



An Investigation of the Beliefs and Classroom Performances of the Overseas Students in Chinese Learning at DUT

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Abstract

This research intends to discover the beliefs of the overseas students in Chinese learning at DUT (Dalian University of Technology) and how their beliefs influence their classroom performances. Furthermore, it will figure out the relationship between the overseas Chinese learners' beliefs and their corresponding classroom performances concerning Chinese learning. With reference to research method, qualitative and quantitative methods are used to collect data. Firstly, two kinds of questionnaire are designed to collect the data regarding overseas Chinese learners' beliefs and their classroom performances. What is more, classroom observation is used to record the genuine classroom performances of the overseas students in Chinese classes to supplement data collected from questionnaires. And also, SPSS 17.0 is adopted to calculate the relationship between the learners' beliefs and their classroom performances. Finally, this paper concludes that the overseas Chinese learners' beliefs and their classroom performances have influences on their learning outcomes.

Key words: Chinese learning; Learners' beliefs; Classroom performances; Learning outcomes

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INTRODUCTION

With the development of globalization, Chinese learning is paid much more attention to than before. Nowadays,

more and more overseas students from different cultural and educational backgrounds come to China in order to learn Chinese and have a better understanding of Chinese culture. However, they may have distinct motivations, goals and outcomes in Chinese learning.

According to Richard and Lockhart (1994), learners' beliefs are their perception of language learning, their expectation of the difficulties of learning a language, their preferred learning strategies and their learning motivation. What is more, Richard and Lockhart classify learners' belief system into eight categories including beliefs about the nature of English, the speakers of English, the four language skills, the teaching, language learning, appropriate classroom behaviour, self and goals. And also, Allright (1988) believes that the classroom performance of learners is like a mirror which helps show their own advantages and disadvantages. Learner's classroom performance covers a wide range such as raising questions, asking for help, controlling the class discussion and so on and it is influenced by many factors (Hayes, 1992).

From the above introduction, we may conclude that the overseas Chinese learners may hold various beliefs concerning Chinese study, those beliefs will also influence their classroom performances in turn and will further influence their language learning outcomes.

However, Chinese teachers sometimes do not pay much attention to different learners' beliefs, their classroom performances. Also, they do not obtain appropriate feedback from Chinese learners in class. Hence, most teachers who work on Chinese teaching for international learners may not teach according to their aptitudes.

Based on the above-mentioned discussion, it would be of great significance if a research is conducted to figure out the overseas Chinese learners' beliefs and their corresponding classroom performances about Chinese learning based on the classification of eight categories of learners' beliefs according to Richards and Lockhart

(1994) and four aspects concerning learners' classroom performances according to Hayes (1992). And also, this research will discuss the relationship between the overseas Chinese learners' beliefs and their classroom performances, which will make Chinese teaching and learning take place in accordance with students' real aptitudes.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Researches on Learners' Beliefs

Shawn Loewen and Li Shaofeng (2009) worked on a study to investigate the beliefs of L2 learners regarding the controversial role of grammar instruction and error correction. The results manifest that among learners studying English as a second language and those studying a foreign language, there are varied beliefs about grammar instruction and error correction.

Moreover, Ellen Simon and Miriam Taverniers (2011) performed research on advanced EFL learners' beliefs about language learning and teaching by comparing between grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. This study sets out to examine learners' beliefs about learning English at tertiary level in Flanders. As suggested by Ellen Simon and Miriam Taverniers, teachers need to know what their learners' beliefs and expectations are about vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation instruction at university level.

1.2 Researches on Classroom Performances

Hussein Elkhaifi of the University of Washington (2005) conducted an empirical study regarding the effect of foreign language learning anxiety on students' classroom performance, particularly the effect of learning anxiety on the achievement of their listening comprehension in an Arabic course. The study indicates that foreign language learning anxiety in class correlates negatively with the achievement of learners' listening comprehension. The study also reveals that reducing students' anxiety in language class and providing a less stressful classroom environment might enable teachers to help students improve both their listening comprehension proficiency as well as their overall classroom performance.

