

## UNVEILING THE PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGES OF TEACHING MANDARIN IN ZIMBABWEAN SCHOOLS

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### Abstract

*The growing economic interdependence between China and other countries has created a surge in the demand for the teaching of Mandarin language, hence its inclusion into foreign language studies in Africa, and Zimbabwe specifically. However, the pedagogical practices within the Zimbabwean classrooms teaching Mandarin are unknown. This qualitative study addresses this by analyzing the challenges faced by secondary school Mandarin teachers. Ten Harare-based teachers were purposively selected for in-depth semi-structured interviews to share their experiences in teaching Mandarin. Guided by the theory of Communicative Approach to Language Teaching, themes were derived from the interview data and explored, revealing overarching challenges such as the dominance of English as the language of instruction, Shona/Chinese cultural differences, lack of instruction time, linguistic incompetencies, learner traits, restrictive teaching materials, and restricted access to digital means. To address these constraints, the study recommends the employment of native-speaker instructors by Zimbabwean schools, inclusion of intercultural competence into the language syllabus, and increasing access to digital technologies to enhance language acquisition. Moreover, future research needs to investigate learner experiences in order to provide a balanced view of the challenges experienced in teaching Mandarin in Zimbabwean classrooms, with the aim to inform language instruction enhancement and learner success.*

**Keywords:** CLT, Pedagogical Challenges, Mandarin Teachers, Classrooms, Zimbabwe

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## Introduction

This study examines the pedagogical challenges experienced by secondary school teachers of Mandarin in Zimbabwe, which may influence their ability to achieve meaningful learning outcomes. Mandarin, the standard Chinese variety, is mainly offered as a foreign language, globally (Szeto, Ansaldo, & Matthews, 2018). The rising economic ties between China and other nations have driven greater demand for Mandarin language courses, leading to its integration into foreign language curricular in African countries such as Zimbabwe (Hamadziripi & Mkize, 2019). Specifically, increasing trade relations between China and Zimbabwe have driven the popularity of studying Mandarin language in Zimbabwe, with the subject becoming a key component of the curriculum of Zimbabwean schools (Mugwara & Yuliang, 2021). Despite the growing interest in studying Mandarin language in Zimbabwe, there is still limited evidence available on the experiences of the teachers of the language. While Mkize & Chisoni (2015) and Tahwa (2020) investigated motivation in Chinese language learning in Zimbabwe, and extracurricular activities for Chinese language learning, respectively, none of their studies were based on teacher experiences. This absence of research has resulted in a restricted body of knowledge in relation to the pedagogic challenges of implementing Mandarin language lessons, and a lack of understanding of the useful methods of instruction for teaching Mandarin in these contexts.

Prior research indicates the major role of teacher variables, including instruction techniques and student-teacher interactions, in determining successful learning outcomes of Chinese as a foreign language (Wang, Zhang & Wang-Bramlett, 2022; Wang & Du, 2016). Mandarin teachers in foreign language environments generally experience intense instructional challenges (Wang et al., 2022). Scholarly evidence has revealed that the majority do struggle to come up with engaging and interactive lessons, relying heavily on traditional instructional approaches that are geared more towards memorization than communicative use (Pan, Sun, Zou, Cao, Zhang & Li, 2023; Zhao, 2016; Lam, 2020). This can result in student disengagement and limited language skills (Zhao, 2016). Teachers of Mandarin as a foreign language also face challenges with curriculum constraints, student diversity, and limited resources (Hao & Li, 2024; Pan et al., 2023). For instance, instructors may need to adapt to students who possess various linguistic backgrounds and learning styles, along with rigid curriculum specifications (Hao & Li, 2024). Research has also acknowledged the challenges of instructing Mandarin tones and characters to learners who have no exposure to tonal languages or logographic writing systems (Tahsildar, 2019; Cao, Sussman, Rios, et al., 2017; Qian, Li, and Cheng, 2023). Tahsildar's (2019) study on foreign learners studying Chinese in China indicated various complex linguistic features that students found hard to master, making it difficult to teach the logographic writing

systems. Qian et al. (2023) attribute the challenge of teaching Chinese to tonal variation that has the potential to alter word meaning, and its structurally complex grammatical makeup, requiring a rigorous instruction programme to master. All these difficulties highlight the need for targeted support and skills development to equip Mandarin teachers to cater to the unique needs of teaching in foreign language environments.

