Research Article

A Study on the Problems of Chinese Language Teaching as a Foreign Language in Secondary Schools in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: "One belt one road initiative" concept caused to strengthening China – Sri Lanka bilateral relations considerably during last years and as a result of it a vast number of Sri Lankan students are motivated to learn Chinese language based on its significant impact on contemporary Sri Lankan society. In order to promote the Chinese language learning in Sri Lanka general education system, Sri Lanka educationists have designed a Chinese language curriculum focusing on the successful achievements of local students in global world. This study mainly focuses on the exploring the problems and factors which may affect negatively on the Chinese language teaching and learning in secondary schools, Sri Lanka. Similarly focuses on the countermeasures to develop the Chinese language education in Sri Lankan schools. This study explores and identifies some reasons for the problems of Chinese language teaching from the perspectives of the teachers who have been problematic in Chinese language teaching process. By conducting an interview and a face to face interview, students' attitudes, examination systems, instructional programs, teachers' qualifications and teaching strategies, language learning environments have been considered as barriers to teaching Chinese as a foreign language (TCFL). Moreover, suggestions for student centered learning, updated teacher training system, designing well equipped learning Chinese language environment and teaching materials are offered.
Keywords: Chinese, Foreign Language, Problems, Secondary education, Teaching.

1. Introduction

The study of second or foreign language acquisition has a long history of more than four decades and it was one of the rapidly expanded areas in the field of humanities (Moskovsky *et al.,* 2017). There is no doubt that every person has a high level of proficiency in their first language but such proficiency cannot be expected from the learners who learn a second or foreign language in formal educational settings (Alnatheer, 2013). Teaching a foreign language is always a challenging task and that tasks requires nationwide efforts, thus, it's vital to have a national system of foreign language teaching (Oktay, 2015) which requires a scientific plan. Achieving this plan is impossible if the students do not have a cognitive motivation for learning a foreign language. A foreign language is useful to communicate, scientific and cultural purposes of the target language. The ideal foreign language learning classroom should be communicative, constructivist and collaborative, also the basis of a foreign language teaching should be the spoken, not learning grammar and writing. The problems of secondary education system of Sri Lanka has been major matter of concern for many years in the Sri Lankan educational field. Therefore, this study attempts to facilitate the Chinese language teaching and learning in secondary education in Sri Lanka in order to enhance the active participation to the future economic growth of the country.

Present study investigates the deficiencies in teaching Chinese as a foreign language in secondary education related to the teaching methods, school curriculum, text books etc. Further, it examines new developments and trends in foreign language education and some suggestions in order to stimulate learners' motivation, to promote enthusiasm of learning Chinese and also to provide assistance for the smooth dissemination of Chinese language teaching and learning in secondary education, Sri Lanka.

In order to overcome the problems exit in foreign language education, possible solutions are establishing a coordination committee for the language learning problem, designing a new curriculum, revising syllabuses, organizing in-service training and changing the teacher training systems (Bayraktaroglu, 2012; Enginarlar, 2003). Increasingly, language educators contend that foreign language learning should increase students' intercultural competence (IC) which would allow them to see relationships between different cultures, mediate across these cultures, and critically analyze cultures including their own (Chapelle, 2010). Language teachers should recognize their role in eliciting culture learning in their classrooms and ways to access that learning (Moloney and Harbon, 2010). To Geringer (2003), teacher quality outweighs other factors such as motivation, funding, and class sizes, and qualified teachers can create the best environment for learning. There should be qualified teachers with the ability to teach to obtain quality education, which is an important problem for many developing countries (Paker, 2006).

