

Research Article

# Practice and Reflection on the Construction of a “Communities of Learners” in Normal Students’ Linguistics Courses: An Innovative Exploration of the Modern Chinese Course

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## Abstract

By virtue of educational practice, this thesis delves into the construction strategies and steps of the “communities of learners” model in the linguistics course of normal students. In addition, three effective cases of combining it with the content of modern Chinese courses are summarized. Running on the problems of students’ motivation and participation, teachers’ roles and guidance methods, learning resources and environmental support in the implementation process, this thesis reflects on the problems of students’ learning motivation and participation, and puts forward effective solutions, such as teacher-student interaction, group cooperation, multiple technical means, digital learning platform, and shaping a “cooperative colleague relationship” among teachers.

## Keywords

Linguistics Major, Modern Chinese Course, Communities of Learners, Practice, Strategy

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Background

With the continuous deepening of educational reform, linguistics education for normal students faces unprecedented challenges and opportunities. In the context of cultivating innovative talents, the teaching methods and approaches for linguistics courses need urgent innovation to meet the demand for high-quality normal major talents. This study uses the construction of a “communities of learners” as a starting point to explore its innovative application in the Modern Chinese course, aiming to improve normal students’ linguistics liter-

acy and practical abilities, thereby providing new ideas and methods for the reform and development of linguistics education.

### 1.2. Concept of “Communities of Learners” and Its Application Value in Normal Students’ Linguistics Education

A communities of learners, as an educational concept and practice model, is defined as a group composed of learners and their facilitators (including teachers, experts, tutors, etc.).

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This group, based on common vision, values, and emotions, centers around real tasks, and through continuous, in-depth cooperation and interaction between teachers and students and among students, achieves common growth and progress to meet shared learning goals [1].

The application value of the communities of learners in normal students' linguistics education is significant. First, as a teaching model that emphasizes student subjectivity and cooperation, the communities of learners can inject new vitality into normal students' linguistics education. Second, it helps cultivate normal students' teamwork and critical thinking abilities. Finally, the communities of learners provides abundant practical opportunities for normal students. This practical experience helps deepen their understanding of linguistics theories and enhances their practical and problem-solving skills.

### 1.3. Current Research Status at Home and Abroad

In the relevant research on learning communities at home and abroad, we can see the broad influence and in-depth exploration of this concept in the field of education. Foreign research started earlier, with American educator Ernest L. Boyer [2] proposing the concept of the communities of learners in 1995, leading many scholars to engage in its construction and application research. The research team led by American psychologist A. L. Brown [3] conducted a case study named "Fostering Communities of Learners" (FCL) over more than ten years, becoming a classic study in the field of learning communities, providing methodology and instructional design strategies for constructing learning communities in classroom learning. Japanese scholar Sato Manabu started a pilot reform of the learning community in 1997 at Hama-no-Sato Elementary School, vigorously promoting the development of Japanese elementary and secondary education towards constructing learning communities, and declared that classroom reform is the central topic of school teaching reform. [4]

In contrast, although research on communities of learners in China started relatively late, significant progress has been made in recent years. Scholars such as Zhao Jian [5], Chen Jingjing [6], Zhu Xudong and Han Chunmei [7], Yang Yi [8], Wei Ying [9], Jiang Chuanwei [10], Wang Yikang [11], and Kong Xiao [12] have conducted in-depth studies on the practical application of communities of learners, proposing a series of effective implementation strategies and providing valuable references for educational practice. Furthermore, with the rapid development of information technology, some researchers have begun to explore how to use technological means to promote the construction and development of communities of learners. Typical examples of these are the researches by Chen Zheng [13] and Cheng Peili [14].

From the current research status at home and abroad, communities of learners have significant advantages in im-

proving learning outcomes and promoting cooperation and communication among learners. However, challenges remain, such as how to stimulate students' motivation and participation in learning and how to adjust and optimize the roles and guidance methods of teachers. To address these issues, future research needs to explore the construction and operational mechanisms of communities of learners more deeply, providing a more solid theoretical foundation for their widespread application in educational practice.