Considering the minimal research that targets the experiences of teaching Mandarin in Zimbabwe, rigorous studies in this area are essential to inform context-based support and teacher development initiatives, and to enhance the quality of Mandarin teaching in the country. This study attempts to bridge the existing research gap by addressing the following research questions:

1. What are the pedagogical challenges faced by Zimbabwean secondary school teachers of Mandarin in Harare?
2. How can these challenges be addressed to enhance more successful learning outcomes?
3. What are the implications for instructing Mandarin as a foreign language in Zimbabwe?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory of Communicative Approach to Language Teaching (CLT) provides a theoretical perspective to explore the pedagogical obstacles experienced by the Mandarin teachers in Zimbabwean schools. CLT originated in the 1970s due to the weaknesses associated with traditional language teaching approaches, which emphasised structure and form over efficient communication (Richards, 2006). This method relies on the assumption that language is a basic communication tool, and therefore language acquisition needs to be aimed at enhancing learners' abilities to communicate in natural settings (Spada, 2007). The major goal of CLT is to provide learners with the effective communication skills in the target language, optimizing their capabilities to communicate in various contexts (Larsen, 2003). Through an emphasis on communicative competence, CLT aims to enhance learners' language competences in listening, speaking, reading and writing in various contexts, with a specific focus on facilitating opportunities for natural language usages (Freeman, 2008). This transition from structuralism and behaviourism towards communicative competence draws attention to the fact that language learning needs to be embedded in authentic communicative situations.

In the CLT framework, the instructor has multiple roles to play including being a facilitator, guide, and mediator, giving utmost importance to learners' effective communication rather than grammatical soundness through drills (Brown and Lee, 2015). This involves not only administering interactions in the classroom, but also overseeing student activities. The pedagogical practices and approaches of the teacher strongly influence the nature and

quality of learners' participation and performance in the target language (Toro, Camacho-Minuche, Pinza-Tapia and Paredes, 2019). For this reason, teachers must plan and incorporate materials to support the learning activities. Furthermore, Toro et al. (2019) highlight teachers' own attitudes and beliefs regarding language teaching as determining factors of the learning atmosphere and outcomes in the CLT classrooms. Given the multifaceted nature of the teachers' responsibilities, it becomes apparent that their role within the CLT model is both complex and central, which calls for a deeper understanding of the language instruction and learning situations.

This study, guided by the CLT model, perceives the roles of Mandarin teachers as multidimensional, including establishing communicative activities and tasks, providing support and guidance, facilitating opportunities for authentic interactions, sustaining learner motivation, giving clear instructions, and cultivating a supportive learning context. Through this perspective, this study explores the teachers' experiences juxtaposed to these roles, with an emphasis on learner-centeredness. Thus, questions in relation to the appropriateness of the instructional materials, adequacy of the teaching strategies, and aptness of the assessment plans, emerge. Moreover, the study delves into the feasibility of sustaining an interactive classroom in the presence of external factors such as time management, resource availability, influence of language and culture, and teacher attitudes, in an attempt to get an overall view of the complex dynamics involved.

## **Methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative design to investigate the experiences of Zimbabwean school teachers of Mandarin. This approach facilitated an open-ended exploration and an in-depth comprehension of pedagogical issues in their natural settings. Within the qualitative design, the study carried out semi-structured interviews with ten teachers from ten purposively sampled secondary schools in Harare (five state owned and five private schools, achieving sample representativeness). Purposive sampling enabled the selection of a diversity of schools that offer Mandarin as well as the recruitment of relevant teachers of the language, ensuring a systematic data gathering procedure. The interviews took place between March and June 2024, at the premises of the selected schools, using a predefined instrument, with a set of open-ended questions. They lasted approximately 30 minutes each, were audio-recorded, and later transcribed into qualitative data.

