

An Analysis of the Current Situation of Chinese Learning by International Students Who Are Native English Speakers in the Context of the Epidemic

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 has significantly impacted transnational language learners, affecting their learning environment, learning process, and learning outcomes. This paper investigates the current situation of international Chinese language learning among native English speakers in Hebei universities, analyses the epidemic's impact on learners, and draws up targeted teaching suggestions.

Keywords: *Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language; Teaching Problems; Teaching Advice; Online Teaching*

1. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 2020, the new crown epidemic broke out, and its impact on our lives continues to this day, especially in the education sector. Due to the restrictions imposed by the epidemic, many schools have had to adopt online delivery, and the same applies to international students. In response to the epidemic, China's foreign education policy and the policy on the admission of international students to China have been significantly adjusted, which has had an impact on the Chinese language learning of international students both at home and abroad: international students at home, although they are at school, can only communicate with their teachers online from their dormitories in front of a small computer screen; international students abroad, although they have submitted their applications for admission to China, are forced by the epidemic situation to They can only learn Chinese online in their own country. On the one hand, teachers do not have access to students and cannot provide adequate and targeted learning programs; on the other hand, international students abroad face the problem of the time difference, as their teachers' classes may coincide with their rest time, and they lack a particular language environment, which dramatically reduces the effectiveness of learning Chinese. Native English speakers are the most significant international students coming to China. They come from different countries and are in different cultural

environments, but due to their common mother tongue, they show similar characteristics in learning Chinese. Like an actual vehicle in globalization, transnational education plays a vital role in international cultural exchange and plays a significant role. [1]Therefore, to address the specificity of the group of native English speakers learning Chinese across borders, I have chosen international students who are native English speakers in our school as the target group for a study on their online and offline Chinese learning effects.

2. ANALYSIS

2.1. The current situation of Chinese learning among international students who are native English speakers

Native English speakers make up the most significant proportion of international students coming to China. As the most widely spoken language globally, English has a large base of native speakers. From the perspective of learning motivation, there are three primary motivations for native English speakers to study in China: first, to learn the language, these students generally have a certain degree of Chinese language foundation, but from the perspective of language ability level, they are at the primary stage of language learning, have passed HSK3 or HSK4 exams, mastered 600-1200 Chinese vocabulary,

and have essential language communication ability, and those with a better degree can communicate with native Chinese speakers fluently, but due to the learning environment, the Chinese communication skills of these international students are still lacking. The second is to learn professional knowledge. These international students have a good foundation in Chinese, may have received systematic language training in their country of origin or have studied in China for a while, can communicate daily, check together with Chinese students in a classroom, have passed the HSK5 level exam, and have mastered 2500 basic vocabulary. The primary purpose of study for this group of international students is to improve their professional level with the help of the Chinese language. The third is communicative tourism. The learning task of this category of international students is the easiest, and the teaching difficulty is relatively low. Most of them are short-term experiential groups for learning Chinese, the purpose of learning is to experience Chinese culture and have a simple understanding of the Chinese language, not in-depth[2].

For the first and second categories of international students, the learning tasks and learning purposes are more distinct, and their eagerness to learn Chinese is also higher, which is relatively more affected by the epidemic. Most of the international students in the first category with low Chinese language proficiency choose to return to their countries of origin during their holidays due to their new arrival in China, due to their avoidance of the unfamiliar environment or other reasons. This leads them to receive online learning during the epidemic. The second group of international students has been in China for a more extended period, and most of them choose to spend their holidays in China for reasons such as study, socialization, or financial costs. The study status of these international students is less affected by the epidemic, and they can enter the classroom together when the epidemic situation in China subsides and Chinese students return to school and start receiving offline classes. The third category of international students is the most memorable, short-term groups are the least affected by the epidemic, and the rich online activities can meet some of the needs of short-term group learning; However, the learning experience will be less experiential; basically, they can achieve the initial learning purpose.

2.2. Analysis of the impact of the epidemic on the Chinese language learning of native English-speaking international students

As a sizable and massive group of international students coming to China, native English speakers occupy most of those who come to China every year. Taking the data of Hebei Province alone as a reference, in 2019, there were nearly 7,000 international students of

various types from more than 70 countries and regions, pursuing their studies in 33 undergraduate and specialized higher education institutions in the province. The COVID-19 outbreak has rapidly spread to other areas since its outbreak in Wuhan in late December 2019. From January to March 2021, international students in Hebei Province once again experienced a COVID-19 attack in the Shijiazhuang region, which greatly affected the teaching schedule of the universities and forced them to make teaching adjustments in response to the epidemic, conduct online classes, and adjust the teaching schedule and the number of international students in China and abroad. The universities have had to adapt their teaching schedule to the epidemic, offering online classes and adjusting the timing and content for international students from home and abroad.

The three categories of international students mentioned above were affected differently, with short-term groups being the least affected by the epidemic, and will not be analyzed separately here. The first category of international students had to undergo online language learning. For the school, the content of online and offline language learning was the same, but due to the loss of a natural language environment, and given the difference between the effectiveness of online classes and offline learning, the school reduced the class size to allow teachers to target their teaching better. However, from the students' point of view, although the school has made adjustments to optimize the online learning environment, online classes still have their inevitable disadvantages, such as teachers not being able to visualize the problems students encounter in learning the language, which reduces the relevance of teaching. The epidemic situation in some countries makes it difficult for these international students to continue their studies. The loss of a real-life communicative environment significantly impacts international students whose aim is to learn a language and improve their communicative skills[3]. The university may be able to enhance the enrichment of the course by adapting the curriculum and scheduling classes to provide more targeted teaching, but this does not overcome some of the problems associated with online learning.

