

# Challenges and Strategies in Learning Chinese as a Second Language: A Study on Non-Chinese Speaking Students in a Private School in Kuala Lumpur

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## Abstract

*Learning Chinese as a second language (CSL) presents unique challenges for non-native speakers, particularly in non-Sinophone regions like Malaysia. This study explores the attitudes, challenges, and learning strategies of non-Chinese-speaking students in acquiring Chinese. Utilizing a qualitative research approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 students from a private school in Kuala Lumpur. The findings indicate that major challenges include character memorization, pronunciation difficulties, and limited exposure to the language outside the classroom. However, students employ diverse strategies, such as gamification, rote memorization, and technology-assisted learning, to enhance their proficiency. The study highlights the influence of social learning and motivation in language acquisition. Furthermore, it identifies gaps in current research, particularly the integration of traditional and digital learning methods. The findings provide practical implications for educators and policymakers in developing more effective CSL instructional strategies.*

**Keywords:** *Chinese as a Second Language, language acquisition, learning strategies, language anxiety, motivation, gamification, character memorization.*

## Introduction

Over the past two decades, the Chinese language has gained significant global recognition as an essential foreign or second language (Gong et al., 2018). This increasing importance has led to a growing number of non-native learners, particularly in government, foreign, and private schools, who seek to acquire proficiency in Chinese. However, due to its complex linguistic structure, Chinese remains one of the most challenging languages for English speakers to learn (Sung, 2014). As a result, many students struggle with mastering Chinese and often discontinue their studies within a short period. Educators, therefore, continue to explore innovative strategies to improve students' proficiency and retention in learning Chinese. The fundamental skills required for language acquisition—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—serve as the basis for instructional methodologies. This study aims to investigate the challenges faced by non-Chinese

students learning Chinese in a private school in Kuala Lumpur, their attitudes towards the language, and the effectiveness of various learning strategies.

## **Background to the Study**

The increasing globalization of China and its economic influence have heightened the demand for Chinese language proficiency. However, learning Chinese presents considerable challenges, particularly for English-speaking students, due to its distinct phonetic, grammatical, and orthographic system (Sung, 2014). Historically, traditional teaching methods emphasized teacher-centred instruction, where teachers acted as authoritative figures and controlled the learning process (Luther, 2000; Esmaeili et al., 2015). While this approach ensured structured learning, it often failed to engage students effectively.

Recent studies have highlighted active learning as a more effective approach to language acquisition. Boyer et al. (2014) suggested that active learning enhances student engagement by encouraging them to focus on how to learn rather than just what to learn. Flipped learning has also emerged as an effective pedagogical strategy, requiring students to study independently outside the classroom and bring their learning experiences into discussions (Lockwood & Esselstein, 2013). However, studies have shown that students often do not maximize the available learning materials, limiting the effectiveness of this approach (Ekici, 2021). Given these varied instructional methods, this study seeks to assess which learning strategies best support non-Chinese speaking students in acquiring proficiency in Chinese.

## **Problem Statement**

Chinese is widely recognized as a complex language for English-speaking learners due to its unique tonal system, character-based writing, and grammatical structure (Sung, 2014). Mastering Chinese requires students to learn pronunciation, tones, and thousands of characters, posing significant cognitive challenges. Writing Chinese, in particular, demands extensive practice and memorization, making it difficult for students to retain and apply their knowledge effectively.

Existing studies have explored various approaches to enhance Chinese language learning, including the use of online applications (Jie Fang et al., 2022; Ng et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2017; Li Jin, 2017; Sam et al., 2018; Tang et al., 2021) and orthographic-based learning strategies (Shen, 2004; Sung, 2014; Ke, 1998). However, there is no consensus on the most effective method for learning Chinese as a second language. This study aims to bridge this gap by identifying the key challenges faced by non-Chinese speaking students, examining their attitudes towards the language, and evaluating the effectiveness of different learning strategies.

