PERCEPTION AND RECEPTION OF CHINESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: THE CASE OF NIGERIAN LEARNERS IN AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This paper examines the teaching and learning of Chinese language among learners in Ahmadu Bello University, highlighting their interests, perception of certain aspects of the language, their impression on teaching/methodology, use of online resources, their adjustments to learning a new language as well as their learning strategies and their readiness for learner autonomy.The learners were selected using a homogeneous random sampling. Copies of two questionnaires were distributed and data obtained was analyzed using SPSS package. Discussions and recommendations were made in the following areas: interest in languages, learning strategies, teaching methodology, classroom activities, learner autonomy, use of ICT and Chinese language learning Apps, recognition and learning of Chinese characters collaborative learning and speaking. Measures of improvement in these areas were suggested, including developing strategies for effective language acquisition.
Keywords: Chinese language, strategies, Chinese characters, speaking/orals, learner autonomy, classroom activities.

Introduction
In this era of technological advancement and globalization, one cannot downplay the importance of learning languages because languages go a long way in helping to communicate and to break down barriers among other benefits. Languages serve to facilitate mutual understanding between people be it in business, studies or any area in which humans venture. Therefore, the learning of foreign languages has become indispensable in today's evolving world. In Nigeria, learning foreign languages like French have been a very important part of the educational system almost at all levels. In recent years, the introduction of the Chinese language has given more diversity to the array of foreign languages to be taught and learnt in Nigeria. Due to China's emergence as a significant global power, the Chinese language has become important for economic cooperation and international communication. However, teaching and learning Chinese as a foreign language pose unique challenges to the learners. This paper addresses the issues faced by the Chinese language learners at the beginner level in Ahmadu Bello University. The paper investigates the particular challenges faced by these learners, their level of interest, their strategies, and overall impression about the language. Suggestions and recommendations are made for a more impactful teaching and learning of Chinese as a foreign language in Nigerian universities and other institutions of Chinese teaching and learning.

Brief review from existing related literature
Sung (2010) investigated language attitudes among American college students in Chinese classes. Sung discovered that there is a great increase in enrolment in Chinese and suggests that there is a need to be enlightened about students attitudes and challenges in order to be able to meet the language needs of the learners and maximize their learning process.

Aubrey H. Wang (2010) however, highlights that motivation and teacher effectiveness play a great role in alleviating challenges. Wang believes that although issues like ethnicity and environment play a big role in motivating students to learn languages, when the teacher is not effective it de-motivates the learners. He says that it is very important when teachers are effective and when they provide feedback during learning, it is less challenging for the learners.

Everson (2011), on the other hand, shows the importance of literacy development in Chinese as a foreign language. He stresses that learning to read and write in Chinese is a very challenging endeavor for the learners, because they are not alphabetic but logographic in nature and prove quite difficult for learners especially from English speaking background as in our case study. He suggests that native teachers be patient with learners from alphabetic reading backgrounds. He further states that expecting the students to master the Chinese characters quickly will be unrealistic. He suggests that some characters be written by memory but others should only be mastered for recognition alone. The use of PINYIN (spelling in English alphabets of Chinese sounds) is also very important.

Xu (2012) shifts her focus from the learner and concentrates on the teacher and his challenges. She contrasts the experience of teaching Chinese in China and in the United States. One of her major challenges was how free and outspoken the learners were and as compared to their more passive Chinese counterparts. She looks into ways of being able to teach the language effectively and still maintain class control. Ye(2012) also looks into the learning of characters and discovered how difficult it was to combine all the major parts of Chinese language learning(speaking, listening, and comprehensive grammar) and at the same time learn how to write characters. Therefore, she suggests that characters should be delayed until after a significant level of learning before they can be introduced, when the learner has acquired an important level in the beginner stage.

Theoretical framework
This paper is based on socio-constructivist theory that is founded on the principles and knowledge constructed by an active learner; that knowledge, in this instance, language is socially constructed. Constructivist knowledge is not transmitted from an expert or teacher to a passive recipient/learner. Rather, the results from the cognitive activity of the meaning-construction. The learner is engaged in the construction of mental representations of the material to which he or she is exposed, and makes sense of it. Knowledge therefore results from what is taken by the learner in the problem-solving activity, and for reflections on those actions. The main feature of constructivist theory is that it focuses on the learner taking responsibility for learning, actively participating in the learning process. The learning environment is always learner- centered.

