

ENHANCING PERFORMANCE IN MANDARIN LIVE ROLE-PLAY ASSESSMENTS: THE 'GOLDEN STEPS' PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract. This paper addresses challenges in teaching Mandarin as a Foreign Language (MFL) in Malaysia. In the Mandarin live role-play assessment, many students were not fully prepared, but relying on notes to deliver the content, and therefore demonstrating low levels of performance, which significantly impacts their overall grades, and challenged the assessment validity. To overcome the problem, this paper proposes the "Golden Steps" pedagogical framework, from "memorising error-free script, doing online group practice, making individual selfie memorisation video, and conducting a full group rehearsal" to guide MFL learners from mastering role play content to perform Mandarin live role-play confidently. This paper analyzes the "Golden Steps" pedagogical framework through the learning theories. It draws on Bandura Social Cognitive Theory in 1986, demonstrating how the steps build self-efficacy through enactive mastery. It further utilizes Kolb Experiential Learning Theory in 1984 to show how the process guides learners through a complete learning cycle of conceptualisation, observation, experimentation, and concrete experience. The 7Cs of Communication framework across five sequential phases are also employed to ensure the final performance is coherent: Mastery of Content (error-free script), Practice and Observation (group practice videos), Articulation and Automation (individual selfie memorisation videos), Collaboration and Cohesion (group rehearsal videos), and Execution and Evaluation (live assessment). Synthesising all the elements of the theories, this paper introduces the "Golden Steps" framework by providing MFL learners with a clear pathway from basic content mastery to confident, communicative execution. The "Golden Steps" pedagogical framework offers educators a practical, theory-grounded strategy to enhance students' performance in Mandarin live role-play assessment.

Keywords: *Mandarin as a Foreign Language (MFL), role-play live assessment, social cognitive, self-efficacy, experiential learning, communication framework*

Introduction

In Malaysian universities where Mandarin is taught as a foreign language, live role-play is often adopted as a key speaking assessment. The significance of adopting a live role-play as an assessment tool lies in its live interaction requiring learners to recall accurate content, attend to dialogue flow and maintaining performative aspects such as eye contact and gesture. Despite the educational value of live role-play assessment, a significant challenge persists: Many students were not fully ready and frequently relied on written notes. Students frequently glance at scripts, or pause due to uncertainty about the dialogue sequence. Others memorise only their own lines without understanding the full conversational structure, making them unable to respond appropriately when come to their turns. Many students postpone serious preparation until immediately before assessment, relying on last-minute memorisation that proves insufficient. Student unreadiness brings up the issue of assessment validity. When students rely on notes, assessment no longer measures communicative competence but rather reading ability. To overcome the validity issues, what is required is a systematic approach guiding students step by step through preparation, providing opportunities for

practice and feedback, and building students' confidence toward a successful live performance. Hence, this paper proposes the "Golden Steps" pedagogical framework to support Malaysian MFL learners in preparing for Mandarin role-play assessments. The framework consists of four stages: (1) memorising an error-free script, (2) conducting online group practice, (3) producing individual selfie memorisation videos, and (4) performing full group rehearsals.

Grounded in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) and Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), the "Golden Steps" pedagogical framework aims to build learners' self-efficacy and communicative competence through progressive mastery experiences. By integrating theoretical insights with practical pedagogical strategies, the framework provides educators with a structured pathway to enhance student performance in Mandarin live role-play assessments. Drawing upon recent empirical research on role-play in language learning contexts (Zulianingrum, 2025), this paper proposes the "Golden Steps" pedagogical framework to offer solution to the issue of student unreadiness in live Mandarin role-play assessment.