## **Significance of the Study**

Understanding the challenges and learning strategies of non-Chinese speaking students is crucial for developing effective instructional methods. The Chinese writing system consists of both ideographic and phonetic elements, which, combined with its grammatical structure, influence students' ability to grasp and express ideas accurately (Huang & Li, 2016).

This study provides insights into the attitudes, challenges, and strategies of non-Chinese speaking students in learning Chinese, offering valuable contributions to language educators and researchers. By analysing students' perspectives, the study aims to improve language instruction methods, enhance student engagement, and inform future curriculum development. Furthermore, the findings may help educators design targeted interventions to support students in overcoming difficulties in Chinese language acquisition.

## **Research Objectives and Research Questions**

This study aims to identify and evaluate the strategies used by non-Chinese speaking students in learning Chinese. The research objectives include:

1. Identifying the attitudes and challenges faced by non-Chinese speaking students towards Chinese language learning.
2. Examining the learning strategies employed by non-Chinese speaking students.
3. Assessing the effectiveness of these learning strategies on students' academic performance.

To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the attitudes and challenges of non-Chinese speaking students towards learning Chinese?
2. What learning strategies do non-Chinese speaking students adopt?
3. How do these strategies impact students' performance in Chinese language assessments?

## **Literature Review**

The Chinese language has long played a significant role in Malaysia's linguistic landscape, with increasing emphasis on its acquisition due to both economic and cultural significance. As globalization strengthens China's economic influence, proficiency in Chinese has become a valuable skill for individuals seeking academic and professional advancement. Employers and parents alike perceive Chinese language proficiency as an essential asset, contributing to greater opportunities in education and career development. According to Bifuh-Ambe (2009), language proficiency is defined as an individual's ability to communicate effectively in both social and academic settings. In the Malaysian context, acquiring fundamental Chinese communication skills is not only beneficial for employment but also crucial for fostering social integration in a multicultural society. As English is no longer the sole dominant global language, many educational institutions and private language centres have expanded their efforts to teach Chinese as a second language to cater to this growing demand.

The Chinese language curriculum for second-language learners in Malaysia is structured around several core objectives. These include enabling students to communicate in Mandarin, developing proficiency in Mandarin writing, enhancing Mandarin reading comprehension, and fostering an appreciation for Chinese culture. Many parents believe that exposing their children to Chinese at an early age provides long-term academic and professional benefits, leading to increased enrolment in Chinese-medium schools and supplementary private language classes (Chua, 2022). This

parental investment reflects broader societal perceptions of Chinese as an essential language for future success.

Globally, the demand for Chinese language proficiency has risen, leading to the adoption of diverse instructional methodologies across different countries. In Western nations, technology-enhanced learning and gamification have become prevalent strategies for second-language acquisition. For instance, Sam (2018) investigated the use of gamification in Chinese language learning through the Newby Chinese System in Ireland. The study revealed that gamification significantly enhances learners' motivation by integrating game-related objectives, immersive virtual environments, competitive gameplay, and interactive social activities. Similarly, Tang (2021) explored gaming-based learning strategies among high-elementary and intermediate-level Chinese learners in the United States. The study, which utilized the language-learning game *Questaurant*, found that digital games serve as effective tools for vocabulary retention and pronunciation improvement.

Beyond gamification, mobile applications and social media platforms have also played a crucial role in Chinese language acquisition. Li Jin (2017) examined the role of WeChat as a supplementary learning tool for American students learning Chinese. The study found that WeChat facilitated direct communication with native speakers, enabling a relaxed and informal learning environment. Many learners reported that using WeChat provided an effective alternative to traditional classroom instruction, reducing reliance on textbook-heavy methods while enhancing their conversational skills.

In Malaysia, there has been a growing interest among non-Chinese individuals in acquiring proficiency in the Chinese language. Various studies have examined the different strategies employed by Malaysian learners to overcome the challenges associated with learning Chinese. Chua (2022) conducted research on Chinese character memorization techniques among Malaysian learners, revealing that rote learning remains the most common approach, particularly among beginner students. Despite its limitations, rote memorization is widely used due to the complexity of Chinese characters and the need for repeated exposure to reinforce learning.