1.3 Summary of the Above Researches

From the above literature review, we can clearly see that few researches focus on the relationship between overseas Chinese learners' beliefs and their classroom performances. Therefore, this research chooses the overseas students in DUT to fill the gap and explores the relationship between learners' beliefs and their classroom performances in Chinese learning as well as the influences of the two aspects on their learning outcomes.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

As mentioned above, few researches take the perspective of international students' beliefs to explore their classroom

performances. Therefore, it is significant to find out their beliefs, classroom performances and the relationship between the two aspects. The research questions are as follows.

2.1 Research Questions

- a) What are the beliefs of the overseas students in DUT regarding Chinese learning?
- b) How do these overseas students behave in Chinese classes ?
- c) What is the relationship between learners' beliefs and their classroom performances in Chinese learning for the overseas students in DUT ?

2.2 Participants

200 overseas students from the School of International Education in Dalian University of Technology (DUT) are selected to take part in the research. All of the participants are not native speakers of Chinese. What is more, none of them has had any experience visiting or living in Chinese speaking countries before.

2.3 Instrumentation

The methods of collecting data in this research are made up of two aspects, including the questionnaire and classroom observation.

Firstly, questionnaire is designed to collect information about learners' beliefs and classroom performances. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part is the questions about the overseas students' beliefs in Chinese learning, which is based on Richard and Lockhart's (1994) beliefs system. The second part is the questions in relation to classroom performances of the overseas students in Chinese classes, which is from Hayes' questionnaire concerning learners' classroom behaviors (Hayes, 1992).

Secondly, classroom observation (Nunan, 2002) is used as a paralleled research method to supplement the data collected from questionnaires. Taking notes is used to record the genuine classroom performances of the overseas students in Chinese classes because recording their classroom performances by a digital device is forbidden in DUT.

Thirdly, the researcher makes statistical analysis with the help of SPSS 17.0 after questionnaires are collected. Descriptive analysis on mean and standard deviation of learners' beliefs and classroom performances regarding Chinese learning is given respectively.

Finally, the analysis of the relationship between the learners' beliefs and their classroom performances is presented through Pearson correlation analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the description of the DUT international students' beliefs, their classroom performance concerning Chinese learning, and the relationship between

the two aspects in detail. Furthermore, it discusses how the learners' different beliefs bring about their different classroom performances to a certain extent, which in turn influences their learning outcomes regarding Chinese study.

3.1 Analysis of the Overseas Chinese Learners' Beliefs

From Table 1, we can clearly see that the overseas Chinese learners in DUT have multifaceted beliefs concerning Chinese learning because of their diverse culture and education backgrounds.

Table 1
Description of Chinese Learners' Beliefs

Beliefs	N	Mean	Standard deviation
About the nature of Chinese	200	3.26	1.137
About speakers of English	200	3.30	1.119
About the four language skills	200	3.296	1.320
About teaching	200	3.80	0.993
About language learning	200	3.50	1.064
About appropriate classroom behaviour	200	3.07	1.099
About self	200	3.38	1.122
About goals	200	3.87	1.228

In the above table, the mean value of goals in learners' beliefs reaches the highest at 3.87, and the mean value of appropriate classroom behaviour hits the lowest at 3.07. Meanwhile, the belief in teaching and language learning comprise the high value-3.80 and 3.50 respectively. On the contrary, the beliefs concerning the nature of Chinese and the four language skills are also taken into consideration by the overseas Chinese learners in DUT.

The data in Table 1 suggests that the international students in DUT are concerned more about their goals in Chinese learning. Most of them have set out their own explicit goals in Chinese study. What is more, having been influenced by their own culture and education difference for a long time, these overseas Chinese learners in DUT do not pay much attention to their appropriate classroom behaviour in Chinese courses. And also, they are concerned much about how the Chinese teachers in DUT teach them Chinese in class, which may influence the way they choose to study Chinese to a certain extent.

On the other hand, these Chinese learners in DUT from various countries are a little worried about the difficulty of Chinese grammar and words because the two basic factors in Chinese will have effect on their mastery of the four language skills-listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, they tend to have a positive attitude and confidence in learning Chinese.

3.2 Analysis of the Overseas Chinese Learners' Classroom Performances

Questions about learners' classroom performances include four categories: verbal participation, dominating others, seeking support and sociability.