## 2. Current Situation Analysis of Modern Chinese Course Teaching in Colleges and Universities

Modern Chinese is a compulsory linguistics course offered by Chinese colleges and universities for majors such as Chinese Language and Literature, International Chinese Education, and Elementary Chinese Education, playing a very important role in the training of teacher education professionals. However, as a theoretical course, its teaching effectiveness in colleges and universities often leaves much to be desired, primarily for the following reasons:

### 2.1. Course Nature

Linguistics is a special discipline that lies between liberal arts and sciences, characterized as a humanities course with a strong emphasis on theory and logical thinking. Linguistics classes are often abstract and dull, making them uninteresting to many students. For general liberal arts students, understanding linguistics can be quite challenging, leading to resistance over time.

### 2.2. Teachers' Status

Linguistics research can be divided into phonetics, philology, lexicology, and grammar, as well as rhetoric, which involves the study of pragmatics. Modern Chinese teachers often specialize in a specific sub-discipline within linguistics, inevitably leading to inconsistencies in their grasp of different chapters of Modern Chinese. Some chapters may have outstanding teaching outcomes, while others may be lacking.

### 2.3. Current Teaching Situation

According to the author's observation, traditional linguistics classrooms in domestic colleges and universities exhibit several misconceptions in teaching types and pedagogical philosophies:

#### 2.3.1. Indoctrinative Classrooms

Due to the generally extensive content of linguistics courses, covering phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, rhetoric, etc., but often lacking sufficient class hours, many instructors

resort to traditional rote teaching methods. Teachers treat students as a collective, delivering predetermined content each class to fulfill set teaching objectives and tasks, neglecting the cultivation of skills and the developmental autonomy of students. Consequently, this teaching model not only limits students to a superficial understanding of theoretical knowledge but also inhibits their ability to apply it in language practice or future educational contexts.

### 2.3.2. Competitive Classrooms

To stimulate student enthusiasm and participation and prevent classes from becoming too dull, some teachers encourage classroom competitions. Individuals or groups compete for points through activities such as rapid answering, which serves as a method of assessment. In such teaching scenarios, students often prioritize changes in their point standings over genuine engagement with the learning content. Students have limited time for in-depth learning and critical thinking. In classrooms where mobile devices are used for rapid answering, students who fail to secure an opportunity to answer often blame their device's specifications, which inadvertently fosters a culture of comparison and places unnecessary financial burden on students and parents.

### 2.3.3. Misconceptions Regarding "Subjectivity"

Cultivating students to become independent and self-disciplined learners is a major educational goal. However, there are still misunderstandings about "subjectivity" in the current educational field. "Student-centered" does not mean isolating students from interactions with teachers, textbooks, and the learning environment, thereby idealizing education as solely reliant on the internal "subjectivity" of students, and making it entirely based on students' desires, needs, and initiative [15]. It is precisely because of this misconception of "subjectivity" that teachers fall into the misconception that all autonomous learning is the so-called "ideal" learning. This makes it difficult for them to properly manage the teacher-student roles in the classroom.

## 3. "Communities of Learners" in the Modern Chinese Course: Implementation Practices

### 3.1. Strategies and Steps to Build Communities of Learners

#### 3.1.1. Establishing Learning Objectives and Tasks

In the practice of constructing communities of learners for the normal students' linguistics major course, defining learning objectives and tasks is a crucial initial step. To ensure the effective operation of communities of learners, it is essential to first clarify the core teaching objectives of the

course, namely to cultivate a solid theoretical foundation, practical skills, and innovative spirit in linguistics for normal students. Based on these objectives, specific learning tasks are set, such as organizing group discussions to review and summarize linguistic theory knowledge, exploring dialectal differences through project-based practices, and enhancing self-awareness and learning effectiveness through reflective writing.

