Enhancing Local Chinese Language Teacher Training in the Republic of Congo

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ABSTRACT

China is now one the most important countries in the globe, and with the increasing influence of Chinese language and culture, Chinese education has become more and more important during the last two decades in Africa in general, and in the Republic of Congo in particular. However, we assert the existence a major flaw in the field of Chinese education, mainly the lack of adequate training programs for Chinese teachers. Thus, this study investigates the current situation of local Chinese teacher training in the Republic of the Congo, with to goal to identify the main challenges related to the issue, and to put forward innovative methods to solve these challenges. Lately, Chinese teaching in the Republic of Congo has developed rapidly. Looking into the future, this research outlines the future research direction in the field of Chinese teacher training. It emphasizes the potential long-term impact of intensive training on language education, cultural exchanges and economic opportunities for Congolese students. In addition, it emphasizes the role can be played by government agencies, educational institutions and international organizations in supporting such initiatives.

KEYWORDS

Chinese Language Education; Teacher Training; Republic of the Congo; Innovative Approaches; Challenges

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the interest in China's language and culture in the Republic of Congo has obviously increased. This surge in interest is not only a local phenomenon, but also reflects China's global prominent position and influence in various fields, including economy, politics and culture. As China continues to strengthen its presence in Africa through trade partnership, infrastructure development and cultural exchange activities, the demand for proficiency in Chinese in African countries is becoming more and more obvious. As a country with rich cultural diversity and language heritage, the Republic of Congo is no exception. As its population seeks opportunities for trade, commerce, diplomacy and cultural exchanges with China, the demand for Chinese language education has increased

significantly. Therefore, educational institutions at all levels have launched Chinese programs, courses, and timetables.

Chinese education has gone beyond the boundaries of professional language colleges and is being integrated into the mainstream education system from primary school to university. This expansion not only reflects the recognition of China's global importance, but also reflects the joint efforts to equip Congolese citizens with the skills they need to effectively participate in international affairs and the global job market. However, despite the increasing interest and investment in Chinese education, there are still challenges in ensuring the quality and effectiveness of teaching. These challenges include a series of problems, from the lack of qualified Chinese teachers to the development of culturally relevant and attractive courses.

Dealing with these challenges is very important to give full play to the potential of Chinese education in the Republic of Congo. In addition, the success of Chinese education depends not only on the number of courses, but also on the level and teaching skills of teachers. This highlights the important role of teacher training, which is crucial to the quality and sustainability of Chinese education programs(Yu, 2022). In view of these considerations, this paper comprehensively discusses the challenges encountered in the training of Chinese teachers in the Republic of Congo. It aims to reveal the gaps in current methods and emphasize the need for innovative and situation-specific training methods. By responding to these challenges and proposing innovative training solutions, this study aims to promote Chinese education in the Republic of Congo, thus strengthening cultural, economic, and diplomatic ties between the two countries.

RESEARCH METHODS

To solve this issue, we have chosen to use mixed methods, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. We believe a combination of both methods enables us to have a clearer understanding of the overall situation and enough quantitative data to support our conclusions.

Our data gathering methods were mainly on semi-structured interviews, which consisted in conducting extensive interviews with local Chinese teachers and students, as well as education officials at the Confucius Institute and High Schools institutions, to collect information about training methods, needs and challenges, as well as some of their suggestions regarding the issue.

We conducted a qualitative analysis based on date from our interviews to acquire a deeper understanding and the local situation, and associated with the literature, we determined the main challenges related to local Chinese teacher training in the republic of the Congo and elsewhere around the globe, but at the same time discover new trends, challenges, innovative methods related to the topic.

For our qualitative analysis, we used Microsoft Excel to analyze the quantitative data of the survey, producing descriptive data, as well as comparative analysis and meaning correlation.

We made an in-depth literature review regarding methods and practices related to Chinese teacher training, especially in local situations, as well as the main challenges and

solutions found in similar background. The ideas we put forward in this work are part of what we have learned from this rich review.

However, the study still has limitations, such as sample size, availability of participants and time and space constraints, because the author lives in China and the study was conducted in his native Republic of Congo. However, we ensure that the constraints are minimized, and our conclusions are reliable and effective.

