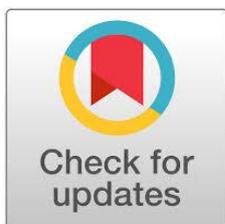


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Ghanaian Chinese Language Learners' Perception of Chinese Characters

Bright Nkrumah^{*)}, Raymond Asamoah

University of Ghana, Ghana

^{*)}Corresponding author email: bnkrumah@ug.edu.gh

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Abstract

This paper investigated students' perception of learning Chinese characters at the University of Ghana. The Chinese writing system is an exclusive indispensable script that forms part of the Chinese culture. However, the complexity, forms, strokes, pronunciation, radicals, and orthography structure of the characters makes it difficult for Ghanaian students to learn the Chinese language. A qualitative and quantitative design was used for the study. Of 338 students, 183 participated in the study from the first to the fourth year. Purposive sampling was used to select the students to respond to the questionnaire and share their opinions about the Chinese characters in interviews. The findings showed that (a) reading and writing of the Chinese characters were perceived to be more difficult than speaking. (b) the Chinese character radicals, forms, remembering of strokes, orders, numbers, and the orthography structure of the Chinese characters were a hurdle for Chinese language learners. Suggestions were made to urge students to cultivate the habit of consistently practicing the characters through collective participation and learning. The language learners need to do away with excuses, fear, and make-believe obstructions and spend more time in the learning process to enhance their skills in the Chinese writing system.

Keywords: University of Ghana; Chinese Learners; Chinese characters; perception

Introduction

Due to China's position as a major economic force, non-native speakers worldwide desire to learn Chinese as a second foreign language (Wang, Maloney, & Li, 2013). Learning Chinese as a second language will expand one's opportunities (Gong, Lai, & Gao, 2020). It simply means being equipped with the value-added tools and skills needed to adapt to the job market and preparing to meet current and future trends. This fact is illustrated by increasing enrollments of non-native speakers in Chinese Foreign Language (CFL) courses and admission to the Chinese Proficiency Test: Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK), the national standardized test of Chinese language proficiency for non-native speakers (Qi & Lemmer, 2014; Kuo et al., 2015; Nel et al., 2019; Nkrumah & Darko, 2020; Mbugua & Iraki, 2022; Yang, 2022). The University of Ghana started teaching the Chinese language as a major, combination, and minor program in September 2009. Irrespective of how to enthuse students towards learning the language, the characteristics of the language are often perceived as one of the most difficult components of the language by the learners, especially those with alphabetic first-language (L1) backgrounds (Gao, 2020; Lin et al., 2022).

Chinese is a logophonetic or logographic language, meaning that each script represents meaning and sound (Gao, 2020). However, dialectology attests to the fact that the features of the Chinese language are unique, with different scripts or styles than any other alphabetic language. Linguists have pointed out that Chinese writing (characters) is one of the main characteristics that completely differ from other languages like English (Hu, 2010; Huang, 2000; Shen, 2004; Shu, 2003). Due to its linguistic significance and difficulties in learning, character learning has received considerable attention in CFL/CSL research since its onset. Ghana is not exceptional among the countries such as Botswana, Kenya, and Nigeria, which are learning the Chinese language in Africa (Nkrumah & Darko, 2020; Mbugua & Iraki, 2022). With the rapid increase in the number of Chinese learners worldwide (Kuo et al., 2015), the Chinese characters remain a major part of the learning process that discourages most students from learning or performing better in the language (Lin et al., 2022).

More than one hundred articles have been published in English or Chinese to probe this topic (Gao, 2020). Regardless, little is known about this issue regarding how language learners

in Ghana perceive the characters. Therefore, the study aims to investigate students' perception of learning Chinese characters at the University of Ghana.

Literature Review

Chinese Characters

The phrase "Chinese character" typically denotes what is currently referred to as Chinese characters. Most words in contemporary Chinese are compounds. Two or three monosyllabic morphemes are combined to generate these words (Hsu, 2012). In the Chinese writing system, each morpheme may be distinguished as a distinct written character with a distinct meaning. It is possible to infer a composite character's meaning from its morphemes or characters (Hsiang et al., 2022). Chinese characters come in a genuinely enormous variety, yet there are far fewer of them that are employed often. Approximately 3,800 common Chinese characters are enough to cover 99.90% of Chinese reading materials (Perfetti & Zhang, 1995; Hsiang et al., 2021). Two thousand five hundred (2500) characters are listed as the most commonly used characters in modern Chinese (Lou & Wang, 1987), and this number makes up 97.97 percent of the reading materials in that language. Another 1,000 characters were identified as the second most frequently used characters and make up 1.51 percent of the reading materials in that language, meaning that 3,000 to 4,000 characters cover nearly 99.64 percent to 99.90 percent of all general reading materials (Graham, 2018).