Table 2
Description of Chinese Learners' Classroom Performances

Classroom performances	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Verbal participation	200	3.36	1.041
Dominating others	200	2.41	1.107
Seeking support	200	3.44	1.067
Sociability	200	3.17	1.011

As Table 2 indicates, seeking support shares the highest mean of 3.44, by contrast, dominating others occupies the lowest point at 2.41. At the same time, verbal participation and sociability are highly valued by the overseas Chinese learners in DUT amounting to 3.36 and 3.17 separately.

It can be inferred that the overseas students tend to ask their Chinese teachers and classmates for help when they have difficulty in learning Chinese in class. In addition, in order to maintain harmonious relationship with teachers and classmates, they refrain themselves from dominating others in class. However, not being influenced by the traditional way of teaching in China, the overseas students usually seize every opportunity of verbal participation and basically take part in classroom activities actively during Chinese courses irrespective of public image and face.

3.3 The Analysis of the Relationship Between Verbal Participation and Learners' Beliefs

The relationship between learners' beliefs and their classroom performances is analyzed with the help of SPSS 17.0. The correlation coefficients are illustrated in Table 3.

In Table 3, it shows us that the overseas Chinese learners' classroom verbal participation is correlated with beliefs about the nature of Chinese ($r=.299^{**}$), beliefs about the teaching ($r=.292^{**}$), and beliefs about the goals ($r=.274^{**}$).

From the previous discussion, we may come to a conclusion that most of the overseas Chinese learners basically suppose that speaking Chinese is more difficult than reading and writing, while they often keep a positive attitude towards Chinese learning. Therefore, most of them pay more attention to oral practice in class activities including answering questions, asking questions, putting forward unique ideas, exchanging learning experience with others and debating in Chinese.

Table 3
Correlation of the Chinese Learners' Beliefs and Their Classroom Performances

Beliefs classroom performances	Verbal participation	Dominating others	Support seeking	Sociability
About the nature of Chinese	.299**	.059	.032	-.025
About speakers of Chinese	.145	.291**	.224	.027
About the four language skills	.117	-.112	-.077	.176*
About teaching	.292**	-.181	.131	.097
About language learning	-.033	.038	.328**	.044
About appropriate behaviour	.255	.026	.455**	.006
About self	.104	.170*	.243	.211
About goals	.274**	.067	.158	.075

Note. **: Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed); *: Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

Additionally, we know that the overseas Chinese learners have constructed definite beliefs with reference to effective or ineffective teaching. In particular, if Chinese teachers have created an active atmosphere, associate theories with practice, and use vivid instances to explain elusive terms and concepts, they prefer to participate in verbal activities to a certain extent.

When it comes to the relationship between beliefs about the goals and learners' classroom verbal participation, it is apparently indicated that the overseas Chinese learners have explicit goals respecting Chinese learning including the communicating in Chinese fluently in daily life, proving language learning ability, and having a decent job. Hence, they are basically willing to join in more verbal participation in accordance with their goals.

3.4 The Analysis of the Relationship Between Dominating Others and Learners' Beliefs

As Table 3 illustrated, the overseas Chinese learners' behaviour of dominating others is related to beliefs about the speakers of Chinese ($r=.291^{**}$), and beliefs about self ($r=.170^{*}$).

It can be indicated that the overseas Chinese learners' behaviour of dominating others has positive correlation with beliefs about the speakers of Chinese, which suggests that the international students assume that Chinese students will not interrupt and criticize the teachers' lectures freely in class in order to show their respect for teachers. Thus, most of the international students never interrupt their Chinese teachers' lectures and other classmates' discussions, or criticize their Chinese teachers' views freely in class.

Furthermore, the overseas Chinese learners' behaviour of dominating others is also positively relevant to beliefs about self. As we know that approximately 35% of them

usually have confidence in learning different languages. Therefore, they tend to question others' views when there exist different standpoints in class.

3.5 The Analysis of the Relationship Between Support Seeking and Learners' Beliefs

As indicated in Table 3, the overseas Chinese learners' behaviour of support seeking is linked with beliefs about language learning ($r=.328^{**}$), and beliefs about appropriate classroom behaviour ($r=.455^{**}$).

The statistic indicates that 34.18% of the international Chinese learners often employ the methods and materials given by their Chinese teachers, so most of them choose to take notes to understand, memorize and review the Chinese knowledge acquired. And also, they often seek help and support from teachers.

