

Factors Affecting Students' Attitude towards Learning Chinese as a Second Language: A Case Study of the Confucius Institute at Makerere University and Luyanzi College, Uganda

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Abstract

The relationship between Uganda and China has promoted trade and people-to-people contact. In recent years, Chinese enterprises and other investments have been established in Uganda. Many Ugandans visit China for trade, tourism, and education. Learning Chinese in Uganda is becoming more and more important because the language opens up so many doors. The study focused on students learning Chinese as a second language at the Confucius Institute, Makerere University, and Luyanzi College. The research article explored the factors affecting attitude toward learning Chinese as a second language as well as their goals for learning Chinese. This study employed a quantitative approach by sending questionnaires to students learning Chinese at the Confucius Institute, Makerere University, and Luyanzi College. A total of 82 students were recruited for the study; 50 from Makerere University and 32 from Luyanzi College. The study unequivocally revealed that a positive attitude remains the most vital factor in learning Chinese as a second language at the Confucius Institute at Makerere University and Luyanzi College. Learners showed a positive attitude towards learning the Chinese language since most of the responses indicated that they enjoyed learning the Chinese language and learned Chinese for better jobs and business opportunities. However, there are factors such as limited learning materials, lack of opportunities to practise the language, the age of the students and their gender that negatively

affect students' attitude towards learning the Chinese language. Therefore, the researchers recommend that scholarships be granted to students with a desire and passion for the language. Chinese language teachers should develop teaching strategies that yield motivation and also try to bridge the gap between the teachers and students. Furthermore, more exchange programmes should be established between Uganda and China so that more students can travel between the two countries. This would give people more opportunities to learn and practice the Chinese language.

Keywords

Chinese Language Teaching in Uganda, Attitude, Chinese Language and Learning, Second Language

1. Introduction

1.1. The Context of Language in Uganda

Uganda is a multi-ethnic country with 56 tribes, each having a unique native language. The native languages were originally locally spoken by members of the respective tribes, but with the growth of urbanization, improvement in transport and communication networks, and the subsequent emergence of intertribal intermarriages, increased national movement by Ugandans resulted in the native languages being spoken more randomly across the country (Eberhard et al., 2020; Mulumba & Masaazi, 2012). The 1995 constitution of Uganda recognizes English, a non-native language, as the official national language. However, other languages may be used as a medium of instruction in schools and other educational institutions and for legislative, administrative, and judicial functions as prescribed by law. Kiswahili, another non-indigenous language used as a first language by a limited number of people in East Africa, is recognized as the official second national language in Uganda.

1.2. Introduction of the Chinese Language in Uganda

Uganda and China have had a long-standing diplomatic relationship that began on October 18, 1962 (about a week after Uganda attained independence), with the official opening of the Chinese Embassy in Uganda. In 1971, Uganda voted for the lawful representation of China in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. Since then, the two countries have enjoyed a mutual relationship and increased cooperation (Kaplinsky et al., 2006; University of Stellenbosch, 2007; Warmerdam & Van Dijk, 2013).

The increased economic cooperation between China and Uganda has resulted in an increased movement of Chinese to Uganda and Ugandans to China (Lan, 2015). Consequently, there is a solid need to ease communication between Chinese and Ugandans. The two governments thus agreed that a Confucius institute is established at Makerere University in Kampala. Its establishment aimed to

teach Ugandans basic Chinese language skills that could enable communication with their Chinese counterparts and also to train teachers who would then teach the Chinese language in primary and secondary schools. The institute was officially opened in January 2014. Since then, a number of Ugandans have been taught the Chinese language. Those who excelled have had the opportunity to travel to China under the Confucius scholarship to further improve their spoken language (Li, 2018; Lee, 2019). There has also been an increase in scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students in China, with the emphasis being put on courses taught in the Chinese language in order to improve language acquisition (Mulvey, 2020). In 2019, the Makerere University senate approved a Bachelor of Chinese and Asian Studies to help promote cultural integration (Hsiao & Faria, 2020). Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports, through the National Curriculum Development Center, has incorporated the teaching and learning of the Chinese language into the lower secondary education curriculum (Kiwuwa, 2015; Agade, 2019).