#### 3.1.2. Formation of Learning Teams

In the implementation of communities of learners in the modern Chinese course, forming learning teams is a pivotal aspect. To foster an atmosphere of equality, respect, attentive listening, and psychological safety in the classroom, diverse grouping strategies can be employed. Given that many undergraduate classrooms in colleges and universities currently adopt traditional seating arrangements, teachers can adaptively allow students to form teams based on their preferences, with groups ideally consisting of 4 to 6 members seated side by side or in front and back pairs. Alternatively, depending on the task requirements, groups can be formed with students from different regions and varying dialectal backgrounds, facilitating students' multi-dimensional understanding and analysis of language phenomena.

#### 3.1.3. Designing Learning Activities and Resources

When designing learning activities and resources, it is crucial to consider the characteristics of the modern Chinese course and the learning needs of normal students. Firstly, tasks are assigned through task sheets, which set out a series of practical tasks related to linguistics, such as "Hierarchical Analysis of Phrases and Sentences," "Dialect Investigation and Preservation," and "Analysis of Internet Language Phenomena," enabling students to grasp theoretical knowledge of modern Chinese through practical application.

Secondly, in terms of resource design, digital teaching resources such as online courses, instructional videos, and e-books are utilized to provide students with abundant learning materials. Simultaneously, a platform for sharing learning resources is established to encourage students to upload their learning experiences, fostering a collaborative learning atmosphere. Additionally, guest lectures and Q&A sessions by expert scholars in the field of linguistics are invited to provide valuable learning opportunities for students.

### 3.2. Implementation Case Studies of Communities of Learners in the Modern Chinese Course

#### 3.2.1. Case Study 1: Discussion-Based Communities of Learners Practice

Students are divided into multiple collaborative groups, and learning activities revolve around real-world tasks. One such

scenario task is:

Today, a foreign exchange student asked me, “What does ‘我吃食堂’ mean?” I told him, “‘我吃食堂’ in Chinese means ‘I eat in the canteen.’” The student responded, “‘吃’ is a verb, and the object after it is what one eats. Generally, the object of eating is food, such as ‘吃饭 (eat a meal), 吃冰淇淋 (eat ice cream), 吃面条 (eat noodles), 吃蔬菜 (eat vegetables),’ etc. ‘食堂’ is a place; how can people eat a place? The correct Chinese should be ‘我在食堂吃饭,’ isn’t that right?” As a Chinese language teacher, how should I respond to this exchange student’s question?

This task involves the relationship between the object of a sentence and semantic roles. In the classroom, we adopted a cyclical model of “independent thinking - group discussion - answer revision - presentation - feedback and evaluation.” First, group members independently think about the answer to the question based on relevant chapters from the textbook and record their thoughts on the task sheet. Then, they discuss and listen to each other, revising their answers to ensure every member participates in the learning process. During the group discussion phase, students actively exchange and share their views, jointly solve problems, and continuously refine their understanding. Afterward, each group presents the answer they have agreed upon. Finally, in the feedback and evaluation phase, teachers and other groups provide evaluations and feedback on the presented results. Throughout this process, students not only engage in deep thinking and discussion but also deepen their understanding of theoretical concepts and enhance their ability to apply linguistics theory to actual teaching.

### 3.2.2. Case Study 2: Project-Based Communities of Learners Practice

This project focuses on “Research on Dialect Differences in Modern Chinese.” Students are divided into several groups, each selecting a grammatical item of a specific dialect for research. In the initial phase of the project, teachers provide abundant learning resources and guidance, including books, papers, and online resources related to dialect research. Under the leadership of their group leaders, students collaborate to collect, organize, and analyze dialect data and write research reports.

To assess the learning outcomes of the project, we adopted various evaluation methods, including self-assessment, peer assessment, and teacher evaluation. The evaluation results showed significant progress among the students. They not only mastered the basic theories and knowledge of modern Chinese but also learned how to apply this knowledge to solve practical problems. Additionally, their teamwork and problem-solving skills were enhanced and improved. For example, in one group, students collaborated on research regarding pronominal differences in Min dialects and successfully presented their findings using PPT. Throughout this process, students not only learned how to use modern technology to aid

their learning but also learned how to share and communicate their learning outcomes with others.