Research Methodology
This study was conducted among learners of Chinese at the Department of French Ahmadu Bello University. Seventy-two (72) subjects comprising of both male and female students were selected using random homogeneous sampling. These subjects selected were students that took the Chinese course during the academic sessions between 2019 and 2024.

Being a quantitative research, questionnaires were administered to them and the data collected was analyzed using the SPSS package. Descriptive statistics were used to represent the results obtained. Each of the questionnaires had two major parts with 18

questions in each part making a total of 36 items. The questions were drawn on a likhert scale from most positive to most negative: that is from 6 to1 and 4 to 1 respectively. (see appendix)

Data analysis
Table 1 : Opinions of the respondents on learning Chinese as a foreign language

	Part 1	SA		A		SL A		SL D		D		SD			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	M	STD
1	Interested generally in Foreign Languages	58	80.6	11	15.3	3	4.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	5.76	.517
2	Interest in Chinese	34	47.2	26	36.1	8	11.1	3	4.2	0	0	1	1.4	5.22	.967
3	Chinese is difficult	6	8.3	13	18.1	11	15.3	15	20.8	17	23.6	10	13.9	3.25	1.545
4	Chinese should be taught in Nigeran schools	37	51.4	23	31.9	9	12.5	2	2.8	1	1.4	0	0	5.29	.895
5	Nigerans can learn chinese easily	23	31.9	21	29.2	18	25.0	6	8.3	1	1.4	3	4.2	4.69	1.274
6	Chinese characters are interesting to learn	25	34.7	29	40.3	9	12.5	4	5.6	3	4.2	2	2.8	4.88	1.233
7	Chinese characters are difficult to learn	5	6.9	13	18.1	24	33.3	10	13.9	14	19.4	6	8.3	3.54	1.394
8	Speaking Chinese is easy	11	15.3	18	25.0	26	36.1	10	13.9	1	1.4	0	0	4.21	1.198
9	Prefer PINYIN than writing Characters	33	45.8	18	25.0	13	18.1	5	6.9	2	2.8	1	1.4	5.00	1.187
10	Students can learn Chinese by themselves	11	15.3	10	13.9	22	30.6	8	11.1	9	12.5	12	16.7	3.58	1.651
11	teachers methods can hinder interest/understanding	49	68.1	16	22.2	2	2.8	1	1.4	4	5.6	0	0	5.39	1.262
12	French is easier than Chinese	26	36.1	12	16.7	12	16.7	10	13.9	6	8.3	6	8.3	4.33	1.661
13	Will take longer to learn Chinese than other languages	10	13.9	18	25.0	17	23.6	16	22.2	1	1.4	10	13.9	3.86	1.532
14	Use audio visual aids to enhance learning Chinese	10	13.9	18	25.0	17	23.6	16	22.2	1	1.4	10	13.9	5.69	.573
15	More speaking than other activities in language class	37	51.4	24	33.3	10	13.9	1	1.4	0	0	0	0	5.35	.772