Thematic Analysis was used to examine the qualitative interview data, as guided by Creswell's (2016) procedure. The process involved: familiarization with the data (interview transcripts were thoroughly read to gain an in-depth understanding of the content); initial coding (codes were derived from the data, and themes emerged); theme development (codes were classified into themes and sub-themes); theme refinement (themes were revisited, modified, and delineated); theme naming (themes were labelled,

and a thematic map was established); theme interpretation (themes were interpreted within the context of the research aims and CLT theory). The ethical clearance to conduct this study was provided by the National Research Council (ethics approval no: ZNRC/24/6678). Informed consent was given by the participants, ensuring voluntary participation, awareness of the aim and usefulness of the study, anonymity, and the right to withdraw from the study with no consequences. Participant anonymity in the data analysis stage was maintained through assigning each individual with a unique alphanumeric code, ranging between P1 and P10 for the ten participants.

## Findings and Discussions

The qualitative data gathered from in-depth interviews with Mandarin teachers in Harare is presented and discussed in this section. It is organised into seven thematic sub-headings identified through systematic thematic analysis, corresponding to seven interview questions and their sub questions, that constituted the interview instrument as highlighted below.

1. Language of Instruction (Question 1: In what language(s) do you instruct and communicate in your Mandarin classroom, and at what point do you use the target language (Mandarin), the students' native language (Shona), or a blend of both?)
2. Cultural Diversity (Question 2: How do you address the cultural dimension of language in teaching Mandarin in your class, and how do you ensure learners' appreciation of cultural variations underlying the target language?)
3. Linguistic Competence (Question 3: Based on your observations of the learners' progress, can you describe the current level of their proficiency in Mandarin, and what specific language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) do you think that they have grasped or are struggling with?)
4. Instructional Materials (Question 4: What sort of authentic materials (for example, pictures, videos, audio clips, news stories, social media posts) do you employ in your Mandarin instruction and how often? What criteria do you use to select and adapt such materials to fit your learners' needs and proficiency levels?)
5. Individual Attributes (Question 5: What personal characteristics (for example, motivation, learning style, language learning background, culture, learning anxiety) do you perceive to mostly influence the learning of Mandarin, and in what ways do you include these attributes in your teaching?)
6. Time Factor (Question 6: How do you perceive the proportion of time devoted to teaching Mandarin in your school, and what is its effect on syllabus completion, your ability to address learners' needs and develop language proficiency?)
7. Digital Technologies and Internet Resources (Question 7: How much access do you have to reliable digital tools and Internet connectivity at your school, that you can use for Mandarin instruction, and are there any specific digital resources that you believe are inaccessible or would enhance your teaching?)

### *Language of Instruction*

All of the Mandarin instructors under study, who were Zimbabweans and taught Chinese as a foreign language, encountered a language of instruction challenge. To the question, "*In what language(s) do you instruct and communicate in your Mandarin classroom?*" the participants indicated that they primarily utilise English as the instruction language for theoretical as well as practical exercises. This question focused on the extent to which teachers can sustain interactive learning using the target language. The teachers reported that teaching Mandarin as a foreign language in English is extremely difficult, which is bound to hinder creativity and language acquisition owing to the intrinsic structural differences between the two languages, as well as limited exposure to actual use by students. The participants further highlighted the need for assistance from Mandarin native speakers to provide learners with a real experience of practicing the language, which would enrich their learning experiences. One participant said that:

[P10]: *I truly try to place students in a natural language situation in class; but with Mandarin, it is not that simple. There are moments when I will forget what a word means or even pronunciation. I believe there needs to be a native speaker who can sometimes introduce students to ideal linguistic norms.*