The integration of gamification in Chinese language acquisition has also been explored within the Malaysian education system. Ng et al. (2022) conducted a study on Year 4 students using the *Class Dojo* application, finding that gamification significantly improved student motivation by incorporating goal-oriented learning elements, fostering self-assessment, and promoting independent learning. Similarly, Goh (2016) examined the effectiveness of the Pleco application for non-native learners of Chinese characters. The findings indicated that students viewed Pleco positively as a tool for improving writing accuracy and comprehension. The study further found that the application benefited both beginner and advanced learners by supporting vocabulary retention and aiding in the recognition of complex characters.

### **Gaps in Existing Literature**

Although extensive research has been conducted on Chinese language learning strategies, significant gaps remain in the literature. Many existing studies have primarily focused on digital learning tools such as WeChat, gamification applications, and stroke-based memorization techniques (Jie Fang et al., 2022; Ng et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2017; Sam et al., 2018; Tang et al., 2021). Additionally, previous research by Shen (2004), Sung (2014), and Ke (1998) emphasized

the effectiveness of orthographic learning strategies for Chinese character acquisition. However, there is limited research on how non-digital learning strategies, such as peer-assisted learning, cultural immersion, and mnemonic devices, contribute to language retention. Furthermore, few studies have explored how learners integrate both traditional and digital learning approaches to optimize their Chinese language acquisition. Addressing these gaps would provide a more holistic understanding of the most effective learning strategies for second-language Chinese learners.

### **Theoretical Framework in Chinese Language Learning**

The study of language learning strategies has evolved over time, with researchers defining these strategies in various ways. For the purpose of this study, learning strategies are understood as students' ability to effectively utilize available resources to achieve their linguistic goals. Several learning theories provide insight into how students acquire and retain new knowledge.

Boroch et al. (2010) argued that students with strong metacognitive awareness actively process and connect new information to prior knowledge, thereby fostering deeper comprehension. Constructivist learning theory further suggests that learners construct knowledge through interpreting their previous experiences (O'Banion, 1997). This aligns with the belief that second-language learners benefit from active engagement and contextual learning.

Merriam et al. (2006) introduced Social Cognitive Theory, which combines behavioural and constructivist principles. This theory emphasizes the role of social observation in learning, suggesting that students acquire knowledge through interactions with diverse peer groups. Social learning, also referred to as observational learning, allows individuals to develop new skills by engaging with their environment and observing others.

### **Attitudes Toward Learning Chinese**

A student's attitude plays a crucial role in the process of second-language acquisition. Attitudes are psychological constructs that shape an individual's perceptions, emotions, and behaviours (Rokeach, 1968). Weinburgh (1998) asserted that students with positive attitudes toward a subject tend to achieve higher academic success. Gardner and Lambert (1972) similarly emphasized that motivation is a key determinant in second-language proficiency. Wen (2011) further highlighted the impact of positive learning experiences on student retention and linguistic achievement.

In a study conducted by Hui (2017), it was found that students' personal backgrounds, learning goals, and social environments influenced their attitudes toward learning Chinese. Zhang (2021) identified three key factors that contribute to positive attitudes in language learning: personal fulfilment, interpersonal relationships, and social bonds. These findings suggest that fostering a supportive and motivating learning environment is essential for improving students' engagement with the Chinese language.

## **Challenges in Learning Chinese as a Second Language**

Learning Chinese as a second language presents several challenges, particularly for non-native speakers. One of the primary difficulties lies in the logographic writing system, which differs significantly from alphabetic languages such as English and Malay (Chua et al., 2015). Unlike alphabetic scripts, Chinese characters require knowledge of radicals and stroke patterns, making character memorization a demanding task. Sung (2014) noted that students often struggle with the visual complexity of Chinese characters, requiring consistent exposure and repetition for mastery.

