

Survey and Analysis of Chinese Learning Needs of International Students—A Case Study of International Students Majoring in MBA and MPA in a College of The Belt and Road

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This study investigated the Chinese learning motivation, learning goals and learning strategies of 26 international students majoring in MBA and MPA at a university with The belt and road college, mainly by questionnaire and interview method, supplemented by classroom observation method. The survey found that 20 of the 24 international students were zero-start Chinese learners, and their learning motivation was mainly "instrumental" and "intrinsic", and they had high enthusiasm for Chinese language and Chinese culture. They have a high enthusiasm for Chinese language and culture, and will actively solve the difficulties they encounter in learning Chinese. At the same time, this study conducted a questionnaire survey on the needs of international students in terms of curriculum and content, teaching materials, teaching assessment and extracurricular activities, combined with the results of individual and group interviews and classroom observations, to summarize the real needs of international students in various aspects of Chinese language learning, so as to provide teaching reference for teachers teaching international students, and to provide a reference for colleges and universities to develop Chinese teaching programs. The survey will provide a basis for the colleges and universities to formulate Chinese teaching programs and coordinate teaching activities, so as to help international students learn Chinese better.

Keywords: One Belt and One Road, international students in China, Chinese language learning, learning needs analysis

I. Introduction

Needs Analysis was first used in English for Specific or Special Purposes (ESP /LSP = English /Language for Specific or Special Purposes) in foreign language teaching to provide a basis for curriculum development for adults learning English for specific purposes. The purpose of ESP /LSP is to provide a basis for curriculum development for adults learning English for specific purposes, i.e., to analyze the target environment and linguistic characteristics of language learners, and finally to develop a theoretical curriculum specifically for teaching English (Guo & Wu, 2012, pp. 91-96). Hutchinson & Water's (1987) argue that the needs analysis in

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second language teaching goes far beyond language, and that the ability to enable learners to achieve desired target behaviors, i.e., learning skills, is an important aspect that Hutchinson & Water's also include in their needs analysis. Their model of analysis consists of two parts: a target needs analysis framework and a learning needs analysis framework (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, pp. 22). Dudley-Evans & John highlight the core element of environmental scenario in the needs analysis and examine how elements related to the environmental scenario of the curriculum can be made conducive to adapting to the curriculum environment for better development of the curriculum (Dudley-Evans, 1998).

The research theory of foreign language demand analysis has provided theoretical support for the study of the demand for Chinese as a second language in China. Professor Li Yuming (2005) first proposed that we should pay attention to the needs of foreigners learning Chinese, and not only carefully study and meet their existing needs, but also actively create new learning needs (Li, 2005, p. 2). Ni Chuanbin (2007) was the first to conduct an empirical study on the learning needs of foreign students in terms of enrollment, classroom learning and assessment by means of a questionnaire survey. Since then, some scholars have conducted studies on the learning needs of Chinese as a second language (Ni, 2007, p. 9). Guo Suhong and Wu Zhongping (2012) discussed the methods of Chinese language demand analysis of international students, the significance of Chinese language demand analysis of international students, and the current situation and problems from a theoretical approach, and Li Yan (2017) made a more comprehensive research review on the study of Chinese as a second language learning demand. She combed through the results of Chinese language learning needs in the past ten years and found that the number of studies in this field is relatively scarce and the research foundation is weak, and suggested that the research on Chinese language learning needs should be further developed and improved in terms of theoretical framework, research perspectives, data sources and data collection methods (Li, 2017, p. 8).

According to the existing studies, we found that there are abundant studies on the Chinese learning needs of international students from different countries and regions, but there are fewer articles on the Chinese learning needs of non-Chinese majors from countries along the "Belt and Road". The above studies provide us with valuable experience and guidance for conducting surveys and interviews.

II. Research Objectives and Research Questions

This study takes 24 international students of MBA and MPA majors in the 2019 class of the Belt and Road College of a university as the subjects of the survey to understand their specific needs in terms of Chinese teaching materials, course contents and learning styles.