Besides, the international students' behaviour of support seeking is significantly and positively correlated with beliefs about appropriate classroom behaviour. They seldom keep silent in class when they have difficulty in studying Chinese in class. Therefore, they basically will ask classmates and teachers for help.

3.6 The Analysis of the Relationship Between Sociability and Learners' Beliefs

As Table 3 has shown, the overseas Chinese learners' behaviour of sociability has positive correlation with beliefs about the four language skills ($r=.176^{*}$). It is clearly that most of them attach the importance of the four language skills to Chinese learning due to different individual reasons including job need, academic research, term tests, HSK certificate and pursuing academic degree, which in turn motivates them to interact actively with teachers and classmates in class so as to improve abilities from four aspects (listening, speaking, reading and writing).

CONCLUSION

(a) Beliefs and Classroom Performances Influencing Learning Outcomes.

According to Miserandino (1996), students who are intrinsically motivated are more involved and persistent, participate more, and are curious about classroom activities. Study results suggest that the overseas Chinese learners who hold specific beliefs about the nature of Chinese, the four language skills, teaching, language learning, self and goals are intrinsically motivated to perform better in classroom, receive support from their Chinese teachers in class to enhance their learning outcomes. Also, motivation has been linked to higher grades and achievement in school (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987). Statistics indicate that the overseas Chinese learners who have specific goal contents can be intrinsically or extrinsically oriented to be engaged in the learning activities and teaching materials.

What is more, these Chinese learners tend to obtain high scores in their final examinations and HSK certificates (with 11.39% passing level 3; 16.46% passing level 4; 10.13% passing level 5 and 5.06% passing level 6). Such motivation is also positively associated with other learning outcomes including Chinese learning time, Chinese learning interests, and learning other aspects concerning Chinese culture. As the statistics shows that the international Chinese learners who are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to perform better in the classroom activities choose to spend much more time practicing oral Chinese and completing Chinese assignments better after class.

And also, the overseas Chinese learners' classroom performances in turn influence their continual interests in Chinese learning. According to Renninger, Bachrach & Posey (2008), fun classroom activities may trigger the situational interest that is the first stage of learners' interest development. This situational interest may influence the decision of these overseas Chinese learners about whether to continue their Chinese study or not. Obviously, a small portion of them (roughly 3%) fails in their term tests and they are asked to degrade as well as learn what had been learned again. On the contrary, those who participate in classroom activities actively can complete Chinese courses from primary level to intermediate level, and to advance level smoothly. Meanwhile, in order to enhance the international students' interest in Chinese learning, various courses and activities regarding Chinese culture are provided for them such as Beijing opera, Chinese cuisine, Chinese calligraphy, Chinese painting and so forth. The overseas Chinese learners who are intrinsically motivated prefer to attend such Chinese cultural courses and activities to deepen their understanding of China.

(b) Pedagogical Implications

According to the analysis of the relationship between learners' beliefs and their classroom performances, this paper puts forward the some pedagogical implications for both Chinese teaching and learning. It is hoped that these implications are of the significance to improve the current situation of the international students concerning their Chinese learning.

Initially, Chinese teachers should try their best to make Chinese classroom atmosphere more active so that the overseas Chinese learners will reduce their unfamiliarity with Chinese study as well as enhance their desirability to involve in Chinese learning in class.

What is more, if Chinese teachers can illustrate some vivid examples to help them understand some elusive language points, which will make Chinese learnable to some degree?

At the same time, Chinese teachers are advised to combine theories with practice closely when explaining courses to overseas Chinese learners, which will be easier for them to have a good knowledge of abstract concepts.

(c) Limitations

Some limitations should be taken into account in the current research.

All the 200 participants are chosen from the School of International Education in Dalian University of Technology and the number of the sample is limited. Therefore, the outcomes may represent the overseas Chinese learners who study in DUT, but they may not be suitable to explain the learners' beliefs, classroom performances in Chinese learning from other universities.

Meanwhile, it is noticed that there exist contradictions between their beliefs and actual classroom performances, however, the reasons are not discovered here due to the limitation of the present research.

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APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT BELIEFS OF CHINESE LEARNERS

Description: 1 means Never, 2 means Seldom, 3 means Basically Matched, 4 means Often, 5 means Always.

