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A SURVEY ON THE CURRENT SITUATION OF TEACHING SPOKEN CHINESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN KAZAKHSTAN: A CASE STUDY OF THE INTERNATIONAL KAZAKH-CHINESE LANGUAGE COLLEGE IN ALMATY

Oral communicative competence is the core ability for second language learners to conduct daily communication. In order to get close to the current situation of spoken Chinese teaching in the classrooms of indigenous Kazakhstan people, this survey takes the Chinese classroom of the International Kazakh-Chinese Language College as a case study. Mainly using interviews and naturalistic observation of classroom, this study examined not only the teaching practices but also the concepts and attitudes of the teachers and students in the school regarding the teaching of spoken Chinese and the development of oral communicative competence. The paper discussed several defects of the spoken Chinese teaching in the school in four dimensions: teacher quality, textbook resources, teaching methods, as well as testing and assessment. According to the general situation of Chinese language teaching in Kazakhstan, the reasons for these problems are analyzed in the context and suggestions for improvement are put forward.

Key words: Kazakhstan, Chinese language, oral teaching in classroom.

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Қазақстандағы ауызекі қытай тілін сыныпта оқытудың ағымдағы жағдайын зерттеу: Алматы қаласындағы Халықаралық қазақ-қытай тіл колледжін тақырыптық зерттеу

Ауызша сөйлеу қабілеті – екінші тілді үйренушілердің күнделікті қарым-қатынастағы негізгі қабілеті. Қазақстандағы жергілікті қытай тілі сыныбында ауызекі тіл оқытудың ағымдағы жағдайды түсіну үшін, бұл зерттеуде Халықаралық қазақ-қытай тіл колледжін негізге ала отырып, сұхбаттасу мен сыныптағы жағдайды бақылау арқылы, колледж мұғалімдерінің ауызекі қытай тілін оқыту, ауызша қарым-қатынас дағдыларына үйрету бойынша тұжырымдамасы, көзқарасы мен оқыту практикасы қарастырыла отырып, мұғалімдердің тәлімділігі, оқу құрал ресурстары, оқыту әдістері, тест арқылы бағалау сынды төрт аспектісі бойынша колледждің ауызекі қытай тілін оқытудағы жетіспеушіліктерін зерттедік. Ауызша коммуникативті дағдылар екінші тілді үйренушілердің күнделікті қарым-қатынасқа жетудегі негізгі құзырлығы болып табылады, сонымен қатар олар барлық деңгейдегі қытай тілін оқытуда басты назарда болады. Біз мектепте қытай тілін оқытудағы кейбір кемшіліктерді 4 өлшем бойынша талқыладық: мұғалімнің сапасы, оқулықтардың ресурстары, оқыту әдістері, сонымен қатар тестілеу мен бағалау. Қазақстанда қытай тілін оқытудың жалпы жағдайына сәйкес, бұл мәселелердің себептері контексте талданып, жетілдіру бойынша ұсыныстар енгізілді. Қазақстандық оқу орындарында қытай тілін оқытудағы жалпы жағдаймен бірге осы мақалада бұл проблемалардың себептері талданып, жақсартуға бірнеше ұсыныстар көрсетіледі.

Түйін сөздер: Қазақстан, Қытай тілі, ауызекі тілді оқыту.

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**Опрос и исследование текущей ситуации преподавания
устного китайского языка в классах Казахстана: на примере
Международного колледжа казахско-китайского языка в Алматы**

Способность к устному общению является основной способностью изучающего второго языка в повседневном общении. Чтобы понять текущую ситуацию преподавания устного китайского языка в классах Казахстана, авторы статьи рассматривали китайский класс Международного колледжа казахско-китайского языка в Алматы в качестве тематического исследования, в основном используя интервью и методы естественного наблюдения в классе, для изучения концепции, отношения учителей и студентов в преподавании устного китайского языка и настоящего положения преподавания устного китайского языка. Анализ проводился по четырём аспектам: грамотность учителей, материальные ресурсы – учебники, методы обучения и оценка тестов, были исследованы некоторые недостатки устного обучения китайскому языку в классах. В основном применяя интервью и естественное наблюдение за классом, были изучены концепции и отношения учителей и учеников в школе к преподаванию разговорного китайского языка и развитию устной коммуникативной компетенции, а также их практики преподавания. Исходя из общей ситуации с преподаванием китайского языка в Казахстане, выявлены причины этих проблем в различном контексте и выдвинуты предложения по его улучшению.