As the world become increasingly interconnected through the process of globalization, proficiency in more than one language is critically important for business, trade, diplomacy and to promote international cooperation, mutual understanding and respect. Chinese language is one of the outstanding foreign languages in foreign language education in Sri Lanka. In 1972, teaching Chinese as a foreign language was commenced as a certificate course study in University of Kelaniya. Hence, University of Kelaniya was recognized as the pioneer institution for Chinese language education in Sri Lanka. And also, university of Sabaragamuwa offer Chinese as a major subject for the degree program. Since the number of students who learn Chinese gradually increased Chinese language was also introduced to the Ordinary and Advanced level examinations in secondary schools in 2007. According to the annual reports published by the Department of Examination, there are around 300 students learning Chinese language in ordinary level and advance level classes in secondary schools Sri Lanka.

2. Literature Review
2.1 The development of foreign language teaching methodologies
Language teaching methods are derived from a range of standpoints. These include views of language, of language learning in general, and of second or foreign language learning in particular. The variety of origins has produced a plethora of methods. Language has been perceived in the literature as a codified linguistic structure underpinned by established rules (e.g. Honey, 1997) or as a mediated social semiotic (e.g. Halliday, 1973; Lantolf, 2000). Language learning has been variously described in terms of behaviorist habit formation (Skinner, 1957), of an innate language acquisition device and a universal grammar (Chomsky, 1965) or of being meaning-oriented rather than form-oriented (Mitchell, 1994). Second or foreign language learning has been equated with first language learning (Gouin, 1892) or has been depicted as a process that is very different from first language teaching (Stern, 1970). In this section, some of the methods that have been propounded on the strength of these perspectives are outlined. The majority are methods that are among those most commonly described in historical overviews of language teaching (e.g. Titone, 1968; Rivers,

1981; Tang, 1983; Howatt, 1984; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards and Rodgers, 1986; Knight, 2001).

Until the middle of the twentieth century, the Grammar-Translation Method was the predominant method for language teaching in most educational contexts. This method was derived from the learning of Latin and Greek, which were the classical languages taught in Europe. Grammar as a discipline had its roots in Greek and Roman scholarship and was revived during the Renaissance.

The objective of the method was to instill intellectual rigor and to transmit the cultural values embodied in the literary canons to a new generation. Language was thus viewed as an academic discipline, rather than as a means for conducting everyday social interactions. Priority was given to the written language, with comprehension achieved through translation from the target language into the mother tongue, and competence developed through translation from the mother tongue into the target language, underpinned by mastery of the grammar system through parsing and other form-focused exercises, and memorization of lexical items. Towards the end of the twentieth century, great attention was given to the 'Communicative Approach' or 'Communicative Language Teaching', although in reality these are more an umbrella term for a range of curriculum design principles and teaching methods all sharing the underlying philosophy than a single, specific method. Bygate, Skehan and Swain (2001, p.2) argue that the Communicative Approach "was explicitly a post-method approach to language teaching…in which the principles underlying the use of different classroom procedures were of paramount importance, rather than a package of teaching materials".

The pluralism of the Communicative Approach could be seen as united by common principles, which include a view of language as principally serving as an expression of meaning at the discourse level (not just the word or sentence level), where appropriacy is as important as accuracy; a view of language learning as best brought about by involving learners actively in communication related to real-life contexts; and a view of the teacher as a facilitator and motivator, as well as source of knowledge. Task-based learning was appropriated from other subject areas in the curriculum (such as issues-based teaching in social sciences) and from experiments in Bangalore by N.S. Prabhu, and promoted as a 'strong' form of the Communicative Approach, as it emphasizes holistic language. Drawing on constructivist views of learning, particularly those of Vygotsky and Bruner, task-based learning advocates a learner-centered curriculum and teaching methods that have a strong element of group-work and autonomous activities: thus it appears to mesh well with communicative views of language learning that stress the development of various competences—communicative, strategic, cultural, etc.—by the individual learner.