We believe that the above methods will enable us to have a clear understanding of the current situation of China teachers' training in the Republic of Congo, and the results of this study will be an essential guiding effort to improve the teaching quality of China in that country.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Dilemma Faced by the Development of Native Chinese Teachers in the Republic of Congo

Chinese teaching in the Republic of the Congo has a history of nearly 50 years, but it is still very backward. In fact, there are problems in every basic point of the current situation of Chinese teaching in senior high schools in Congo (Brazzaville). These problems are generally related to the teaching elements, especially the lack of Chinese teachers, especially the lack of a suitable Chinese training program for local teachers. In addition, the number of high school students in Congo (Brazzaville) changes obviously every year, showing an increasing trend. Taking Savorgnan De Brazza High School as an example, in 2014, there were 215 students in three grades of high school, and in 2015, there were 319 high school students. This year, the number of Savorgnan De Brazza students in Congo (Brazzaville) has risen to more than a thousand. Two years ago in 2021, There were only around 26 Chinese teachers in Brazzaville high schools (with around 15 public high schools and around 20 or more private schools). With more and more students learning Chinese, the number of teachers is a very prominent problem. In addition, of the 26 Chinese teachers, only 2 are teachers majoring in Chinese, and the rest are teachers of other majors with the vast majority having only graduated from high school with no proper college level education. Most of them are volunteers who have studied Chinese for one or two years at the Confucius Institute in Ngouabi University, but have never participated in any proper, professional training in Chinese teaching. According to official statistics, 98% of Chinese teachers in Congo (Brazzaville) are college students. Though there have been 2 new teachers who have graduated with a Master's degree level, due to the high demand in the field, this alone will not be sufficient to fully fill the gap. Moreover, the other 2 teachers have retired, leaving another huge hole. On the other hand, the classroom is also a very prominent problem, because the number of students is increasing, so a classroom that used to accommodate 35 students normally now often has as many as 80 students, which is a great challenge to Chinese teaching. Most high schools in Congo (Brazzaville) have this problem. Under such circumstances, the effect of Chinese classroom teaching management is very poor.

In Congo (Brazzaville) Chinese teaching, Congo (Brazzaville) high school has a syllabus, but there are no textbooks. Brazzaville High Schools only use the Basic Chinese Textbook as a reference textbook. They have been used since before 1990 and have not been replaced so far. The materials in the class are all found by the teachers themselves, copied

and then given to the students. This will bring the randomness of teaching, and there is a lack of coherence and logical connection between classes. There is a huge lack of experienced Chinese teachers in the Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville). Because most of the teachers in Congo (Brazzaville) Chinese high school are college students and have not been properly and professionally trained as such. Though there are seminars organized every year by the University of Jinan(*Renforcement Des Capacités : Un Séminaire Au Profit Des Enseignants de La Langue Chinoise | Adiac-Congo.Com : Toute l'actualité Du Bassin Du Congo*, n.d.) which is a partner of the Confucius Institute in the Republic of the Congo, they only last for a week or some days, during which only the teacher is giving some lectures, but not much opportunity is given to each teacher to test their teaching abilities or performance(Chang, 2022).

A major challenge is the lack of qualified Chinese teachers, who are proficient in Chinese and have the teaching skills needed to effectively teach non-native speakers. Although the demand for Chinese education is increasing, experienced teachers are in short supply. The shortage of qualified teachers hinders the quality of education and affects the ability to meet the growing demand for Chinese teaching(郭鹏, 2012)and (Lu et al., 2019).

In addition, it is generally believed that effective language teaching transcends grammar and vocabulary; It contains cultural understanding. China's culture is complex and diverse, with many nuances, traditions and customs. In order to teach Chinese effectively, teachers need to have a deep understanding of these cultural aspects. When local teachers may lack this cultural depth, challenges arise, leading to misunderstandings or cultural insensitivity in the classroom. This is one of the many problems faced by Chinese education in the Republic of Congo, because most teachers lack sufficient cultural awareness of China's language and culture(Zhou & Li, 2016) and (Pryshlyak & Lupak, 2019).

Teaching Chinese as a foreign language also requires serious and professional teaching skills. Trainers need to be proficient in teaching methods and means to meet the challenges of second language acquisition. This includes understanding the stages of language development, effective teaching strategies, and the ability to adjust teaching according to individual learning styles(崔希亮, 2018; 李泉, 2009). Lack of professional knowledge in this field will affect the effect of language training("The Acquisition of Chinese as a First and Second Language," 2021). However, because most of them have not received this kind of education, most Congolese teachers will have little or no skills, which hinders the quality of teaching.

