third of the students (32.1% or 80) 'often' and 'sometimes' watched Mandarin drama series or movies respectively. Based on the watching frequency of 'very often', 'often', and 'sometimes', more than 50% of the students had spent some time watching Mandarin TV dramas or movies. This

interest implies that ‘audio-visual’ resources could be one of the effective ways to help students learning Mandarin.



Scale: 1 (Never); 2 (Not often); 3 (Sometimes); 4 (Often); 5 (Very often)

Figure 3 Students’ frequency of watching Mandarin drama series or movies

6.3 Students’ Top 10 Most Favourite Mandarin Drama Series or Movies

This investigation into the learners’ interest in watching Mandarin drama series and movies shows that the majority of the learners reported watching Mandarin drama series and movies as one of the casual activities in their daily lives. Hence, this section identifies the Mandarin drama series and movies the students favoured the most.

All respondents (249) had responded to the question about their favourite Mandarin drama series or movies. In identifying the best Mandarin drama series or movies for the students, items watched by at least 10 students were selected. Among these identified 10 drama series or movies are Love 020, Our Time, Meteor Garden, Journey to the West, Police Stories, A Love is So Beautiful, So I Married an Anti Fan, Put Your Head in My Shoulder, Falling Love with Me and Go Go Squid.

7. Discussion

To master listening ability for a target language, learners should have as many listening experiences as possible. Learners are encouraged to have listening fluency before they start to speak as it is believed that learners will be able to speak well only if they have enough receptive vocabulary for listening purposes (Nation, 1990). Drama series or movies are important language learning resources as watching them is useful to help improve learners’ listening abilities.

To make listening to and watching a Mandarin video more effective for MFL learners in Malaysia, audio-visual materials suitable for elementary learners should be compiled. For this purpose, the effort to derive high frequency words from audio-visual programmes is needed and the procedures will be elaborated in the next section.

If an audio-visual course is offered to students, teachers could pre-teach a small number of the high frequency vocabulary from the drama scripts or video clips before students watch the video (Nation, 2009), otherwise learners could self-learn a number of vocabulary from the available audio-visual course book before watching the programme. Learning of high frequency words of Mandarin

drama series or movies is useful to students as these words are spoken Mandarin that learners may come across very often in their daily lives.

With the identification of MFL learners' favourite Mandarin drama series or movies, the high frequency words used in an episode (or more) of these programmes can be derived. To make this step a successful one, researchers can utilise online scripts or create their own digital copy of the scripts of learners' favourite dramas or movies to compile small corpora for the purpose of deriving high frequency words.

7.1 Towards Developing Small Corpora for Mandarin Drama Series & Movies

As emphasised in this study, the compilation of teaching materials should be done on the basis of learners' needs (Zhong, 2006). Thus, to fulfil the needs of MFL learners in Malaysia at an elementary level who want to use audio-visual material, the material compiled should be learner-centred, that is, focused on learners' interests and their proficiency level (Zhu, 2006). The findings in earlier section about learners' favourite Mandarin drama series & movies could be used to determine which series, either some full drama episodes or some selected video clips of different drama series (Zhu, 2006), are suitable for selection.

A specific textbook for the selected material could be then compiled based on the format of *Kan Dianying Xue Hanyu* which includes an introduction of the main cast and the main subject matter of the drama, important or high frequency vocabulary, the best scripts selected, and so on. When learners are familiar with the vocabulary and the subject matter of the drama, the repetition of watching the guided audio-visual material will be helpful in increasing their ability to listen to and speak Mandarin.

7.2 Framework of Developing Small Corpora for Mandarin Drama Series & Movies

In extracting the high frequency vocabulary of the audio-visual material, a few steps can be followed to make this effort a success. First, survey which Mandarin TV dramas or movies the students favour the most. Second, obtain the digital version of the scripts (either an episode or more) from the identified drama series or movies online (if available) or employ a typist to prepare a softcopy based on the hard copies such as available books or the paused screen of the CD or DVD. Third, set up the corpus of the selected TV dramas or movies by doing grammatical tagging and double editing of the tagging output. Fourth, derive the high frequency vocabulary from the developed corpus.