Sn	Part 2	A		ST		R		N		Mean	STD
		F.	%	F.	%	F.	%	F.	%		
1	I have problems learning Chinese language	3	4.2	58	80.6	9	12.5	2	2.8	2.86	.512
2	I usually memorize Chinese characters in order to remember them	36	50.0	31	43.1	4	5.6	1	1.4	3.42	.666
3	I love it when a teacher revises what he/she has taught us	64	88.9	4	5.6	3	4.2	1	1.4	3.82	.565
4	I use the internet/websites to study on my own	23	31.9	38	52.8	8	11.1	3	4.2	3.12	.768
5	I enjoy studying/working in a group with my peers	37	51.4	30	41.7	5	6.9	0	0	3.44	.625
6	I forget new characters I learn	4	5.6	48	66.7	14	19.4	6	8.3	2.69	.705
7	I use my imagination to remember characters	34	47.2	31	43.1	5	6.9	2	2.8	3.35	.735
8	I speak Chinese outside the classroom with my Nigerian peers	8	11.1	36	50.0	19	26.4	9	12.5	2.60	.850
9	I memorize new characters I come across on my own	11	15.3	41	56.9	15	20.8	5	6.9	2.81	.781
10	I study on my own immediately after each lesson	16	22.2	40	55.6	16	22.2	0	0	3.00	.671
11	I learn things on my own outside what iam taught in class	23	31.9	37	51.4	9	12.5	3	4.2	3.11	.779
12	I watch Chinese TV/Movies	13	18.1	26	36.1	21	29.2	12	16.7	2.56	.977
13	The teacher asks me to write characters we have learnt several times	64	88.9	7	9.7	1	1.4	0	0	3.86	.454
14	I enjoy writing Chinese characters many times (over and over again)	30	41.7	28	38.9	12	16.7	2	2.8	3.19	.816
15	The internet and ICT (computers DVD'S etc) are indispensable learning Chinese	42	58.3	20	27.8	4	5.6	6	8.3	3.36	.924
16	I like it when we do speaking/role playing activities in class	57	79.2	13	18.1	2	2.8	0	0	3.74	.605
17	I practice what I have learnt with the native speakers of Chinese when I see them	7	9.7	15	20.8	14	19.4	36	50.0	1.90	1.050
18	I use a dictionary to check up new words/characters	25	34.7	24	33.3	11	15.3	12	16.7	2.86	1.079
19	I use applications on my mobile phone to learn Chinese	29	40.3	11	15.3	2	2.8	30	41.7	2.10	1.870

16	need to be more actively implicated in learning	60	83.3	6	8.83	5	6.9	1	1.4	0	0	0	0	5.74	.650
17	Curios about customs/culture of Chinese	26	36.1	27	37.5	12	16.7	3	4.2	4	5.6	0	0	4.94	1.099
18	Prefer speaking to other aspects of Chinese	16	22.2	21	29.2	20	27.8	7	9.7	5	6.9	3	4.2	4.38	1.347

1.SD :strongly disagree 2.D : Disagree 3.SLD:slightly disagree 4.SLA:slightly agree 5.A: agree 6.SA: strongly agree

Table 2: Opinions of the respondents on the learning Chinese as a foreign language

1. Never 2. Rarely 3. Sometimes 4. Always

Learning Chinese	N	Mean	S. D.	S. E.
Part 1	72	4.728	.31448	.03706
Part 2	72	3.198	.27196	.03205
Total	72			

From part one (1) of the data analysis that has to do with interest and general areas of the Chinese language, We were able to discover the following: All the learners (100%) show that they are generally interested in foreign languages and 94.4% were interested in Chinese language. 5.6% show that they are not interested in Chinese language. Majority of the learners (93.4%)feel that a teacher and his or her teaching methodology can make the students interested in the language or hinder interest and understanding of it. 58% of the learners believe that Chinese is not difficult while for 41.7% believe that Chinese is difficult.

While majority of the learners believe that Chinese language should be taught in Nigerian schools, 13.9% are of the opinion that Nigerians cannot easily learn Chinese language. When it comes to learning of Chinese characters, majority of the learners indicated that learning Chinese characters is very interesting but 58.3% of them still believe that learning Chinese characters is difficult. That is why majority of them (88.9%) indicated that they prefer writing in PINYIN (that is the transcription of sounds with alphabets) to writing Chinese characters. Majority of them (76.4%)also indicated that speaking the language is easy for them, no wonder 98.6 % of them indicated interest in having more speaking activities than other activities in class, because they (79.2%) prefer speaking to other aspects of the language.59.8% of them believe that students can learn Chinese by themselves while the rest of them (40.2%) believe that students cannot learn Chinese language by themselves. When compared to other languages, many of the learners (69.5%) believe that French is easier than Chinese and 62.5% of them believe that it would take a longer time to learn Chinese than languages like French, Spanish and German. Almost all of the learners (99.04%) believe that a student needs to be more actively implicated in his or her study of the language. 62.5% of the learners indicated that they would like to always use audio- visual aids to enhance their learning. 90.3% of them said that learning the language arouses their curiosity about the culture and customs of the Chinese people.

