

The Status and Teaching Challenges of Integrating Chinese Listening And Speaking Courses as A Foreign Language

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Abstract

This paper employs a literature analysis approach to explore the status of teaching strategies for Chinese listening and speaking courses in the context of Chinese as a foreign language education. This article reviews the challenges in teaching Chinese listening and speaking. This review found that the challenges include limitations of traditional teaching methods; monotonous teaching approaches: separation of listening and speaking skills; insufficient understanding of students' needs; limited assessment methods; insufficient teaching experience; limited research in teaching Chinese listening and speaking; limited class time for listening and speaking; inadequate classroom management for listening and speaking classes; challenges in listening and speaking proficiency; uneven mastery levels in listening and speaking; loss of motivation due to mechanical training; weak communication skills; significant individual differences among international students; challenges in developing language awareness; monotonous and outdated teaching materials and ineffective integration of culture. The literature recommends a comprehensive approach to teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL), incorporating cultural elements, diverse teaching methods, technology use, feedback provision, and continual teacher skill enhancement to address challenges and improve the effectiveness of Chinese language instruction.

Keywords: Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, Integration of Listening and Speaking, Teaching Challenges, Status, Chinese Class.

Introduction

There is a growing interest worldwide in learning Chinese as a second language, which underscores the importance of proficiency in speaking and listening courses in this field. The growth of China's economy and global influence has led to a growing interest in Chinese language education. In accordance with Tang (2022), by the end of 2021, 176 countries and regions had initiated Chinese language education programs, with 76 countries having incorporated Chinese into their national educational systems. It is estimated that there are

more than 25 million learners of Chinese as a foreign language in China, because of the growing opportunities for education, employment, and business.

Therefore, it has become imperative to improve the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language in order to facilitate more effective language acquisition and cultural acculturation. Foreign language programs in Chinese universities have been expanded and refined to include comprehensive language and skill-specific courses in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Furthermore, these programs also include specialized modules in the areas of culture, literature, history, and business. Furthermore, courses in Chinese cultural pursuits such as calligraphy and martial arts enrich the educational experience, providing practical engagement and a broader spectrum of learning opportunities.

The ability to listen and speak effectively is an essential part of foreign language education. It is imperative to integrate these skills into communication flow, since their absence can impede the flow of information. Developing comprehensive oral communication skills encompassing both listening and speaking abilities is the primary objective for beginners in Chinese. There has been significant advancement in research in the field over the past few decades, encompassing a broad range of teaching methodologies and theories related to language acquisition.

It was found by Qian (2014) that foreign students in China place a great deal of importance on listening and speaking, thus underscoring their importance in effective communication. However, courses focusing on these skills are perceived as challenging. In this regard, educators should address how to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching in these areas. Developing students' proficiency levels requires key teaching principles, such as 'comprehensible input'. The process of honing listening skills requires more than classroom exercises and may require the use of problem-solving techniques in order to improve.

According to Song (2006), native language thought patterns have a significant impact on students' use of Chinese. As a result, this influence can have both beneficial and detrimental effects. The ability to express oneself in Chinese is often difficult for intermediate students. Teachers should emphasize communicative methods, reinforcing language use through repeated practice.

Communication relies heavily on listening and speaking, yet these modules receive relatively little attention in comparison to other aspects of the curriculum. There are challenges in integrating "listening-speaking immersion" and in balancing the emphasis between linguistic meaning and form in the recent shift towards listening-speaking immersion in pedagogy.

This paper aims to address these challenges, proposing solutions through the examination of case studies and theoretical research. It seeks to develop methodologies that integrate listening and speaking skills and strike a balance between teaching the semantic and structural aspects of the language. The goal is to enhance students' practical communication abilities and effect a transformative shift in Chinese as a foreign language instruction.

The significance of this study lies in its detailed examination of the complexities and strategies involved in teaching Chinese to non-native speakers. The article discusses a number of challenges, including conventional teaching methods, student engagement, material selection, diverse proficiency levels, practical application, evaluation methods, and issues related to pronunciation and expression. In addition, the study provides a number of potential solutions, such as the use of task-based learning, integrating cultural and real-world contexts, utilizing diverse teaching methods, incorporating technology, assessing in a variety of ways, and continuously enhancing teachers' skills and cultural knowledge. These insights are invaluable for educators and policymakers, guiding the development of more effective

curricula and teaching methods, thereby advancing the standard and efficiency of Chinese language education for non-native speakers.