### 3.2.3. Case Study 3: Reflection-Based Communities of Learners Practice

In the practice of constructing “communities of learners,” we also designed a “reflection-based communities of learners practice.” This practice model emphasizes self-reflection and collective reflection during the learning process, aiming to enhance students’ learning effectiveness and self-awareness through continuous reflection and summarization. For instance, after completing a chapter, students share their learning insights and difficulties within their groups and discuss solutions together. This form of reflection not only promotes communication and interaction among students but also helps them gain a deeper understanding of the course content.

To evaluate the effectiveness of reflective learning, we employed questionnaires and interviews. The survey results showed that over 80% of students believed that reflective learning helped them better understand course content and improve learning outcomes. Additionally, students generally indicated that through reflection, they could more clearly recognize their shortcomings and find directions for improvement.

## 4. Discussion

In the process of constructing “communities of learners” in Modern Chinese, we encountered the following challenges and issues:

### 4.1. Student Motivation and Participation

In the practice of constructing “communities of learners,” student motivation and participation emerged as a significant challenge. According to our survey data, about 30% of students exhibited low motivation when participating in “communities of learners” activities, which negatively impacted the overall effectiveness of the “communities of learners.” To understand this issue more deeply, we conducted questionnaires and interviews, finding that the lack of clear learning goals, a mismatch between personal interests and learning tasks, and poor team atmosphere were the main reasons for decreased motivation.

### 4.2. Teacher Roles and Guidance Methods

In the practice of constructing “communities of learners,” the role of teachers and their guidance methods are particularly important. Traditional teacher roles often focus on the one-way transmission of knowledge, whereas in “communities of learners,” teachers need to shift to being guides and facilitators of learning. In this process, teachers are no longer the sole source of knowledge but rather the guides for students



in their knowledge exploration.

Moreover, in “communities of learners,” teachers need to pay attention to individual differences and provide personalized guidance. Every student has their own unique learning style and interests, and teachers need to deeply understand each student’s characteristics to tailor learning plans and guidance strategies for them.

### 4.3. Learning Resources and Environmental Support

In the process of constructing “communities of learners” for normal students’ linguistics courses, the issue of learning resources and environmental support is particularly important. With the rapid development of information technology, learning resources are no longer limited to traditional paper textbooks but have expanded to digital, networked multimedia resources. However, in practice, we found that although resources are abundant, effectively integrating and utilizing these resources to support in-depth learning and collaboration in “communities of learners” remains a major challenge.

For example, in the modern Chinese course, we attempted to introduce a series of online learning platforms, digital resource libraries, and interactive tools. However, in our survey, we found that only 33% of students were able to fully utilize these resources, while the rest were unable to effectively participate due to a lack of guidance or interest.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. Strategies to Stimulate Student Motivation and Participation

In the practice of constructing “communities of learners,” stimulating student motivation and participation is key to ensuring teaching effectiveness. To address this issue, we adopted various strategies. First, by introducing real-life cases and authentic contexts, we enabled students to connect their learned knowledge with real-world applications, thus enhancing the practicality and appeal of learning. In the Modern Chinese course, we designed a series of case analyses based on actual linguistic phenomena, allowing students to identify and solve problems during the analysis process, thereby motivating them to engage in deeper learning.

Second, we emphasized student agency and engagement through forms such as group collaboration, role-playing, and debates, allowing students to learn and grow through interaction. For example, in the “project-based communities of learners practice,” students formed their own teams to choose a project related to Modern Chinese for research and presented their findings in class. This learning method not only honed their teamwork skills but also allowed them to experience the joy and value of learning through practical application.