From part two (2) of the data analysis that has to do with strategies, learning habits and methodology, we were able to discover the following from the learners:

84.8% of the learners showed that they had problems learning the Chinese language generally. When it comes to learning of Chinese characters, 88.9% said that they always memorize the characters they're given in class while 5.6 said that they don't and then 27.7% indicated that they never forget the characters that they learned, while the majority,

66% of the learners forget characters they learn sometimes. Most of the learners use their imagination to learn characters, up to 90% of the learners in the indicated that. 71.9% of the learners said they memorize characters on their own, while 80.6% are positive about writing characters many times as assignments. 88.9% of the learners indicated that they enjoy it when the teacher revises with them what they are taught in class and they also said that the teacher gives them characters to write many times as assignment. 84.7% indicated that they use websites on their own to learn Chinese without being asked and 86.1% indicated that the internet and ICT are indispensable when it comes learning Chinese language. Majority of the learners indicated that they usually learn on their own immediately they are being taught after each class 22.2% indicated always 155.6% indicated sometimes. 83% indicated that they learn things on their own outside what they're being taught in class.

When it comes to speaking 97.3% indicated that they like speaking and role playing games in class. 11.1% indicated that they always speak Chinese to their Nigerian peers while 50% of the learners indicated that the only do that sometimes. Only 19.4% of the learners indicated that they speak Chinese to native speakers of Chinese when they meet them but 50% of the learners said that they have never spoken to any native speaker of Chinese.

18.1% of the learners said they always watch Chinese TV and movies, 36.1% indicated that they sometimes watch Chinese TV and movies, while16.7% indicated that they never do. 68% of the learners said that they used dictionaries to help them in their study of Chinese. 40.3% of the learners indicated that they use applications on their mobile phones in learning Chinese while 15.3% said that they sometimes use applications on their phones, but 41.7% never use applications on their phone and this is a high percentage.

Discussion
The discussions from our findings are organised under the following categories:

1. **Learning Foreign languages**: we observe that the learners are generally interested in learning foreign languages, and they like the Chinese language specifically but we also observe that they still have some sort of difficulty and problems in learning the language.

2. **Speaking / oral practice**: from our analysis we discovered that the learners enjoy speaking Chinese language and most of them attested that Chinese language is easy they also manifested the need for having more speaking activities in the class than other activities we also realized that many of them are interested in practicing the Chinese language with their appears but little or none of them speak with native speakers.

3. **Chinese characters**: (recognition and writing) Chinese characters constitute a very significant part of the language and have to be mastered for success in the language. Most of the learners believe that learning Chinese characters is very interesting but they still find them difficult. Many of them prefer using the PINYIN than the character characters most of the time. A majority of the learners welcome writing characters many times in order to properly identify and master them. A good number of them forget the characters they learn but many of them memorize characters to be able to retain them and others also use their imagination to learn the characters and these are very good strategies for Chinese language learning.

speaking with native speakers is very important. They can use social media, and there are also sites where they can chat and make live video calls with native speakers and this will give them the boost and confidence they need to progress in the language.

- Classroom activities have to be dynamic and group/collaborative activities and speaking/role playing activities should be encouraged. Team competitions are also important. Popular chinese songs can also be explored in the classroom. The learners can download these songs, listen to them individually or do activities in class based on these songs.

- Self learning strategies should be encouraged, like individual character practice time, using applications on their own, reviewing their lessons on their own, exploring new areas on their own, without the teacher's guidance. These will foster learner autonomy among the students and they will be able to take a more active role in their learning of the chinese language.

- For further research we propose that the students responses be compared the old students who studied Chinese four years ago and the ones that studied it within the last two years to see the difference in outlook and performance, to ascertain if the learners/ teaching styles have evolved or not. Another aspect is to take a survey of Chinese learners who are not learners of foreign languages and compare their output to see if learning another foreign language has an impact on the learning of Chinese or not.