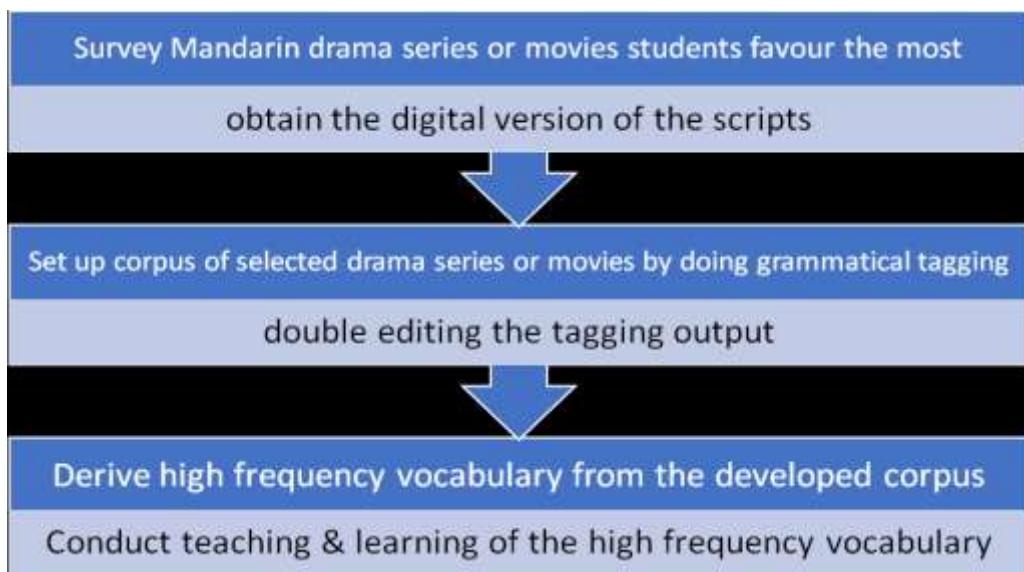


Figure 4 Framework of Developing small corpora for Mandarin drama series & movies

Further analyses could be conducted to compare the high frequency words derived from the corpus of the Mandarin drama series with the high frequency words of other Chinese corpora, namely the annual Chinese Media Corpora (NLRMRC, 2009), the FDMC (Xiao et al., 2009), the All Levels 12 Series MFL Textbook Corpus (NLRMRC, 2007), and the Spoken Corpus of 23 Series Elementary MFL Textbooks (Low, 2011). The common words across one or more frequency lists are the words that are both useful for listening, speaking and reading purposes.

Due to today's learners' favourite Mandarin dramas may not be the same as future learners' preference, it may not be wise for MFL teachers to invest time and energy to transcribe a long drama series as has been done for *Fuhua Beihou*. However, it is certainly workable (especially by forming a team) to select, edit, transcribe and compile some simpler and interesting parts of different popular Mandarin drama series into some systematic audio-visual material.

7.3 Impact of learning high frequency vocabulary of Mandarin Drama Series or Movies

By learning high frequency vocabulary for the selected audio-visual material, elementary learners will be able to understand the spoken language in the audio-visual material after watching it several times. Although elementary learners are impossible to fully understand any of the Mandarin drama series not included in the compiled audio-visual material, it is believed that vocabulary learning with a focus on needs-based high frequency words will, however, narrow the language chasm which exists between elementary learners' lower proficiency level and the level of language used in Mandarin dramas to a certain extent. By learning needs-based high frequency words, learners will be able to acquire some basic understanding of the Mandarin language used in Mandarin dramas or movies.

8. Conclusion

Nearly 70% of the respondents emphasised the importance of having 'audio-visual materials'. More than 50% of respondents also declared that they wanted 'more suitable textbooks' and 'more useful vocabulary', respectively. More than 50% of the respondents declared that they were interested in watching Mandarin drama series or movies. This included more than 5% of the respondents who watched Chinese programmes 'very often'; Near 20% of respondents who 'often' watched Chinese programmes, and a quarter of the respondents who 'sometimes' watched Chinese TV dramas or movies.

In regards to respondents' favourite Mandarin drama series or movies, top 10 Mandarin drama series or movies were identified. The top four ranked by students were Our Time, Meteor Garden, Journey to the West and Police Stories. To fulfil the needs of elementary MFL learners in Malaysia who want to use audio-visual material, the material compiled should be focused on learners' interests. The findings in section 4.3 about learners' favourite Mandarin drama series & movies could be used to determine which drama series or movie are suitable for selection. Framework of Developing small corpora for Mandarin drama series & movies was proposed to provide guidance on how to derive high frequency vocabulary from learners' favourite Mandarin drama series & movies. Further effort could be carried out to compile audio-visual materials for teaching and learning purposes based on high frequency vocabulary from corpora of Mandarin drama series & movies.

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