



Teaching and learning of Mandarin as a foreign language in South African schools

Abstract

Globalisation has influenced the demand for the acquisition of Mandarin. As a proactive response, the South African Department of Education included Mandarin as a second additional language in the National Curriculum Statement grades R–12 in March 2015. The research reported on in this article was context specific. It entailed a case study of a school in Gauteng that had introduced Mandarin as a foreign language. Chomsky's language theory, the interactionist theory and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory are acknowledged. A qualitative inquiry strategy was employed; individual and focus group interviews, questionnaires and observations were used as data gathering tools. Content analysis was done manually. Themes, categories and subcategories were identified. The research culminated in a case study narrative elaborating on the main themes, namely motivation and beliefs, teaching Mandarin, and learners' learning experiences.

Keywords: Mandarin; foreign language; teaching; learning

1. Introduction

“The nation [China] has a booming economy and one of the biggest consumer markets in the world; it's clear that now is a good time to know Chinese” (Grasso, 2007: xi-xii). It is apparent that Chinese is becoming the second most demanded language globally and will ultimately become almost indispensable to business professionals in the next 20 years (Grasso, 2007: xi). As a result of the increasing frequency of “international exchanges with China in economics, trade, science, technology, culture, education, art and tourism” nowadays (Wang & Lemmer, 2015: 35) the world's demand for Chinese learning has increased sharply (Hanban, 2014). Importantly, Ping (2009: 85) emphasises the role parents play in the increasing demand for Mandarin Chinese as they think it will be useful in the future careers of their children.

It is thus important that we realise globalisation has an influence on foreign language teaching such as communicative pedagogies, which allow for participatory electronic chatrooms and videos, internet, tele-collaboration and social networks and that offer learners increased access to native speakers in their cultural environments (Kramsch, 2014: 296).

South Africa has recognised the importance of introducing Mandarin in schools. The Department of Education made amendments “to the regulations pertaining to the National Curriculum Statement Grades R–12 to provide for the listing of Mandarin as a second additional language” (Government Gazette, 2015: 3). In January 2016, an incremental implementation of the roll-out of Mandarin as a non-official, second additional language in South African schools (grades 4–10) will take place and in 2017, grade 11 and in 2018, grade 12 (AllAfrica Global Media, 2015). To date ten schools in Gauteng have introduced Mandarin as a second additional language. The teaching of Mandarin in South African schools started with one school in 2014 and nine more schools in 2015 (as part of a pilot project) with the assistance of the Chinese Culture and International Education Exchange Centre. South Africa currently has six Confucius institutions and together with the Chinese government, a curriculum will be developed to teach Chinese in schools (South Asia Media network, 2016) and to use “flexible teaching patterns”, which have been adapted to cater for local primary and secondary schools (Hanban, 2014).

Despite the surge for learning Chinese as a foreign or second language (CFL/CSL), little research has been conducted in this area, particularly on the learning styles and strategies used by these learners (Chu *et al.*, 2015: 2). There is thus a need for immediate (and ongoing) proactive research into the teaching and learning of Chinese in South African schools to ensure that challenges are overcome before they become insurmountable. We need to be vigilant of context-specific gaps that may emerge. With this background in mind, the aim of this research is to explore and describe the emergence of Mandarin teaching and learning in South African schools¹.

2. The teaching and learning of Mandarin as a foreign language

The traditional way of teaching a foreign language was grounded in behaviourist theories of learning. Foreign language learning was a “mimetic” activity where learners had to repeat or imitate new information. The major determinants of language learning success were the quality and the quantity of the language feedback. In 1959, Chomsky reviewed this approach and claimed that children are biologically programmed for language, that they have an innate ability to find out for themselves what the underlying rules of a language system are (Moeller & Catalano, 2015: 327). Chomsky (2003: 70-71) also adds that language development is determined by the nature of the environment, as an appropriate environment that is “a stimulating environment is required to enable our natural curiosity, intelligence and creativity to develop, and to enable our biological capacities to unfold”. An emerging theoretical position, namely interactionist, emphasised the role of the “linguistic environment” which needs to be combined with the learners’ innate abilities to learn a language. Language development thus results from a “complex interplay” between the innate language abilities of the learners and their environment and the language needs to be modified to suit the ability of the learners. The learner must be “active co-constructive participants instead of just listening to input, and rather interact and negotiate that input which they receive” (Moeller & Catalano, 2015: 328).