Ключевые слова: Казахстан, китайский язык, преподавание разговорного китайского языка.

Introduction

Kazakhstan and China have been friendly neighbors since the establishment of diplomatic relationship in 1992, and in 2011, the two countries announced the development of a comprehensive strategic partnership. Kazakhstan's development strategy "Kazakhstan 2050" and the new economic plan "The Bright Path" are closely aligned with China's Belt and Road Initiative. The cooperation between the two countries has reached a new level, featuring the exchanges and cooperation between the two in the fields of petrochemicals, trade and culture are becoming more and more frequent.

Amid such context, the need for more talents in Chinese language in Kazakhstan are surging, where the citizens are becoming increasingly enthusiastic about learning Chinese. According to the statistics of the Chinese Ministry of Education, the number of Kazakh students coming to China has reached 14,000 in 2019, ranking the 8th in the list of countries of origin of foreign students coming to China. At present, 5 Confucius Institutes have been opened up in Kazakhstan.

Oral communicative skills are the core competency for second language learners to achieve daily communication, and they are also the focus of Chinese language teaching at all levels and should be given high priority. In order to understand the current situation of spoken Chinese teaching in the classrooms of Kazakhstan natives, we conducted

a cumulative survey for about 4 months from September 2019 to June 2021, using the Chinese classrooms of the International Kazakh-Chinese Language College in Almaty as a case study. Mainly applying interviews and naturalistic observation of classroom, we examined the concepts and attitudes of the teachers and students in the school regarding the teaching of spoken Chinese and the development of oral communicative competence, as well as their teaching practices. We discussed some shortcomings of the teaching of spoken Chinese in the school in 4 dimensions: teacher quality, textbook resources, teaching methods as well as testing and assessment. According to the general situation of Chinese language teaching in Kazakhstan, the reasons for these problems are analyzed in the context and suggestions for improvement are put forward.

Literature Review

There is few research published in journals from Kazakhstan and abroad that examine the current situation of teaching Chinese as a second language in Kazakhstan's classrooms. These papers are basically non-empirical and theoretical-introspective (Daulet, 2013; Kerimbayev, 2020:99-127).

However, there are a number of empirical surveys conducted by researchers in China.

The majority of the relevant studies in China are master's and doctoral dissertations, most of which are written by Kazakhs studying in Chinese

universities (Bekebasova, 2011; Dauletbek, 2016; Jin, 2016; Ma, 2017; Milet, 2014; Nurashva, 2015; Sairanbek, 2012; Xiao, 2017). These dissertations are generally macroscopic in their choice of topic and do not specifically examine the status quo of spoken Chinese teaching in a particular school in Kazakhstan, so their conclusions are often vague and over-generalized. Moreover, due to the limited academic literacies of the postgraduates, the degree of completion and readability of their papers is not satisfying.

In addition, Chinese journals have published a number of relevant studies based on interviews and questionnaires.

Some studies have a rather broad perspective of investigation. Li and Jamali (2013) completed what is probably the most comprehensive survey of the exact situation of Chinese language teaching in Kazakhstan to date. The paper investigated the teaching of Chinese language in 10 universities, 9 primary and secondary schools, 3 Chinese language and culture centers of state universities, and about 30 private language training centers in Astana, Almaty, Chimkent, Turkestan, and Karaganda cities in Kazakhstan, covering the quality of Chinese language teachers, teaching materials, curriculum, teaching management, and the demand for Chinese language teachers.

Other studies choose to focus their examination horizon on one particular dimension. Li and Alimanjan (2016) narrowed their respondents to colleges and universities offering Chinese language courses in Astana and Almaty, and examined students' motivation, textbook in hand, learning strategies and approaches, and assessment ways. Xia (2017) and Khungshan (2020) focused on investigating the Chinese language textbooks currently used in Kazakhstan, analyzing the problems exposed in the use of existing Chinese language textbooks in the country, and summarizing several concepts for the compilation of localized or country-specific textbooks suitable for Kazakh learners. Liang and Chen (2014), on the other hand, from the perspective of the professional development of the native Kazakh or Russian speaking teachers of Chinese language, used questionnaires to survey 51 Chinese language teachers in 23 universities in Kazakhstan, and interviewed certain representative teachers to explore the main factors limiting the professional development of Chinese language teachers in Kazakhstan.