Presently, English is the predominant international business language spoken across cultures. However, recently, due to China's economic power and influence in international business, the Chinese language has become the second most important international language in international business contexts after English (Xu, 2019). The Chinese language plays an important role in global and international business, highlighting the importance of learning Chinese. Over 30 million people from various countries are now studying Chinese. The Center for Language Education and Cooperation (Hanban) says that there are 530 Confucius Institutes on six continents. Africa alone has 61 Confucius Institutes and 48 Confucius Classrooms. The core objective of the Confucius Institute is to promote Chinese language and culture, assist Chinese instruction abroad, and foster cultural exchanges.

1.3. Learner Acquisition of Second Language

A second language is any language learned after acquiring the native language. It is sometimes referred to as a foreign or a target language (Saville-Troike, 2006; Thang et al., 2002; Yin & Abdullah, 2018). Several factors influence the learning of a second language. These include the popularity of the language, opportunities associated with learning the language, ease of travel or immigration into the country of native origin, and the impact of colonization (Bouchard, 2019; Faizah, 2016). These factors greatly affect learners' attitude toward the second language, and the attitude is assertive in the selection and ability to learn the language (Getie, 2020). Like in other second languages, the rate and effectiveness of Chinese language learning is highly influenced by the students' attitude towards the Chinese language (Macnamara, 1973). Learner characteristics, social factors, and the learning environment both affect the learner's acquisition of a second language.

Personality factors such as self-esteem, neuroticism, extraversion, introversion, and others have significant effects on second language learning efficiency. For

example, Robert (1975) reported a positive correlation between extraversion and oral second language fluency, whereas introverted students did better in listening assessments. The extrovert often shows optimism, a spirit of adventure, and self-confidence, while the introvert is always shy and afraid of making mistakes and lacks self-confidence (Krashen, 1987). To ensure that both personality types succeed, it is important to create an environment where students understand that mistakes are part of the learning process and that speaking is more important than being perfect.

A suitable learning environment enhances learner acquisition of the second language. For example, constructive interaction between students and the language teacher may help learners develop a better understanding of the language than learners with less interaction with the teacher. The physical learning environment, including noise, crowding, classroom setting, and school surroundings, are also key. Noise, for example, affects learners' reading abilities, cognitive development, and motivational tasks. Thus, providing and maintaining an appropriate physical learning environment is essential in promoting and motivating learners (Spolsky, 1969).

Specific social components, particularly social class, culture, age, and gender, as well as the significance of the target language in the learner's community, are crucial to second language learning (Ellis, 1994). Age, for example, is a significant contributor to second-language learning. For instance, whereas young learners are better at language acquisition, adults are superior at learning language rules and systems because of their more advanced cognitive abilities. Children can improve their pronunciation and standard accent, and they are more likely to succeed in learning and using a second language. Therefore, language instructors should employ strategies suitable for each age group's needs (Cazden, 1988; Lightbown, 2000). The learner's attitude toward learning a second language is greatly influenced by the attitudes of their parents and the community. For instance, a parent who had a negative experience learning a foreign language would probably not suggest it to his children. On the other hand, a parent who speaks more than one language might get overly enthusiastic about his child learning a foreign language. Similarly, a student who grows up in a community marked by racial tension or in a household where prejudice towards specific ethnic groups exists would not be immune to the consequences of this environment (Spolsky, 1969; Rokeach, 1968). Studies have also revealed a positive correlation between the degree of exposure to the target language and the level of proficiency gained. Students learn better when they have more opportunities to talk with people who speak the language they are trying to learn (Spolsky, 1969; Getie, 2020).

1.4. Students' Attitude towards Second Language Learning

An attitude is a set of beliefs about a situation or subject that predisposes one to react to a certain type of preferred behavior. It consistently shapes the thoughts,

emotions, and behaviors of the person towards a psychological object (Rokeach, 1968). A student's attitude, therefore, constitutes a cognitive component, an effective component, and a behavioral component. The cognitive component is the perception of the situation by the learner. The effective component is the feelings the learner manifests as a result of the cognitive aspect. The feelings are assessed as either good or bad and then evaluated and manifested into the behavioral component, hence the manifestation of the attitude (Wenden, 1991).