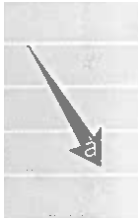
Muñoz (2014: 24) resonates with the above as she found in her study that learners “showed early awareness of foreign language learning and learning conditions as well as the influence of the learning environment and experience on the changes that reshaped their views” during their primary education. Further to this, Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory “views

¹ Different references in the text use Chinese, Mandarin Chinese or Mandarin as the language under discussion. For the purpose of this article, Mandarin will be used as it is used in the Government Gazette, (2015:3).

cognition as a social faculty”, which means that it is essential that the learner participates in culturally organised activities where social dialogue takes place. Ortega (2009: 218-219) explains that Vygotsky reconceptualised cognition and consciousness to be fundamentally social and is the only social approach to second language (L2) learning which is fully accepted as a second language acquisition (SLA) theory by SLA researchers. It is therefore imperative for foreign language (FL) teachers to employ second language orientated learning strategies, which focus on understanding the overall meaning in communication, to use Chinese in a natural and authentic context and to monitor learners’ progress (Chu *et al.*, 2015: 1).

The Chinese written form is not directly related to its pronunciation. A Scheme for the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet, known as the *pinyin* system which means “arranged sounds” uses the alphabet to transcribe Chinese sounds “and four diacritical tone marks to indicate the different tones of the Chinese characters (Schmidt, 2002: 35).

3. Pronunciation tones

1st High Tone	2nd - High Rising Tone	3rd - Low Falling Rising Tone	4th - High Falling Tone
			

Zhilong, F. 2000. Essential Chinese for travellers. Hong Kong: Regent

When different tones are indicated on a syllable then each will have a different meaning (Hau-Yoon, 1999: 3). For example, “医doctor” is marked as “yī” in high level tone, “移move” is marked as “yí” in high rising tone, “蚁ant” is marked as “yǐ” in low rising tone and “亿a hundred million” is marked as “yì” in high falling tone.

Chinese characters take the place of an imaginary square space and are “made up of multiple reusable components that fit into the square space” (Tse *et al.*, (2007: 377). Pinyin (a phonic system) is used for learners to know the sound and their pronunciation of the characters. This makes it easier for them to attach sounds to ideographs and to the meaning. Pinyin cannot stand on its own in place of the characters but supplements the characters by being written next to the characters and thereby supports children in learning the characters (Tse *et al.*, 2007: 376, 381) for example:

Speaker: Nǐ hǎo (你好) (English pronunciation: nee how) You fine (honorific form) Hello!

Respondent: Nǐ hǎo (你好) (English pronunciation: nee how) You fine. Hello!

Speaker: Nǐ hǎo ma?(你好吗?) (English pronunciation: nee how ma) How are you?

Respondent: Wǒ hěn hǎo , nǐ ne ?(我很好, 你呢?) (English pronunciation: wo hen how nee ne) Fine. And you?

Speaker: Wǒ hěn hǎo , xiè xiè (我很好, 谢谢) (English pronunciation: wo hen how shieh shieh) I am fine thank you.

It is thus important that phonic symbols should not be learnt before the characters. Chinese characters are usually learnt by copying them repeatedly until the learner can reproduce the form and the pronunciation by memory (Tse *et al.*, 2007: 375, 376, 381). Explicit teaching of radicals helps Chinese foreign learners (CFL) to learn characters (Tong & Yip, 2015: 173–177).