It has always been difficult for learners to understand the distinctive Chinese writing system, especially for those whose mother language uses the Roman alphabet (Graham, 2019). Each Chinese character represents a word or morpheme, but for beginning students, it is nearly difficult to distinguish the pronunciation from the character's structural characteristics (Schleicher & Everson, 2005; Graham, 2019; Hsiang et al., 2022). Everyone agrees that "pictographs" were the ancestors of Chinese characters (DeFrancis, 1984; Hsiang et al., 2021). This common name implies that the fundamental building blocks of Chinese writing are separated images and sounds. However, many other experts limit this classification to the oldest Chinese characters. Ideography is a different word that is frequently used. This phrase refers to written signals conveying abstract and tangible ideas without considering sound for certain people (DeFrancis, 1984; Wang & Leland, 2011; Hsiang et al., 2018). Another well-known

category of the Chinese language is the “logographic” language, which refers to a word-representation graph. According to others, “syllable and character constitute at most not a word but a morpheme” (the smallest unit of meaning), which is defined by a variation of the logographic notion known as “morphographic” (DeFrancis, 1984, p.72; Ho & Siegel, 2016).

Chinese characters are therefore referred to be a “morpheme-syllable writing system” by Mori (1998). Researchers asserted that a Chinese word is a syllable when spoken and a character when written. The Chinese writing system uses morpho-syllabic symbols with “deep” orthography. Chen et al. (2011) wrote, “the relationship between the written symbol and spoken sound is irregular and unsystematic. “In conclusion, although academics may hold varying ideas regarding their perceptions of the Chinese language, all of the mentioned terms accurately capture the essence of Chinese from various perspectives (Hsiang et al., 2022) because Chinese characters are descended from pictographs. The consensus among experts on the subject is that all writing began with the creation of pictures, if not quite in that order (Gelb, 1963; Kong, 2020). Numerous non-pictographic characters were created using pictograms to replace words for abstract ideas and improve writing effectiveness. Chinese scholar Xu Shen originally categorized the numerous character kinds, classifying the script into six groups in his etymological dictionary *Shuōwén jiězì*, (说文解字) (DeFrancis, 1984, pp. 79): (a) Pictographic characters (象形字, xiàngxíng zì); (b) Ideographic characters (指事字, zhǐ shì zì); (c) Logical aggregates (会意字, huìyì zì); (d) Semanticphonetic compounds (形声字, xíng shēng zì); (e) Associate Transformation (转注字, zhuǎnzhù zì); (f) Borrowing (假借字, jiǎjiè zì).

Pictographic characters (象形字, xiàngxíng zì). The fact that pictograms only make up a small part of Chinese characters, in stark contrast to the widespread perception that pictograms make up the majority of Chinese characters, is one of the most remarkable aspects of this category (Hsu, 2012). Only 4% of characters are said to have fallen into this group. 日 for “sun,” 月 for “moon,” and 木 for “tree” are a few examples.

Ideographic characters (指事字, zhǐ shì zì). Simple indicative, simple ideograph and ideographic letters are other names for ideographic symbols. These characters either directly portray abstract ideas or add markers to pictographs to give them new interpretations (Hsu,

2012). The characters 一 for “one,” 二 for “two,” and 三 for “three” serve to demonstrate this. Other frequent instances are 上 “above” and 下 “below” in the language.

Logical aggregates (会意字, huìyì zì). Associative compounds can also be interpreted as logical aggregates. To represent abstract ideas, the characters in this set are all multi- or compound-element graphs. The combination of the pictographs 日 “sun” and 月 “moon” forms “bright,” 明 which is typically regarded as signifying the union of the sun and moon as the natural source of light, is a well-known example of this group (Hsu, 2012). Another common example is the creation of the word 林 “forest” by combining two pictograms of the word “tree” 木.