On the whole, the current situation of the development of classroom teaching of spoken Chinese as a second language in Kazakhstan has hardly been investigated and studied outside of China. While

there are indeed some relevant surveys in China, but inevitably, two problems come out. First, the researches were done earlier, the data obtained are slightly outdated, and the conclusions are stuck at least 5 years ago. Second, the researchers lacked the opportunity to enter Kazakh schools and observe their real classroom teaching for a long time, so there exist some inaccuracies in their understanding of the actual situation of classroom teaching.

Methodology

Respondents

The study was carried out at the International Kazakh-Chinese Language College in Almaty. Founded in 2007, it is the only civilian-run higher vocational and technical institute in Kazakhstan that places Chinese as the first foreign language, teaches in Chinese, and features the training of Chinese language talents (it can also award junior college diplomas). The school is the only member in Kazakhstan of the Council of International Society for Chinese Language Teaching, and has formed a special brand of Chinese language education in this country. So far, the school has trained nearly 1,000 students and sent hundreds of outstanding students to Southwest University, Central China Normal University and many other well-known universities in China to study in degree programs.

The College now has a total faculty of 59. There are 19 full-time Chinese language teachers, including 2 PhDs and 17 masters, aged between 25 and 55, with an average teaching experience of 13 years. In addition, there are some part-time Chinese language teachers with a large mobility and unstable number. All the Chinese teachers at the school are Chinese Kazakhs, born in China and then immigrated to Kazakhstan. All of the Chinese teachers on the faculty have experience studying in China.

There are nearly 700 students in the school. The majors offered are Kazakh-Chinese translation, Russian-Chinese translation, English-Chinese translation, Tourism, etc. There are 26 classes in the school. The motivation of the students in this school to study Chinese is relatively clear, most of them aim to study in China and apply for language preparatory projects or undergraduate programs in Chinese universities. So their learning outcomes are good: first-year students usually reach HSK level 2 or 3 within the first semester, and HSK level 3 or 4 in the second semester. Most students in the second year pass Level 4, and a few pass Level 5.

From September 2019 to June 2021, the second author carried out a field investigation into the teach-

ing of oral language in the Chinese language classrooms of the university. During this period, a succession of one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with 3 Chinese language teachers and 3 students of the Kazakh-Chinese translation and Russian-Chinese translation majors; a total of

12 offline face-to-face Chinese language classes and online live classes of the Kazakh-Chinese translation, Russian-Chinese translation, and English-Chinese translation majors were successively observed in a non-invasive and natural way. The information of the interviewees is shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 – Chinese Language Teacher Respondents in IKLC

Code name	Gender	Age	Length of Teaching (Year)	Academic Degree	Professional Title	Chinese Language Proficiency (HSK)
Teacher Z	Female	38	13	Master's degree	The first-grade teacher	Level 6
Teacher G	Female	36	13	Master's degree	Teacher	Level 6
Teacher M	Female	42	11	Master's degree	The first-grade teacher	Level 6

Table 2 – Student Respondents in IKLC

Code name	Gender	Age	Major	Grade	Length of Chinese learning (Year)	Chinese Language Proficiency (HSK)
Student A	Female	19	Russian-Chinese translation	Third-year	3	Level 3, 250 points
Student J	Female	18	Russian-Chinese translation	Third-year	3	Level 3, 250 points
Student T	Male	23	Russian-Chinese translation International Relations (at present)	First-year graduate students	4	Level 5, 223 points

Methods

The second author has maintained long-term contact with IKLC teachers and students. Respondents and classes to be observed in this study were obtained through a convenient sampling method.

1. Interview Method

With the help and facilitation of Ms. Saule and Ms. Zhanar at IKLC, the second author carried out one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, respectively. The interviews were conducted in person, over the phone, or via web-based instant messaging software, with an average time of roughly 30 minutes.