Literature Review

Currently, in the field of teaching Chinese as a foreign language in China, the course types generally include intensive reading, listening, speaking, reading, and writing as the main components. With the development of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, there are different viewpoints within the academic community regarding the teaching approach for listening and speaking skills.

Integration of Listening and Speaking Skills

Over the past few decades, the pedagogical landscape for teaching Chinese as a foreign language has undergone significant changes, particularly in the separation and integration of specific language skills. During this period, "listening and speaking" were initially separated from "reading and writing," with a primary focus on developing listening and speaking skills. At this early stage, a holistic approach was taken, integrating phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar into the listening and speaking curriculum, with special attention being paid to the development of listening skills.

There has been a recent tendency for some Chinese universities to adopt innovative approaches, such as combining listening and speaking classes or replacing traditional listening classes with speaking-focused courses. Liu (2006) advocated the use of this integrated methodology in order to improve both listening and speaking skills simultaneously. In Jinan University's School of Literature, an intensive program experimented with substituting listening classes for speaking ones, thereby reassessing the relationship between listening and speaking in language education. This approach was discussed in Meng (2016)'s textbook, which was designed to replace conventional listening classes with integrated modules.

According to Yang (2007), compact, comprehensive courses can be designed that combine listening and speaking rather than their traditional separation. As a result of Zong's (2016) extensive research, which included 34 colleges and 51 teaching programs, 15 programs (29.4%) integrated listening and speaking, while 30 programs (60%) maintained their separation. Based on these data, it appears that Chinese language curricula treat listening and speaking as separate elements.

Despite this, a consensus has emerged among scholars regarding the importance of integrating listening and speaking when teaching Chinese as a foreign language. According to Zong (2016), the integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing constitutes a forward-looking trend. Similarly, Lu (1995) argued that listening is the basis for speaking, advocating the inclusion of speaking exercises within listening classes. As Xu (2013) emphasizes, this type of integration is essential during the early stages of language acquisition. According to Hu (2010), listening and speaking exercises should be contextualized within the same topics, with listening paving the way for speaking, which in turn serves as a measure of listening comprehension. Zhang and Xu (2014) proposed a model that advocates a synergistic approach, utilizing uniform contexts and materials for both listening and speaking, and encouraging a cyclical process of listening before speaking. A recent study by Tian (2015) examined the theoretical and practical aspects of this approach and concluded that the integration of listening and speaking courses represents an inevitable evolution in the study and practice of language teaching.

Overall, the research indicates a growing acknowledgement of the integral role that integrated listening and speaking teaching models play in enhancing Chinese as a foreign language proficiency.

Findings from Analysis

To explore the challenges in teaching Chinese listening and speaking and the strategies in dealing with the challenges, the researcher have searched the journal article and thesis in CNKI. There are 37 articles mentioned about the teaching challenges and teaching strategies to deal with challenges. Based on the literature analysis, this section summarizes discusses the challenges TCFL teacher encounter during real-life communication, and the lecturers' teaching strategies to cope with the challenges of integrating listening and speaking Chinese class. The challenges are from teachers' perspective; students' perspective; teaching resources and culture integration.

Challenges in Chinese Language Teaching and Learning

Teachers' perspective

1) *Limitations of Traditional Teaching Methods*: Traditional teaching methods often fail to engage and utilize students' initiative effectively. The use of these methods can render student's passive in interactive listening classes, placing excessive emphasis on theoretical textbook knowledge and leading to a dull classroom atmosphere (Zhang, 2015; Li, 2010; Xu, 2014; Yao, 2014; Wen, 2015; Tang, 2017; Li, 2017; Peng, 2016; Deng, 2017).

2) *Monotonous Teaching Approaches*: Teaching methods often lack diversity and innovation, with unclear teaching objectives (Xi, 2014; Hui, 2014; Song, 2014; Wu, 2015; Liu, 2016; Zhang, 2022).