Semantic-phonetic compounds (形声字, xíng shēng zì). This category, often known as pictophonetic or phono-semantic compounds, includes most of the characters used in contemporary Chinese (Hsu, 2012; Kim, 2020). Approximately 90% of characters fit this description. “Phonetic” and “semantic” elements are combined to create a new character. The term “phonetic element,” as defined by DeFrancis (1984), often refers to a syllable of sound. The “semantic element” proposed by DeFrancis (1984) is a crucial classifier or radical that reflects the character’s overall meaning. Examples include 河 “river,” 湖 “lake,” and 流 “stream.” All of these characters have a radical of three dots on the left, which is a condensed picture of a water drop, suggesting that all of these symbols have a semantic relationship to water; the indications on the right are phonetic.

(Zhuanzhuzi) Associate transformation. These kinds of characters are uncommon. This category is frequently left out or mixed with other groups in contemporary systems (Hsu, 2012). A well-known example in this category is the separation of the terms 考 “to test” and 老 “old,” which once had the same character meaning as “elderly person” but later became two distinct words with different connotations.

Borrowing (假借字, jiǎjiè zì). Word borrowing is also known as phonetic loan characters. This category is known for using existing characters to represent unrelated words with similar pronunciations; occasionally, the original meaning is lost (Hsu, 2012). For example, the

character 自, which originally meant nose, now signifies oneself; the character 萬, which originally meant spider but is now used to mean 10,000.

Learners' Perception of Chinese Characters

More individuals are encouraged to study Mandarin because of China's rapidly expanding economy, yet many struggles with the language's challenging characters and give up (Nel et al., 2019). Students of the Chinese language find it difficult to recall the shape, sound, and meaning of the characters as they are not densely integrated. According to research by Yang (2022), one of the difficulties students have when learning Chinese is the sheer volume of characters that must be learned with their pronunciations, orthographic forms, and meanings. Students often discuss how difficult it is to write in the proper stroke order when practicing. Students agree that practicing writing, using radicals and orthographic hints, reviewing flashcards, and engaging in interactive activities are good learning methods.

The traditional Chinese character system exhibits a higher level of intricacy, making it one of the most aesthetically complex writing systems (Yang & Wang, 2018). Insufficient exposure to Chinese characters leads to a high forgetting rate, confusion of the characters, and the improper use of Chinese characters (Lin et al., 2022). According to (Nkrumah & Darko, 2020), the perception of the Chinese characters being difficult depends on learners' general attitude toward the language. However, Chinese characters with radicals and less visual complexity tend to be easier to acquire than characters without radicals and with greater visual complexity regardless of learners' perception (Kuo et al., 2015). The Chinese language is entirely dissimilar from the English language, which essentially does not adopt the alphabetic approach, but the Chinese use a logographic language system. Learning Chinese characters is more difficult when there is no relationship between a character and its pronunciation. 2011 (Sung & Wu). Chinese characters consist of various patterns of strokes that, to some extent, reflect the meanings of the words by replicating the real objects in the world, unlike alphabetic languages where the word sound may be derived from the spelling (Li, 1996). As stated by (Lin et al., 2010), some strokes have extremely minute distinctions; for instance, '未' and '末' can only be

recognized by the lengths of their two horizontal lines. The radicals of Chinese characters are combined with additional components to create the characters.

Additionally, since characters have the same phonetic components but have distinct radicals, their pronunciations may appear to be different from one another. Zhang (2011), for instance, characters with radicals “氵” and “亻” suggested that they are primarily connected to water and human psychology, respectively. This fact brings about huge complexities in studying the Chinese characters as a lot of effort and time is needed to ponder on recalling and memorizing what the components and strokes add to each character. According to (Lee & Kalyuga, 2011), this activity is cognitively challenging for students who have little or no prior understanding of the strokes and elements of characters before studying more characters because a slight change in the character stroke might affect the meaning of the characters or result in a writing mistake. To become completely literate in Chinese, students must remember and master many Chinese characters (Sung & Wu, 2011). 3000 Chinese characters are widely used and may be found in 99 percent of written Chinese documents, according to Wong, Li, Xu, and Zhang (2010). These parodies of Chinese characters demonstrate the importance of certain information to explain the purpose of the Chinese language. For instance, the character 爸/bà with the first tone denotes “father,” whereas 拔 / bá with the second tone denotes “pull out.” Therefore, mastering Chinese tonal knowledge is necessary for understanding and speaking Chinese (Liu et al., 2011).