Pronunciation also poses a major challenge for learners. Chua et al. (2015) found that minor variations in radicals can lead to differences in pronunciation, necessitating strong recall skills (Lee & Kalyuga, 2011). Additionally, tonal pronunciation plays a crucial role in Chinese language comprehension. Research by Sian Hong Teoh et al. (2022) indicated that mastering the tonal system—comprising five distinct tones—is essential for accurate communication. As Chinese is a tonal language, incorrect tonal pronunciation can result in misinterpretation of meaning, further complicating the learning process for second-language learners.

In summary, the literature underscores the growing importance of Chinese language acquisition in Malaysia and globally. Research highlights various strategies, including digital tools, social engagement, and traditional learning methods, as key contributors to second-language proficiency. While gamification and mobile applications have demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing motivation, there remains a need for further investigation into non-digital learning strategies. Additionally, understanding the role of metacognition, attitudes, and social learning theories in Chinese language acquisition can offer deeper insights into how students develop proficiency. Addressing the existing research gaps will be essential in refining language education policies and improving instructional approaches for non-native Chinese learners.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the attitudes, challenges, and learning strategies of non-Chinese-speaking students acquiring Chinese as a second language. Qualitative research enables researchers to collect, analyse, and interpret subjective data, offering insights into individual experiences and behaviours within specific contexts (Mohajan, 2018). The data collected were systematically organized and categorized thematically to identify patterns and emerging themes related to students' learning experiences.

The primary objective of this study was to determine the attitudes and challenges faced by non-Chinese-speaking students in learning Chinese, as well as to examine the learning strategies they employed to overcome these challenges. Additionally, the study aimed to assess the effectiveness of these strategies in improving the participants' language proficiency.

A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for this study as it allowed for an in-depth understanding of students' perspectives through focus group interviews. Kvale (1996) emphasized that interviews provide valuable insights into students' thought processes, enabling them to reflect on their learning journey. This study specifically targeted non-Chinese-speaking students enrolled

in a private school in Kuala Lumpur. Focus group discussions were conducted to encourage students to share their experiences, learning difficulties, and strategies in a structured yet open-ended manner.

### **Population and Sampling**

The study focused on a total of 20 non-Chinese-speaking students aged between 10 and 15 years from a private school in Kuala Lumpur. These students had low proficiency in Chinese and primarily used English or Malay as their main communication languages, engaging with Chinese only during classroom lessons. Most of them had started learning Chinese during primary school but continued to experience considerable challenges in acquiring proficiency in the language.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who best fit the research criteria. Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method, involves deliberately selecting individuals based on specific characteristics relevant to the study (Palinkas et al., 2015). The participants in this study shared common attributes, including their non-native status, low Chinese language proficiency, and ongoing engagement in formal Chinese learning.

This sampling method ensured that the data collected would be directly relevant to the research objectives.

### **Instrumentation**

The study utilized semi-structured interviews to obtain in-depth qualitative data from participants. The interview questions were carefully designed and divided into four main sections:

1. Background Information – Collected demographic data, language background, and preferred mode of communication.
2. Challenges in Learning Chinese – Identified the primary difficulties faced by students in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
3. Learning Strategies – Investigated the various approaches students employed to enhance their proficiency in Chinese.
4. Motivation for Learning Chinese – Explored students' attitudes, personal goals, and external factors influencing their motivation.

The interview questions were adapted from a study by Jia Lin et al. (2023), which examined attitudes toward learning Chinese as a second language. Each question was carefully structured to ensure clarity and relevance to the research objectives while allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences.

## **Validity and Reliability**

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings, efforts were made to ensure both validity and reliability throughout the study.

### **Validity**

- **Expert Review:** The interview questions were reviewed by language education experts to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives (Kim, 2017).
- **Member Checking:** Participants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts to verify accuracy and minimize potential misinterpretations (Birt et al., 2016).