As the interviews progressed, we found 4 hot topics emerged from the conversations: teacher quality, textbook resources, teaching methods, as well as test and assessment. The 4 topics received a greater amount of attention from the interviewees. As Teacher Z said, *“I hope that (the relevant departments or institutions) conduct several training courses, such as those to improve our teaching skills*

or teaching methods, online teaching methods, and how to compile local textbooks, because in Kazakhstan there is a lack of local textbooks.”

The conversation was recorded with the consent of the interviewees. After the interviews the second author collated, transcribed, classified and annotated the recordings.

2. Naturalistic observation of classroom

The second author mainly adopts 2 methods to observe the Chinese language classroom teaching at IKLC. One is to enter the classroom personally and observe it on site; the other is to invite students to make audio or video recordings of the classroom, after which we make non-intrusive observations of the recordings. The investigation focused on 4 dimensions: teachers' oral teaching skills and literacy, the development and utilization of textbook resources, oral teaching modes and teaching methods, and oral achievement assessment methods. The information was extracted and recorded on the Classroom Observation Record Form.

Results and Discussion

Teacher quality

Native Kazakh or Russian speaking teachers of Chinese language (hereinafter referred to as NST) are the backbone of the Chinese language teaching force in Kazakhstan, accounting for 84% of the total number of Chinese teachers, most of whom are Kazakh immigrants from Xinjiang, China (Li, 2013).

NSTs have the advantage of being natives. They are able to explain Chinese words, sentences, and cultural phenomena more fluently in teaching with the help of Kazakh or Russian. They can also communicate with students basically without any misunderstanding, especially in the area of Kazakh-Chinese and Russian-Chinese translation, which is inherently convenient. In addition, NSTs are more familiar with the local school conditions, educational resources and interpersonal networks.

However, there are also 3 relatively prominent weaknesses in the oral teaching literacy of NSTs.

One is that there exist some weak points in their knowledge of Chinese phonetics and oral expression skills. For example, the pronunciation of Mandarin is not standardized enough, which is reflected in not being able to clearly distinguish the front and back nasal sounds, and not having a standard intonation, which featuring “Kazakhstan-style Chinese pronunciation” in different degrees.

Second, the awareness and ability of teachers to correct errors of students’ pronunciation are not adequate enough. Sometimes they even mislead students in the teaching of pronunciation.

Third, a few NSTs, particularly part-time teachers, lacked the experience of further studying in China in the last 5 to 10 years, so their understanding of the current Chinese situation and popular culture is not timely and accurate. Their impression of China may even be stuck in the past 10 years. This makes it difficult for them to initiate hot topics about contemporary China with the times in the speaking classroom. The stale topics cannot fully stimulate students to express themselves and participate in discussions.

According to the *Standards for Teachers of Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages* compiled by the Office of Chinese Language Council International (a.k.a. Hanban, now the Center for Language Education and Cooperation), the language knowledge and skills that international Chinese language teachers should possess include: “Standard 1: Knowledge and skills of Chinese language. Teachers should master the basic knowledge of Chinese phonetics, vocabulary, grammar and Chinese char-

acters, and have good listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of Chinese. Standard 2: Teachers should master at least one foreign language. They should be proficient in the basic knowledge of phonetics, intonation, vocabulary, and grammar, and be able to communicate by using their listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating skills comprehensively”. The self-assessments of the NSTs interviewed showed that they all thought they had basically met Standard 1, but that they were still lacking in Standard 2, with insufficient teaching experience and non-standard Chinese pronunciation.

Due to the above-mentioned deficiencies in oral teaching literacy among native teachers, some of them, consciously or unconsciously, exhibited a downplaying of oral teaching in their classroom. They actively lower the requirement of developing students’ oral communication skills in Chinese.