The second category of international students studying professional content faces a more intuitive problem. During the epidemic, most schools were closed to reduce unnecessary outings for students, and students studying professional content lacked the opportunity to go out for internships or field studies. Specific activities and learning programs were conducted in an online format, similar to the problems faced by the first category of international students for professional learning content: the lack of a field experience environment. However, on the whole, these international students studying with Chinese students are less affected by the epidemic, as most of them live in China, have a relatively established social circle and living environment, and are

relatively safe as they are at school and low risk.

At the same time, the psychological problems of international students during the epidemic also deserve our attention[4]. In the context of the epidemic, universities in China have been replacing traditional classroom lectures with online lectures to minimize the epidemic's impact on students' studies. The change in learning style will inevitably bring new pressure on international students. The characteristics of international students' lives and studies are that they are far from home, lack support and care from family and friends, and at the same time, they have more autonomy and diversity, so there are more uncertainties in their minds. Another aspect that should not be overlooked is that most international students have limited Chinese language skills and have varying degrees of cultural barriers. Studying alone in a foreign country, they inevitably have to deal with interpersonal problems in the new environment alone. All these may cause stress to international students under the negative stimulus of the sudden epidemic and affect their psychological state, which affects their study results and learning status[5].

2.3. Teaching measures and suggestions

Through the previous problems, we can easily find that the current problems of transnational Chinese language learning for international students mainly come from two aspects: one is the student side, which faces problems that may be due to the objective lack of learning conditions, as well as the subjective aversion to learning, insufficient motivation to learn, incompatibility with learning styles and psychological problems; the other is the teacher side, which also includes the measures taken by the school, mainly in terms of teaching methods, teaching strategies, as well as a series of adjustments in teaching contents and arrangements[6]. Correspondingly, the solutions to the problem should also be based on countermeasures and recommendations from these two aspects.

From the student's side, to improve the lack of effectiveness of students' online learning, attempts can be made to set up an online learning platform initiated by the university: firstly, to use the already developed online platform courses for teaching. International students cannot return to school or China, making face-to-face daily teaching methods impossible, forcing us to find another way - online teaching. The problem, however, is that there is a lack of resources for teaching complete English online courses as whole English teaching for international students has not been available on a large scale for a long time. Here, we can use online platforms and develop micro-lessons to allow international students to study independently, anytime, anywhere[7]. We assign the chapters that need to be studied before each class, watch the course micro-lesson videos on the course online platform, and complete the assignments and

quizzes on the course platform after class.

The second is the live online classes. In addition to using the online platform course teaching, teachers can use live class software, such as Tencent Classroom and Nails, to broadcast live online. For international students in all-English course classes who do not know Chinese and face difficulties in registering and logging in, the choice of live class software should be conducive to their operation. The software should allow teachers to interact with students in real-time by writing on the screen and drawing pictures. For international students, the software should be easy to register, without the need for separate registration.

It is equally important to address international students' mental health during the outbreak. The novel coronavirus acts as a source of stress and affects people's regular lives with significant lethality. It is perfectly normal for international students coming to China to feel uncomfortable, irritable, and anxious at this time. Schools should provide timely mental health education to make students consciously aware of their emotional changes and guide them to accept their emotions. At the same time, students should be helped to continue living in their old way of life as much as possible during the epidemic, ensuring that they eat well, sleep well and take care of themselves[8]. Teachers who are engaged in the front-line management of international students should pay more attention to and understand the students' difficulties in accessing classes online and practical family difficulties and actively help students solve their problems by using existing policies and resources. They should understand students and make them feel valued and cared for by the school and teachers, which in turn will encourage them to open up to their teachers so that teachers can find students with psychological problems in the first place, and can also use the university mental health counseling center to provide them with remote online psychological assistance.

From the teacher's end, many teachers cannot adapt quickly to the changes and adjustments in teaching methods. The objective reality of online teaching under the epidemic forces university teachers to keep learning new teaching techniques. In the past, offline delivery did not require much teacher information technology teaching. However, the epidemic has made it necessary for all frontline teachers to learn new technologies, including developing online platform courses and using live classroom software. To help teachers successfully carry out online teaching under heavy teaching loads, online training on significant course platforms can be organized for teachers who are constantly learning. [9]

The solution to the problem of the time difference in international students' learning is to let students study the online courses we have developed, and this online learning is not limited by time. For international students with time difference problems, they do not need to attend

the live class, but they must watch the live replay to study according to their own time, and the function of the live software automatically recording the learning can also play a monitoring role. For international students who cannot see the live class and study on the course platform due to internet speed problems, the following solution is also available: send the PPTs, chapter assignments and quizzes, and mid-term exams to the student group, and send the answers to the teacher upon completion.

3. CONCLUSION

The epidemic has had a significant impact on the teaching of international students, which is both a challenge and an opportunity for international education, as our teaching methods and content have undergone a significant reform under the impact of the epidemic, which has dramatically enriched the teaching methods and content of international education. Online education has developed the teaching of Chinese as a new form of expression. Once again, it has stimulated the vitality of teaching Chinese as a foreign language[10]. This is also a new form of learning for international students, with more and more people overseas joining the Chinese learning camp. In the wave of globalization, international education has taken on a new life, giving us a glimpse of a future full of infinite hope for language learning and international education.

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