### **Reliability**

- **Triangulation:** Data were collected from multiple participants of different ages and backgrounds to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies associated with learning Chinese (Flick, 2018).
- **Audit Trail:** Detailed records of the interview guides, transcription processes, and coding strategies were maintained to allow for transparency and replicability of the research process (Nowell et al., 2017).

## **Data Collection Method**

The data collection process involved conducting semi-structured focus group interviews over a three-month period. Each interview session lasted approximately 20 minutes, ensuring that participants had sufficient time to reflect on their experiences while minimizing disruptions to their academic schedules. The interviews were conducted in a quiet, comfortable setting within the school to facilitate open discussion.

With the participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of responses. The transcriptions were carefully reviewed to ensure accuracy before proceeding with data analysis.

## **Data Analysis Process**

A thematic analysis approach was employed to analyse the collected data. Thematic analysis (TA) is a widely used qualitative research method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns within datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2020). This method allowed for the systematic categorization of data into key themes and sub-themes related to students' attitudes, challenges, and learning strategies.

The analysis process followed a six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2020):

1. **Familiarization with Data:** Transcriptions were read multiple times to gain an overall understanding of participants' responses.

2. Generating Initial Codes: Data were coded based on recurring patterns and meaningful statements.
3. Searching for Themes: The codes were grouped into broader themes representing key findings.
4. Reviewing Themes: Themes were refined to ensure they accurately represented the data.
5. Defining and Naming Themes: Final themes were labelled and described to provide clear insights.
6. Producing the Report: The findings were systematically presented with supporting quotes from participants.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was obtained from the school administration and research supervisors before data collection commenced. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and measures taken to ensure confidentiality and data security.

The following ethical measures were implemented:

- Informed Consent: All participants and their guardians provided written consent before participation.
- Confidentiality: Participants' identities were anonymized using pseudonyms to protect their privacy.
- Right to Withdraw: Participants were given the freedom to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.
- Data Security: Audio recordings and interview transcripts were stored in a password-protected database, and all collected data will be securely deleted five years post-study completion to ensure data protection.

## **Findings**

### **Contextual Findings**

To establish a comprehensive understanding of the respondents, the study began with a series of demographic questions during the interviews. These questions were designed to provide insights into population differences and their potential influence on perceptions of learning Chinese as a second language. Understanding the demographic profile of the participants was essential for contextualizing the findings and identifying any patterns or trends related to their learning experiences.

### **Participant Profile**

The study involved 20 students from a private school in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The sample consisted of 17 female students and 3 male students, reflecting a gender imbalance that may have implications for the generalizability of the findings. The participants were distributed across different academic years, as outlined in Table 1 below.

*Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Participants*

| <b>Academic Year</b> | <b>Male Students</b> | <b>Female Students</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Year 4               | 1                    | 1                      | 2            |
| Year 5               | 0                    | 5                      | 5            |
| Year 6               | 0                    | 1                      | 1            |
| Year 7               | 1                    | 4                      | 5            |
| Year 8               | 0                    | 2                      | 2            |
| Year 9               | 1                    | 4                      | 5            |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>3</b>             | <b>17</b>              | <b>20</b>    |

*Note.* The table summarizes the distribution of participants by academic year and gender.

All participants were non-Chinese speakers who primarily used Malay or English for communication at home. Despite learning Chinese as a second language, they faced various challenges in acquiring proficiency. Before the interviews, informed consent forms were provided to all students, which they signed to indicate their willingness to participate in the study.

The interview data were categorized into three key themes:

1. Challenges faced while learning Chinese
2. Strategies employed to overcome these challenges
3. Attitudes toward learning Chinese

The study identified several challenges students encountered while learning Chinese, including interest in the language, time required to memorize characters, communication difficulties, and classroom participation.

## Interest in Learning Chinese

Table 2 illustrates students' interest in learning Chinese.