According to the classroom observations, the focus of IKLC’s Chinese teaching model is aimed at improving students’ vocabulary and developing their reading and Chinese character writing skills. The training of oral communication skills is relatively weak. In the interview, a teacher claimed that the emphasis of teaching objectives should be set on developing Chinese reading skills, “*I think communication skills are less important because many students do not go abroad, (teachers) just need to teach them the basic words and grammar, and all they need to do is to be able to read Chinese characters.*”

Such value orientation of placing oral communication at a less important position among teachers exerts a negative influence on students. Through classroom observations and interviews, we found that most students’ reading, writing and translation levels were generally higher than their oral communication skills. The relative backwardness in the development of their oral communication skills is mainly manifested in 2 ways: first, inaccurate pronunciation of Chinese, lacking of fluency in expression, and weak ability to organize discourse and to express coherently in dialogue or monologue narration. Second, there is a lack of language sense for appropriateness and politeness of speech. Although they have mastered some vocabulary, sentence patterns and idioms, the students are not clear about their semantic features and usage rules in real communication and in specific situations, resulting in more pragmatic errors.

Thus we suggest that schools in Kazakhstan and China should strengthen the educational cooperation and collaborate to establish a web-based mechanism for in-service training. In the past, the Chinese gov-

ernment organized training programs annually and assign NSTs in Central Asia to Chinese universities. However, this traditional, face-to-face mode is costly and limited in its reach to the NST community. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19, it has been difficult to implement on a large scale.

The training of NSTs during the post-epidemic era should focus on developing three forms.

First, schools in Kazakhstan could cooperate with local Confucius Institutes to build a peer-to-peer exchange platform between NSTs and Chinese publicly-dispatched teachers. They can also invite the latter to conduct web-based teaching experience sharing and public lessons on Chinese language knowledge for NSTs to enhance their oral Chinese teaching skills. These Chinese public teachers generally speak Russian and have rich teaching experience. They are familiar with Chinese teaching resources in China as well as more advanced in their teaching philosophy and methods than NSTs.

Second, we could invite expert teachers and well-known scholars of Chinese language from both countries to give lectures on the latest theoretical developments and research findings in L2 oral learning and teaching, so as to provide reference for NSTs' practice of oral Chinese teaching and raise their awareness of the importance of oral teaching.

Thirdly, a case library of international Chinese classroom teaching is suggested. We could guide NSTs to observe skilled Chinese teachers' methods of oral communication exercises in real classrooms, or let skilled Chinese teachers watch videos or live streams of NSTs' Chinese classroom teaching, and then provide targeted one-on-one guidance. Through discussion and exchange of ideas, NSTs can be inspired to creatively apply the methods and techniques they have learned to their own teaching. They can also practically enhance their ability to design teaching activities and master modern educational technology.

Textbook resources

Classroom observations revealed that the explanation of the texts and post-lesson exercises are the main elements of Chinese language classroom teaching at IKLC. Therefore, Chinese textbooks have a direct impact on the effectiveness of classroom teaching in Kazakh schools.

The Chinese textbooks used in Kazakhstan are basically imported from China and Russia. What IKLC uses most are the *New Practical Chinese Textbook* edited by Liu Xun and *Boya Chinese* edited by Li Xiaoqi and her collaborators. There are not so many country-specific Chinese textbooks written by indigenous writers and published by lo-

cal publisher. Many schools subscribe to Chinese language textbooks from Russia or China, but due to the poor channels, teachers and students are actually provided with a rather limited number and variety of textbooks, which are not systematic and sometimes suffer from short-term shortages. Some of the textbooks have been released in revised versions in China, but the old versions are still used in Kazakhstan.

The pricing of Chinese language textbooks and tool books is so high that students in average financial conditions find them unaffordable. For example, the only tool book available in the market for Chinese language is the *Kazakh-Chinese Dictionary*, while there is no *Chinese-Kazakh Dictionary*. Moreover, the price of the *Kazakh-Chinese Dictionary* is as high as 15,000 tenge, which is about 300 CNY. Because the textbooks are hard to reach and expensive to buy, many students choose to borrow them from school or make copies of them.

The Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan has not yet formulated a unified Chinese teaching curriculum. Many schools leave it to the Chinese language teachers to choose their own teaching materials, leading to different versions and quality of teaching materials in use. Some versions are too old and the knowledge included is outdated. Some do not take into account the individual needs of Kazakh learners and have little local applicability. Although some teachers will adapt or translate Chinese textbooks published in China, they are almost exclusively used in the schools where the teachers are.