Chinese language students have also been taught Hanyu Pinyin, which may help students with character pronunciation and character input in mobile technology. The most significant study on character learning procedures was undertaken by Shen (2005) with 95 university-level non-native speakers ranging from beginning to advanced learners. The study found eight underlying psychological elements represented by 30 widely employed methods at all levels. Shen categorized 25 as cognitive methods (such as making connections with previously taught Characters) and five as metacognitive tactics (such as reviewing before class) out of 30. However, for learners to contribute to character writing, they must be literate or have a particular number of characters mastered, which is difficult for them. As stated by (Sung, 2014), to apply the appropriate characters in a given situation, learners must understand character traits well.

Method

This study employed the mixed method technique, combining a qualitative and quantitative approach to collecting and analyzing data (Creswell & Hirose, 2019). By paying attention to both the feature and the pervasiveness of the case, researchers may perform high-quality research using the mixed approach. Therefore, considering the issue under investigation, it was more suitable to identify a theme in the data that addressed the shortcomings of both methodologies (quantitative and qualitative). A single technique for research design would not have been able to produce a more sophisticated knowledge of some phenomena, which is the goal of the mixed-method approach.

Population

A researcher refers to the population as the whole group of study participants with particular qualities that are of interest to them when referring to the study's findings (Indu and Vidhukumar, 2020). All students at the University of Ghana studying Chinese were included in the study population (students from year 1, year 2, year 3, and year 4). Therefore, 338 people made up the study's population. These individuals were enrolled in every subject acceptable for study in a program for learning Chinese. The fact that each participant entered from a different year at the university allowed for various perspectives on how they saw learning a second language.

Sampling

For the study's objective, purposive sampling was employed to develop the data sample of the research study under discussion. The sampling was based on the researchers' insights. A sampling design refers to the approach used to select a sample from a target population. Target sampling was used because the researchers selected respondents based on their peculiar characteristics, such as program of study and knowledge of the Chinese language proficiency. Of a total of 338 participants, 183 students participated in the survey, comprising 97 male students

from year one, year two, year three, and year four, constituting 53.1% of the total correspondents. Eighty-six (86) were female students from the various years; year one, year two, year three, and year four comprised 46.9% of the total correspondents. The overall research plan of the mixed method used incorporated the deployment of questionnaires and interview guides for the study. As such, 40 respondents were interviewed, while the remaining 143 were given questionnaires to gather data for the study. The interview session was conducted in a focus group setting, where the researchers moderated the discussion to obtain the necessary answers needed to answer the questions.

Background Information of Respondents

Table 1. Respondent Gender

Group	Number	Age	Gender	
			M	F
Year 1	20	18-19	16	14
Year 2	25	20-21	19	17
Year 3	45	22-23	25	25
Year 4	53	23-25	37	30
Total	183		97	86

Sampling Size

The study's sample size was determined from the population using a 95% confidence level according to a formula propounded by Cochran (1963). The population size was the total number of students at the University of Ghana. Therefore:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

where n =required sample size

N =population size

E =Error

$e = 100 - 95 / 100 = 0.05$, using a population size of 338

$$n = \frac{338}{1 + (338)(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{338}{1.85}$$

$$n = 182.7027$$

$$n = 183$$

Hence, a sample size of 183 respondents was selected for the study.

Primary data

Primary and secondary data were used in the research to solicit information from first-hand articles, journals, and relevant books and distribute questionnaires to the students. Primary and secondary inputs provided direct access to the research study of the people and the phenomena.

Data collection tools

When conducting research, there was a need to have tools that would help collect data. Open-ended questionnaires and interview guides were used to gather information on the Ghanaian students' perceptions of the Chinese characters at the University of Ghana. A questionnaire is a survey instrument used to gather data from participants for the research study. Using the two data collection instruments allowed the researchers to properly understand and address the problem.