Literature review

Role-play has long been recognised as an effective pedagogical strategy for developing communicative competence in language learning. Empirical studies have shown that structured role-play activities significantly improve speaking fluency, vocabulary use, and learner confidence. Ampatuan and Jose (2016) demonstrated that role-play approaches significantly enhance learners' communicative abilities by providing authentic contexts for language application. Their study involving Filipino English language learners revealed that participants who engaged in structured role-play activities showed marked improvement in speaking fluency, vocabulary usage, and confidence. Recent research has further highlighted the role of role-play in promoting language experimentation and learner confidence. Zulianingrum (2025) reported that learners participating in role-play scenarios developed practical communication strategies, with the majority (90% of the participants) reporting increased confidence in their language abilities. While above research examines role-play in English language teaching, limited studies focus on Mandarin as a Foreign Language, particularly in Malaysian contexts. The proposed "Golden Steps" pedagogical framework seeks to address this gap by providing a systematic preparation process that supports both linguistic accuracy and communicative confidence.

Theoretical framework

Social cognitive theory: observational learning and self-efficacy

The "Golden Steps" find its first theoretical foundation in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986). A central concept within Social Cognitive Theory is self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their capability to successfully perform a task (Bandura, 1997). Bandura identified enactive mastery experiences, that is, personal successes in performing a task as the most influential source of self-efficacy. The "Golden Steps" strategically provides multiple enactive mastery opportunities at different levels. Step 1 (error-free scripts) provides cognitive mastery to know the language content is accurate. Step 3 (individual selfie memorisation videos) provides performative mastery to make oneself successfully delivering lines alone without assistance. Panjie and Velarde (2025) empirically demonstrated that language self-

efficacy closely correlates with metacognitive, cognitive, and social learning strategies. Their correlational study involving 300 non-English majors revealed that students with higher self-efficacy were significantly more inclined to adopt effective learning approaches, including planning, monitoring, and evaluating their language use. This finding suggests that interventions targeting self-efficacy enhancement may yield benefits for overall learning strategy adoption.

Experiential learning theory

The second theoretical foundation is Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), which conceptualises learning as a cyclical process which involves four stages of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. Effective learning occurs when learners engage in all four stages of the cycle, moving from experiencing to reflecting, thinking, and acting (Kolb and Kolb, 2017). Matte (2024) research in university language classrooms demonstrated that learners who moved through Kolb's cycle showed greater transfer of linguistic knowledge compared to those engaged in unreflective practice. The "Golden Steps" pedagogical framework operationalises this learning cycle by guiding students through repeated cycles of practice, reflection, and experimentation. Step 1 engages abstract conceptualisation through understanding assessment requirements. Step 2 conducts video-based practice allows learners to observe and evaluate their performances, facilitates reflective observation as students watch themselves and peers, analysing what worked and what requires improvement. Steps 3 and 4 provide active experimentation opportunities, first individually then collaboratively, testing different approaches to deliver the role play content.

The 7Cs of communication

Complementing these theories, the 7Cs of Communication framework of Clarity, Conciseness, Concreteness, Correctness, Coherence, Completeness and Courteousness, provides a comprehensive rubric for evaluating communicative effectiveness (Karmarkar, 2022). In the context of role-play assessment, these dimensions align with typical evaluation criteria: clarity corresponds to pronunciation and intonation, correctness to grammatical accuracy, coherence to discourse organisation, and courtesy to interactional competence. Within the "Golden Steps" pedagogical framework, Steps 1-3 establish foundational Cs (Clarity, Conciseness, Concreteness, Correctness), focus on linguistic accuracy and clarity, Step 4 achieves higher-order Cs (Coherence, Completeness and Courteousness) through full collaborative practice and rehearsal. The integration of the 7Cs framework into role-play preparation ensures that learners attend not only to what they say but also to how they say it and how they interact with conversation partners. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive foundation for structuring role-play preparation activities that enhance both linguistic competence and communicative performance.

Research objectives

This paper proposes the "Golden Steps" with the following objectives: (1) To develop a theoretically grounded "Golden Steps" addressing student unreadiness for live Mandarin role-play assessment in a Malaysian university; (2) To provide MFL

educators with a practical “Golden Steps” for pedagogical activities for live role-play performance.