Maluch *et al.*, (2015: 76–77) found that the strongest predictors for learning a foreign language are the teacher's proficiency in the instructional language and background characteristics of learners. Furthermore, Li (2013: 294–305) established that learners' enjoyment of Chinese lessons is closely related to teachers' knowledge and background. These include knowing the learners, their routines and the activities and classroom practices they enjoy and the teachers' enthusiasm and their knowledge of China and the Chinese culture.

4. Research questions

The main research question is "How is Mandarin taught and learnt in a primary school in relation to a learner's innate ability and social learning environment?"

The sub-questions are:

1. Why do learners want to learn Mandarin?
2. How can a learner's innate ability be unfolded when teaching Mandarin?
3. How does the learning environment influence the teaching and learning of Mandarin?
3. What are the learners' experiences of learning Mandarin?
4. How can the teaching and learning of Mandarin experiences (opportunities and challenges) inform future Mandarin teaching and learning in South African schools?

5. Method

In order to answer the research questions and explore the relationships between the teaching and learning of Mandarin in primary schools and a learner's innate ability and learning environment, a qualitative inquiry strategy, namely a case study was employed in this study. Purposive sampling was used to identify the participating school that offers Mandarin as an extramural activity. The school is situated in Tshwane South. Seventeen learners enrolled for extramural Mandarin classes. All these learners as well as the principal, a teacher facilitator and one Mandarin teacher participated in the study. Ethical clearance was obtained from Unisa's Ethics Committee.

6. Data collection

Three focus group interviews were conducted. Groups 1 and 2 consisted of six learners each and group 3 consisted of five learners. Each focus group interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Seeing that so many learners in the school volunteered but only one Chinese teacher did, the teachers selected only top academic achievers from grades 4-7. The principal and teachers decided that only the top achievers in each grade could participate in the Mandarin classes.

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with the principal, the teacher facilitator and the Mandarin teacher. These interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each.

The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. The researchers also observed two Mandarin lessons. The researchers wrote field notes and took photographs of learners' workbooks.

The parents of learners participating in the study completed a questionnaire containing open-ended questions.

7. Data analysis

The contents of transcripts of the interviews with learners and educators were analysed manually and core meanings, patterns or themes (Patton, 2002: 442, 453), together with refined categories and subcategories relating to the research topic, were identified. The researchers' observation field notes were combined and added detail to the themes, categories and subcategories. Parents' responses to open-ended questionnaires were reflected on a template. The template made provision for a parent's biographical information, the 11 questions included in the questionnaire and the parent's response to each question. The parents were numbered from (a) to (p). Their responses contained their perspectives and added further detail to the identified themes, categories and subcategories. The data from the focus group interviews with learners formed the core of the discussion. A case record "pull(ed) together and organise(d) the voluminous case data into a comprehensive, primary resource package" (Patton, 2002: 449). A final case study narrative reflects the findings for public reading (Patton, 2002: 450). Separate feedback sessions with the principal and learners were held and a post-research meeting with parents was planned.

8. Case record

Three themes (together with their categories and sub-categories) emerged during the manual data analysis namely: Theme 1: Motivation and beliefs, Theme 2: Teaching Mandarin and Theme 3: Learners' learning experiences. These themes, with their categories incorporated are discussed below.

Key:

P1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 – learners in focus groups

FG (1, 2 & 3) – focus group

Principal

TF – teacher facilitator

Theme 1: Motivation and beliefs

Why would primary school learners want to learn Mandarin? "For FL learners, developing their own voice increasingly means developing an ear for the voices of others – no doubt a crucial, if lifelong, educational goal" (Kramsch, 2014: 309).

The general feeling of the learners in the Mandarin class was that they had been given an opportunity to learn another language and that it would benefit them to learn Mandarin. They felt that knowledge of Mandarin might lead to interesting job opportunities and would stand them in good stead should they visit China. They enjoyed learning the language because it was interesting and different. The learners in the study expressed their views, with particular reference to job opportunities, for example:

FG3-P5: [I want to learn Mandarin] because I want to be an international accountant, so if I travel places, if I go to China, [I] want to speak the language.