*Table 2: Interest in Learning Chinese*

| Interest Level | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|----------------|
| Dislike        | 5%             |
| Neutral        | 40%            |
| Enjoy Learning | 55%            |

Out of all students interviewed, 5% expressed dislike for learning Chinese due to the difficulty of Chinese characters and language barriers. Approximately 40% maintained a neutral stance, expecting teachers to provide more guidance. Meanwhile, 55% of the students found the language enjoyable and valuable for future opportunities.

Some students expressed their enthusiasm for learning:

- "Yes, because it is interesting, and I want to understand the culture." (Interviewee S1)
- "Yes, because it is fun to learn a new language." (Interviewee S2)
- "Yes, because if I want to go to China, I can speak fluently." (Interviewee S4)

Conversely, some students encountered significant difficulties:

- "I don't like it, nor do I dislike it. I feel neutral. But sometimes I feel the language is the hardest to learn. The characters are difficult to learn and write." (Interviewee S3)

## Time Spent Understanding Chinese Characters

Table 3 presents the time students needed to understand Chinese characters.

*Table 3: Time Required to Understand Chinese Characters*

| Time to Understand Characters | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 hour                        | 23%            |
| 1 day                         | 15%            |
| 1 week                        | 62%            |

Students required varying amounts of time to grasp Chinese characters, with 62% needing a full week, as memorization played a critical role. Students noted that dual meanings and similar-looking characters made it challenging to distinguish words.

- "Depending on the difficulty of the words, I use one week to memorize them." (Interviewee S3)
- "I use one hour, but it depends on how easy or hard the characters are." (Interviewee S2).

## Speaking and Communication in Chinese

Table 4 illustrates how often students communicated in Chinese.

*Table 4: Frequency of Speaking Chinese*

| <b>Frequency of Speaking Chinese</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Frequently                           | 72%                   |
| Occasionally                         | 17%                   |
| Rarely                               | 11%                   |

Some students actively communicated in Chinese with family members:

- *"Yes, most of the time, I speak with my grandmother. If I don't understand a word, I ask my mom." (Interviewee S10)*

Others struggled with speaking due to lack of confidence:

- *"A bit, I think my tone is not right, and I struggle with that. I only greet friends in Chinese." (Interviewee S8)*
- *"I tried speaking before, but it sounded weird." (Interviewee S3)*

## Challenges in Answering Questions in Class

Table 5 shows the students' ability to respond in class.

*Table 5: Ability to Answer Questions in Class*

| Ability to Answer Questions | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Able to Answer              | 40%            |
| Sometimes Able              | 30%            |
| Unable to Answer            | 30%            |

Students found Pinyin and teacher explanations crucial for understanding:

- *"Yes, I can answer because the teacher gave a brief explanation." (Interviewee S4)*
- *"Sometimes I can answer, but not always." (Interviewee S7)*
- *"No, I don't understand the Chinese words." (Interviewee S1)*

## Strategies for Learning Chinese

Students employed various strategies to learn Chinese characters. Table 6 presents the strategies used.

*Table 6: Strategies Used to Learn Chinese Characters*

| Strategy                                | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------|
| Memorization                            | 25%            |
| Copying                                 | 10%            |
| Practicing                              | 10%            |
| Other (e.g., flashcards, rote learning) | 55%            |

Some students used memorization techniques:

- *"I spend time practicing the characters until I can engrave them in my memory." (Interviewee S6)*

Others relied on copying techniques:

- *"Sometimes I copy the words multiple times and use them in sentences." (Interviewee S7)*

## Overcoming Challenges

Table 7 highlights how students sought help when facing difficulties.

*Table 7: Solutions to Overcome Learning Challenges*

| <b>Solution</b>         | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Asked teacher           | 47%                   |
| Used Google             | 18%                   |
| Asked parents           | 9%                    |
| Asked friends/relatives | 15%                   |
| Gave up/Other           | 24%                   |

A significant proportion of students relied on teachers for assistance, while some sought help from family and online resources.

## Attitudes Toward Learning Chinese

Students' attitudes toward learning Chinese were categorized into four themes, as shown in Table 8.

