

Current Issues in Chinese Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has increased the importance of second language acquisition. This article examines three problems in my language teaching practise as a Chinese pre-service language teacher. There are differences between students. Thus, strategies to cultivate student autonomy in second language learning, and cross-cultural communication in second language learning are very important. Doughty and Long believe that language acquisition is a very complex cognitive process. To fully understand this process, extensive learning and thinking must be carried out. In addition, as a pre-employment language teacher, assessing language learning processes and problems can help professional growth.

Keywords: *Chinese teaching, Pre-service language teacher, Second language acquisition, Learning autonomy.*

1. THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN STUDENTS

Ellis [2] summarised the research on second language acquisition into four categories: what second language learners learned, how language learners acquire the second language, how learners' personal acquisition of the second language varies, and the impact of classroom instruction on second language acquisition. Thus, the variations between students have a significant impact on how the second language is taught. For pre-service teachers, dealing with the disparities in language competence and learning styles among the students in the same class may be a challenge. It is critical to comprehend the variables that influence students' learning.

First, students' learning differences can be classified as internal or external. Motivation, language ability, and physiological differences are all internal variables [2]. In addition, external variables may affect the context of second language acquisition. It encompasses, but is not limited to social elements, parental influences, and the educational environment [3]. Australia is a multiracial nation. Students studying Chinese come from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Even for kids from Chinese immigrant households, the language environment of the first and second-generation immigrants may be very different. This explains why their comprehension of Chinese is varied. As a result, it is critical to ascertain learners' language proficiency and develop a customised and adaptable learning plan.

Second, each student's learning style is unique. Some students learn better visually, while others learn more aurally. This necessitates a diversification of the instructional approaches. Florian [4] believes that inclusive education should consider the unique requirements of each student. Two students may face the same problems in the whole learning process. However, the reasons for the problems may be different, which requires teachers to understand the diversity of students, teachers to strive to meet their unique learning requirements, and teachers to help improve their learning. The differences in children's ways of learning a second language create some teaching challenges. This requires student teachers to choose learning techniques appropriate for each student's characteristics based on their cognitive level and capacity to learn in future teaching practice.

2. HOW TO STIMULATE STUDENTS' INTEREST IN LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE

Interest in the target language by students is critical for language acquisition. In order to increase students' interest in language, it is essential to cultivate their autonomy in language acquisition. However, external incentive tends to erode students' autonomy in the classroom [5]. According to research by O'Regan [6], the number of students participating in HSC to learn a second language has been declining. For pre-service teachers, if language teaching is not based on students' interests, it is impossible to carry out future teaching practices. In

addition, if students' enthusiasm for language learning weakens, this will affect the government's funding for language teaching, which will directly affect the Ministry of Language Learning research. Therefore, strategies to improve students' interest in learning Chinese are crucial.

From experience, one approach to interest students in Chinese study is to increase their autonomy in the classroom [7]. Sociolinguistics has shown that language has economic value and that people's language acquisition is utilitarian, undermining learning autonomy [5]. For example, many people learn Chinese to make money or do business with Chinese people in China, not to love Chinese. Therefore, it is necessary to regard students' external learning motivation as internal motivation to learn. Deci and Ryan [8] noted that, according to self-determination theory (SDT), satisfying students' desire for competence is critical to increasing their autonomy. When students believe they are capable of completing learning activities, their learning autonomy increases. Dover and Schultz [9] stated that regular examinations are not conducive to the connection between students and tutors and are not conducive to students' learning autonomy. Therefore, changing students' evaluation methods can reduce their pressure and increase their sense of ability, thereby increasing their interest in language acquisition. For instance, teachers can invite students to create a WeChat instead of writing a 100-word article to explain their daily lives.

3. CULTURAL BACKGROUND AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Another critical problem in second language education is how to develop students' intercultural communication abilities. Language acquisition is inseparable from communication skills, language application ability, and a knowledge of one's cultural background [10]. Allowing pupils to comprehend the cultural connotations of the language may help to pique their interest in language acquisition. In Chinese language instruction, it is not sufficient for students to grasp the literal meaning of the material; it is also necessary for students to grasp the implicit or extra meaning [11]. If students do not grasp the cultural connotations of the language, it will be difficult for them to comprehend the content, which will inevitably result in communication breakdowns.

Additionally, students must develop a more nuanced grasp of certain critical cultural and linguistic concepts [12]. Therefore, students should be familiar with some relevant cultural backgrounds. For instance, there are many appellations in Chinese, such as "Zhao lao shi" (teacher Zhao) and "lao tong xue" (old classmate). To properly comprehend such appellations, a particular cultural context is required. As a result, it is critical to expose students to actual language learning activities and to help them convert cultural information into

communication skills. Intercultural communication is a dynamic process that requires teachers to develop their intercultural communication skills [12]. For in-service teachers, it is essential to strengthening cross-cultural adaptation before focusing on cross-cultural education [13]. Therefore, while presenting Chinese culture, teachers also need to understand and respect other cultures in future teaching practices.

The variety of language teaching resources enables pupils to grasp the language's cultural meaning [14]. Diverse literary works from the media, such as novels, films, and news, may also be used for language instruction. In contrast to traditional Chinese literature, these modern works illuminate another facet of Chinese culture. Along with exposing students to classic novels such as *Dream of the Red Chamber* during the Chinese lesson, teachers may also urge the students to interact with Chinese media and broadcasts. Students may understand contemporary China's political and cultural contexts while also acquiring the newest linguistic expressions via these study resources. In a nutshell, one of the goals of second language instruction is to develop students' capacity for intercultural dialogue [12]. The extent to which learners comprehend the target language's social culture is critical to their learning efficiency and communication skills.