2.2 The learner-centered education in FLT
The learner centered education includes the idea that the students have choice in what to study and how to study. It is focused on the student's needs abilities, interests and learning styles with the teacher as the facilitator of learning. During 1970s-1980s the impact of learner-centeredness in language teaching was evident with the development of communicative approaches which shifted the attention of the teaching-learning processes from language form to language function, or to language use in accordance with the needs of learners (Savignon, 1997). According to David Nunan (1990:179), general learner-centered philosophy "emerged as an offspring of communicative language learning". The shift from the structural to the communicative approach implied in some way a shift form teacher-

centered to learner-centered teaching. In 1985 R. B. Kaplan (1985:3) wrote: "various approaches have fostered the notion of student-centered classroom". Tabulawa (2003) states that the concept of 'learner centeredness' is usually used together with 'participatory', 'democratic', 'inquiry-based', and 'exploratory' methods.

The expectation of student-centered pedagogy is that students are active participants in the learning process rather than receivers of knowledge from the teachers. This is a democratic type of pedagogy as it requires a relationship which is based on a dialogue between teacher and student. This shows that in new educational approaches, the roles of teacher and student have changed and been redefined. For Penny Ur (2001:6), there are two versions of this approach, the *strong* one, which "would imply things like getting learners to find out information for themselves rather than being told, to create their own materials, to decide on their own syllabuses, to self-asses" and the *weak* one, which "would imply things like asking for and respecting (but not necessarily obeying) learners' requests, a lessening of the teacher-talk and an increase in learner activation". The learner-centered approach "tends to view language acquisition as a process of acquiring skills rather than a body of language," in Nunan's words (1990:21), and it is associated with some specific techniques or classroom activities, such as working in pairs or groups, though what makes the real difference is that teachers, who follow this approach, try to engage learners in meaningful activities whose main aim is genuine communication in the target language.

Along with the new emphasis on the learner instead of the teacher, the foreign language classroom would create a learning environment including the facts such as the authenticity of language content and materials, appropriateness of the language content to the learners' needs and interests, learner's active role in the language learning process and learners' autonomy. Learner centered teaching seems especially suited to teach a second or foreign language as it is focused on learners' active factors, motivation, enjoyment in the L2 learning process. Therefore, in this paper, we would like to have a close look at how the leaner-centered approach to be successfully implemented in the TCFL classroom in the secondary schools Sri Lanka.

3. Methodology

The research sample is consisted of 19 teachers and 22 students from the secondary schools, Sri Lanka. To select the participants of the study, a simple random sampling method was used. All the teachers participated for this study were female teachers and they have pursuit Bachelor's or masters' degrees. Teacher participants varying years of teaching experience ranging from one to ten years. The students participated for this study, were in grade 10, 11, 12, 13 of secondary schools. It was tried to be understood the problems that are faced in TCFL classroom by conducting questionnaire and interview research methods. In order to get teachers' views, a questionnaire was prepared. The questionnaires with three parts was developed for the survey study. The first part of the questionnaire related to the demographic information (Table 1). The second and third part of the questionnaire comprised on the questions (Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD)) and the other questions (As open ended ones) they may identified were also asked. The two parts dealt with the teachers' perception of the TCFL teaching in secondary schools, usage of teaching approach in teaching Chinese and their perceived difficulties related to the areas of syllabi, textbooks, teachers' guide and teaching approaches. With the aim of deriving the results of the survey and exploring teachers' and students perceptions about the integration Chinese teaching in TCFL class, a semi- structured interview was conducted by the researcher.

The interviews were conducted in Sinhalese, in the participants' mother tongue, in order to them for carrying out better verbal communication. Using the mother tongue during the interviews allows the respondents to feel free in expressing their opinions and elaborate more clearly on their viewpoints. The number of teachers engaged in this semi-structured interview was six. The data gathered from the questionnaire and interview were analyzed descriptively by calculating the percentages. Finally, the conclusions were made by listing the ideas and concepts related to the field.