Data analysis

Data analysis compresses large amounts of data and presents results to answer research questions and understand research goals (Smith, 2018). The qualitative part of the interview was explained using thematic structure analysis. This structure allows researchers to minimize the data for the study using case and code analysis (Lucani, 2019). First, the data was transcribed. The data transcribed was then evaluated manually using the edifice framework analysis by retaliating to the research study objectives to ensure that the research data analysis procedure was systematic. The quantitative aspects of the research were assessed using version 26 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency table, mean and standard deviation. Questionnaires: (1) What is your perception of the Chinese characters? (2) What is the importance of learning the Chinese Characters? (3) What are the difficulties in learning the Chinese characters? (4) What are some interesting things you came across when learning the Chinese Characters? (5) What strategies can be used to improve Chinese character learning?

Analysis of the questionnaire

Table 2. Perception of the Chinese characters

Item	(N=143)	Percent
The participant rated Chinese characters to be difficult in general	34	24%
Chinese characters are magical	32	22.3%
Recognition of Chinese characters is easier than writing	30	20.9%
Matching the pronunciation of words with Chinese characters is very easy	25	17.5%
Chinese character is easier to read and write than to speak and understand	22	15.3%

Source: Field Data, 2022

Since the purpose of this study was to investigate the student's perception of Chinese characters, as far as learning the language was concerned, it was, therefore, prudent that the researcher first and foremost seeks the opinion of the respondents on the characters, whether they are difficult to learn or not. To this effect, 34(24%) participants generally rated Chinese characters as difficult. However, some of the students 30 (20.9%) also saw the recognition of letters as easier than writing. Irrespective, it was easier to match the pronunciation of the words as 25 (17.5%) respondents agreed to this. Finally, the remaining 22 (15.3%) students perceived that Chinese character was easier to read and write than to speak and understand.

Table 3. Difficulties in learning Chinese characters

Item	Mean	Std deviation
Chinese Character writing system	4.202	.982
Reading	4.007	1.141
Grammar (sentence order)	4.076	1.041
Pronunciation	3.867	1.182
Vocabulary	3.741	.668

Source: Field Data, 2022

Writing Chinese characters is the most difficult as this skill recorded the highest mean of 4.202 with a standard deviation of 0.982. Writing the characters is the most difficult because of all the parameters of learning the Chinese characters, such as reading, writing, and pronunciation, followed by grammar. From Table 2, the second highest difficulty students encounter in their quest to acquire knowledge of the Chinese language is grammar (Mean=4.07, SD=1.041). The reading of the characters is also considered a

problem. This challenge is not as pressing as grammar and writing, as this skill obtained the third highest mean value (Mean=4.007, SD=1.141). The table also indicates that pronunciation is a little manageable on the spectrum of difficulty learning the characters as it had (mean=3.887, SD=1.82). The item that is not deemed difficult is vocabulary (mean=3.741, SD=0.668).

Table 4. The importance of learning Chinese character

Item	Mean	Std deviation
It improves students' proficiency in the Chinese learning	4.776	.6962
It helps students to be acquainted with basic writing rules (for example, the Chinese strokes order).	4.622	.8119
Learning Chinese characters allows students to understand the historical evolution of the Chinese	4.797	.7650
It helps students to learn more about the character components (radicals)	4.671	.8029
Speakers of Chinese are very knowledgeable	4.720	.7908

Source: Field Data, 2022

The importance of learning the characters manifests in allowing students to understand the historical evolution of Chinese, with the highest mean score of 4.797 and a standard deviation of .7650. Another benefit of learning the characters is that it improves students' proficiency in overall Chinese learning, as this recorded a mean of 4.776 and a standard deviation of 0.6962. Speakers of Chinese are knowledgeable (Mean=4.720, SD=.7908). It also helps students to learn more about the character components (radicals) as this had a mean of 4.720 and a standard deviation of .7908.

Notwithstanding the difficulty in learning the Chinese characters, the students have learned interesting aspects by trying to master the characters presented in Table 4. The students have learned about the Chinese radicals. Thirty-three (33) of them, representing 23.1%, have learned the radicals in their attempt to learn the characters. Interestingly, 30 (21%) of them have discovered the uniqueness of the Chinese writing system through learning the characters. Twenty-nine (29) (20.3%) students have also learned a lot about the uniqueness of the strokes and the stroke order. Twenty-six (26)

(18.2%) and 25 (17.4%) have learned about the dialects of the Chinese language and the uniqueness of homophones, homonyms, and homographs, respectively.