Research questions

The paper addresses the following research questions: (1) How do principles from Social Cognitive Theory and Experiential Learning Theory be integrated to structure "Golden Steps" as the preparation for live Mandarin role-play assessment? (2) What specific pedagogical activities of “Golden Steps” enable Malaysian MFL learners to develop the accuracy, fluency, and confidence required for successful live role-play performance?

Materials and Methods

Theoretical synthesis approach

This study adopts a conceptual framework development approach based on systematic theoretical synthesis (Jabareen, 2009). The framework was constructed through a multi-stage process to identify key principles informing successful role-play preparation. Bandura (1986) Social Cognitive Theory provided the self-efficacy framework, while Kolb (1984) Experiential Learning Theory structured the developmental progression. The 7Cs of Communication framework was integrated to ensure attention to interactional competence dimensions. The synthesis process followed established procedures for theoretical framework development in educational research (Jabareen, 2009). First, key theoretical principles from Social Cognitive Theory and Experiential Learning Theory were identified through a systematic literature review. Second, relationships among theoretical constructs such as self-efficacy, observational learning, and experiential learning cycles were mapped to identify points of integration. Third, the "Golden Steps" was constructed by organising pedagogical activities according to theoretical principles, ensuring each step addressed specific self-efficacy sources and experiential learning phases. This approach allows the study to translate theoretical insights into a structured pedagogical framework for role-play preparation.

Literature selection criteria

Literature informing framework development was selected based on: (a) relevance to role-play pedagogy in language learning contexts, (b) empirical investigation of self-efficacy in language acquisition, (c) application of experiential learning to language education, (d) contextual relevance to Malaysian or Asian language learning settings, and (e) publication in peer-reviewed venues with preference for indexed journals. Database searches were conducted using combinations of keywords including "role-play," "language learning," "self-efficacy," "experiential learning," "Mandarin," "Chinese," "Malaysia," and "communicative competence." Reference lists of identified articles were examined for additional relevant sources.

Results and Discussion

The “Golden Steps” provide a systematic approach to preparing MFL learners for live role-play assessment. The “Golden Steps” provide a systematic approach to

preparing MFL learners for live role-play assessment. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) posits that learning occurs in a social context through observation, and that learners' beliefs in their capabilities (self-efficacy) are crucial for motivation and action (Bandura, 1997; Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2021).

Step 1: Error-free scripts (mastery of content)

Theoretical grounding: Social cognitive theory (Enactive mastery – Cognitive dimension)

Step 1 provides cognitive mastery in ensuring scripts are error-free. This foundational accuracy is essential, as Zulianingrum (2025) notes that role-play activities enable learners to effectively use functional language in everyday contexts when properly prepared. Step 1 requires students to validate error-free scripts through structured peer-review based on lecturer-corrected copies. Students draft scripts according to specifications (12-15 sentences per student), submit for lecturer's correction, then engage in peer validation with partners to ensure using an error-free script for preparation. By ensuring script accuracy before memorisation begins, Step 1 prevents memorisation of incorrect language. It provides cognitive enactive mastery that students will gain confidence from knowing content is correct.

Step 2: Online group practice video (practice and observation)

Theoretical grounding: Social cognitive theory (Modelling); Kolb (Reflective observation)

Step 2 requires students to produce and submit an online group practice video. Students first watch reference videos to understand successful performance standards. Following observation, they make their own practice video performing scripts together by using notes on hand. The requirement for students to watch reference videos and produce their own group practice videos directly applies the principle of observational learning. The video becomes an object for reflection, enabling students to identify strengths and weaknesses. Students watch themselves and peers, observe effective elements (fluency, pronunciation) and areas for improvement (pauses, errors). Javahery and Bavandi (2025) highlight that such reflective observation is crucial for developing practical skills in language education contexts, as it transforms experience into learning. This reflective observation in Step 2 develops a foundation for the next accurate self-assessment. Step 2 is positioned as practice rather than assessment, encouraging experimentation without penalty.