Gardner (1985) in (Ping, 2009) believes that learners are motivated to learn a language as they may have an instrumental or integrative orientation towards another language and as Chomsky states that children are biologically programmed and have innate abilities to learn a language.

The TF was asked whether she believed the primary school is where Mandarin should first be taught and her answer was:

TF: Well, yes I do believe that primary school is actually the first place where you need to go because that is where they learn language best, they are much more open to language when they are smaller than when they are grown up. So when they are small they pick it up like a sponge. I see them in the class and I see me.

The Chinese teacher was asked whether young children would be able to learn Mandarin and she answered:

Yes. I think so because the young kids [are] learning the foreign language easier for them. I think so. Very smart. Oh. I also enjoy the class, the children.

Furthermore, during our classroom observations, the grade 4 learners were equally active and participated in the lesson activities. They were able to converse in Mandarin, with the teacher and their classmates and spontaneously volunteered to write Pinyin and the Chinese characters on the board and their workbooks were evidence of their ability to write Pinyin and Chinese characters. The principal added that

... what they are teaching them is basic for everybody in the class, whether you are grade 3 or grade 4, doesn't matter, everybody learns the Chinese figures and everything so, it is a step by step, it worked out well.

Many of the learners we interviewed in the focus groups indicated that their parents wanted them to learn Mandarin, for example parents said: *My neighbour [advised] me to [place] my son [in the] Chinese school because China is a member of BRICS and is rapidly becoming one of the world's first countries*". The Chinese teacher also attested to the parents' eagerness that their children should learn Mandarin: *"No parents (none of the parents) have a problem with Mandarin classes"*

The interviews with the principal and the teacher facilitator made it clear that the teachers, learners and parents had been enthusiastic about the teaching of Mandarin since the introduction of the project by the Department of Education and that they recognised the advantages of learning Mandarin. The principal explained: *"[Mandarin] is their fourth language and they love it. I think because it is a challenge ... and because our attitude is we are like visionaries ... we think ahead, we plan ahead"*.

The following drivers of learning for primary school learners (grades 4–7) were identified during the interviews: intrinsic motivation, their parents' enthusiasm and approval, opportunities to travel to China and job opportunities, the ability to communicate with Chinese people and the head start that knowledge of Mandarin would give. The principal confirmed these findings: *"[L]ike I said earlier, it comes from the inside motivation as well, not only leaving it to the children or parents and worked for the child, when the child understands why he is doing this"*.

Theme 2: Teaching Mandarin

During two Mandarin lessons, the researchers observed that the learners participated enthusiastically in dialogues, role-plays and activities that required them to write in Pinyin on the blackboard. Learners were given opportunities to express themselves without interruption and to engage in short conversations in Mandarin. The learners were also able to respond in unison to greetings and express everyday courtesies.

There was good interaction between the teacher and the learners. The teacher asked many questions and explained grammar rules where the need arose and the learners had already discovered grammar rules for themselves, as they were able to use the language correctly both orally and in writing. She used chorus responses from learners, individual questions for individual learners and the pairing of learners to practise conversations and to demonstrate language usage in front of the class. The learners enjoyed the activities and were alert at all times. The teacher had a friendly yet firm disposition and often praised the learners. She corrected learners in a diplomatic way and she seemed to know most of the learners' strengths and weaknesses because she sometimes allowed learners to assist and correct their peers. The teacher had a sound knowledge, understanding and use of the Mandarin language. She was also able to speak, read and write English and although limited, the learners understood what she was saying. The interaction between the teacher and learners was very good, as most learners were able to respond to the teacher's questions and some even volunteered to write Chinese characters on the board during an activity. Learners had workbooks, which showed that plenty of progress had been made, especially with the writing and drawing of Chinese characters.