Attitude impacts a student's inner moods, actions, and hence learning. The way a student feels about learning a language can affect things like how much they want to read, write, and speak the language on their own. Weinburgh (1998) asserts that attitude influences one's success in learning a language more than success influences attitude. Despite the fact that success in second language learning is highly attributed to individual differences, a student's attitude plays a significant role in its acquisition (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Skehan, 1989; Kang, 2012). Consequently, discovering the student's attitude towards language will help both teachers and learners in the teaching and learning process. Yusri et al. (2012) argues that there are two types of attitudes in a language: the attitude towards language learning and the attitude towards the language community. Suppose the speaker is attracted to a particular community. In that case, the enthusiasm with which they adore their language is higher than when a speaker has negative feelings. Studies have thus shown that learners with a positive attitude towards a language, its speakers, and its culture are more successful in learning the language than those with a negative attitude. According to Cooke (1970), a positive attitude toward the language's culture and native speakers can result in a positive attitude about the language as well as the process of acquiring it. In addition, if an individual is interested in the language patterns, it could also induce them to associate more with the language as opposed to when they do not like it at all (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Ellis, 1994).

The factors that influence language acquisition (Section 1.3) also significantly impact learners' attitudes toward second language learning. For example, girls are much more likely than boys to have a good attitude towards learning a second language. The attitude determines their selection and ability to learn the language (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Spolsky, 1969; Getie, 2020). Although the attitude acquired is relatively enduring, it can also be unlearned (Rokeach, 1968). If effective learning is to occur, teachers should, therefore, make deliberate efforts to help students unlearn negative attitudes and acquire positive ones. Therefore, this study focused on examining the factors affecting students' attitude towards learning Chinese as a second language and the reasons for studying Chinese at the Confucius Institute at Makerere University and Luyanzi College, Bweyogerere in Uganda. A study of the factors that affect students' attitude towards learning Chinese language will assist in unraveling the difficulties of learning Chinese and provide a deeper understanding of how to improve Chinese language teaching and learning at the Confucius Institute at Makerere University and Luyanzi College.

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- 1) To examine how students' attitude affect their second language learning.
- 2) To determine the factors that affect students' attitude towards learning Chinese at the Confucius Institute at Makerere University and Luyanzi College.
- 3) To find out why students at the Confucius Institute at Makerere University and Luyanzi College study the Chinese language.

2. Methodology

This section describes the data collection instruments and data collection procedures. It also explains how the methods and tools were used to achieve the desired objectives. As part of the study, students at the Confucius Institute at Makerere University and Luyanzi College, Bweyogerere, who were learning Chinese, were given questionnaires. These were used to find out about their attitudes, goals, and feelings about learning Chinese.

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach by sending questionnaires to students learning Chinese at the Confucius Institute, Makerere University and Luyanzi College. Adaptations were made to the questionnaire in order to identify differences in language attitudes. The questionnaire used 5-point Likert-type scales for both negative and positive statements, and learners were permitted to place a tick on one of the scales based on their opinions. The questionnaires were divided into three sections. The purpose of the first section was to collect information about the language backgrounds and the students' demographic information (age, sex, level, and majors). The second section of the questionnaire consists of statements about the participants' attitudes towards Chinese as a learning language. The third section probed the reasons for learning Chinese language. The design was chosen so that the researcher could talk to a representative sample of Confucius Institute, Makerere University, and Luyanzi College students about their objectives and attitudes toward learning Chinese. Questionnaires as data collection tools have been used by researchers over the years.

2.2. Geographical Area and Sampling Procedure

This study focused on students learning Chinese at the Confucius Institute, Makerere University, and Luyanzi College, Bweyogerere, Uganda. A total of 82 students were recruited for the study; 50 from Makerere University and 32 from Luyanzi College. From each institution, students were stratified according to their year and level of study, and an equal number of students were randomly selected from each stratum. Stratified sampling techniques were employed in the respondents' identification. The selection was such that the number of male and female students was approximately equal, while their ages varied. The stratification by academic year and level of study was necessary because these elements have a substantial effect on students' perceptions of language and the signific-

ance of their language decisions, as they are assumed to be independent-minded. Therefore, the information provided by these students may be accurate because it may have originated from their own experiences.