The outcome of the study that local instructors require assistance from first language speakers of Mandarin highlights the need for a strong linguistic and cultural support in foreign language instruction. This is in accordance with research findings which indicate that native speakers possess a better understanding of linguistic phenomena and cultural aspects of a language (Chen, Siniscalchi, Lee and Li, 2018). Native speakers have the ability to provide corrections and feedback that contribute towards accuracy and effectiveness in language teaching. Burns (2014) acknowledges the significance of native speakers as they use the target language naturally and more frequently as opposed to non-native speakers. This supports evidence in the current study, which emphasises the necessity of having the presence of native speakers in developing an immersed learning environment. Besides, native speakers can facilitate better cultural understanding and contextualization, which is essential to language learning (Chen et al., 2018). They can offer genuine materials, perspectives, and customs, enhancing the learning experiences and facilitating cross-cultural proficiency.

Despite the expanding view of the potential of native speaker instruction, it is worth noting the important mediation role played by non-native speakers in language learning, within the learners' socio-cultural environments. Non-native teachers enable students to better appreciate and grasp the target language through closing the cultural gaps and providing familiar context-specific perspectives (Lowe and Pinner, 2016). Hence, a collaborative



model where both native and non-native teachers work together can immensely benefit the foreign language classroom, and can provide learners with a more integrated and dynamic learning experience.

### *Cultural Diversity*

The research results show that one of the major challenges confronting Mandarin teachers in Zimbabwe is that the learners are mainly unaccustomed to the target language's culture, resulting in serious misinterpretations and difficulties in understanding. Reacting to the question, "How do you address the cultural dimension of language in teaching Mandarin in your class?", participants uncovered that the Chinese culture is included in the curriculum. However, they expressed concern that this approach is lacking as direct exposure to the culture is required to boost students' appreciation of the values portrayed in the language. Some of the outstanding teachers' perceptions incorporate the following:

[P3]: *The distinction between Shona and Chinese cultures have posed challenges in effectively instructing Mandarin given the close relationship between the target language and its culture.*

[P8]: *The students have misconceptions; they believe that it is somehow possible to master Mandarin without first knowing the culture that accompanies it.*

[P9]: *Through teaching Mandarin, I came to realise that culture has a lot of influence in teaching language. My students have been performing poorly because they are not knowledgeable about the Chinese culture.*

The views of the participants indicate the interrelatedness of language and culture and emphasise the inclusion of cultural skills in language teaching. Nugroho (2016) agrees and notes that learning a language is learning about some elements of the culture in which the language is spoken, including depictions of the other cultures. Fenner (2017: 4) further reinforces the significance of intercultural awareness in attaining a degree of language proficiency, introducing the notion of "communicative competence" in foreign language instruction. This concept focuses on the development of grammatical competence and awareness of appropriate use of language among learners, realised through an intercultural approach to language teaching (Fenner, *ibid*).

Byram, et al. (2002) define intercultural competence as enabling a mutual understanding of language, attitudes, values, and worldviews between social identities. The aforementioned language barriers, however, suggest that it would be challenging for Zimbabwean Mandarin teachers to transfer linguistic competence to learners with no knowledge of the target culture. The current language teaching methodology could possibly develop linguistic competence but not intercultural linguistic proficiency. As Zhang (2021) points out, learners' inability to comprehend cultural implications can result in misunderstandings and miscommunications. Hence, teachers should enrich their

intercultural interaction strategies to enable effective intercultural communication in the classroom.

### *Linguistic Competence*

The CLT theory emphasises that students must possess a certain degree of proficiency in the target language in order to promote interactive classroom practices. To quantify this, the following question was posed to participants: *"Based on your observations of the learners' progress, can you describe the current level of their proficiency in Mandarin?"* Most of the participants agreed that the sophistication of Mandarin poses significant linguistic difficulties for learners. All agreed that Mandarin is a complex language to learn, especially in the foreign language context, however, there were variations in their assessment of the level of complexity. Three participants rated it as very challenging, seven thought it was fairly difficult, and two viewed it as manageable if proper learning materials and adequate time were provided. Further enquiry revealed the major sources of Mandarin complexity as language characters, tones, and sound similarities. In addition, it was noted that first language (Shona) interferences also hindered the acquisition of Mandarin by students in Zimbabwe. One participant (P8) had this to say: *"Whenever the learners translated Chinese into their own language, Shona, to avoid linguistic difficulties, interference occurred."*