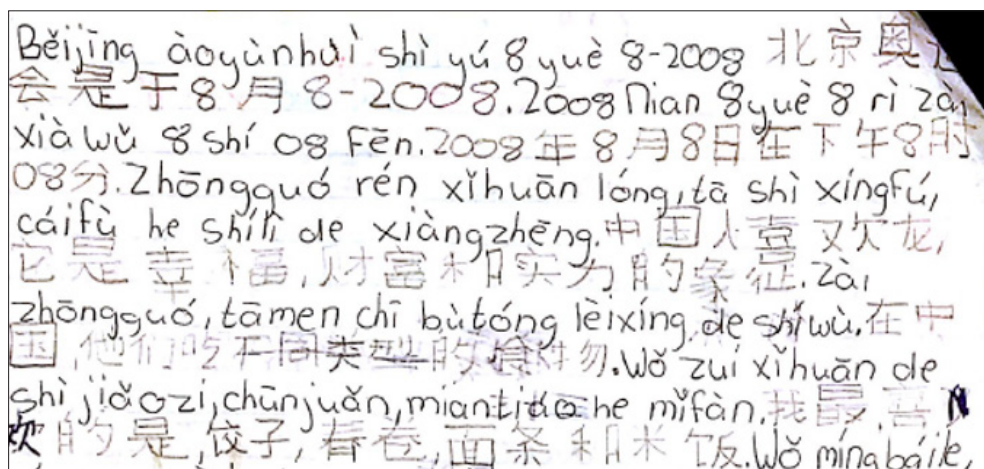


Figure 1: Example of a learner's written work in Pinyin and corresponding Chinese characters

The classroom environment was relaxed, the teacher was friendly and patient and the classroom was spacious and equipped with technology.

9. The Chinese teacher

Zhang and Li (2010: 94) explain that teachers are a decisive and guiding factor in the teaching and learning of Mandarin as a foreign language. The limited availability of qualified and

experienced teachers was a constraining factor in the teaching of Mandarin in the school in this study. Rhodes (2014: 118) explains that highly qualified language teachers are a priority in foreign language teaching because good instruction leads to higher success rates. Rhodes emphasises clear programme goals and states that a well-articulated programme is of the utmost importance. Halliday (2014: 1) found that the best teachers to teach Chinese are those who speak the same language as the learners, in this case English. The Chinese teacher's home language (in this study) is Chinese. She completed a two-year certificate training course to qualify as a Chinese foreign language teacher in Wisconsin, USA, where she lived for three years.

Ja, during I stay in the America, United States I teaching the young kids. I also have a teaching, I am for the middle school teacher experience teaching mathematics for ten years [in China]. Ja, workshops also in teaching in some school. In a local school and I also been teaching Chinese as a second language in university, in China. Yes, I have take the tests for Mandarin.

The teacher came to South Africa at the beginning of 2015 on a two-year contract and says: "First I enjoy the teaching Mandarin for the kids, I love it and also is I was chose by the Chinese government to teaching Mandarin for South Africa public school".

The focus groups had the following to say about the Chinese teacher:

FG2-P4: Although she can't speak English properly, we kind of understand what she is saying. She is always to the point and makes you understand.

FG3-P3: Well, our teacher, XXX, she teaches us in a very exciting and fun way, you actually want to learn more Mandarin. So that is why for me Mandarin is fun to learn.

FG3-P4: I like watching the videos and songs that she teaches us.

FG1-P1: What I enjoy the most is that the teacher is kind.

When the Chinese teacher was asked how she went about preparing her lessons, she responded as follows:

Everybody can learn, I think anybody can learn. If they are interested. Ah, yes, so that is why before why I make the lesson plan, I also think how can I do for the students easy to memorise, easy for learning the Mandarin. Good memory is important. Because Mandarin is a language and also the write the character is hard for them. Yes, it is very difficult for memorise a lot, and also for pronunciation is the tone, the tone is hard for the students. Ja, we also have other teachers. Sometimes we discuss with her lesson plan. Plan before the class. Every day. Or may last week. I also think about to teach. For the week. We have a theme, to talk about their family... taught about relation about your house. To do like some activity, more funny, motivate the students for more interesting. If they hear they memorise. Ja, if they pay attention for a classroom, if they do the homework, more practise attending the class activities, they will be better.