This paper focuses on the following two questions: (1) What is the overall situation of the demand for Chinese language learning among MBA and MPA students in the countries along the Belt and Road? (2) What are the specific needs of international students in MBA and MPA in terms of Chinese teaching materials, course contents and learning methods?

III. Research Methodology

This study mainly used a combination of questionnaires, in-depth interviews and observations of students' classroom behavior. At the beginning of the study, we conducted initial interviews with the Chinese language teachers of the study participants to understand their Chinese language learning situation. The initial

questionnaire and the post-interview outline were designed. The contents of the questionnaire, interview and classroom behavior observation mainly included: (1) students' basic personal information; (2) Chinese language attitudes; (3) Chinese learning purposes; (4) students' target scenarios of using Chinese; (5) Chinese learning needs; (6) target levels of Chinese learning, etc. Students' classroom behaviors were mainly observed in terms of students' behavioral characteristics in the Chinese classroom, the frequency and content of students' questions and their participation in classroom activities.

IV. Research Results and Analysis

Part 1 Questionnaire Results and Analysis

The questionnaire of this study consists of two parts: basic personal information and learning needs survey. In terms of basic information, a total 10 of three questions were designed to investigate the learning background of international students, such as the country they come from and how long they have studied Chinese, etc. In terms of learning needs, three dimensions were examined in detail, namely, learning motivation, learning strategies and learning needs outside the course.

1. Learning Motivation Survey Results and Analysis

Motivation is very important for second language learners and can have a lasting motivating effect on learning. The Chinese learning needs of foreign learners, both in terms of the intensity of needs and the aspects of needs, vary from time to time. The questionnaire of this study investigated the motivation of international students of MBA and MPA majors after their enrollment, and the findings are as follows.

71% of the respondents were instrumental motivated, learning Chinese for the purpose of life, study and work, and they valued acquiring communicative skills; some students took Chinese language proficiency as an important weight for job hunting and had a stronger need to obtain the corresponding level certificate. 29% of the respondents were integration motivated, and their main purpose of learning Chinese was to better understand and the main purpose of learning Chinese is to better understand and spread Chinese culture and to satisfy their own interests.

2. Learning Strategy Survey Results and Analysis

Oxford (2017) states that "second language learning strategies are complex, dynamic thoughts and actions that learners consciously choose and use to some extent in order to regulate multiple (e.g., cognitive, affective, social) aspects of themselves in specific contexts" (Oxford, 2013, p. 20), also, he states that the purpose of learning strategies is to accomplish language tasks; to improve language behavior or use; and to enhance long-term language proficiency. Cognitive strategies are an important part of learning strategies. This study examined students' perceived order of importance, learning difficulties, and the most important abilities to be improved among the major Chinese language skills through a questionnaire with questions 5-7, and the survey results showed that most respondents' needs for language skills in Chinese learning were focused on three items: conversation, listening, and reading, mainly on "listening. The survey results show that most of the respondents' needs for language skills in Chinese learning are focused on conversation, listening and reading, mainly on "listening" and "speaking" skills, with conversation being the most important and the most important skill they want to improve.

The investigation of Chinese learning strategies also involves their specific learning methods, such as the way they solve difficulties in the process of learning Chinese, the way they correct mistakes, and their Chinese learning habits. The survey results showed that students at the elementary level of Chinese language learning rely heavily on teachers. When they encountered difficulties in learning Chinese, “asking the teacher for advice” accounted for 67%, followed by Internet search and dictionary. The main methods of correcting errors were “correcting directly in class” and “correcting errors by the teacher’s suggestion and guiding oneself”.

3. Course extracurricular learning needs

(1) Analysis of course learning needs

Among the course requirements, the first is the selection of teaching materials. This study investigated three aspects of the current use of Chinese textbooks: the difficulty of the textbooks, satisfaction, and the reasons for dissatisfaction. The survey results showed that 92% of the students thought the difficulty of the teaching materials was moderate and were relatively satisfied with the existing materials. The most popular classroom exercises for international students are group exercises and pair exercises, as well as role plays. Therefore, the most popular classroom exercises for international students are cooperative, and teachers can focus on this aspect when designing classroom exercises.