The findings indicate a shared challenge faced by students learning Mandarin in Zimbabwe, alluding to the struggle that teachers have to endure while teaching the language. Zhang (2021) agrees and further states that Mandarin tone learning is an overwhelming task that comes with an array of challenges, necessitating the design of particular exercises to help learners. These findings are consistent with prevailing literature, highlighting the linguistic challenge faced by teachers and learners of Chinese as a foreign language.

### *Instructional Materials*

The interviewees were asked to relate their experiences of using authentic materials in their Mandarin classes, as recommended by the CLT approach. The question asked was: *"What sort of authentic materials (for example, pictures, videos, audio clips, news stories, social media posts) do you employ in your Mandarin instruction and how often?"* The responses dominantly reflected a restricted usage of interactive materials, with seven participants (P1, P3, P5, P6, P8, P9, and P10) declaring inconsistencies. For example, P6 testified that *"We often use textbooks but supplemented by educational videos"* whereas P9 reported that *"Our interactive materials are mainly in the form of online quizzes, and sometimes PowerPoint presentations."* Conversely, three participants (P2, P4, and P7) highlighted a consistent usage, employing audio-visual materials such as magazine articles, voice recordings, and



recorded dialogues, to introduce learners to authentic language and support their interactive learning needs. For example, P7 stated that:

*I prefer to use real-life materials such as magazine or newspaper articles, to achieve language familiarity and to engage the learners. It enables them to see the application of language in a real-world set up, and supports more than one learning style.*

However, among those who declared use of authentic materials, challenges were cited, encompassing inaccessibility of the materials, cost, time, and inconsistent teaching methodologies. For example, P4 reported that:

*Although I make an effort to engage with authentic materials such as online videos, it's normally hard due to limited access to the internet, data cost, and preparation time for such materials.*

These findings stress the need for teachers to overcome the hindrances that prevent the application of genuine materials in language teaching, to enable an engaging and effective learning environment. They also affirm Mugimu and Sekiziyuvu's (2016) findings which established that, despite the significance of authentic materials in enhancing communicative competencies, they are most likely not accessible in developing countries owing to scarcity of instructional resources. Moreover, when such materials are available, they can also prove not to be suitable for CLT (Mugimu and Sekiziyuvu, *ibid*). This is in line with the Zimbabwean context in which teachers of Mandarin face severe challenges in developing or borrowing authentic materials due to limited resources. Consequently, teachers in the studied sample have minimal usage of authentic materials, a critical aspect of CLT that facilitates active learner involvement and sharpening of the four language skills. Seemingly, the teaching methodologies employed by Zimbabwean Mandarin teachers integrate CLT and traditional approaches that heavily depend on grammar textbooks. Nevertheless, as Walia (2012) suggests, it is practical to blend traditional teaching methodologies and CLT. Hence, the integrated approach by Zimbabwean Mandarin teachers is innovative and viable.

### *Individual Attributes*

Studies indicate that there are several individual traits that impact language learning outcomes. To evaluate this phenomenon, the participants were asked the question "*What personal characteristics (for example, motivation, learning style, language learning background, culture, learning anxiety) do you perceive to mostly influence the learning of Mandarin?*" The participants acknowledged the influencing power of some personal attributes such as motivation, learning approaches, and linguistic styles. In particular, P10 strongly believed that motivation is an important attribute determining variations in

language learning outcomes, based on individual interests, goals and needs. Hence, understanding the motivational factors among learners is key for successful instruction. In P10's view:

*The evolving career prospects for some students has led to fading interests in learning Mandarin, resulting in eventual dropouts from the subject.*

Similarly, P7 declared that:

*Enrolment into Mandarin classes is significant at early secondary level, around Form one and two, thereafter, the majority of learners tend to acquire new interests and pursue other academic fields.*

Further, according to P4, the demotivation to learn Mandarin stems from the difficulty of the language itself. This view echoes Tahsildar (2019) who argues that the foreign language learners' perceived complexity of Mandarin is associated with low motivation to learn the language. The language complexity views can lead to negative cognitive reactions and emotions, preventing learners from partaking in the learning process (Tahsildar, *ibid*).