Step 3: Individual selfie memorisation video (articulation and automation)

Theoretical grounding: Social cognitive theory (Enactive mastery – Performative dimension); Kolb (Active experimentation)

Step 3 requires each student to produce an individual selfie memorisation video performing own's complete role-play lines alone, without notes or assistance, while standing and incorporating physical movement. This creates conditions for individual enactive mastery, the most influential source of self-efficacy. Successfully delivering lines alone on camera provides direct evidence of capability as the most influential self-efficacy source. Repeated practice develops automaticity, the requirement to stand and move addresses the performative dimension to prepare students to physical presentation.

The outcome is development of Self-Efficacy and Automaticity. Bandura (1997) emphasises that mastery experiences are most effective when tasks are challenging but achievable with effort, and when success is attributed to personal capability rather than external factors. The individual video requirement, performed without notes or peer support, ensures that success is clearly attributable to the learner's own preparation and ability.

Step 4: Group rehearsal video (collaboration and cohesion)

Theoretical Grounding: Kolb (Active Experimentation – Social Dimension)

Step 4 requires a full group rehearsal video performing together without notes, from memory, incorporating full acting and interaction. This enables synthesis of individual readiness into group performance. Successful role-play requires coordinated interaction, that is, knowing when to speak and to respond appropriately, maintaining eye contact and managing dialogue flow. Step 4 is critical for achieving higher-order communicative qualities of Coherence, Completeness, and Courtesy. This progression from individual to social experimentation aligns with experiential learning principles and prepares learners for collaborative performance (Kolb and Kolb, 2017). The group rehearsal phase is particularly important for developing what Canale and Swain (1980) term sociolinguistic and discourse competence, that is, the ability to manage interaction appropriately and maintain coherent conversation.

Final output: The live role-play assessment (execution and evaluation)

Theoretical grounding: Kolb (Concrete experience)

Having completed four preparatory steps will make students fully ready to perform in the live role play assessment. Rather than feeling anxious of forgetting lines, they will be confident to make a success in the live presentation. The live assessment evaluates students across pronunciation, intonation (12%), fluency (8%), performance (7%), and additional criteria (3%) assessing confidence, interaction, and cooperation. Students prepared through the “Golden Steps” are positioned to excel in the live role play. The outcome is Confident Performance and Communicative Effectiveness. Through scaffolded steps, students are ready to engage in concrete experience with higher success probability and reduced anxiety. This preparation addresses the anxiety-reduction benefits documented in role-play research, where Zulianingrum (2025) found that 90% of participants reported increased confidence through structured role-play activities.

The 7Cs of communication framework

The 7Cs framework provides a tangible rubric for effective communication during live performance (Karmarkar, 2022)

Clarity, Conciseness, Concreteness, Correctness (Supported by Steps 1, 2, and 3): Step 1 ensures messages are Correct (grammatically accurate) and Concrete (specific to roles). Repeated practice in Steps 2, 3, and 4 improves delivery to be Clear (pronunciation) and Concise (fitting sentence structure and time limits). These foundational elements are essential for communicative competence, as Ampatuan and Jose (2016) demonstrated in their research on role-play approaches. Coherence, Completeness and Courteousness (Supported by Step 4): Full group rehearsal (Step 4) is

critical for achieving these higher-order dimensions. It allows students to practice dialogue flow to ensure Coherence and Completeness with natural beginning, middle, and end structures. It also fosters Courteous interaction including turn-taking, active listening, and appropriate responding that captured in "Confidence/ Interaction/ Cooperation" marking criteria.

Proposed pedagogical framework: The “Golden Steps” for MFL learners in Malaysia

Based on the synthesis of identified theories and the application of the “Golden Steps”, this section presents the complete pedagogical framework of “Golden Steps”: Towards Successful Live Mandarin Role-Play. *Table 1* outlines the five phases of the framework: Mastery of Content, Practice and Observation, Articulation and Automation, Collaboration and Cohesion, and Execution and Evaluation. These five phases are designed to systematically guide Malaysian learners of Mandarin as a Foreign Language (MFL) toward successful live role-play performance. To enhance clarity and practical application, *Figure 1* further illustrates these five phases in simplified terms as Mastery, Practice, Articulation, Collaboration, and Execution, providing a concise representation of the progressive preparatory stages towards successful live role-play performance.