2.3. Research Instrument, Data Collection and Analysis

A set of questionnaires was used with both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was designed to capture the factors that affect attitudes, such as age, personality factors, gender, and the educational context. The questionnaire also captured the reasons for learning Chinese in Uganda. To discover factors affecting students' attitudes towards learning Chinese and the degree to which each factor affects students' attitudes, students were asked to rate their opinion on each of the following statements using a 5-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, No Opinion = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1. The students who put a tick under the numbers 5 and 4 (Strongly Agree and Agree) confirmed the students who have positive attitudes, while those that put a tick under numbers 3 and 2 (Strongly disagree and disagree) confirmed the students with negative attitudes. Also, it was made clear in the questionnaire's introduction that their participation was entirely optional. In addition, the introduction provided background information on the study's focus and goals, as well as reassurance that participants would remain anonymous. Questionnaires were administered manually. Thus, we used this approach since traditional means of collecting data, such as mail, email, and physical addresses, were unavailable. This method also guarantees a high response rate, which is an added bonus. For a total of 25 days, researchers gathered the responses from the students. Only completed questionnaires and those completed by the intended respondents were reviewed to ensure accuracy. The data gathered from respondents was quantitatively analyzed using tabulations and descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages, tables, and charts in the computer software Statistical Product for Service Solutions (SPSS, version 20).

3. Research Results

As shown in **Table 1** and **Figure 1**, the age group between 24 and 27 years old, had the highest attendance (27.4%) of Chinese language courses in Uganda. On the other hand, age groups between 17 - 20 and 40 - 42 had the lowest number of Ugandan students doing Chinese language courses.

The findings (**Table 2**) reveal that enjoyment of language learning is a dominant personality factor rated at 43.9% among other personality factors in motivation and positive attitude towards learning Chinese as a second language. This was followed by being open to new cultures (30.5%) and being extraversion (10.9%).

The results revealed the respondent's high consideration of the classroom environment (34.1%). The second most important environmental aspect considered was the teacher's teaching style (21.9%), followed by the teacher and

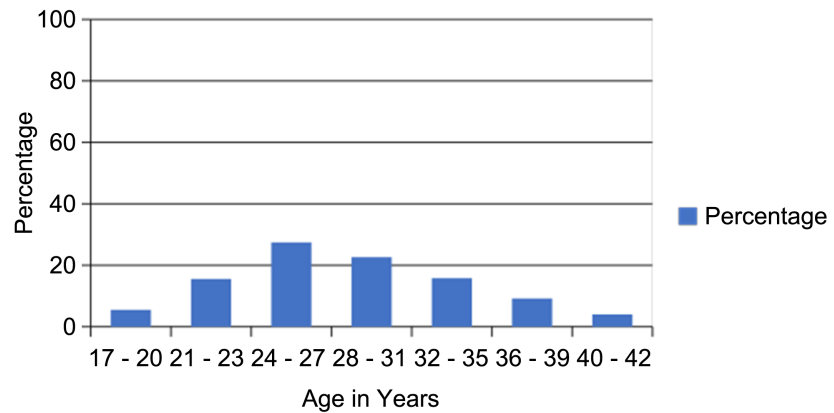


Figure 1. A bar graph showing age groups of Chinese language students.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage of age groups of Ugandan Chinese language students.

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
17 - 20	4.51	5.5
21 - 23	12.71	15.5
24 - 27	22.47	27.4
28 - 31	18.53	22.6
32 - 35	12.95	15.8
36 - 39	7.54	9.2
40 - 42	3.28	4
Total	Total no. of respondents 82	100

Table 2. Personality factors and motivation to learn a second language.

Personality factors	Frequency	Percentage
Enjoyment of language learning	36	43.9
Being open to new cultures	25	30.5
neuroticism	10	12.2
Extraversion	9	10.9
Introversion	02	2.4
Totals	82	100%

student relationship (17.1%). The teacher's feedback (12.2%) was the last considered, according to the study (Table 3).

Results indicated in Figure 2 show that more females (72.4%) enroll in Chinese language courses in Uganda than males (27.6%).