Many instructional resources may aid students in comprehending the language's cultural context. Additionally, as a teacher, it is critical to recognise the variations in students' learning styles and to use teaching techniques that are appropriate for each student. Using this approach, pupils may be more driven to fully grasp the language. The student-centred approach may boost students' feeling of accomplishment and may be an effective technique to pique kids' interest in language acquisition [15]. Continuous transformation of the educational system necessitates better teaching quality.

4. CHINESE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

The teaching of Chinese in Australian primary and secondary schools dates back more than 40 years, but it has only become mainstream in the last two decades. Nonetheless, until this year, the Chinese had the lowest number of students among the six most often taught languages in schools [16]. Many factors contribute to this situation, the most important of which is that compared with other languages, students have a longer time to master Chinese; the pedagogics and resources that make learning Chinese an intellectually stimulating educational experience are still underdeveloped. At the same time, learning Chinese has become an untapped pedagogics and resource that stimulates the educational experience of intelligence [17].

The sluggish pace of development in the language is a continuous deterrent for many second language users. Even pupils who persevere only learn 500 characters by the end of secondary school, equivalent to 1st grade in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. At the same time, students of European languages read newspaper articles and other material intended for first language adults [16]. Suppose the students believe it is worthwhile to continue. In that case, success must be much more significant, which necessitates fresh ideas about how the language is taught and acquired.

The poor Year 12 Chinese as a second language statistics reflect that 95 percent of Chinese students drop out before reaching Year 11 [18]. These kids are all from non-Chinese families, and many of them leave since they know they will fail their final year. Children who have Chinese-speaking parents have usually spoken Chinese from birth. They constitute a significant proportion of most school populations, and by Year 12, they outnumber actual classroom pupils by a ratio of around 7:1. Because the results are ranked, it has been almost difficult for anybody not of Chinese ancestry to obtain a high score for over a decade [18]. Even the most seasoned educational programmes are losing momentum in the final years, not least because they openly encourage their pupils not to continue if they require a good grade. This is true regardless of the pupils' actual performance. Many people who abandon Chinese are skilled at it and would want to continue.

Teachers are in a precarious position in the current scenario. The inclusion of home speaker kids in the Chinese as a Second Language group is often an issue involving their children or co-workers. There are always children of individuals they know every year. There is much pressure not to give in. They also often find background speaker courses simpler to teach, so some claim that second language students drop out because Chinese are difficult or lazy. Others are caught up in the consequences of these issues, declining student numbers at senior levels resulting in decreased working hours or even a reduction in personnel.

Many Chinese instructors in Australia are utterly clueless about the problems their language presents to foreign learners and have no clue how to cope with student issues. For example, they do not comprehend the kind of effort required by foreign learners to grasp the Chinese tone system. Therefore, they ask pupils to listen and repeat. When this fails, many people no longer pay attention to the students' tone, thinking they are too complicated for English speakers to learn. It is undeniable that tones are challenging to master, so students need particular exercises to master them [18]. Similarly, in developing literacy skills, teachers often rely on teaching them to write when they are young. However, foreign learners lack the vital language skills

that even five-year-old native speakers already have, so these methods are usually ineffective.

A significant flaw in the effort is that in Australia, instructors in training for the different languages taught in schools are all put in the same course. Thus there is little specialised education in teaching the unique difficulties of any one language. Since almost only native speakers have received Chinese teaching training and no one has walked the path that students must take, Chinese teaching is mainly hindered by the lack of direct work in Chinese teaching skills. Teachers who have received teaching Chinese as a foreign language in China often have a strong understanding of the characteristics of Chinese. However, they have not established enough learning concepts to support teaching practice. Their curricula also do not cover classroom management and teacher-student relationships, critical success factors in schools outside of China.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Despite the complicated issues mentioned earlier, there are many reasons to be optimistic regarding Chinese education in Australian schools. In addition to more than doubling the number of students learning Chinese, our understanding of the challenges Chinese poses to English learners has also improved. We have also made some progress in developing new ways to demonstrate Chinese to students and successful exercises aimed at learning problems—progress [18]. Many of the new programmes launched in elementary schools are actual language courses with sessions three times a week or more for each grade level. Many of them also teach substantial material in Chinese, such as Science, utilising an immersion method, which makes the study more relevant and promotes acquisition. Suppose children have the opportunity to continue to maintain an appropriate level in middle school. In that case, it can be expected that the proportion of students who graduate from high school will be much more significant, reaching a higher level of ability than they are now.

The solid foundation of language teaching in schools will provide most students with the foundation they need to reach university-level competence levels, allowing language to access adult materials in professional languages such as literature, social sciences, or the law. This is the level that the Australian government and many educators, teachers, students and parents hope to see Australian Chinese as a second language student [18]. If such an ambition is to become a reality, three main areas of growth are required. To begin, the Year 12 assessment levels should be split such that all students who study hard have a real opportunity to succeed. Second, much more study on the nature of the learning challenges for English speakers to grasp Chinese is required. In comparison to other global languages, very little is known about this element, and there is also a great deal

more to learn about the nature of the language itself, as well as materials developed based on such study and made accessible to people of all ages [18]. Third, much more communication is required between people in China who are training language teachers and developing resources and those outside of China who are engaged in classrooms where many Chinese graduates and materials are ultimately taught and utilised. Understanding of the educational culture of abroad cultures, in particular, is required, as is awareness of the use of Chinese in an international context, which is the aim of overseas learners and their instructors. Such global understanding requires joint communication efforts and can only be attained by a deliberate and consistent mutual commitment to the objective.

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