- Lastly, to ensure positive results in the teaching and learning of Chinese as a foreign language in Nigeria, the following measures can be considered; along side with the collaborative learning, technology based and enhanced learning, language and cultural immersion and teacher training/development can be introduced. These will improve the capacity and efficacy of Chinese as a foreign language in Nigeria, which in turn can foster further cultural, educational and economic ties with China.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire on learning Chinese as a foreign language

*to be filled by Nigerian learners of Chinese as a foreign language.

I.   circle the appropriate answer:
1. Age group: 18-20   21-22   23-24   25 & above

2. Sex: MALE   FEMALE

II.circle the appropriate number corresponding to your response.

6=strongly **agree**	5=**agree**	4=slightly **agree**	3=slightly **disagree**	2=**disagree**	1=strongly **disagree**

Example: Music is interesting to me. If you really like music then you would circle 6

1.	I am interested generally in foreign languages.	6	5	4	3	2	1
2.	I am interested in Chinese language.	6	5	4	3	2	1
3.	I believe Chinese is a difficult language.	6	5	4	3	2	1
4.	I think Chinese should be encouraged and taught in Nigerian schools.	6	5	4	3	2	1
5.	I think Nigerians can easily learn Chinese language.	6	5	4	3	2	1
6.	Chinese characters are interesting to learn.	6	5	4	3	2	1
7.	Chinese characters are difficult to learn.	6	5	4	3	2	1
8.	Speaking Chinese language is quite easy.	6	5	4	3	2	1
9.	I prefer to use PINYIN (transcription of sounds with alphabet) than writing the characters.	6	5	4	3	2	1
10.	Students can learn Chinese language by themselves.	6	5	4	3	2	1
11.	Teachers/teaching methods can hinder interest/ understanding of the language.	6	5	4	3	2	1
12.	French language is easier than Chinese.	6	5	4	3	2	1
13.	It will take a longer time to learn Chinese than other languages like Spanish, French and German.	6	5	4	3	2	1
14.	I would like to use audio-visual aids to enhance my learning of Chinese.	6	5	4	3	2	1
15.	There should be more of speaking in a language class than other activities.	6	5	4	3	2	1
16.	A language student needs to be more actively implicated in his /her learning process.	6	5	4	3	2	1
17.	Learning Chinese makes me curious about the culture/customs of the Chinese people	6	5	4	3	2	1
18.	I prefer speaking Chinese than other aspects of the language.	6	5	4	3	2	1

III. Circle the appropriate number corresponding to your response

4= **Always**	3=**sometimes**	2=rarely	1=**Never**

Ex: I go to the gym on weekends. If you don't, then you would circle 1.

1.	I have problems learning Chinese language.	4	3	2	1
2.	I usually memorize Chinese characters in order to remember them.	4	3	2	1
3.	I love it when a teacher revises what he/she has taught us.	4	3	2	1
4.	I use the Internet/websites to study on my own.	4	3	2	1
5.	I enjoy studying/working in a group with my peers	4	3	2	1
6.	I forget new characters I learn.	4	3	2	1
7.	I use my imagination to remember characters.	4	3	2	1
8.	I speak Chinese outside the classroom with my Nigerian peers.	4	3	2	1
9.	I memorize new characters I come across on my own.	4	3	2	1
10.	I study on my own immediately after each lesson.	4	3	2	1
11.	I learn things on my own outside what I am taught in class.	4	3	2	1
12.	I watch Chinese TV/Movies	4	3	2	1
13.	The teacher asks me to write characters we have learnt several times.	4	3	2	1
14	I enjoy writing Chinese characters many times. (over and over again)	4	3	2	1
15.	The Internet and ICT (computers, DVD's etc) are indispensible in learning Chinese.	4	3	2	1
16.	I like it when we do speaking/role playing activities in class	4	3	2	1
17.	I practice what I have learnt with the native speakers of Chinese when I see them.	4	3	2	1
18.	I use a dictionary to check up new words/characters.	4	3	2	1

Thank you very much, for your co-operation: samayaros@yahoo.co.uk