The participants also noted that the students' learning strategies varied, influencing the quality of learning. It was reported that some students prefer engaging in tasks and activities, whereas some are hesitant due to individual traits such as low self-esteem. P4 enlightened that "*A number of learners choose to withhold their thoughts during spoken activities, due to word pronunciation uncertainties*". P1 held the same view, noting that "*Individual preferences in the language classroom vary, and it is up to the teacher to accommodate those differences.*" Nonetheless, the inclusion of all students' learning needs was assumed to pose problems, with six out of ten participants (P3, P4, P5, P7, P9, and P10) reporting that the majority of the learners preferred Shona-mediated Mandarin instruction, since they found their mother tongue more expressive. This was believed to hinder language learning progress as learners ought to conceptualise and communicate ideas in the target language for effective learning outcomes.

These research findings indicate that learners' preferences strongly influence motivation, attitudes, and progress in the acquisition of Mandarin in Zimbabwean schools. They emphasise the need to accommodate personal variables through adopting appropriate materials, methodologies, and practices that cater to classroom diversity. This study contributes to the growing evidence supporting individual preferences and traits as key predictors of successful foreign language teaching and learning (Zhang, 2021). Awareness of differences in learning styles and using inclusive instruction techniques can enhance successful language learning (Zhang, *ibid*). Hence, teachers can provide a more successful and personalised learning environment by acknowledging and acting upon individual differences.

### *Time Factor*

Time plays an important role in foreign language learning as it enables interactivity in the acquisition of communicative competence. Responding to the question: "*How do you perceive the proportion of time devoted to teaching Mandarin in your school?*", eight out of ten participants expressed dissatisfaction with the lesson time allocated for Mandarin (30 minutes at average), which they perceived to be inadequate. This is despite the complexity of the linguistic structure of Mandarin which has many characters and an extensive vocabulary. The participants noted with concern that time constraints hinder progress and cause delays in language acquisition. In P8's view, "*Thirty-minute sessions are not sufficient to organise learning tasks, carry out practical activities, and assess students.*"

Concurring, P2 indicated that due to time limits, he is often forced to hasten discussions and provide feedback on incomplete tasks, compromising student-centred approaches to learning. In addition, P6 revealed that due to time constraints, she resorted to prioritizing the component of Chinese culture in the syllabus, over language structure, which she noted required ample time and effort. This outcome indicates that time constraints prevent Mandarin instructors from meaningfully executing their lesson plans, facilitating personalised learning, providing essential feedback, and conducting relevant formative assessments to evaluate learning progress. The time limitation is indeed concerning, considering Chen's (2015) assertion that attaining linguistic competence in Chinese demands four times more the time allocated for learning English or other modern languages.

### *Digital Technologies and Internet Resources*

The majority of the participants expressed discontent in relation to access to digital tools and resources for instructing Mandarin. To investigate this phenomenon, the following question was posed: "*How much access do you have to reliable digital tools and Internet connectivity at your school that you can use for Mandarin instruction?*" Only three out of ten participants (P3, P5, and P9) acknowledged having adequate access to digital equipment such as computers, projectors, microphones, headsets, speakers, as well as Internet connectivity in their language classrooms. However, Internet connectivity challenges, power supply inconsistencies, and limitations to data usage were noted as secondary hindrances to effective classroom digitization. P9 had this to say:

*Internet connectivity issues and power outages are our major concern in the use of digital gadgets. Teaching Mandarin requires good access to these tools, without which vocabulary modelling is difficult.*