10.Chinese lessons

In the words of the teacher facilitator:

She had everything on the laptop, but she always printed it out and then the children just had the PowerPoint handouts [and] notes ... Once she started working with that, it was really great. She uses a lot of tools to help her. I think she is a very creative person. She presents the English, the phonetic, the words as well as the symbol, all at once. Last week we learned about family and all of that. For me it was easier to learn the characters at that stage because I could make links to what the character means by looking at the character. So I think, ja, the way she is doing it at the moment it works for our children.

When the Chinese teacher was asked how she went about teaching Mandarin she responded as follows:

I first pay attention, it is the listen and then speak. And then they write. The first they listen, I also teach them for if they can't understand language the meaning and then speak. There is some basically their textbook, listen, read and the write all together. I do this during the whole class I do like, but if I no more time, may be the write for next class. First the listen and speak. If they not school in the primary school, if they can write, I will teach them how to teach. The most important I think is listening and speak.

Halliday (2014: 5) emphasises that teachers who teach Chinese should be well versed in the phonemic script of the language; they should read and write Pinyin accurately and fluently.

Zhou and Li (2015: 18, 25–26) suggest that CFL teachers need to design activities to cater for different learning styles. The learners in this study indicated their preferences regarding certain aspects of the Mandarin lessons, which was an indication of how their various learning styles influenced their preferences:

FG2-P5: I love learning new words and learning how to write the different characters.

The learners agreed that the lessons were fun as they played games, learned new words, were taught how to write characters for example, FG3-P3 said: *"I like the different obstacles in learning how to write the Chinese characters and how to pronounce the words and the tone the different Pinyin and the characters..."*

They also learnt about the Chinese culture and about homework, FG3-P No 3: said: *"... I was researching about China, I actually like the culture and learned a lot of things while writing it and it was just a great experience. I felt like I was in China myself"*.

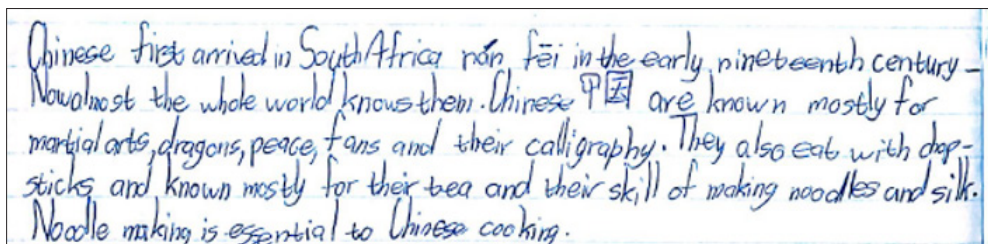


Figure 2: Examples of learner's work on the culture of China

Rhodes (2014: 127) states that a significant impact is made on proficiency by instructional methodologies such as content-based and thematic instruction, using the target language when teaching, having set benchmarks and assessing learners' proficiency. In this study, however, the TF explained: *"I have my doubts that we will still ... have a formal assessment [this year], but I do see that she really takes her list and she asks the children different things and she does make notes"*.

The principal was convinced that the project (the Mandarin lessons) was a great success:

I think it is successful. I sat there twice, they were already writing little figures and they were singing the songs. The day I went there, they were reading, singing, talking, everything ... From April to now it is unbelievable. It is either the technology or the lecturer, or we are working with the guys with the right minds.

The Chinese teacher added:

Hopefully they can speak some basic Chinese language and they make the greeting and conversation? Yes, I want them to write characters and the Pinyin also. Today I made time for teaching the Pinyin. They learn to speak the standard Mandarin, the pronunciation be good.