Table 1. Demographic information of the teacher participants

		Frequency	**Percentage**
Teaching experience	1– 4	16	84.21%
	5 or above	3	15.79%
Qualification	BA/ B.Ed.	11	57.89%
	MA/M.Ed./ M.Phil.	8	42.11%
Organization type	Public	18	94.74%
	Private	1	5.26%
Participated for teacher trainings/ not	Yes	8	42.11%
	No	11	57.89%

Table 2. Demographic information of the student participants

		Frequency	**Percentage**
Gender	Male	16	84.21%
	Female	3	15.79%
Grade	10	10	45.46%
	11	6	27.28%
	12	4	18.19
	13	2	9.09%

4. Results and Discussion
4.1 Results of the survey
Based on the teachers' responses, the problems existed in TCFL classroom in secondary schools, Sri Lanka were analyzed as follows:

Table 3. Problems on Chinese language syllabi in secondary schools, Sri Lanka.

Item	Problem	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Syllabi is very deep and profound.	47.37%	26.32%	21.05%	5.26%	-
2	Not up to the standards of authentic foreign language learning.	21.05%	31.58%	36.84%	10.53%	-
3	It's very difficult for students to achieve the learning outcomes mentioned in the syllabi.	15.79%	52.63%	10.53%	15.79%	5.26%

*Table 3 shows the Chinese languages teachers' views on problems on Chinese language syllabi in secondary schools, Sri Lanka. According to the majority of teachers' point of view the current syllabi of TCFL in secondary schools do not meet the needs of the students.

Similarly, the teachers have responded that, the syllabi currently used in TCFL includes the intended goals and learning outcomes which cannot be easily achieved by the learners in their different stages of learning Chinese.

Table 4. Problems on Chinese teacher's guide (TG) in secondary schools, Sri Lanka.

Item	Problem	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Most of the parts in TG was not clear and in detailed.	21.05%	15.79%	42.11%	21.05%	-
2	TG is rarely followed when teaching Chinese.	26.32%	36.84%	21.05%	5.26%	10.53%
3	TG does not focus on four language skills.	15.79%	31.58%	36.84%	15.79%	-

*Table 4 shows the Chinese language teachers views on teachers' guide used in TCFL education. According to this data analysis, the Chinese language teachers rarely use teachers' guide to teach Chinese as they believe that the TG does not provide a proper guidance on how to enhance students' four language skills and what teaching methods should be followed. And also, the teachers have stated their comments saying that related to the teaching points such as culture, literature and essay writing, TG is not giving proper guidance by providing sample texts, essays etc.

Table 5. Problems on Chinese language text books in TCFL in secondary schools, Sri Lanka.

Item	Problem	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Text book is not up to student's Chinese proficiency level.	21.05%	36.84%	31.58%	5.26%	5.26%
2	A new text book should be recommended.	26.32%	42.11%	15.79%	10.53%	-
3	Students are not interested to learn the content on text book.	21.05%	42.11%	10.53%	15.79%	10.53%

*Since we know that language learning is a complicated process and that is why several materials play an important role regarding second or foreign language acquisition. But textbook is such a material that can be accepted by all as a specific process or system of language learning. Table 5 shows the Chinese language teachers' views on text books used in TCFL classroom in Sri Lankan secondary schools. Currently, "Contemporary Chinese" and "New practical Chinese reader" compiled in China, are used as Chinese textbooks in secondary schools.

The majority of teachers showed their negative vive for the text books currently used in TCFL. The teachers responded that the textbooks are too much difficult by comparing with students' actual language proficiency level. Also, they have suggested for another selection for textbooks as the leaner does not feel interesting in its content. It does not carry authentic language and expressions. Also, it lacks real life situations and content which suit the Sri Lankans learners of secondary schools. More importantly, according to the point of view of the teachers, the Chinese text books currently used do not focus on Sri Lanka and China intercultural knowledge in order to enhance the effective communication ability of the learner.

Table 6. Common problems in TCFL education in secondary schools, Sri Lanka.

Item	Problem	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Limited teaching materials.	31.58%	26.32%	21.05%	21.05%	-
2	Exam system does not evaluate the speaking skills of the students.	57.89%	15.79%	26.32%	-	-
3	Time is not sufficient for TCFL.	31.58%	47.37%	10.53%	5.26%	5.26%
4	Learner's lack of motivation.	21.05%	36.84%	15.79%	15.79%	10.53%
5	Unsuitability of learning environment.	26.32%	36.84%	15.79%	5.26%	15.79%

*Table 6 shows the teachers' attitudes on some problems related to the evaluation system, teaching materials, time etc.