Table 5. Interesting aspects found in learning Chinese character

Item	(N=143)	Percent
Chinese radicals	33	23.1%
Chinese writing system	30	21%
The uniqueness of the strokes and the stroke order	29	20.3%
The dialects of the Chinese language	26	18.2%
The uniqueness of homophones, homonyms, and homographs	25	17.4%

Source: Field Data, 2022

Table 6. Strategies to improve the learning of Chinese characters

Items	Mean	Std deviation
By doing away with excuses and anxiety when learning Chinese characters	4.776	.7729
Participating in all class quizzes	4.580	.8171
Reading: Using multiple sources (e.g., workbooks, textbooks, and teaching slides to improve the grammar knowledge	4.734	.7867
Consistent handwriting practice of the Chinese characters and memorization every day	4.839	.7473
Reviewing flashcards	4.650	.8071

Source: Field Data, 2022

As a way of helping deal with the difficulty that comes with learning the characters, most of the respondents agree that they will improve their knowledge of the characters by Consistent handwriting practice of the Chinese characters and memorization every day. This strategy recorded the highest mean of 4.839 and a standard deviation of 0.7473. Doing away with excuses and anxiety when learning Chinese characters also has the propensity to help with the difficulty of learning the Chinese language. This strategy recorded the second highest mean of 4.77 and a standard deviation of 0.7729. Reading: Using multiple sources (e.g., workbooks, textbooks, and teaching slides to improve grammar knowledge is noted to be a good strategy as this had

(mean=4.734, SD=.7867). Reviewing flashcards as a strategy for managing the challenge of the Chinese characters had the fourth highest score (mean=4.650, SD=.8071). Participating in all class quizzes is also seen as a strategy as this recorded the least mean of 4.580, with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.8171.

Analysis of the Interviews

Perception of the Chinese characters

An interview is a crucial research tool, in part because skilled, sensitive, and perceptive interviews produce a rich set of accounts of the interviewee's experiences, knowledge, ideas, and impression (Coleman, 2019) and make it easier to understand people's private and public lives, as well as their thoughts and emotions (Coleman, 2019). Forty students from year one to year four were interviewed on their perception of learning Chinese characters. About thirty-five believed that Chinese characters were hard to learn and write. These respondents could not be described as anything short of negative. Twenty of them explained that those skills made it extremely difficult to pass their quizzes and exams to further elaborate on this finding. The remaining five thought recognizing Chinese characters is easier than reading and writing. All 40 respondents confessed that Chinese characters used multiple strategies to represent the language's words. On this account, they easily forgot the characters right after learning. However, they agreed that learning the characters demanded time, consistent practice, and patience.

Difficulties in learning Chinese characters

All forty students raised concerns about the difficulties encountered while learning the Chinese characters as their major problem. Some students were, however, of the view that the Chinese writing system was boring and time degenerative. Forming simple sentences using the characters was impossible as only ten out of the forty respondents could do it. More than half of them did not find difficulty when it came to the pronunciation of the characters. However, the correction tonation was something they struggled with because they are foreign learners of the language. Regarding some

Chinese characters and their attached radical structures, some students were concerned that the radicals made the characters complex to identify.

The importance of learning Chinese character learning

Despite the challenges that confront the learners because of how difficult the characters are to learn and master, twenty-seven students revealed that writing the characters in the right order helped them memorize the words' structure and meaning. Twenty of them would not hide the joy of the characters helping them better understand the cultural context of the Chinese language. All forty respondents believed that learning the characters made them more intelligent and better understand and write correctly in other languages like English.

Interesting aspects found in learning Chinese characters

The results showed the students an in-depth understanding of Chinese radicals. Through consistent learning, fifteen got a deeper knowledge of the Chinese writing system and the stroke order. The homophones, homonyms, and homographs became easy to recognize from the opinion of the fifteen.

Strategies to improve the learning of Chinese characters

Through the focus group discussion, thirty-five students commented that having an interest in the Chinese course and consistent practice was a positive, motivating factor that should not be overlooked. Notwithstanding these, the University of Ghana students suggested that the lecturers give more assignments to help them improve their character writing skills and knowledge of the Chinese characters. The interview lasted for 15 minutes.

Discussions

This study examined the Ghanaian students' perception of learning Chinese characters. The researchers designed the scope of work to understand why students of the University of Ghana find it so challenging and have difficulties with Chinese characters. Secondly, among reading, speaking, and writing, which one do students find most demanding?