Research results displayed in Figure 3 revealed that most respondents (79.4%) study Chinese as their second language primarily for job and business opportunities. Other students (18.6%) study Chinese because of its interesting nature and

Table 3. Impact of learning environment on attitude of learning Chinese language.

learning environment	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher's teaching style	18	21.9
Classroom environment	28	34.1
Teacher's feedback	10	12.2
Teacher and Student relationship	14	17.1
Availability Chinese language teaching materials	12	14.6
Totals	82	100%

rich culture. Ado et al. (2016) further confirms that learning Chinese as a second language is purposely to improve business and job opportunities. Many Africans, including Ugandans, have migrated to different cities of the People's Republic of China, such as Guangzhou, for business opportunities where they buy consumable goods and sell them back to Africans (Lan, 2019). There is evidence that Chinese companies are investing and helping build infrastructure in Africa, including Uganda. Li (2016) and Wegenast et al. (2019) say that candidates for jobs in these companies would have an easier time if they knew Chinese. The research findings also back up the fact that China has become a popular place for Ugandan and other African students to go to school (Li, 2018; Lee, 2019).

4. Discussion of Results

4.1. Effect of Age on Attitude of Learning Chinese Language

The largest age group of students enrolling in Chinese language classes was between 24 and 27 years. This result is consistent with what Caceres-Lorenzo (2015) and Maican & Colorado (2021) discovered in their studies on the acquisition of foreign languages. According to Ellis (1994), younger language learners are generally perceived to perform better than older language learners. Other research provides empirical support for extremely elderly people's negative attitudes toward learning a second language (Patkowski, 1990; Flege, 1999; Wang & King, 2022). Age as a demographic component has an effect on the attitude toward learning Chinese, as evidenced by the fact that many Ugandans in a given age group are eager to study Chinese as a secondary language.

4.2. Gender and Learning of Chinese Language

According to the study's analysis of the responses, women made up 72.6% of all respondents, while men made up 27.4%. These results support the notion that females are more motivated than males to learn Chinese as a second language. According to Gardner & Lambert (1972), girls are more likely than boys to have positive attitudes toward learning a second language. In research done by Wu & Sung (2011) and Okyar (2021), non-native females had the better pronunciation of Chinese language vocabulary than their male counterparts (2021). Similar to

Number of Males and Females that Participated in the Study

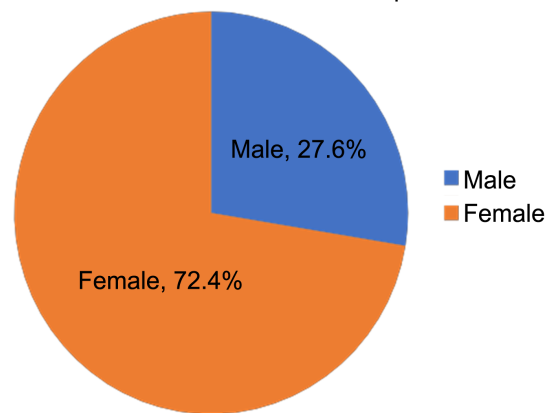


Figure 2. Number of respondents who were females and males in percentage.

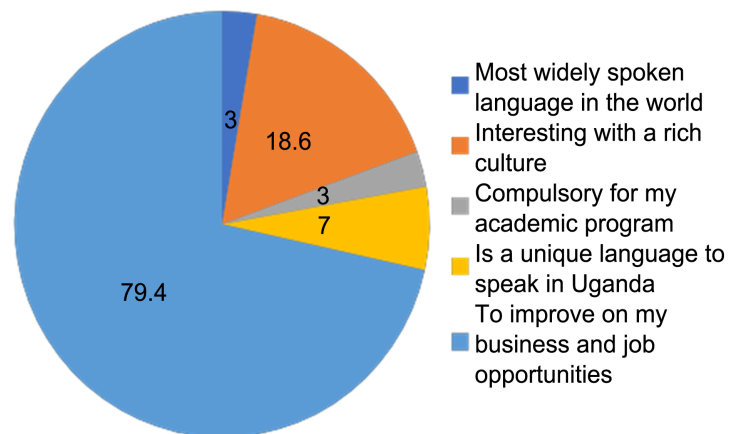


Figure 3. Reasons for learning Chinese language as a Second language.

this, during the administration of the study's questionnaire, much more enthusiasm was seen among female respondents than among male respondents. Gender affects attitudes toward learning Chinese as a second language as it affects motivation to learn Chinese among non-native Chinese speakers.