3) *Insufficient Understanding of Students' Needs*: Teachers often have inadequate understanding of students' needs, resulting in a mismatch between teaching content and students' actual difficulties, with improper handling of student errors (Hui, 2014; Li, 2017; Liu, 2019).

4) *Separation of Listening and Speaking Skills*: Listening and speaking skills are often isolated and mechanically trained in separate activities during listening and speaking classes, lacking integration into real-life language contexts, leading to insufficient practice and application of knowledge in communications (Pang, 2016).

5) *Limited Assessment Methods*: Current assessment of students' listening and speaking abilities in Chinese language classes often relies heavily on exams, leading to a lack of diverse evaluation methods, making it challenging to effectively gauge students' proficiency (Wen, 2015; Li, 2017).

6) *Insufficient Teaching Experience*: A lack of teaching experience among instructors, particularly in complex language learning processes, can impact teaching effectiveness, quality, and students' learning progress (Guo, 2019).

7) *Limited Research in Teaching Chinese Listening and Speaking*: Research in teaching Chinese as a foreign language has seen significant growth in recent years, but early language teaching

primarily focused on grammar, reading, and comprehensive courses. Compared to languages like English, research in Chinese language teaching is relatively underdeveloped (Wei, 2019).

8) Limited Classes arrangement for Listening and Speaking: Limited class time for listening and speaking is a common issue, particularly in Chinese language teaching. Restricted hours may hinder teachers from covering essential content and limit students' practical opportunities (Lian, 2017).

9) Inadequate Classroom Management for Listening and Speaking Classes: Teachers may struggle to ensure that all students have sufficient time for oral practice, resulting in chaotic classroom management and a loss of student engagement and motivation (Wang, 2021).

Student Perspective

1) Challenges in Listening and Speaking Proficiency: Students often face difficulties in developing their listening and speaking skills (Hu, 2013; Hui, 2014; Deng, 2017; Li, 2017; Wei, 2019; Ning, 2020) in terms of their proficiency levels in listening and speaking skills (Hu, 2013; Qian, 2014; Wu, 2015; Lian, 2017; Guo, 2019). Some of the reasons for this poor proficiency are due to limited expression capabilities (Wen, 2015; Peng, 2016; Tian, 2017; Guo, 2019), struggling in grasping and processing auditory information (Xu, 2014; Peng, 2016; Lian, 2017), and fear of speaking in Chinese (Qian, 2014). As a result, they had lost their interest and abilities (Li, 2010) and loss of motivation (Xu, 2014; Hui, 2014; Yao, 2014; Tang, 2017; Tian, 2017; Guo, 2019; Ning, 2020).

2) Weak Communication Skills: Students often rely heavily on teacher-led instruction, lacking independent communication skills and proficiency in Mandarin communication techniques (Wang, 2014; Wang, 2021; Zhang, 2022).

3) Significant Individual Differences among International Students: Students from various countries exhibit distinct language backgrounds and personality traits. For example, Japanese and Korean students tend to be reserved and introverted, while European and American students are generally more outgoing and open (Wu, 2015; Wen, 2015; Ning, 2020; Wang, 2022).

4) Challenges in Developing Language Awareness: Students often struggle to develop an intuitive understanding of Mandarin due to the complexity of the language and limited opportunities to apply what they learn in real communication (Wang, 2014).

Teaching resources

Monotonous and Outdated Teaching Materials: Teaching materials often lack representative language teaching content and struggle to align with current communication needs, leading to challenges in material selection (Hu, 2013; Hui, 2014; Song, 2014; Wu, 2015; Wen, 2015; Liu, 2016; Lian, 2017).

Cultural integration in teaching

Ineffective Integration of Culture: Instructors sometimes overlook the importance of integrating cultural content into listening and speaking classes, resulting in confusion among

students from diverse cultural backgrounds regarding the content of listening dialogues (Qin, 2014; Song, 2014).

