

An Analysis of the Characteristics of Language Learners Aiming to Improve Vocational Skills-- Taking some Chinese learners in East and Southeast Asia as an example

Biying Zhang

*Jilin Communications Polytechnic, Changchun, China
zhangbiying@outlook.com*

Abstract: *As countries around the world continue to develop, the number of language learners has skyrocketed. Learners learn for different purposes, some for the purpose of language and cultural interest, some for the purpose of studying abroad, and some for the purpose of enhancing their vocational abilities. This study will focus on the characteristics of Chinese language learners who aim to improve their vocational skills. It will summarize and analyze the learners' backgrounds, learners' levels, learning attitudes and learning purposes, and factors that influence learners' learning goals. Finally, it will make suggestions for teachers who teach Chinese language learners who aim to improve their vocational skills.*

Keywords: *enhancing vocational skills; professional Chinese; language learners*

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the continuous development of China's economy, more and more people from different countries and regions begin to learn Chinese and Chinese culture. These learners have a strong motivation to learn, a clear learning purpose, and a clear direction for the Chinese language content they are learning. In the past, due to the influence of behavioristic psychology, people have long focused on "teaching", which means that the teacher's teaching method is the key to the success of language learning. Later, the development of cognitive psychology and the slogan of "putting students at the center" broke the traditional concept of emphasizing "teaching" over "learning". The educational circle has also shifted from traditional research on teachers' teaching to research on students' learning^[1]. Although there are universal rules for second language learning, individual differences in learners can make a difference in learning outcomes. In recent years, I have taught a total of 106 professional Chinese learners, and got a total of 97 valid questionnaires about the learners by means of interviews and questionnaires. The following is an analysis of the characteristics of professional Chinese learners based on the valid information and the actual situation.

2. Learners' background

Through interviews and questionnaires, I learned that the learners' ages ranged from 17 to 25 years old in all 97 valid questionnaires. Two of the learners had learned Chinese since they were young. And because their parents had lived and worked in China in their early years, they were taught from an early age to learn Chinese well so that they could engage in a Chinese-related job or let their Chinese language skills help them find a more satisfying job in the future. The other 95 learners started learning Chinese after the age of 15, or even just started learning Chinese. 7 of them have parents who know a little bit of Chinese due to their life or work, while the other 88 learners have parents or family members who do not know Chinese at all. It can be seen that the age of professional Chinese learners is relatively stable. Most of them are young people who are looking for a job or just started working, and there are no family members who are proficient in Chinese from their families.

Due to the continuous development of China's economy and the strengthening of foreign trade, especially the construction of the "Belt and Road Initiative", the cooperation between China's neighboring countries and countries along the "Belt and Road Initiative" is getting closer and closer. They realize that in the future, they will need many inter-disciplinary talents who can communicate with China,

and those who are proficient in "language and technology". Therefore, among the professional Chinese learners I have taught, most of them are from East and Southeast Asian countries, such as Korea, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Thailand, etc. The specific distribution of the number is as follows, at table.1.

Table 1. Countries and number of professional Chinese learners in 97 valid questionnaires

Country	Korea	Vietnam	Malaysia	Thailand
Number of people	46	6	6	39

3. Learners' Levels

From the questionnaires and teaching, we can find that the two learners who learned Chinese from childhood can reach HSK4-5 level when they study professional Chinese, and they study professional Chinese because of their professional needs. They are studying vocational Chinese because of their career needs. These two learners are majoring in air crew and gaming. These two learners can speak Chinese at a level that is basically understandable because of their standard pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Because of their good foundation, strong sense of purpose, and the fact that they are both engaged in communication work, they are both very outgoing and dare to speak and practice in their studies, so they make rapid progress overall, especially in speaking. Most of the other learners are at HSK level 2-3. They can speak simple Chinese, but their pronunciation is not standard, their vocabulary is limited, and there are significant grammatical mistakes. A small percentage of learners are still in the introductory level, without any basic knowledge. The learning characteristics of professional Chinese are that most of them focus on oral language. And because they often need to communicate with Chinese people in oral language, writing and reading are less important to them than spoken language. As a result, the content of teaching is often professional, so that learners can learn professional Chinese quickly and precisely in a short period of time. However, they are only good at speaking Chinese, but weak at reading, literacy and writing. Even many learners have difficulty in discussing other topics except for the Chinese language related to their occupation.

4. Learning Attitude and Learning Purpose

In the actual teaching, we found that there are some learners with great learning enthusiasm, while others do not have a strong learning initiative. And this emotional difference will result in different learning attitudes of learners, and the learning attitudes of vocational Chinese learners can be divided into two categories.

4.1. Active type

In addition to their professional needs, learners are interested in the Chinese language and culture. They have a strong desire to learn, a serious learning attitude, make active efforts in the learning process, are willing to communicate actively with teachers, and even listen to Chinese songs and watch Chinese TV series frequently. They are willing to take the initiative to use Chinese to communicate with others in their work. They tend to have a strong internal motivation and often show that they can learn consciously and actively with good learning results and rapid progress^[2].

4.2. Passive type

Because of their work, they need to learn Chinese. But they do not have a strong desire to learn Chinese, so their learning attitudes are relatively scattered. They tend to treat learning as a task and show no enthusiasm for learning. They will not continue learning Chinese after they have achieved a certain goal or objective. They are forced to learn by external pressure and have no interest in learning, which prevents them from getting good results and makes relatively limited progress^[2].

I believe that although the purpose of professional Chinese learners is very clear - to use the language as a tool to facilitate their work, the purpose of learning determines the attitude of the learners, and different attitudes will affect the learning outcomes and the pace of progress.