*Table 8: Attitudes Toward Learning Chinese*

| <b>Attitude Toward Learning Chinese</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Difficult                               | 35%                   |
| Becoming Easier                         | 30%                   |
| Fun                                     | 25%                   |
| Self-Motivated                          | 10%                   |

## Motivation for Learning Chinese

Table 9 presents students' motivations for learning Chinese.

*Table 9: Motivation for Learning Chinese*

| <b>Motivation</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Family            | 48%                   |
| Teachers/Friends  | 45%                   |
| School Curriculum | 7%                    |

The findings underscore the crucial role of family, teachers, and peers in motivating students.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings provided valuable insights into students' challenges, strategies, and attitudes toward learning Chinese. The study highlighted the difficulty of memorization, pronunciation issues, and dependency on teacher support as significant obstacles. However, strategic learning techniques and social encouragement proved vital in helping students overcome barriers in acquiring proficiency in the Chinese language.

### **Challenges Faced by Students Learning Chinese**

The study identified five major challenges students faced when learning Chinese as a second language:

1. Interest in learning the language
2. Time required to memorize Chinese characters
3. Ability to communicate in Chinese
4. Ability to answer questions in class
5. Proficiency in four language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking

Findings revealed that 55% of students were interested in learning Chinese, aligning with Gultom et al. (2020), who stated that student interest is a key driver of language acquisition. However, nearly half of the students either remained neutral or expressed disinterest, primarily due to difficulties in memorizing the large vocabulary and reading comprehension issues. These challenges significantly contributed to students' struggles in mastering the language, making Chinese one of the most difficult languages to learn.

A primary obstacle was the time required to memorize Chinese characters. The study found that 62% of students needed at least a week to memorize characters due to their complex stroke structures and multiple meanings. This finding was consistent with Chua et al. (2015), who emphasized the logographic nature of Chinese characters as a major hurdle for non-native learners.

Another significant challenge was oral communication, which plays a vital role in language learning (Tan et al., 2010). The results indicated that 72% of students practiced speaking Chinese regularly, often due to the presence of native Chinese-speaking peers in their school environment. This aligns with Hernández-Chérrez et al. (2021), who suggested that peer interactions enhance language acquisition by providing real-life exposure to spoken language.

However, difficulties persisted in answering questions during class discussions. Approximately 60% of students reported being unable to respond confidently in Chinese class. Many struggled with understanding words and forming coherent responses, leading to hesitation and silence during lessons. These findings supported Bensoussa et al. (1990), who argued that answering questions in class is essential for reinforcing language comprehension.

The study further highlighted that reading and writing skills were the most challenging for students, accounting for 78% of the reported difficulties. Yang (2018) similarly concluded that students learning Chinese as a second language faced greater challenges in reading and writing than in listening and speaking. This was attributed to the complexity of Chinese characters and the need for significant memorization and practice.

### **Strategies Used by Students**

To overcome these challenges, students employed various learning strategies, categorized into:

1. Memorization strategies for learning Chinese characters
2. Different approaches to mastering reading, writing, speaking, and listening
3. Solutions to address learning difficulties

The study found that memorization was the most commonly used strategy, with 25% of students relying on it to retain Chinese characters. This approach, although widely used, was time-consuming and mentally demanding. Additionally, 20% of students engaged in repetitive practice by using worksheets and repeated exposure to new vocabulary.

A notable 55% of students adopted alternative learning methods, including rote learning and flashcards, which helped them retain characters effectively. These findings aligned with O'Banion (1997), who emphasized that students modify their learning strategies based on their prior experiences.

The study also indicated that writing required more effort than speaking, listening, or reading, as Chinese characters are significantly different from the alphabetic writing systems used in English and Malay (Chua et al., 2015). This explained why students faced greater difficulties in reading and writing compared to speaking and listening.