Continuous professional development is another important aspect, which enables trainers to know the latest teaching methods, materials and technologies. However, providing such training opportunities is a challenge, especially in an environment with limited resources like the Republic of Congo. Without enough continuous training opportunities, most trainers do not have the ability to use innovative and effective teaching skills. Subsequently, it may be difficult and expensive to obtain Chinese teaching materials, textbooks and multimedia resources. The lack of access to these materials limits the quality and diversity of teaching. The shortage of teaching materials brings a burden to trainers, who often need to write their own teaching materials, which distracts their time and energy for effective teaching.

As mentioned above, Chinese teaching in the Republic of Congo faces many problems related to the quality of teachers, most of whom are college students who have not received proper training in second language acquisition or Chinese teaching. In this case, it is difficult for Chinese education in Congo to reach a considerable level, and it is also difficult to give full play to its potential.

The Need for New Training Methods in Chinese Language Education
Like many other countries, the Republic of Congo is increasingly interested in Chinese language education. Although the demand for Chinese courses continues to grow, it is increasingly obvious that traditional teaching methods may not fully meet the changing needs and challenges faced by educators and students(Elvira et al., 2017). This section discusses the urgent needs of teachers and students for new Chinese education and training methods under the Congo background.

In recent years, under the impetus of technological progress, the change of teaching methods and more emphasis on practical language skills, global language education has undergone major changes. The prospect of language learning is no longer limited to traditional classrooms, but extends to virtual environments, blended learning and innovative teaching tools (Lin et al., 2016). In order to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed for effective communication and cultural understanding, new training methods must reflect these changes in the field of language education. Educators and policy makers in Congo must realize that Chinese education can no longer rely solely on traditional teaching methods.

As mentioned above, the shortage of qualified Chinese teachers highlights the necessity of innovative training methods. Traditional teacher training programs are often difficult to train a sufficient number of qualified teachers, which makes schools have limited choices in recruitment (Li et al., 2017). New training methods can help bridge this gap and enable current educators to improve their language proficiency and teaching skills.

Adapt to diverse learning styles
Congolese students show different learning styles, backgrounds and language abilities. Traditional and one-size-fits-all teaching methods may not be able to effectively meet the individual needs of students. New training methods should include differentiated teaching, adaptive learning techniques and learner-centered methods (Suwastini et al., 2021). These methods can ensure that educators can effectively participate in and support a wide range of learners. -Using digital resources and technology. The digital age has brought unprecedented opportunities for language education. Innovative training methods should use digital resources, online platforms and interactive tools to create fascinating immersive learning experiences (Gikandi et al., 2011). This method can expand the scope of language education programs and provide students with resources outside the classroom.

Fostering Cultural Competence and Sensitivity
As Chinese language education in the Republic of the Congo places an emphasis on cultural exchange, new training methods should prioritize the development of educators' cultural

competence and sensitivity. This includes intercultural training, exposure to diverse cultural contexts, and collaborative initiatives that promote cross-cultural understanding (Byram, 2021).

Measuring and Certifying Proficiency

Innovative training methods should also encompass modern approaches to assessing and certifying language proficiency. The development of standardized proficiency assessments tailored to Congolese contexts, as mentioned earlier, is integral to this process. Additionally, digital portfolios and e-assessment tools can provide more accurate and flexible measures of student progress(Guskey, 2002).

Ensuring Sustainable Language Programs

To ensure the sustainability of Chinese language education programs in the Republic of the Congo, new training methods should include modules on program management and financial sustainability. Educators and administrators must acquire the skills to develop program budgets, secure funding, and maintain long-term program viability (Kasworm, 2023). In conclusion, the Republic of the Congo stands at a critical juncture in its pursuit of effective Chinese language education. Recognizing the evolving landscape of language learning, addressing the shortage of qualified educators, adapting to diverse learning styles, harnessing digital resources, fostering cultural competence, and ensuring sustainable language programs are all essential components of the journey ahead. By embracing new training methods that reflect these imperatives, the nation can enrich its language education landscape and empower its students with the skills and cultural understanding needed to thrive in an interconnected world(Jebahi, 2022).

Reflections on the future training of native Chinese teachers in the Republic of Congo

Comprehensive Teacher Training Program

A comprehensive Chinese teacher training program might include some the following aspects:

Intensive Language Training: This component involves intensive language courses in collaboration with established Chinese language institutes or universities. For example, educators could attend immersive summer language programs in China, where they receive intensive Mandarin language instruction.