Table 1. The “Golden Steps” pedagogical framework: Towards successful live Mandarin role-play.

Phase	Guiding Theory	Pedagogical Activity	Communicative Outcome
Mastery of Content	Social Cognitive Theory (Enactive Mastery – Cognitive)	Step 1: Error-Free Scripts. Peer-validation of corrections based on lecturer's corrected copies.	Accuracy and Security: Eliminates linguistic errors, building foundational confidence. Students move from "what if I'm wrong?" to "I know this is correct."
Practice and Observation	Social Cognitive Theory (Modeling); Kolb (Reflective Observation)	Step 2: Online Group Practice Video. Observation of models and self/peer performance.	Cognitive Awareness: Students internalise standards and develop self/peer assessment capabilities for fluency and pronunciation.
Articulation and Automation	Social Cognitive Theory (Enactive Mastery – Performative); Kolb (Active Experimentation)	Step 3: Individual Selfie Memorisation Video. Solo, no-help performance with physical movement.	Self-Efficacy and Automaticity: Success in individual performance builds strong personal capability beliefs. Repeated practice automates sentence recall, freeing cognitive load for acting.
Collaboration and Cohesion	Kolb (Active Experimentation – Social); 7Cs of Communication	Step 4: Group Rehearsal Video. Full, no-help live performance as a group.	Interactional Competence and Coherence: Learners synthesise individual readiness into group flow, practicing turn-taking, ensuring coherent, complete, natural dialogue.
Execution and Evaluation	Kolb (Concrete Experience); 7Cs of Communication	The Live Role-Play Assessment	Confident Performance and Communicative Effectiveness: Students execute well-rehearsed, accurate, fluent performances. Anxiety reduces, enabling focus on acting and interaction, achieving higher scores across criteria.

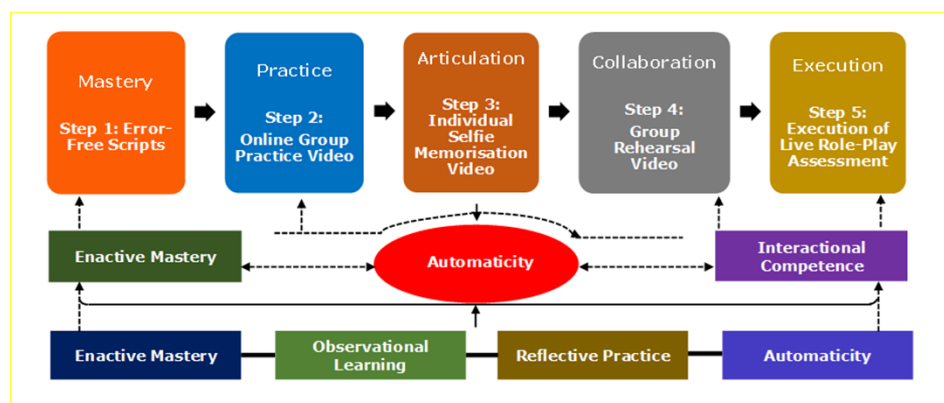


Figure 1. The “Golden Steps” pedagogical framework: Towards successful live Mandarin role-play.