The research also confirmed Perfetti et al.'s (2005) assertion that writing and reading Chinese characters are closely linked, as students who struggled with one skill typically faced similar issues in the other. Findings showed that 27% of students used memorization techniques for reading and writing, reinforcing the idea that rote memorization remains central to character recognition.

When addressing listening and speaking skills, 20% of students focused on developing their public speaking abilities. However, only 16% of students actively practiced listening strategies, suggesting that students lacked a natural immersion environment to enhance their listening skills. 45% of students relied on paying attention to conversations, reinforcing the importance of exposure to spoken language in improving communication skills.

When encountering difficulties, 47% of students sought help from teachers, while others used Google searches (18%), asked friends or family members (15%), or simply gave up (24%). This demonstrated that teacher guidance was viewed as the most reliable source of support, though some students preferred independent research.

### **Attitudes Towards Learning Chinese**

The study also examined students' attitudes, which influenced their learning progress. Findings showed that 35% of students found Chinese difficult, particularly at higher levels where reading and writing became more complex. However, 55% of students stated that their learning experience improved when teachers incorporated engaging activities such as games.

Motivation played a crucial role in learning outcomes. The study revealed that 48% of students were motivated by their families, while 45% credited teachers and peers for their encouragement. This finding reinforced the idea that students thrive when they receive external motivation from parents, teachers, and peers. In contrast, only 7% of students were motivated by the school curriculum, suggesting that curricular design was not a primary factor influencing students' commitment to learning Chinese.

The study found that students faced three primary challenges in learning Chinese: difficulty in memorizing characters, lack of confidence in communication, and struggles with reading and writing. The most common strategy to overcome these challenges was memorization, but it was not always effective in improving comprehension. Students who received consistent external motivation from family, teachers, and peers showed greater persistence in learning Chinese.

The findings suggested that students require more structured and engaging learning environments to improve retention and motivation. Without proper guidance, many students remained uncertain about the meaning of Chinese words and continued struggling with comprehension.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

#### **Implications and Reflection**

The study revealed several important implications for teaching and learning Chinese as a second language. First, students often struggled with insufficient time to master Chinese characters. As Sung (2014) highlighted, Chinese radicals require intensive practice, and students need dedicated time for memorization to build a strong foundation. Second, reading and writing were identified as the most challenging aspects of learning Chinese. This finding aligns with research by Perfetti et al. (2005) and Li Hai Tan et al. (2005), who emphasized the strong connection between writing skills and reading comprehension. Third, the study underscored the importance of using multiple

learning strategies to enhance retention. Kuo and Hooper (2004) identified five effective methods for learning Chinese characters: translation, verbal coding, visual coding, dual coding, and self-generated coding. These strategies were shown to improve vocabulary retention and overall comprehension, suggesting that a multifaceted approach is essential for success.

## **Recommendations**

To address these challenges and improve students' learning experiences, the study proposed several recommendations. First, incorporating game-based learning could make the process more interactive and engaging. Tang (2021) suggested that gamification techniques can motivate students and foster a more enjoyable learning environment. Second, parental involvement should be encouraged, as 48% of students relied on their families for motivation. Parents can play a crucial role in supporting their children's language learning by providing encouragement and creating opportunities for practice. Third, schools should introduce more listening and speaking exercises to help students build confidence.

Engaging in conversations with native speakers or peers can enhance fluency and communication skills. Fourth, technology-based learning tools, such as mobile applications and online platforms, should be explored to supplement traditional teaching methods and improve students' proficiency. Finally, further research is needed to identify the most effective memorization techniques for different age groups and learning styles, ensuring that teaching strategies are tailored to individual needs.

Learning Chinese as a second language presents unique challenges, particularly in reading, writing, and memorization. However, these challenges can be overcome with the right strategies, external motivation, and structured learning environments. By adopting modern teaching methods, such as gamification and technology-based tools, and fostering student engagement, educators can create more effective and enjoyable learning experiences for non-native speakers. With continued research and innovation, the process of mastering Chinese can become more accessible and rewarding for learners worldwide.

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