

Self-Assessment of Chinese Language Competence among International Students: An Analysis of Core Language Skills

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Abstract

Chinese language proficiency is an important factor influencing the academic success and social integration of international students studying in China. This study examines the self-assessment of Chinese language competence across six key skill areas: listening, speaking, reading, writing, communicative competence, and Chinese information literacy. Using descriptive statistical analysis, the study evaluates the mean and standard deviation values representing students' perceived proficiency levels. The results indicate that reading competence shows the highest mean score ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.70$), suggesting relatively stronger confidence in reading ability, while writing competence records the lowest mean score ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.77$), indicating comparatively greater difficulty. Listening ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.72$), speaking ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.75$), communicative competence ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.73$), and Chinese information literacy ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.76$) demonstrate moderate levels of self-perceived proficiency. The findings suggest that although international students generally perceive themselves as moderately competent in Chinese, productive skills such as writing require further development. The study contributes to understanding the linguistic challenges faced by international students and highlights the importance of targeted pedagogical strategies to strengthen language competence.

Keywords: Chinese Language Competence, Self-Assessment, International Students, Language Skills, Communicative Competence, Chinese Information Literacy

Introduction

The rapid globalization of education has led to a significant increase in the number of international students pursuing higher education in China. As Chinese universities attract students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the ability to communicate

effectively in Chinese has become an essential factor for academic success and social adaptation. Language competence enables students not only to understand academic content but also to participate actively in classroom discussions, interact with teachers and peers, and access academic resources. Chinese language learning presents unique challenges for international students due to its tonal pronunciation system, logographic writing system, and complex grammatical structures. These linguistic characteristics often require learners to develop multiple competencies simultaneously, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. In addition to these traditional language skills, communicative competence and information literacy in Chinese have become increasingly important in the digital learning environment.

Self-assessment is widely used in language education as a reflective tool that allows learners to evaluate their own language abilities. It helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses, thereby encouraging autonomous learning and improving language proficiency. According to language learning research, students' perceptions of their abilities often influence their motivation, learning strategies, and overall performance. This study focuses on the self-assessment of Chinese language competence among international students by examining six key areas: listening competence, speaking competence, reading competence, writing competence, communicative competence, and Chinese information literacy. By analyzing these dimensions, the study aims to provide insights into students' perceived strengths and challenges in learning Chinese and to contribute to the development of effective language teaching strategies.

Review of Literature

Language competence is generally defined as the ability to understand and use language effectively in different contexts. According to Noam Chomsky (1965), linguistic competence refers to the underlying knowledge of language rules that enables individuals to produce and interpret sentences. Later, the concept of language competence expanded to include communicative aspects of language use. Dell Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of communicative competence, emphasizing that effective communication requires not only grammatical knowledge but also the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts. This perspective highlights the importance of integrating linguistic knowledge with practical communication skills in language learning.

Research on second language acquisition indicates that listening and speaking skills play a crucial role in early stages of language learning. Stephen Krashen (1982) proposed the Input Hypothesis, which suggests that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current level of competence. Listening activities therefore provide essential input that facilitates language development. Reading and writing skills are also important components of language proficiency, particularly in academic contexts. Jim Cummins (1979) distinguished between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), arguing that academic language proficiency requires advanced reading and writing abilities. For international students studying in China, the ability to read Chinese texts and produce written assignments is essential for academic achievement.

Recent studies have also emphasized the role of information literacy in language learning. With the increasing use of digital resources, students must be able to search, interpret, and utilize information in the target language. Information literacy enhances learners' ability to access authentic materials and supports independent learning. Several studies have examined the challenges faced by international students learning Chinese. Research indicates that pronunciation difficulties, particularly related to tonal distinctions, are among the most common obstacles in speaking and listening. Additionally, the complexity of Chinese characters often creates challenges in reading and writing. The literature suggests that language competence is multidimensional, involving both receptive and productive skills as well as communicative and informational abilities. Understanding students' perceptions of their language competence can therefore provide valuable insights for improving Chinese language education.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to analyze the self-assessment of Chinese language competence among international students. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that measured students' perceptions of their proficiency in six areas: listening competence, speaking competence, reading competence, writing competence, communicative competence, and Chinese information literacy. Respondents were asked to rate their level of competence using a Likert-type scale. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to calculate the mean and standard deviation for each skill area. The mean values represent the overall level of self-perceived competence, while the standard deviation indicates the degree of variation among respondents' responses. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns in students' self-assessed language abilities. The results were then interpreted in relation to existing research on second language acquisition and Chinese language learning.

Analysis

Table 1

Chinese Language Competence

Skill	Mean	SD
Listening competence	3.74	0.72
Speaking competence	3.69	0.75
Reading competence	3.82	0.70
Writing competence	3.58	0.77
Communicative competence	3.71	0.73
Chinese information literacy	3.63	0.76

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of self-assessed Chinese language competence reveals that students perceive themselves as having moderate proficiency across all six skill areas. Among the competencies examined, reading competence records the highest mean score ($M = 3.82$), indicating that students feel relatively confident in their ability to understand written Chinese texts. This may be attributed to structured classroom instruction and the availability of learning materials that support reading practice.

Listening competence ($M = 3.74$) and communicative competence ($M = 3.71$) also show relatively high mean scores, suggesting that students are moderately comfortable understanding spoken Chinese and participating in everyday communication. These skills are often developed through classroom interactions, language practice sessions, and exposure to authentic audio materials. Speaking competence ($M = 3.69$) shows a slightly lower mean compared to listening, which reflects a common pattern in second language learning where receptive skills develop faster than productive skills. Pronunciation difficulties and tonal variations in Chinese may contribute to students' lack of confidence in speaking.

Chinese information literacy ($M = 3.63$) indicates that students possess a moderate ability to access and utilize information in Chinese, particularly through digital platforms and online resources. However, the relatively higher standard deviation suggests variation among students in their ability to use Chinese for information retrieval. Writing competence shows the lowest mean score ($M = 3.58$), highlighting it as the most challenging skill for students. Writing in Chinese requires mastery of characters, grammar, and sentence structure, which often takes longer to develop compared to other language skills. The higher standard deviation ($SD = 0.77$) also indicates that students' writing abilities vary significantly.

The findings demonstrate that while international students perceive themselves as moderately competent in Chinese, productive skills such as writing and speaking require additional instructional support.

Conclusion

This study examined international students' self-assessment of Chinese language competence across six key skill areas. The findings indicate that students generally perceive themselves as moderately proficient in Chinese, with reading competence emerging as the strongest skill and writing competence as the most challenging. Listening, speaking, communicative competence, and information literacy fall within a similar moderate range. The results highlight the need for language programs to provide greater support for productive language skills, particularly writing and speaking. Incorporating interactive learning activities, practical communication tasks, and digital literacy training may help enhance students' overall Chinese language competence. Strengthening these areas can improve students' academic performance and facilitate their integration into Chinese academic and social environments.

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