The majority of the teachers have complained that the teaching materials such as text books, audio and visual materials are very limited in classroom. And also, they think that, due to inadequacy of learning environment in classroom, the teaching process lacks the learners' motivation through Chinese language learning. The teachers also indicated the examination system as one of the most important problems. According to them, the current evaluation system only evaluates leaners' skills on reading and writing and it lacked practical evaluation process.

In addition, since the teachers have only three school periods (40 minute/period) per week to teach Chinese language, they cannot focus on enhancing learners' inter-cultural communicative competency rather than focusing on coverage of syllabi within the given period of time.

Table 7. Suggested solutions by the teachers

Item	Solution	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Sufficient teaching & learning materials should be provided.	52.63%	15.79%	31.58%	-	-
2	Should focus on the quality of national teaching materials.	26.32%	42.11%	21.05%	10.53%	-
3	Syllabi and text books should be redesigned considering on authentic language learning and world of work.	21.05%	47.37%	21.05%	10.53%	-
4	The exams should focus all four language skills.	26.32%	57.89%	15.79%	-	-
5	Should implement a systematic language education policy.	315.79%	36.84%	47.37%	-	-
6	The teachers in TCFL should trained on both teaching content and methods.	26.32%	21.05%	42.11%	5.26%	5.26%
7	Teaching materials should give more attention to enhance the communicative competency of the learner.	21.05%	21.05%	10	5.26%	-

*Table 7 shows the teachers' suggestions for the problems in TCFL in Sri Lanka. The suggestions center upon "educational system', "teaching & learning materials", "quality standards of foreign language education" categories. According to the teachers' views, the influence of "learning environment" and "students' characteristics" to the TCFL in secondary schools is very low. Majority of teachers stated that it's very important to redesign the instructional programs such as text books, syllabi and teachers' guide empowering a systematic foreign language education policy towards secondary schools, Sri Lanka.

4.2 Results of the interview

Based on the students' and teachers' responses during interviews, the data were analyzed as follows:

Table 8. Problems stated by the students in TCFL classroom in secondary schools, Sri Lanka.

Item	Problem	Number of Students	Percentage
1	Not interested in teaching methods.	17	77.27%
2	Insufficient learning materials.	14	63.64%
3	Insufficient qualified teachers.	10	45.46%
4	Lack of interest to actively participate in language learning.	11	50%
5	No suitable learning environment in classroom.	9	40.91%
6	Learning materials do not focus on learner's needs and real life characteristics.	15	68.18%
7	TCFL does not focus on enabling communication.	18	81.82%

*Table 8 shows the attitudes of students in teaching Chinese in secondary schools. According to majority of students, the present Chinese language education system is not directed for their learning needs. As the most significant problems that the student stated during the interviews, the classroom teaching lacked practical sessions. According to the students, the Chinese language lesson of their school focused on grammar-translation method while giving utmost importance to learning grammar. Some students also stated that, the curricular should be re-organized efficiently and job oriented.

According to them, verbal communication is the key role of Chinese language learning process. Therefore, they complained that, the teachers rarely focused on enabling communication and also on enhancing their listening and speaking skills in classroom by utilizing interesting teaching approaches such as multimedia method, communicative approach, interactive method etc. Similarly, the students claimed that, the teachers were not the experts and they lacked talents in teaching Chinese grammar, culture and Chinese literature. And also, the students stated their comments on both quality and quantity of learning materials and classroom facilities during interviews. The students lacked enough text books, culture learning materials related to Chinese calligraphy, Chinese painting and paper cutting and even they are too expensive to buy from outside. Therefore, they lost their interest to actively participate in Chinese language learning. According to this data analysis based on interviews, we can see that, majority of students have negative attitudes towards the current Chinese language education exist in Sri Lankan general education system which is not tailored for the learner's expectations supplying particular foreign language learning environment.