Firstly, a significant number of the students of the University of Ghana found difficulties in learning Chinese characters in general. More than 80 percent (80%) said identifying Chinese characters was difficult, and reading and writing the Chinese language were all perceived to be more difficult than speaking and understanding it. Chinese characters are not equivalent to words. More than 90 percent (90%) of the respondents illustrated that identifying Chinese characters was easier than writing the characters. Chinese characters are considered unique (Liu et al., 2006), although there is little agreement among many English speakers about how difficult Chinese characters are to read. The attitudes and views of learners about studying Mandarin were investigated in research by Yin and Abdullah (2014). Purposive sampling and questionnaires were utilized in this study's quantitative field research to gather information. Seventy-four (74) students from Universiti Malaysia Kelantan participated in the sample.

The results showed that most respondents appeared to have favorable opinions regarding Mandarin, as seen by their readiness to recommend the course to their friends and commitment to keep learning it even after graduating. However, most students experienced anxiety while studying Mandarin. So, contrary to what they said, the anxiety they experienced during language instruction had no evident impact on their ability to learn the language. This study finding agreed with students who perceived the Chinese characters to be difficult to learn. In another study by Lin et al. (2022), the challenges of the characters of the language lead to students easily forgetting the characters. A qualitative, eight-week case study described and analyzed a particular group of learners' difficulties and coping strategies within their specific contexts (Huang, 2000). The study results indicated that depending on several variables. Students may experience different difficulties in learning the characters and adopt different coping strategies for even the same difficulty.

Furthermore, the researchers were keen to examine the perception of the merits or the importance of the Chinese language. It was obtained from the respondents that; the Chinese

language improved one's skills in Chinese depending on the effort. Per the students' views, students that could speak the Chinese language became more knowledgeable. The respondents were geared towards learning to write Chinese characters and did not perceive that as boring. They also emphasized character components as being essentially important when studying Chinese entirely. Hence, the respondents believed that Chinese people stressed the relevance of learning Chinese characters. On the aspects of students' perception of effective approaches to learning Chinese characters, most participants said studying a new character of the Chinese language helped to recognize its parts. Shen (2010) found that "beginning learners..... considered radical knowledge to be a help in learning characters" (p. 60).

Similarly, Xiang (1995) revealed that in teaching commonly used characters, knowledge of phonetic components did not help much with pronunciation leading to students suggesting that studying Chinese characters involved a lot of handwriting practice and memorization. However, the respondents believed that creating imaginative visualizations and finding a connection between the new character and the previously learned characters improved studying Chinese characters. Hence, a significant number of the respondents were of the view that learning a new character enabled the story of the characters to help) in memorizing the characters as for making up stories. Furthermore, the participants who participated in the interview raised concerns about the difficulties encountered while learning the Chinese characters as their major problems. The students also emphasized reading and writing characters as time-consuming tasks. The students at the University of Ghana still showed their gratitude and assurance in learning characters, particularly in writing. Finally, the University of Ghana students emphatically stated that to be more accustomed to the characters, one needs to practice more and be interested in the subject. Students' perception of the Chinese characters will alert educators on how best to open windows and approaches to developing the Chinese characters.

Conclusion and Implication

After carefully examining the data collected and its analysis, the general perception of learning the Chinese characters was seen as difficult. The participant rated Chinese characters to be difficult in general. Writing Chinese characters was the most difficult as this recorded the highest mean of 4.202 with a standard deviation of 0.982. The importance of learning the

characters manifested in allowing students to understand the historical evolution of Chinese. The students have learned about the Chinese radicals. Consistent handwriting practice of Chinese characters and memorization daily would improve their knowledge of the characters. This strategy recorded the highest mean of 4.839 and a standard deviation of 0.7473. There was much evidence pinpointing the key challenges associated with the University of Ghana's students regarding Chinese language characters. Most students have significant and serious issues, challenges, or difficulties with Chinese characters.

Recommendations

Chinese language lecturers should guide students to notice the connections between different characters, such as the characters' complexity, forms, radicals, and orthography structure. Also, students should be allowed to visualize the Chinese characters to memorize them effectively and efficiently. Individuals or students should be encouraged by their lecturers to spend more time and attention on Chinese characters to help ease their learning issues. Constant practice of reading and writing the characters can greatly help achieve desired results of learning Chinese characters.

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