The deficiencies of the Chinese language textbooks currently used in Kazakhstan are mainly reflected in 4 aspects:

First, there are limited types of textbooks available. Some of them are published in an earlier age, the forms and contents are quite old. Some of the textbooks are traditional paper books. The illustrations containing are inadequate and the visual style is boring. They also lack the tutoring materials for listening and speaking. For example, they do not provide standard reading recordings of texts and vocabulary, which is not conducive to students' following and imitating.

Second, some texts, as materials for oral practice, are inherently difficult to stimulate contemporary adolescent students' resonance. The texts do not conform to their psychological characteristics and mindset, which weakens the activeness of the anticipation of students during the oral practice in class. From today's perspective, the points of some texts are inappropriate or questionable. For instance, a text in one textbook mentions a father beating his

son and ridiculing that his dream of going to Egypt would not realize. Moreover, a text in another textbook preaches the virtues of a vegetarian diet. But the reality is that the daily diets of people in many developing countries, including China, are severely lacking in protein intake.

Third, the design and arrangement of the practices in the available textbooks focus on reading and writing tasks. It shows insufficient attention to listening, speaking and communicative training in most of the textbooks. The majority of the practice questions in IKLC textbooks are vocabulary fill-in-the-blank questions and grammar correction questions. The number of oral communication questions such as situational dialogues and group discussions is relatively low.

Fourth, the textbooks available lack an introduction to Kazakh and Chinese culture, especially Kazakh culture. Such circumstance results in students not knowing either contemporary popular culture in China or how to introduce their own culture in Chinese. One student said in an interview that “*If I went to China one day, I hope I will be able to tell them very fluently what interesting traditional customs there are in Kazakhstan.*” This shows that students want to know about China and help China to understand Kazakhstan by means of Chinese language learning.

We suggest that Kazakh schools should strengthen the development of country-specific and media-integrated Chinese textbooks and teaching resources. Specific approaches include:

First, cooperating with China to develop Chinese textbooks for local learners in Kazakhstan. We suggest giving priority to cooperate with the neighboring Xinjiang province, China, as the colleges and schools in Xinjiang have a long history of international Chinese language education, with a relatively strong teaching staff. They have also published many high-quality Chinese language textbooks in Kazakh and Russian.

Secondly, the topics selected for textbooks should meet the needs of young learners and should follow the pulse of the times. The textbooks should give prior consideration to some representative hot topics, major events and popular culture of the two countries, so as to stimulate the curiosity and the thirst for knowledge of young people about Chinese language and culture. Kazakh schools should base on the perspective of cultural comparison to exhibit the traditional and contemporary cultures of the two countries, especially teach students to express the local conditions and customs of Kazakhstan in Chinese.

Thirdly, the teaching objectives of textbooks should highlight the training of oral communication skills and increase the proportion of oral exercises, such as situational dialogues, classroom presentations and group discussions.

Fourthly, utilizing the Internet technology to build a learning platform for Chinese listening and speaking based on mobile terminals (such as cell phones and tablets). Improving students’ access to textbooks by converting them into online resources like micro-lessons, short videos, audiobooks or applications. Textbook writers will also find it convenient to revise and update the content at the backend.

Teaching methods

This study found that IKLC generally adopts a classroom teaching mode of intensive reading, only put in a far more teacher-centered and textbook-based way. But specifically, different teachers exhibit a great variety of teaching styles. “*We have many kinds of teaching methods that vary from teacher to teacher. Some teachers teach only with the textbook, some let us read lots of stories, and some let us memorize poems.* [student JJ] “

The content of the classroom instruction revolves around a text. The main teaching objectives are set to explain the vocabulary, grammar points and the text. The language elements are mainly the vocabulary, grammar and sentence patterns of this text. The language skills are mainly the reading comprehension and Chinese character writing of this text. The traditional Grammar-Translation Method is used in such classes, with emphasis on the comparison of Russian, Kazakh and Chinese vocabulary and grammar. Explanations are often done in the native language of the students.

Classes are predominantly teacher-delivered, with most classroom activities initiated, organized, facilitated, and evaluated by the teacher. A few teachers rarely initiate opportunities for students to ask and answer open questions. Since teachers’ unilateral lectures take up most of the time, there is less time left for teacher-student and student-student interaction in the classroom. The frequency of real and effective listening and speaking interactions between teachers and students or between students is quite low.