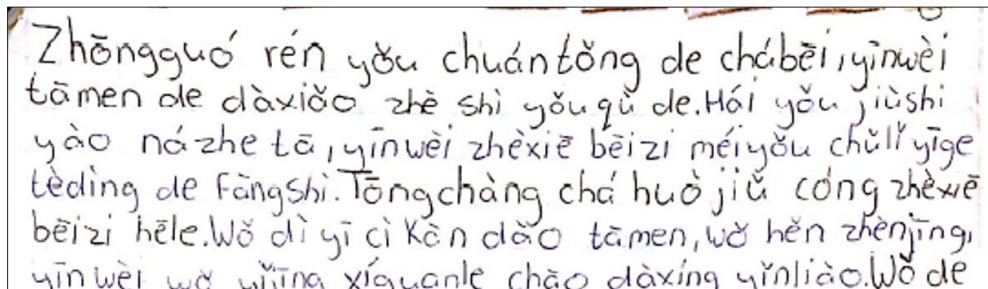


Figure 3: Learner example of writing in Pinyin

It was evident that learners enjoyed their Mandarin classes, although some learners felt that they needed more and longer classes.

Theme 3: Learners' learning experiences

Learners' enjoyment of Mandarin lessons was regarded as very important. The following responses from FG1-P3 were significant and encompassed all the responses recorded during the focus group interviews, in parents' questionnaires, during interviews with the principal, the teacher facilitator and during our own observations:

FG1-P 3: I honestly love Mandarin, there is nothing I don't like about the lessons.

McEown, Noels and Saumure (2014: 227) explain that teachers should know the reasons why learners want to learn a language (e.g. Mandarin) and address these reasons in their lessons. By doing so, teachers can foster learners' "motivation by supporting their sense of competence, relatedness and cultural understanding". The learners in this study expressed their experiences of the Mandarin classes in terms of the teacher's pedagogy and what they have learned so far (from April 2015 to August 2015).

The learners' impression of the teacher was very positive. They experienced her as being kind, caring, supportive, patient and willing to help them and she allowed for mistakes. Responses to this effect were:

FG1-P1 said: She prepares something on her laptop just to show us and to give examples of what we are going to do and we are going to learn, so that helps a lot.

FG3-P5 said: We are taught Mandarin. She usually shows us, like on the board. First she would show us a video from the TV on how the basics are and then she will rephrase it ... and if ... you want [her to repeat something] ... she may write it down then and we take notes on that and then she teaches us how pronounce the words and the tone.

The learners had different opinions about learning the language itself:

FG1-P4: I wouldn't say I don't like it, but ... it is a bit of a challenge to write the Chinese characters... because there is a specific stroke order that you make to follow so if you forget that...!

FG2-P3: It was relaxing, it was like talking to a friend.

FG2-P5: I have already spoken about groups. It was nice discussing this in groups, because I also learn something new from other people. It was great because we shared our feelings in my group.

FG3-P2: I think I am good at Mandarin because we write down nouns and we get to learn while we are at home and they give us websites to go through to watch some videos while we are at home and learn like the number counting and the other things.

FG3-P6: Yes. She even provides extra information, not only just telling us about, she makes us to play, she gives us voice notes and videos and she uses it as well as TV.

Parents were also very supportive of their children learning Mandarin: FG2-P5: “Yes, because my mother already downloaded apps on her phone – four apps actually, two on her phone and two on her tablet, so I sometimes learn it when she is here”. The parents felt that they would like their children to speak, read and write the language fluently because it would open up opportunities for them.

The TF had the following to say:

They love learning Mandarin and the reason why I say so, is because you can see how committed they are and they are very excited and I can see that they put in extra effort and they do extra. I think what they like is that they can speak to each other and other children don't understand them. They love flaunting the language ... So they do like it and I can see them working with her all the time. You know, sometimes I think maybe I should quiet them down, but then I see, they are just talking about the language and they are talking to her.

This is in keeping with Chomsky, the interactionist and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theories, that the learning environment should be appropriate and conducive for the learner to learn the language and where social dialogue takes place spontaneously.