Pedagogical Training: Pedagogical training programs should be tailored to Chinese language education. Educators learn effective teaching methodologies, curriculum development, and assessment techniques specifically designed for Chinese language instruction(Berliner, 1988; Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). - Cultural Competence: This part of the training ensures that educators understand and respect Chinese culture. For instance, educators may attend cultural sensitivity workshops where they learn about Chinese customs, traditions, and etiquette.

A practical study case in this aspect might be: - A Congolese educator, Marie ELENGA, participates in an intensive language program at a Chinese university. She spends a semester immersed in Mandarin language courses and also takes pedagogical training

modules designed for Chinese language educators. - Teacher training workshops are organized locally, where educators like Mister Jean MABIALA learn to integrate elements of Chinese culture into their lessons respectfully. They explore teaching materials that incorporate Chinese festivals, art, and history.

Blended Learning and Virtual Classrooms

Blended learning and virtual classrooms might include the following aspects:

Virtual Chinese Language Labs: These labs provide access to interactive language exercises, multimedia resources, and speaking practice tools. For example, educators and students can access a virtual lab where they practice pronunciation with native speakers through voice recognition technology(Hunt, 2015).

Online Teacher Training: Educators can participate in online teacher training modules that cover a range of topics, from effective use of digital resources to remote classroom management(Gikandi et al., 2011).

Webinars and Workshops: Webinars and virtual workshops are organized regularly, featuring expert guest speakers in Chinese language education. They allow educators to stay updated on the latest teaching methodologies and trends.

A practical example might be: - In a city like Pointe-Noire, educators like Paul MAKIESSI access virtual labs from their local schools. These labs offer interactive exercises and assessments, ensuring consistent learning experiences. - A monthly webinar series invites experienced Chinese language educators to share their best practices. Teachers like Amina attend these webinars to learn about innovative teaching approaches and network with peers.

Those some of this aspect as already been implemented, it lacks in practicality as local educators don't have much time for practical activities. Moreover, such activities are organized only once every year, which is too long of a period.

Cultural Immersion Programs

Cultural immersion plans may include:

Educator exchange: This component includes the exchange of Congolese educators who stay in China for a period of time and immerse themselves in the language and culture of China. They came back with a deeper understanding of the subtle differences between language and culture.

Cultural workshops: a cultural workshop was organized in Congo, where experts from China provided in-depth knowledge about China's culture, art and history. These workshops have improved the cultural ability of educators.

Cultural extracurricular activities: The school incorporates extracurricular activities, such as celebrating China festivals, organizing calligraphy competitions and holding art exhibitions. These activities allow students to experience China culture directly.

A practical example may be: -Educational exchange sends teachers like André to cooperative schools in China. During this period, Andre not only improved his language skills, but also observed the innovative teaching methods used in China's class. - MILANDOU, a Congolese cultural expert, held a seminar to share her expertise in China art

with educators. They learn China's traditional painting skills and how to integrate them into the curriculum.

Community learning center
This includes:

Localized language centers: These centers are usually established in underserved communities in cooperation with local community leaders. For example, a rural community center provides Chinese courses so that nearby residents can also receive education(Xin, 2022).

Community participation: local communities actively participate in the management and operation of these centers. For example, community members volunteer as administrators, and parents help organize events and activities.

Flexible timetable: The center provides a flexible curriculum to accommodate adults and students with various responsibilities. People who work during the day can go to night classes and weekend classes.

Example:
   a) In a remote village, Samuel, a community leader, established a language center in cooperation with a local school. The center provides evening Chinese courses for students and adults, which expands the educational opportunities in this area.
   b) Community members actively participate in the management of the center. Parents like Grace volunteer as coordinators. They organize cultural activities to attract the community and show the progress of students.

These detailed examples illustrate how to implement each training aspect to meet the challenge of Chinese education in the Republic of Congo.

However, the proposed Chinese education and training model in the Republic of Congo may face various challenges. Some key challenges that may be encountered may be:

   1) Funding and resource constraints: In a resource-limited environment, it may be difficult to obtain sufficient funds for comprehensive teacher training programs, technical infrastructure of virtual classrooms and community learning centers.
   2) Infrastructure and connectivity: Many remote areas in Congo lack reliable Internet connection and access to digital resources, so it is difficult to effectively implement online training content. But in the capital or places like Pointe Noire where there is no big connection problem, this should not be a problem.
   3) Cultural sensitivity and adaptation: While respecting local customs and sensitivities, it may be a delicate process to adapt China's language and culture to Congo's environment. Misunderstanding or misinterpretation of cultural elements may occur, which will affect the effectiveness of the cultural immersion plan.
   4) Motivation and participation of educators: Encouraging educators to actively participate in training programs and adopt innovative teaching methods may be an

obstacle. Some educators may resist change or may not fully participate in continuous professional development.