Regarding the number of Chinese lessons per week and class size, the majority of respondents (71%) wanted to maintain the status quo, i.e., 2 hours of Chinese lessons per week; in terms of class size, the majority (70%) wanted the class size to be no more than 20 students.

(2) Extracurricular learning needs

The survey respondents have only one Chinese class per week and have less time to study, their extracurricular learning situation, to a certain extent, also reflects their needs. The questionnaire investigated the extracurricular learning needs of international students from the perspectives of extracurricular learning time and methods. The survey results showed that most of the respondents spent less than one hour to study Chinese after class every day, and the ways of learning Chinese outside class were mainly communicating with Chinese people and watching Chinese movies and TV programs. Besides classroom learning, most of the respondents also want to learn Chinese through professional practice and cultural experience (such as experiencing traditional festivals, paper-cutting, Chinese kung fu, calligraphy, etc.) and other extracurricular activities.

As we can see, the current textbook basically meets the needs of international students, but there are also problems such as low difficulty, lack of interest and too difficult annotations, etc. In response to some students’ suggestions for improvement, the textbook still needs to be improved. In terms of extracurricular learning, more professional practice and cultural experience can be carried out.

(iii) Summary

Through the questionnaire survey on the demand of Chinese language learning for international students majoring in MBA and MPA in countries along the Belt and Road, we can draw the following conclusions.

First of all, in terms of learning motivation, their learning purpose is very clear, and the majority of the respondents’ motivation is instrumental, so they place more importance on acquiring language communication skills. Teachers can adopt certain strategies to continuously motivate international students to learn so that their motivation level can be continuously improved.

Secondly, in terms of learning strategies, most of the respondents think that “listening” and “speaking” are the most important; when they encounter difficulties in learning, most of them choose to ask their teachers for advice, and their favorite way to correct mistakes is to be corrected directly by teachers in class.

Finally, in terms of needs inside and outside the curriculum, most students are satisfied with the teaching materials; they prefer a cooperative classroom practice style; most respondents want to maintain the status quo with 2 hours of Chinese lessons per week; and in terms of class size, most want it to be 10-15 or 15-20 students. In addition to classroom learning, most respondents would like to learn Chinese through extracurricular activities such as choosing professional practice and cultural experience (e.g. experiencing traditional festivals, paper-cutting, Chinese kung fu, calligraphy, etc.).

Part 2 Interview Results and Analysis

1. Learning attitude

(1) Attitude toward Chinese language

Respondent 1 is interested in Chinese and thinks Chinese is an interesting but difficult language, much more difficult than English, with Chinese characters and pinyin being the most difficult.

Interviewee 2 is a highly capable student of languages, mastering six foreign languages such as English, French and Turkish, and used to be an English teacher, so he has his own opinion about language learning. Interviewee 2 believes that Chinese is a practical language and that it is necessary to learn Chinese as it is becoming more and more influential in Afghanistan. Interviewee 2 also thinks that the most difficult part of Chinese is the Chinese characters.

Respondent 3, in response to the question “How do you feel about the Chinese language?”, said that her Chinese language was a bit difficult, and that she needed more practice in class, especially in recognizing Chinese characters.

Interviewee 4 is of Chinese descent, born in Burma and of Yunnan origin. Her parents used Burmese and Chinese to communicate with her when she was growing up, and Interviewee 4 indicated that the Chinese expressions were less difficult compared to Burmese.

(2) Attitudes towards Chinese culture

Interviewee 1 had a strong interest in Chinese culture, found it interesting and different, full of novelty, and had a strong desire to actively participate in various cultural activities. During the communication process, Interviewee 1 took the initiative to share with us photos of the activities he had attended in the places he had visited, shared his feelings with us, asked us where we were from in China, how we were different from Zhuhai, and showed a strong curiosity and interest in China.

Respondent 2 does not have as broad and strong an attitude toward Chinese culture as Respondent 1, but has his own clear orientation and will choose whether to participate in cultural activities based on his interests and the needs of his professional studies. Interviewee 2 also said that he does not usually talk to his family and friends about his life and studies here, nor does he introduce Chinese culture to them, because his friends have been to many places and are familiar with China, so they do not need to be introduced to him.