Suggestions And Implications

In the field of teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL), various researchers have proposed numerous strategies to address the challenges faced in listening and speaking classes. These strategies are centered on enhancing students' language skills, expressive abilities, and cultural understanding, while also fostering their motivation and interest in learning. In response to the challenges faced by TCFL (Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language) teachers, the following strategies have been proposed:

1. **Enhancing Student Participation and Interest:** Implementing engaging tasks, games, and real-life scenarios can increase student participation and interest (Wei, 2019; Tang, 2017; Zhang, 2022). Teachers can also reduce learning pressure by creating a relaxed and supportive learning atmosphere (Deng, 2017).
2. **Improving Teaching Methods and Teacher Training:** Diversifying teaching methods and incorporating interactive, task-based, and student-centered approaches can help overcome the limitations of traditional teaching methods (Liu, 2016; Li, 2010; Hui, 2014). Ongoing teacher training and collaborative communication with fellow educators can enhance teaching skills and understanding of students' needs (He, 2018; Wang, 2014).
3. **Updating Teaching Materials:** Using updated, practical, and culturally relevant content can make learning more engaging (Liu, 2019; Ning, 2020). Teachers should also consider the individual differences and interests of students when selecting teaching materials (Song, 2014; Wang, 2021).
4. **Increasing Opportunities for Practice:** To enhance students' listening and speaking skills, teachers can provide more opportunities for practice through task-based teaching, scenario-based teaching, and interactive activities (Wang, 2014; Zhang, 2022).
5. **Diversifying Assessment Methods:** Using varied and comprehensive assessment methods can help teachers better understand students' progress and proficiency levels. Feedback should be provided in a timely and constructive manner to facilitate improvement (Li, 2017; Guo, 2019; Feng, 2015; Xiao, 2020).
6. **Creating an Engaging Classroom Atmosphere:** Encouraging teacher-student and student-student interaction can make the classroom environment more vibrant and conducive to learning (Deng, 2017; Zhang, 2022; Liu, 2016; Yin, 2019).
7. **Addressing Native Language Interference and Pronunciation Difficulties:** Teachers can design targeted pronunciation training and exercises to help students overcome difficulties posed by their native language interference (Li, 2015; Xiao, 2020; Wang, 2021).
8. **Integrating Cultural Education:** Teachers can incorporate cultural elements and real-life communication scenarios into the curriculum to provide a more authentic language learning experience (Qin, 2014; Zhang, 2022; Wen, 2015; Wang, 2021).
9. **Improving Real-Life Communication Skills:** Teachers can use situational and task-based teaching methods to simulate real-life communication scenarios, which can help students develop their language intuition and communication skills (Qin,

2014; Zhang, 2022; Wen, 2015; Wang, 2021).

To clarify the relationship between each challenge and its corresponding solution, the researcher presents a table that methodically links these elements. This format will serve as a practical guide, offering educators and curriculum designers a clear and concise reference to effectively enhance TCFL teaching strategies and practices.

Table 1

Suggestions for future studies

Teaching challenges	Suggestions
Limitations of traditional teaching methods	Improving teaching methods and teacher training
Monotonous teaching approaches	Enhancing student participation and interest
Insufficient understand of students' needs	Improving teaching methods and teacher training to enhance student participation and interest
Insufficient teaching experience	Improving teaching methods and teacher training:
Limited research on teaching Chinese listening and speaking	Researchers should take seriously on the value of integration of speaking and listening in teaching Chinese as a foreign language
Limited classes arrangement for listening and speaking	
Inadequate class management of listening and speaking class	Improving teaching methods and teacher training
Challenges in listening and speaking proficiency	Enhancing student participation and interest: increasing opportunities for practice
Weak communication skills	Increasing opportunities for practice
Significant individual differences among international students	Addressing native language interference and pronunciation difficulties:
Challenges in developing language awareness	Increasing opportunities for practice
Monotonous and outdated teaching materials	Updating teaching materials
Ineffective integration of culture	Integrating cultural education:
Limited assessment methods	Diversifying assessment methods

Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature suggests a multi-faceted approach to teaching CFL, which includes the integration of cultural elements, the use of diverse teaching methods, the implementation of technology, the provision of feedback, and the continual enhancement of teachers' skills. These strategies, when effectively employed, can help overcome the various challenges faced by TCFL teachers and enhance the effectiveness of Chinese language

instruction.

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