Of course, there are oral exercises in classroom teaching, such as teachers asking students to answer questions, students retelling or paraphrasing a text or a story, and role-playing situational dialogues.

“*Each week we will watch a Chinese movie and retell the plot. We would read Chinese stories, recite ancient Chinese poems. And we would learn new vocabulary each day and then the teacher would dic-*

tate it the next day, so I memorized the vocabulary pretty quickly. [student A] “

“We take classes 6 days a week, and the first 5 days we use the textbook for dictation and memorization. On the last day, Saturday, we watch movies, cartoons, and Chinese variety shows, listen to audio, and learn songs and poems. We recite one poem or song (per) week or two weeks. [student JJ] “

However, this kind of oral training is monological. The content of the exercises is basically a recitation or retelling deeply tied to the text or story. The lack of variability and extension in the contexts, topic functions, and style of the dialogues produced by the students leads to the fact that the oral exercises are mostly echoing what the books or films say. It lacks bilateral or multilateral communication, other-initiated correction and teacher’s scaffolding.

Consequently, some students are not fully motivated to participate in the classroom. For example, in a Chinese language course, the teacher asked the students to work in pairs to make a conversation on the topic of “My Holiday Life”. But the observer noticed that most of the students were silent or chatting in their native language. The atmosphere in the classroom seemed depressing and dull.

The reasons why the above-mentioned teaching models have become the mainstream of teaching Chinese in Kazakh schools are multiple. One of the subjective reasons is that the teachers’ educational and teaching concepts are conservative and need to be upgraded. One of the objective reasons is that the teaching design is limited by the hardware and equipment in the classrooms and the teachers’ educational techniques still need to be improved.

Nowadays the application of modern educational technology in class teaching plays an increasingly important role. The appropriate utilization of multimedia equipment, online video, and audio resources can provide multimodal interactive forms for oral communication training. It can also stimulate the vitality of class learning. Whereas, the fact is that NSTs are not yet proficient in modern educational technology. The most common teaching types of equipment in Kazakh schools are computers, speakers and televisions. Classrooms are rarely equipped with projectors, interactive whiteboards, etc. A few teachers cannot yet fluently use PowerPoint and are used to using the traditional blackboard and chalk. This makes it difficult to use pictures, video presentations, online live conference software, and instant communication tools to enhance the form of input in oral interaction, so oral practice in the class is difficult to simulate the online communication contexts which are common in the Internet era.

However, it is fair to say that a growing number of teachers have realized the drawbacks of the above-mentioned teaching methods and have shifted to the task-based Direct Method, which emphasizes interaction. This is the case, for example, with Teacher Z:

“Usually when I take phonetics classes, I prefer to teach students tongue twisters or Kazakh folk songs translated into Chinese, such as “A Lovely Rose”, Abai’s poem, which is suitable for our Kazakh students. Then, in terms of teaching methods, I usually make very little explanation myself. I will ask the students to practice and speak more, I just guide them to speak and practice, just like a director. I will lead them to speak and practice Chinese as much as possible during the class time, because after all, there is no language environment in Kazakhstan, and it is more difficult for them to speak Chinese in other places. Because of the epidemic, we have only 45 minutes of class time currently, and within 45 minutes I want them to practice more and speak more. When I communicate with my students, I only speak Chinese and write Chinese only. When they use other languages to communicate with me, I would say ‘I don’t understand’ and I force them to speak Chinese and use Chinese. I often use a variety of PPTs, download various software and put some interesting games in my PPTs, so that students can learn and play at the same time, which is not particularly boring and makes them enjoy my classes. “

We suggest that the approach to oral Chinese teaching in Kazakhstan can be optimized in 3 ways:

First, teachers are advocated to use Chinese as the medium of instruction as much as possible. This provides students with the possibly richest L2 input, and avoids reinforcing students’ L1-transfer thinking. Russian or Kazakh can be used conditionally only when explaining relatively complex word meanings, grammar, or cultural items.