Respondent 3 is also interested in Chinese culture and ranked the cultures they know and love in order, namely tea ceremony, Chinese archery and tai chi; they also often tell their families about the environment, study and life here.

In contrast, Respondent 4 did not show a greater interest in Chinese culture, but similarly, both Respondent 3 and Respondent 4 mentioned Chinese culture in the “Belt and Road” initiative and in their professional studies, such as “building together” and “sharing”. “sharing,” “win-win,” and other concepts of traditional Chinese philosophy.

2. Motivation for learning

This study combined Gardner and Lambert’s (1959) classification of learning motivation with the specifics of the interview content to classify learning motivation into inclusion, instrumentality, and attitudes toward the learning situation, which in turn included self-efficacy and goal salience.

Respondent 1 talked about two main reasons for learning Chinese, one is that he wants to stay and work in China in the future, and the other is that his family wants him to learn Chinese because they think it is both interesting and practical. He also mentioned in the questionnaire that learning Chinese is important to his future success in China, and he wants to learn more skills in China, and said that Chinese is an important skill for him even if he returns to work in China in the future.

Based on Interviewee 1’s description, we found that Interviewee 1’s motivation for learning was a combination of integration and instrumental motivation. He had a strong desire to integrate into Chinese society and also expected to be prepared for his future career development. Driven by these two motivations, he was highly motivated to learn Chinese, and often sought help from us after the interview, bringing his homework and HSK Level 1 exam books to us, and asking us for advice on his difficulties and doubts in Chinese learning, such as pinyin, hoping to get more specific and practical methods and techniques to improve Chinese.

Respondent 2’s motivation for learning Chinese, on the other hand, was dominated by instrumental motivation and achieving self-efficacy, which was related to Respondent 2’s language learning experience. As mentioned above, Interviewee 2 is a highly competent linguist, mastering six foreign languages in addition to Chinese, and it does not take him long to learn a foreign language; he learned French in only six months. So he thinks that learning Chinese is a reflection of his self-competence, because Chinese is the most difficult language he has come into contact with, and it is completely different from English and French, and learning Chinese will give him more skills, and then he will have more job opportunities in the future. For future work, Interviewee 2 said he would prefer to work in his home country, but if China can provide better opportunities and more salary to improve his personal life level, he would consider staying in China, or if other places can provide better opportunities, he would choose other places as well.

Respondent 3 indicated that he had two plans: to study for a PhD in China or to work in the trade sector, and therefore had to learn Chinese well, showing a strong instrumental motivation.

Interviewee 4’s motivation for studying is completely different. She intended to return to her home country after graduation to engage in the tea business and inherit her family’s business, but because the current tea market in Myanmar is not good, she chose “Chinese language teacher” as a job candidate. She said that although she has a master’s degree in Chinese international education, she has a negative attitude toward her teaching ability and believes that her Chinese language skills still need a lot of improvement.

3. Learning strategies

In the context of the questionnaire, we describe the extracurricular learning strategies of the respondents in terms of “cognitive strategies” and “specific learning methods”.

Interviewee 1 thought that the most important thing in learning Chinese is communication, and the only way to really learn Chinese well is to communicate with Chinese people as much as possible, but he mentioned that he does not have many Chinese friends, so there are few opportunities for communication.

Based on the results of the questionnaire and our communication with Interviewee 1, we found that in terms of learning methods, Interviewee 1 likes to use Chinese learning apps to help him study on his own after class, and he found them very useful, and showed us several apps that he downloaded on his phone, both for character recognition, pronunciation training and word recognition. Interviewee 1 learns Chinese on his own for 1-2 hours a day.

Compared to Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2 has his own clear opinion on how to learn Chinese well. He said he has good self-learning ability and knows how to learn, and as long as he has a teacher to teach him the basic knowledge of a foreign language, he can find a suitable method to learn the language by himself.

Interviewee 3 thought the best way to improve her Chinese is to “speak more and communicate with Chinese people more”, but her learning style after class is still limited to textbooks. When asked if she tries to communicate with her teacher and classmates in Chinese, she said that she knows she should do so, but it is still difficult.