Note. after reading each question, please make a choice with "o"

1. About the nature of Chinese, I think...					
(1) Chinese grammar is difficult to master	1	2	3	4	5
(2) Chinese words are difficult to pronounce	1	2	3	4	5
(3) Speaking Chinese are more difficult than reading and writing	1	2	3	4	5
(4) Having a positive attitude to learning Chinese	1	2	3	4	5
2. What is your opinion on the foreign language classroom performance of Chinese students ?					
(1) Will interrupt and criticize the teacher's lecture	1	2	3	4	5
(2) Will criticize other students' views	1	2	3	4	5
(3) Will discover and work out questions by oneself	1	2	3	4	5
3. Which kind of the following language skill(s) of Chinese will you pay much attention to?					
(1) Speaking because of future job need	1	2	3	4	5
(2) Reading and writing because of academic research need	1	2	3	4	5
(3) Listening, speaking, reading and writing because of term test	1	2	3	4	5
(4) Listening, speaking, reading and writing because of HSK certificate	1	2	3	4	5
(5) Listening, speaking, reading and writing because of pursuing academic degree	1	2	3	4	5
About 'teaching', I suppose teachers should... , so the students in class will react actively.					
(1) Make classroom atmosphere more active	1	2	3	4	5
(2) Associate theory with practice closely	1	2	3	4	5
(3) Use vivid examples to explain elusive terms and concepts	1	2	3	4	5
5. Concerning the Chinese learning, I tend to...					
(1) Employ the methods and materials given by teachers	1	2	3	4	5
(2) Employ my own way and materials	1	2	3	4	5
(3) Combine the above two strategies	1	2	3	4	5
6. On appropriate classroom behavior, how will you behave in Chinese class ?					
(1) Will raise hand to obtain permission before asking questions	1	2	3	4	5
(2) Will express my unique ideas in class	1	2	3	4	5
(3) Will raise unknown questions at any time	1	2	3	4	5
(4) Will retain my own view to keep a harmonious relationship	1	2	3	4	5

To be continued

Continued

(5) Will prefer group discussion	1	2	3	4	5
(6) Will keep silent	1	2	3	4	5
7. Concerning 'self', I'm...					
(1) Good at learning different languages	1	2	3	4	5
(2) Good at learning language in a certain field	1	2	3	4	5
8. About 'goals', I hope...					
(1) Can pass term exam	1	2	3	4	5
(2) Can gain HSK certificate	1	2	3	4	5
(3) Can communicate in Chinese in daily life	1	2	3	4	5
(4) Can work on academic research	1	2	3	4	5
(5) Can have a decent job	1	2	3	4	5
(6) Can prove language learning ability	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX II: QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT CLASSROOM PERFORMANCES OF CHINESE LEARNERS

Description: 1 means Never, 2 means Seldom, 3 means Basically Matched, 4 means Often, 5 means Always.

Note. after reading each question, please make a choice with "○"

In Chinese class, I tend to ... ,

1. Answer the teacher's questions actively	1	2	3	4	5
2. Like to ask questions	1	2	3	4	5
3. Express my own opinion	1	2	3	4	5
4. Hold to my own opinion	1	2	3	4	5
5. Exchange my personal experience with others	1	2	3	4	5
6. Like to debate with others	1	2	3	4	5
7. Have a better expression in Chinese	1	2	3	4	5
8. Interrupt teachers' lessons	1	2	3	4	5
9. Criticize teachers' views	1	2	3	4	5
10. Interrupt other students' discussion	1	2	3	4	5
11. Question other students' views	1	2	3	4	5
12. Never be absent-minded or doze	1	2	3	4	5
13. Take notes to understand and memorize	1	2	3	4	5
14. Make sense of the assignment	1	2	3	4	5
15. Seek other classmates' help	1	2	3	4	5
16. Seek teachers' help and support	1	2	3	4	5
17. Interact with classmates in class	1	2	3	4	5
18. Concern much about impression left on teachers and classmates in class	1	2	3	4	5
19. Participate in discussions under supervision	1	2	3	4	5
20. Prefer to express opinions when appreciated	1	2	3	4	5
21. Unwilling to express opinions when not agreed	1	2	3	4	5