11. Case study narrative and conclusion

This research explored the teaching and learning of Mandarin as a foreign language in a school in Pretoria, Gauteng, South Africa. The research questions were adequately answered as learners' motivations were captured, how Mandarin was taught within the learning environment was recorded, how learners' learning experiences of Mandarin were reported and what implications the findings have for the future. Furthermore, Chomsky, the interactionist and Vygotsky's theories underpinned the study as it brought into fruition their unified beliefs that the child has an innate propensity towards learning a language within a

conducive learning environment, which includes Chinese cultural activities such as folksongs, videos and visuals of the country and stimulating interactive social dialogue.

The positive experiences and achievements of the learners serve as evidence of the learners' motivation, the schools' enthusiasm, organisational skills, support and involvement, the parents' support and the Chinese teacher's excellent pedagogy and efforts. In addition, the learners' expectations were exceeded as they expressed their excitement about the opportunity to learn Mandarin and to realise the benefits it afforded, including job opportunities and the ability to communicate with Chinese people locally and in China. Learners felt that learning Mandarin was challenging and required hard work and concentration. They also realised that their study of Mandarin helped them with their studies in general and one learner said he felt like a "hero".

From the interviews and interaction with the principal and TF the researchers were able to identify factors that contributed to the success of Mandarin teaching and learning in the participating school. The principal described the school as "visionary"; the management team planned ahead and realised the benefits of offering Mandarin to their learners in this era of globalisation. The Mandarin project was regarded as a long-term investment. Rhodes (2014: 129) explains that in a global society, children need to become proficient in a language other than English, as well as the cultural knowledge and skills embodied by the language. This would enable them to function in a "multilingual, multicultural world". Moeller and Catalano (2015: 327) refer to current developments in foreign language teaching and learning, which lean towards "public pedagogy, social media, and action research as additional ways to foster intercultural competence and language learning". In an effort to ensure continued learning of Mandarin, the school has collaborated with the high school closest to it, which also offers Mandarin, to ensure that learners can continue their study of the language.

The principal, teachers, learners, parents and governing body were immediately enthusiastic when the district office of the Gauteng Education Department approached the school to offer Mandarin. The TF volunteered to facilitate and coordinate the Mandarin classes, as she was also eager to learn Mandarin. The Chinese Culture and International Education Exchange Centre (CCIEEC) became involved, provided and paid for the Chinese teacher. The centre also provided workbooks for the learners. There were no expenses involved for the school or the learners. Parents were also eager to learn Mandarin and the CCIEEC might consider offering classes on Saturdays. Other stakeholders such as a nearby hotel offered free accommodation for the Chinese teachers and breakfast vouchers to award learners who make progress. The cooperation of the parents, board members and community members and their understanding of the benefits of FL learning, were crucial for the project. The district foreign language supervisor played an important role by advocating for the programme in the district and the community at large and by collaborating with other stakeholders.

According to the principal, factors that contributed to the success of Mandarin classes included the way the project was presented to the school community (its purpose), a suitable venue, the way the Chinese teacher conducted the lessons, the why, the how and the what that matters to learners. Other factors include support and praise from the principal, the availability of progress reports to teachers and other stakeholders, buy-in and ownership by the school and partnering schools. Academics from universities all over the world have also visited the school because they are interested in the way Mandarin is taught there.

The Chinese teacher's background, subject knowledge, training, experience and pedagogy played an important role in the learners' acquisition of Mandarin. The learners particularly appreciated the teacher's personal attributes, such as her friendliness, patience, support, her willingness to repeat things and to make the classes fun. She was able to use the school's facilities (technology, tablets, laptops, big screen TVs and e-learning processes), which were already in place. Wong *et al.*, (2011: 232) postulate that collaboratively inquiring into the development of technology-enhanced Chinese language curricula is a way to "build on ideas for contextually viable innovations".

Based on the data obtained in this study, teachers of Mandarin need to capitalise on the successes achieved during these Mandarin classes and to address the challenges that impede the successful acquisition of Mandarin in schools that are introducing Mandarin as an additional language.

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