Additionally, leveraging technological means such as online learning platforms and social media can provide students with abundant learning resources and communication channels. Through these platforms, students can access learning materials anytime and anywhere, and engage in real-time interactions with teachers and classmates, thus maintaining sustained attention and enthusiasm for learning.

### 5.2. Strategies for Adjusting and Optimizing Teacher Roles and Guidance Methods

In the practice of constructing “communities of learners,” adjusting and optimizing teacher roles and guidance methods is crucial. In “communities of learners,” teachers need to transition to being facilitators, organizers, and promoters of learning activities. This shift requires teachers to not only possess solid professional knowledge but also to master effective guidance strategies to stimulate student motivation and facilitate the effective operation of “communities of learners”.

Various strategies can be employed in adjusting and optimizing teacher roles and guidance methods. For instance, implementing the “flipped classroom” teaching model allows students to independently learn foundational knowledge before class, while in-class time is used for group discussions and case analyses to deepen understanding. In this model, teachers are no longer the sole source of knowledge but become guides and assistants in the students’ learning process. The implementation of the “flipped classroom” significantly boosted student motivation and participation.

Additionally, in providing personalized guidance, teachers can set clear learning goals and reward mechanisms to stimulate motivation for students with lower motivation; for students with stronger learning abilities, teachers can provide more in-depth and extensive academic resources to meet their learning needs.

Moreover, to better guide students and promote mutual learning and growth among teachers, a “collaborative colleague” relationship can be established among teachers. By encouraging Modern Chinese course teachers to open their classes to each other and conducting regular departmental activities to discuss teaching cases, teachers can learn from each other and complement each other’s strengths. In the practice of constructing “communities of learners,” we observed significant effects from the adjustment and optimization of teacher roles and guidance methods. Data analysis showed that classes adopting the new teaching model saw an average increase of 10% in final exam scores, with student satisfaction reaching over 90%. Additionally, we found that in the “communities of learners” environment, student communication and collaboration became more frequent, effectively enhancing their critical thinking and innovation skills.

### 5.3. Strategies for Enhancing and Improving Learning Resources and Environmental Support

In the practice of constructing “communities of learners,” the enhancement and improvement of learning resources and environmental support are crucial to ensuring the effective operation of these communities. We employed various strategies to enhance and improve learning resources and environmental support. First, the richness and diversity of learning resources are vital for the learning effectiveness of community members. By introducing digital learning platforms, such as online course libraries and academic databases, we provided normal students with an abundance of learning resources to meet their personalized learning needs. Additionally, we regularly updated the learning resources to ensure their timeliness and cutting-edge relevance.

Second, environmental support is equally essential for constructing “communities of learners.” We provided normal students with spacious and well-lit classrooms, advanced multimedia teaching equipment, and comfortable study spaces, creating a conducive learning environment. Furthermore, the school strengthened its campus network infrastructure, ensuring that community members could engage in online learning and communication anytime and anywhere.

Through practice, we found that the enhancement and improvement of learning resources and environmental support had a significant positive impact on the construction of “communities of learners.” Normal students were more actively involved in learning, communication, and collaboration within these communities, which improved their learning outcomes and satisfaction. For example, in a survey of community members, over 90% of normal students indicated that the enhancement and improvement of learning resources and environmental support had a positive impact on their learning.

### Abbreviations

FCL            Fostering Communities of Learners

### Author Contributions

Peipei Fan is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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## Biography



**Fan Peipei** is an Associate Lecturer at the School of Literature and Media, Lingnan Normal University. He received his PhD in Literature from Sun Yat-sen University in 2019 and his Master's degree in Education from Beijing Normal University in 2010. In recent years, he has participated in or led two national major social science projects and one provincial social science project. He is a member of the Chinese Linguistics Association and the Guangdong Province Chinese Linguistics Association.

## Research Field

**Fan Peipei:** the history of Chinese grammar (modern and contemporary), modern Chinese grammar, the teaching of Chinese linguistics, international Chinese education, and Mandarin teaching.