Interviewee 4 has her own approach to learning Chinese, following a learning logic that starts with pinyin and then moves from vocabulary to grammar. She also improves her Chinese by watching Chinese movies and TV shows and reading some learning public in WeChat, and often learns by observing the teacher in class.

4. Chinese learning needs

(1) Course requirements

Regarding whether the current curriculum can meet their learning needs, all three respondents, except Respondent 4 who has a high level of Chinese language proficiency, said that the existing Chinese language classes are not enough, Respondent 1 wants to increase the number of Chinese language courses, and Respondent 2 has a clearer demand for courses and hopes that the school will offer different elective courses so that students can choose the right course according to their interests and needs.

Interviewee 3 repeatedly mentioned that the Chinese language course is only offered for one year and only 2 classes per week is a bit low, which does not allow enough time to practice under the guidance of the teacher.

(2) Extracurricular needs

Both Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 2 expressed the need for additional books to assist in learning Chinese in addition to textbooks, and both took the initiative to ask the interviewer to recommend suitable reference books for them. Interviewee 1 wanted to take a break to provide audio videos to help him learn, while Interviewee 2 had his own method of language learning because he had studied many foreign languages and was very confident, so he had a clear sense of his own learning needs and preferred to have his teacher recommend books to supplement his Chinese vocabulary. Interviewee 3, on the other hand, said that she needed a study group or study partner to help her study because of the small number of class hours, and that the current two classes per week did not meet her needs.

Respondent 4 believes that he or she is competent enough to learn Chinese well and does not need any help or guidance.

(iii) Summary

The results of the interviews show that for students who are very enthusiastic about learning Chinese, the current curriculum is too small, there are few books for self-study, and there is not enough variety in the curriculum, they need more guidance on learning methods, and they also need to create more opportunities for communication or situational communication, so that they can gain a sense of achievement and self-confidence in learning Chinese in the process of communication; various cultural activities and internship activities are necessary for them. It is necessary for them to have various cultural activities and internships. Although their needs are not consistent, they can still arrange more relevant activities, which can help them understand China and Chinese culture. Therefore, in addition to improving teaching strategies, offering elective courses and recruiting volunteers to set up language corners may be ways to try.

V. Conclusion

In this study, 24 international students from a university's Belt and Road College were studied for their Chinese learning needs through questionnaires and interviews, and the following conclusions can be drawn.

(1) Most international students are motivated by instrumental learning and need to improve their Chinese language skills, especially their Chinese conversation skills, in order to meet the needs of life, study and future employment.

(2) The current Chinese language curriculum, teaching materials and methods basically meet the needs of international students, but at the same time they also want to expand the scope of Chinese communication and learn more about Chinese language and culture.

(3) Because students have complex language backgrounds and their Chinese learning needs are not uniform, it is difficult for teachers to provide comprehensive instruction and tailor their teaching to the students' needs in the limited teaching time.

Taking into account the relevant circumstances of the study subjects, we try to make a few suggestions.

(1) It can be suggested that the Belt and Road College should strengthen cooperation with other colleges to jointly carry out Chinese language and culture activities; (2) regularly carry out "language corner" theme activities to create more language communication opportunities for international students; (3) it is suggested that the lectures combined with Chinese language and culture should be carried out with the characteristics of their majors. The value and significance of the study on the Chinese language learning needs of international students from countries along the Belt and Road are self-evident, but there are still many shortcomings in this study, such as: the limited number of research subjects, only 24, which is difficult to meet the requirements of quantitative research, and the representativeness of the findings is not enough; the number of interviews should be increased appropriately; the observation time of students' classroom behavior is short; the analysis of the questionnaire and interview results is not deep enough, etc. . However, through this research, we found that there is still much room for research in this field, and it is worthwhile to conduct more comprehensive and in-depth researches, such as the study of cross-cultural adaptation of non-Chinese students from Belt and Road countries, and the study of Chinese cultural identity of Chinese students from Belt and Road countries, etc.

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