4.3. Personality Issues and Motivation to Learn a Second Language

The personality factors have been studied over the years for their impact on the learning of second languages. The personality factor of language learning enjoyment was similarly rated as a major personality issue in the learning achievement among students of Chinese secondary language by Zhang & Tsung (2021). Personality factors are part of the affective factors that prepare psychological readiness for learning (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). In their meta-analysis of 40 years of research, Chen et al. (2021) emphasized being open to new experiences as a very vital personality trait in the learning of Chinese as a second language. When a learner enjoys learning a new language and is open to new experiences, his or her level of language learning achievement can be higher.

4.4. Impact of Educational Context on Attitude of Learning Chinese Language

Respondents viewed the classroom environment (34.1%) as the most influential factor in influencing their attitude toward learning Chinese. The classroom environment is the climate of the classroom with its physical, affective, and social conditions that can either facilitate or demotivate the learning process. A positive classroom environment plays a key role in motivating learners to freely communicate or share their ideas with the teacher and, at the same time, increases the enjoyment of the lesson (Li & Dewaele, 2021). It's also crucial to pay attention to the classroom setting, such as promoting and fostering student cooperation and seating arrangements (Levin & Nolan, 1996: p. 126). In addition, Gardner & Lambert (1972) argue that 'behavior, personality, teaching methods, and understanding of students' interests can change students' attitudes about learning the target language. Wilkins (1974) asserts that resources are fundamental to learning, so limited resources impede language progress. Textbooks, workbooks, writing paper, pens, pencils boards, wall-pictures, reading materials, and a library all impact learner attitudes and learning environments. According to available information, teaching style, feedback, learning environment, and availability of language teaching materials may influence how well students learn a language. Students' attitudes are negative if these elements are overlooked, even if they enjoy the language.

5. Conclusion

The research was conducted on the factors affecting students' attitude towards learning Chinese as a second language at the Confucius Institute at Makerere University and Luyanzi College in Uganda. The study unequivocally revealed that a positive attitude remains the most vital factor in learning Chinese as a second language at the Confucius Institute at Makerere University and Luyanzi College. Overall, learners showed a positive attitude towards learning the Chinese language since most of the responses indicated that they enjoyed learning the Chinese language, learned Chinese for better jobs and business opportunities, and were also interested in Chinese culture. This showed their positive attitude towards learning the Chinese language, since they attached a lot of importance to the language. However, there are factors such as limited learning materials, lack of opportunities to practice the language, the age of the students and their gender that negatively affect students' attitude towards learning Chinese at the Confucius Institute at Makerere University and Luyanzi College.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made based on the findings of the study:

- 1) The study revealed that students learning Chinese at the Confucius Institute at Makerere University and Luyanzi College have a positive attitude towards learning the Chinese language. Therefore, teaching and learning the Chinese

language should continue and even be spread to other areas of the country. Also, scholarships should be granted to students with a desire and passion for the language.

2) The study also showed that negative attitudes can impede language learning, and usually negative attitudes arise when the students lose interest in the subject or find difficulties with the teacher, among other factors. Therefore, Chinese language teachers should develop teaching strategies that yield motivation and also try to bridge the gap between the teachers and students.

3) The study found that age and gender were the most detrimental factors in Chinese language learning at Makerere University and Luyanzi College's Confucius Institute. The researchers recommend that teachers need to devise strategies like individualized teaching and assess individual progress in terms of individual ability.

4) Among the factors that make students develop a negative attitude are limited teaching materials, a shortage of opportunities to practice the language and an unfavorable learning environment. The study suggests that more exchange programs between Uganda and China should be set up so that more people can travel between the two countries and learn about each other's cultures and languages. This would give people more opportunities to learn and practice the Chinese language.

However, this current study should be viewed in light of the following limitations: Firstly, the sample size of this study was determined by the total number of registered students studying Chinese in Uganda. Thus, the study made use of all the students that are registered and are studying Chinese in Uganda at Makerere University and Luyanzi College. Therefore, future studies can also consider a broad sample size by including the other students that have learnt Chinese in these institutions. On the other hand, another study can also be conducted on Chinese language students who have graduated to assess and examine if their expectations and desire to study a second language (Chinese) were met and achieved irrespective of the year they graduated.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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