5) Sustainability and long-term commitment: Long-term maintenance of the training model requires continuous commitment of resources, funds and management support. With the passage of time, funds and political priorities may change, which may endanger the continuity of training programs.

6) Cultural exchange logistics: Organizing exchange and cultural immersion projects with educators in China involves complex logistics, including visas, travel arrangements and coordination. There may be delays or difficulties in obtaining visas for educators and students participating in the exchange.

7) Resist change: Resisting the adoption of new teaching methods or technology-driven methods will hinder the successful implementation of the model. Some educators may prefer traditional teaching methods to accept virtual classrooms or digital resources. Overcoming these challenges requires the joint efforts of the government, educational institutions and stakeholders. Flexibility, adaptability and commitment to improving Chinese education are the keys to the successful implementation of the proposed training model in the Republic of Congo.

The Republic of Congo's pursuit of Chinese language education proves its commitment to global connectivity, economic opportunities and cultural exchanges. However, the road to building a strong and barrier-free Chinese education system in this country is not without challenges. A comprehensive discussion on this topic reveals the vision of improving Chinese education through innovative training models tailored to the specific needs of Congo. The challenges faced by Chinese education in the Republic of Congo, including the lack of qualified educators, resource constraints, cultural sensitivity and fair access, are not unique to the country. However, the proposed training model provides a multi-faceted approach to effectively meet these challenges. The comprehensive teacher training program aims to cultivate skilled teachers with language ability and teaching professional knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Training local Chinese teachers in the Republic of Congo is a multi-faceted effort, which has great potential in promoting cultural exchanges, economic cooperation and global contacts. However, it also faces challenges. In this comprehensive discussion, we discussed the obstacles faced by educators and policy makers in seeking to provide local teachers with the skills and knowledge needed for effective Chinese teaching. From the lack of qualified trainers to the complexity of cultural understanding and the need for suitable teaching materials, every challenge highlights the complexity of this important educational effort.

The lack of qualified Chinese teachers is a severe challenge and needs to be paid attention to. Bridging this gap requires innovative methods, such as cooperating with educational institutions in China, establishing teacher exchange programs and online training platforms. By using the professional knowledge of experienced educators, the Republic of Congo can ensure that local teachers are trained by professionals who are proficient in Chinese and effective teaching practice.

Cultural understanding is another important aspect of Chinese education. Chinese teaching transcends language ability; It contains cultural differences, traditions and customs. In this case, cultural sensitivity and accurate expression are very important. Establishing a partnership with cultural experts in China, promoting cultural exchange programs and incorporating cultural elements into the curriculum can help local teachers understand China culture deeply and accurately.

The professional knowledge of trainers is equally important for effective language teaching. Teachers must have the necessary skills to meet the unique challenges of second language acquisition. Continuous professional development, trainer certification program and tutor program can improve the teaching ability of local educators and ensure them to adopt innovative and effective teaching technologies.

Obtaining suitable course materials and teaching resources is the foundation of successful language teaching. Developing suitable courses that meet the needs of Congolese students and obtaining teaching materials itself pose a series of challenges. Working with experienced educators, promoting open educational resources (OERs) and creating online learning platforms are practical steps to solve these problems and ensure a consistent and high-quality educational experience.

Cultural sensitivity in curriculum materials is a challenge that needs serious consideration. It is very important to strike a proper balance between cultural authenticity and sensitivity for students to accurately understand China culture without reinforcing stereotypes.

While meeting these challenges, the government must play an active role and provide support and resources for teacher training initiatives. Adequate funds, infrastructure construction and comprehensive policies are essential to maintain and expand Chinese education in the Republic of Congo.

In short, the challenge of training local Chinese teachers in the Republic of Congo is enormous, but it is not insurmountable. With the concerted efforts of government agencies, educational institutions and international partners, these challenges can be effectively addressed. By investing in training local Chinese teachers, the Republic of Congo can provide its educators with the skills and knowledge needed to provide high-quality Chinese education. In turn, this will open the door for strengthening cultural exchanges, economic opportunities and global contacts, and ultimately benefit individuals who pursue Chinese education and the whole society. As the world becomes more and more interconnected, the ability to communicate and understand its rich culture in Chinese will undoubtedly be a valuable asset for the Republic of Congo and its citizens.

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