5. Factors affecting learners' learning goals

5.1. Environmental factors

Both first and second language acquisition and learning are closely related to the environment (Liu Xun, 2000). The influence of the language learning environment on language learning is significant. Because of the epidemic, the professional Chinese learners I have taught in the past two years are not in China. That is, they took online courses. And before the epidemic, many professional Chinese learners came to China to study for a period of time. So during the teaching process, I realized that the pace of learners' progress will be different between online and offline teaching under the influence of environmental factors. In addition, a Chinese environment in the workplace will also greatly improve the learners' progress pace. One of the learners I taught worked in a Chinese company, so there were many Chinese or colleagues who could speak Chinese. She made rapid progress in just three months of learning professional Chinese and even passed the examination from HSK level 3 directly to HSK level 5.

5.2. Personality factors

Another very important factor that affects the learning outcomes of language learning is personality. In the teaching process, it is obvious that some learners are extroverted and some are introverted. Extroverted learners will read loudly with the teacher, answer questions actively, say hello to the teacher before class, and chat with the teacher after class. Introverted learners listen carefully but seldom answer questions, and their voices are even lower in reading after. I have also noticed that extroverted learners go to various stores in China to try to communicate with Chinese people, and are willing to take the initiative to learn more about the Chinese language and culture, which provides a good opportunity for learners to achieve their learning goals as early as possible. Introverted learners, on the other hand, spend a lot of time in their rooms even when they are in China. As we all know, the most important thing in learning a language is to use it, and only through repeated use can language knowledge be consolidated. If a language learner is shy to practice because of their personalities, the pace of their learning and progress will be directly affected.

5.3. Factors of acceptance of the classroom environment

The interviews revealed that learners' interest in the language also comes partly from the classroom environment. If learners are quick to accept the classroom environment and the teacher's teaching style, their interests will be attracted more quickly and they will learn better in a "quick and precise" course. They will even take the initiative to express their willingness to continue learning Chinese with the teacher after the course. On the contrary, if the classroom environment is dull and the teacher's teaching methods are not quickly accepted by the learners, the learners will become bored, thus reducing their interest in learning and even hindering the achievement of their learning goals quickly. For vocational Chinese, a relaxed and lively classroom environment with strong practical application is more conducive to learning Chinese well.

6. Suggestions for instructors

Based on the above experience and analysis, the following recommendations are made to teachers who teach Chinese for the purpose of improving vocational skills.

6.1. Teach professional Chinese on the basis of focusing on students.

In teaching professional Chinese, teachers should take the initiative and quickly understand the different individual factors of learners, such as learners' backgrounds, Chinese learning levels and personalities, to tailor the content of teaching to students and develop suitable teaching contents. For example, if there is a gap in the level of students in a class, it is important to provide stepped instruction, setting questions at different levels of difficulty for different students to ensure that each student can learn something in class. 1. For another example, in the classroom, it is appropriate to provide more questions suitable for the introverted students to answer at their level and provide them with rich exercise opportunities and platforms so that they can actively integrate into the course activities.

6.2. Teach professional Chinese with the principle of enhancing the richness and practicality of the curriculum.

Try to enrich the teaching design, control the teaching pace, and enhance the cultural and interesting contents, such as Chinese traditional culture, life culture, language culture, and workplace culture, etc. Not only the language knowledge points should be close to the professional production terms, but also the classroom activities should focus on professional scenes. The teaching process should be step-by-step, the learned knowledge should be repeated and the teaching methods should be more visual. Vocational terminology and vocabulary should be prepared in advance to capture the learners' "taste buds" and arouse their interest in learning.

6.3. Teach vocational Chinese with the principle of combining interest and task.

Interest is always the driving force of learning, and the tasks and goals of language learning should match students' interests. Generally speaking, students at the elementary level are more interested in learning and can actively complete the learning tasks. But after a period of time, they will enter a period of fatigue or feel stressed and find it more and more difficult to learn. If students can overcome this stage, they can enter the next stage -- the achievement period. At this point, the learner's sense of achievement will be stronger and he/she will find the interest to keep learning. And appropriate task pressure and a sense of accomplishment after completing a task enhance learners' planning and initiative to learn and provide them with sustained motivation to learn^[3].

In the general environment of epidemic normalization, teachers should enhance their online teaching skills and master the operation of common platforms such as ZOOM, TIM, and Tencent Meeting etc. Each part of the classroom should have a focus and different characteristics for the different learning environments and learning styles of online and offline teaching. For example, when teaching on the ZOOM platform, a series of functions such as speaking, chat rooms, group study rooms and voting areas etc can be fully utilized to allow learners to feel the interaction between the teacher and them, make them stay focused and interested, reduce the sense of distance and create an atmosphere of collective learning.

7. Conclusions

In summary, as language teaching is becoming more and more popular with the goal of improving vocational skills, international Chinese teachers should understand and study the characteristics of learners on the basis of self-transformation and improvement. They should develop different teaching programs for different learners so that they can better improve the quality of teaching and contribute to the sustainable development of international Chinese education.

Acknowledgement

Fund Project: China, National Double High-levels Plan -- Construction of National Characteristic High-level Vocational School --10 Enhancement of Internationalization.

References

- [1] Tai Lei. *A Study on the Motivation and Attitude of Chinese Language Learners in Bulgaria [D]*. Beijing Foreign Studies University, 2018.
- [2] Ding Anqi. *An Analysis on the Types of Motivations of Learning Chinese for Foreign Students in China [J]*. *Overseas Chinese Language Education*, 2016(3):14.2-3, 359-372.
- [3] Wang Zhigang, Ni Chuanbin, Wang Jiping and Jiang Meng. *A Study on Foreign Students' Purposes of Learning Chinese Language [J]*. *World Chinese Language Teaching*, 2004(3):12, 67-78.