The “Golden Steps” pedagogical framework directly addresses the identified problem: student unreadiness as relying to notes and poor performance. By structuring preparation through multiple steps, the “Golden Steps” ensure learners develop automaticity before the live assessment. These addresses Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005) concern regarding automatic fluency in communicative language teaching: learners need repeated opportunities for fluent production, which the “Golden Steps” provide through video recordings and rehearsals. The progression from error-free scripts through individual and group performances systematically builds what Bandura (1997) terms enactive mastery as authentic experiences of success that generate self-efficacy. Research by Panjie and Velarde (2025) confirms that such mastery experiences predict effective learning strategy use, suggesting that “Golden Steps” will enhance not only immediate performance but also long-term language learning approaches. Learners who experience success through structured preparation may be more likely to adopt similar preparation strategies in future language learning contexts, creating greater confidence and effort. The “Golden Steps” make several contributions. First, it addresses a specific unreadiness problem with a theoretically grounded, practically implementable solution. Second, it demonstrates productive integration of multiple theoretical perspectives into coherent pedagogical intervention. Theoretically, the “Golden Steps” demonstrate how concepts of observational learning, self-efficacy, and experiential learning can be operationalised alongside communication criteria to create a coherent guidance. Practically, it offers MFL educators a ready-to-implement structure translating abstract principles into concrete activities with clear requirements and learning outcomes. Third, it contributes to technology-enhanced language learning literature through strategic video recording use, creating learning opportunities beyond face-to-face instruction.

For students, the framework promises transformation in both experience and outcomes of live assessment. Rather than approaching assessment with anxiety, students progress with growing confidence built on successive mastery experiences. For assessment validity, the framework offers more accurate measurement of communicative competence. However, in terms of “Time allocation”, implementing all five phases requires several weeks of course time, necessitating careful curriculum planning to balance coverage of linguistic content with performance preparation. One key limitation warrants acknowledgement. The framework may require adaptation to suit different institutional contexts and assessment requirements, as differences in curriculum design, class size, instructional time, teacher expertise, and assessment

formats may influence its implementation and effectiveness. In addition, empirical validation of the “Golden Steps” effectiveness remains an important direction for future research. Studies examining student outcomes before and after its implementation could provide stronger evidence of its impact on live role-play performance. Qualitative research could further explore students’ experiences as they progress through the five phases of the “Golden Steps”. Future studies may also investigate how the framework can be adapted for learners with different proficiency levels and for the teaching of other foreign languages. The challenge addressed, that is, student unreadiness for live role-play assessment, reflects a fundamental tension in performance-based assessment. The “Golden Steps” offer a principled method, demonstrating that with appropriate structured support, students can overcome the problem and realise the full educational potential of live assessment. At its core, the “Golden Steps” emphasises that all students can succeed when provided with appropriate guidance. It is not because the task is easy, but because structured preparation makes things achievable.

Conclusion

This paper proposes the “Golden Steps” pedagogical framework as a structured and theoretically grounded solution to the challenge of student unreadiness in Mandarin live role-play assessments. By integrating principles from Social Cognitive Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, and 7Cs communication frameworks, the pedagogical framework provides a systematic preparation pathway that develops both linguistic competence and learner confidence. The “Golden Steps” pedagogical framework addresses the problem of student unreadiness in live role-play assessments by providing structured opportunities for practice and mastery. Repeated practice through video recordings supports the development of language automaticity, which is essential for communicative fluency (Gatbonton and Segalowitz, 2005). The framework also operationalises Bandura’s concept of enactive mastery experiences by providing progressive stages of success. Individual and group recordings allow students to observe their improvement and build confidence in their speaking abilities. Furthermore, video-based activities facilitate reflective learning as the individual selfie memorisation video and the group rehearsal video allow learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses objectively, and reduce anxiety associated with speaking tasks. By integrating theoretical insights with practical pedagogical strategies, the “Golden Steps” pedagogical framework offers a coherent approach to enhancing communicative performance in Mandarin language classrooms.

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I extend my sincerest gratitude to the countless students who have given me warmth and support over the years. They have benefited greatly from the “Golden Steps” approach, and in their end-of-semester comments, many have left encouraging words, hoping that I can continue to help more students benefit from this method. Therefore, I have written this paper to detail this teaching approach, with the hope that the “Golden Steps” pedagogical framework will offer educators a practical, theory-grounded strategy to enhance students’ performance in Mandarin live role-play assessments.

Conflict of interest

The author confirms that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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