Moreover, some participants revealed that, in addition to poor access to digital resources, lack of digital skills is an obstacle to effective utilization. Whilst two of the participants (P3 and P5), acknowledged having technical support from school-based computer technicians, facilitating smooth technology integration, P9 reported reliance on school administrative staff for support. These findings highlight overall scarcity of digital resources and lack of technical assistance for the majority of teachers in Zimbabwean schools, raising concerns about Mandarin learning outcomes. This challenge is consistent with Huang, Teo, and Zhou's (2019) study, whose outcome affirmed limited specialised technical support for teachers of Mandarin in Zimbabwe and similar contexts, suggesting a need for a practical approach to address this obstacle.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

Based on the findings from the study, the following pedagogical implications are derived:

1. To enhance effective teaching of Mandarin in schools, native Chinese speakers need to be recruited to support non-native local teachers. A Mandarin-proficient instructor can directly answer students' questions, correct grammatical errors, and hold practical class interactions. Additionally, native Mandarin-speaking instructors are conversant with Chinese culture, which is intertwined with the language, potentially enhancing learning outcomes.
2. Since language and culture are intertwined, it is necessary to integrate intercultural communication competence into the Mandarin curriculum. This requires Mandarin language instructors to be aware of Chinese culture and identity, to effectively impart communicative competence to students. This cultural oriented language learning, therefore, requires exposure to Chinese culture for both students and teachers.
3. Given the complex structure of Mandarin language, teachers must prioritise teaching tone, sound, and character to reduce learner difficulties. Learners must recognise Mandarin's special tonal structure and writing systems, which necessitate character memorization. To practice speaking effectively, students should then immerse themselves in a natural environment, physically or virtually, to attain communicative competence in tonal usage and pronunciation.
4. In order to promote the accessibility and use of Mandarin teaching materials in Zimbabwe, there is a need for outsourcing from manufacturers in other countries. The Ministry of Education should take an initiative to import authentic materials, computer-based resources, and audio-visual aids, to enable an effective implementation of CLT classrooms. Modern language teaching software with recording and self-evaluation functions should also be obtained.
5. The Ministry of Education can also provide all the schools offering Mandarin with digital equipment and internet facilities, so that the learning process is congenial. To support individual learning styles, teachers must prepare content and activities

to accommodate various language capabilities, cognitive traits, and motivation levels. For instance, the role-play method has the capacity to engage learners and develop integrated skills in cultural routines, lexis, syntax, and communication strategies.

6. To develop sustainable Mandarin teaching and learning programmes, educators must re-evaluate the teaching time allocated for this language. In cognizance of
7. Mandarin's eccentric linguistic characteristics, typified by an extensive vocabulary structure and a complex writing system, schools should allocate additional time to promote greater learning outcomes.

## **Limitations**

This qualitative study was limited in scope, examining the pedagogical challenges faced by a small sample of Mandarin teachers in Zimbabwe. While the study is crucial to understanding the experiences of these teachers, its limited scope prevents the generalizability of its findings to the entire population of Mandarin teachers in the country. Future research can focus on other stakeholders such as policymakers, students, and public examination bodies, in order to deepen the understanding of the topic, using larger samples. Conducting broader studies will increase the representativeness and generalizability of the outcomes, and will provide richer insights into the experiences of teaching Mandarin in Zimbabwe.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study indicated several challenges besetting Mandarin teachers in Zimbabwe, encompassing cultural diversity between Chinese (the target culture) and Shona (the learners' native culture), lack of Mandarin proficiency among the teachers, limited instructional materials, unique students' preferences and learning styles, inadequate instruction time, and poor access to digital technologies and resources in the classrooms. In order to respond to these issues, the research suggests a number of strategies, including; hiring native-speaker instructors to assist in Mandarin teaching, incorporating intercultural competence into the foreign language syllabus, promoting practice and learners' immersion in the native context, incorporating teaching methodologies and materials that are inclusive to all learners, outsourcing authentic materials to allow for a communicative mode of language learning, providing adequate time for teaching Mandarin, and availing digital technologies to create an enabling learning environment. Through the implementation of these suggestions, the challenges that face Mandarin teachers in Zimbabwean schools can be effectively addressed.

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