Table 9. The responses of teachers in TCFL in secondary schools, Sri Lanka.

Item	Response	Number of Teachers	Percentage
1	Arrange group activities very often in classroom.	2	33.33%
2	Focus on teaching grammar very often in classroom.	4	66.67%
3	Encourage the leaner to communicate in Chinese very often.	5	83.33%
4	Focus on student centered teaching.	3	50%
5	Spend more time to enhance students' inter-cultural communication competency.	2	33.33%

*Table 9 shows the teachers' responses to the several questions related to the teaching methods asked during the interview. It was revealed that the most of the local teachers use grammar translation method yet and the main focus is on Grammar in the class room. Moreover, the teachers' attitudes towards Chinese teaching are very typical and they do not focus on activity based teaching in order to enhance the active participation of the learner towards Chinese learning.

According to the teachers, they basically pay attention to develop students' writing and skill focusing on examination system in schools. Therefore, either speaking skills or inter-cultural communication skills could not be developed due to lack of time and teaching materials in classroom.

5. Conclusion & Recommendations
The study tried to investigate on the various problems related to teaching approaches, teaching content and teaching & learning materials exit in TCFL in secondary schools, Sri Lanka. The findings of the study indicated that, although the Chinese language teachers are clever at the Chinese pronunciation system, but, their skills of communication in Chinese is not in a satisfactory level. Teachers hardly follow the instructions on the teachers' guide. Teachers are not well trained with newly developed teaching methods and approaches. The TCFL classroom was very typical teacher centered.

This study has shown that, the TCFL in Sri Lankan secondary schools need some positive changes based on both theories and practices in 21st century. Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford (2003) stated that students need the opportunity to learn in their preferred styles to enable them to learn as much as possible. Therefore, the teachers engage in Chinese language teaching in Sri Lankan secondary schools should focus on how to increase the motivation of school children in learning Chinese language, should focus on developing their creativeness in learning a foreign language.

The teachers are also advised to use variety of teaching methods to stimulate the learner by motivating students and encouraging learning Chinese language in TCFL classroom. The teachers should focus on teaching materials in terms of enabling Chinese language communication in the classroom. It should also be given importance to improving students' Chinese language skills via audio-visual materials in order to uplift the Chinese language education in secondary education system, Sri Lanka. It was suggested that, there is a necessity to maintain a well-equipped Chinese language environment with authentic teaching

and learning materials as a solution for majority of the problems regarding Chinese language learning. It should be focused on classrooms that enable practice like language laboratories in order to develop the Chinese language education and tailor for students' expectations supplying particular learning environments.

Another suggestion was performed on the quality of teachers by emphasizing the importance of teacher training. As Ehrman, Leaver and Oxford (2003) explained, "This in no way excludes good teachers and well- constructed syllabi; in fact, they are even more important than ever for the foreign language learners. The teacher assumes greater responsibilities in designing and supporting individual and personalized learning tasks. This has tremendous implications for teacher educators and teacher trainers to act as agents of change as they foster language learning through the use of public pedagogy and critical media literacy. Also, it is suggested that the necessary curricula reforms should be done in order to situate Chinese teaching and learning within an appropriate cross-cultural frame by boosting the foreign language teaching and learning in Sri Lanka. Hence, according to one's own instructional practices through classroom-based investigations, Chinese language teachers actively contribute to the research endeavor and change practices based on findings in TCFL classroom is also highly recommended.

The present study is mainly focusing on teaching problems which are unique to teachers in TCFL in secondary schools, Sri Lanka. Learning problems have not been paid sufficient attention in this research study.

Future researches on Chinese language secondary education in Sri Lanka should more and more consider the learners' learning problems such as attitude problems and subject wise problems in order to come up with a more detailed and comprehensive findings that enables us to design appropriate ways of developing foreign language teaching and learning in Sri Lanka.

6. Acknowledgement

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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