Second, teachers should actively use the handy cell phones and mobile Internet. Free mobile apps and online resources are expected to be used to design a variety of topics and tasks, such as Chinese dubbing of movies or TV shows, Chinese song karaoke, drama performances and debates. By this way, it can improve students’ enthusiasm to practice speaking.

Third, through cooperation with local Confucius Institutes publicly-dispatched Chinese teachers or Chinese volunteers are invited to the school to conduct cultural exchanges and experiential activities with NSTs and students. This can stimulate students’ motivation to participate in oral communication.

Testing and evaluation

The survey found that the current system of oral Chinese language testing in Kazakhstan is not balanced enough. It places too much emphasis on achievement tests, but neglects proficiency tests of learners' oral communication. Oral proficiency tests generally require the formulation of assessment criteria for oral language proficiency. The testers are expected to design real communicative tasks, build structured conversational processes with the subjects, and conduct a comprehensive assessment of the subjects' oral communicative competence.

In addition, IKLC shares the similarity with other Kazakh schools. The assessment of Chinese course performance is based on summative evaluation while lacks formative evaluation of students. Students' grades are mainly obtained through a single test, and the test is only written and oral, with the written test being the main one. The written test includes multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, sentence construction, sentence rewriting, short essay writing, etc. The focus is on the mastery of vocabulary, grammar and Chinese character items in the textbook. The oral test consists of reading aloud from the textbook, translating the text, or expressing it orally according to the topics provided. Most of the oral test questions are directly from the textbook and exercises after the class:

"Each teacher has a different way to test our level. Some will only test what he has taught. Some teachers have us take HSK level 3. Some let us read the text, he wants to see which words we know, which words we don't, and how many words we read per minute. Some teachers do dictation, so you have to be able to write and also to read. [student J] "

"The way of testing is dictation, reciting dialogues and texts. Also we have a lot of various after-class exercises. Of course memorization is not boring, the teacher will help us to remember through games. [student A] "

This achievement assessment is based on written exam and concentrated on text. It can certainly guide students to have a relatively solid grasp of the textbook content they are studying, but it also has obvious drawbacks. The focus of the examination is limited to the layers of phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar. It neglects the examination of contextual constraints, pragmatic rules, and discourse functions. Under the pressure of test-taking, teachers focus their teaching on the vocabulary, grammar and Chinese characters of the textbook and relatively pay little attention to oral training. Students practice speaking mainly to cope with exams. Their expres-

sions are basically imitations and retellings of texts, excessively relying on the memorization of textbook contents. They lack the oral skills to communicate flexibly and accomplish communicative tasks in real communication.

In response to the above 2 defects, we propose the following three suggestions.

First, a scientific oral proficiency test should be conducted to promote learning. It would motivate teachers and students to pay more attention to oral learning. The oral proficiency test should include pronunciation, reading the text aloud, answering questions, topic statements, picture talking and impromptu oral expressions based on specific topics. It could examine students' basic skills of listening and pronunciation as well as their ability to quick reaction and coherent expression.

Secondly, we should publicize the Chinese Oral Proficiency Test (HSKK), encourage students to take the corresponding level. The results of HSKK should be used as a condition for evaluation of merits and awards or even for obtaining a degree.

Thirdly, we should emphasize the formative evaluation of students' usual participation in class and reduce the weight of the final exam in the final grade. Students are guided to actively answer questions, participate in discussions, and interact with teachers and classmates in class.

Conclusion

Kazakhstan and China enjoy a comprehensive strategic partnership. With the further implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, more people in Kazakhstan would choose to learn Chinese.

In this study, we adopted interviews and naturalistic observation of classroom to investigate the current situation of oral Chinese language teaching at the International Kazakh-Chinese Language College in Almaty, Kazakhstan. We discussed several deficiencies in the cultivation of oral Chinese communicative competence at the school from 4 perspectives: teacher quality, textbook resources, teaching methods as well as testing and evaluation. Combined with the authors' understanding of the current situation of Chinese language teaching in Kazakhstan, we believe that these deficiencies of IKLC are somewhat prevalent.

This study analyzes the causes of these problems and puts forward corresponding suggestions for improvement. This paper hopes to provide some reference for the improvement of the quality and efficiency of oral Chinese classroom teaching in Kazakhstan.

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