

PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL MANDARIN INSTRUCTORS IN BOTSWANA: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF NON-NATIVE CHINESE – SPEAKING TEACHERS

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Abstract

Mandarin Chinese was first taught in Botswana through the Confucius Institute in 2009, followed by the introduction of a Bachelor of Arts in Chinese Studies at the University of Botswana in 2011. This program includes both language and non-language courses and employs both native and non-native Chinese-speaking teachers. However, research on the advantages and disadvantages of non-native Chinese-speaking teachers in Botswana is lacking. This study investigates local instructors' perceptions of teaching Mandarin as non-native speakers, using data from questionnaires completed by 8 local instructors. Analysis of the data revealed that advantages of local teachers include their use of the native language Setswana, role -modelling, understanding of student learning difficulties and ability to offer empathy and support. Disadvantages include differences in accent and pronunciation, possibility of errors, extensive preparation time and limited cultural immersion. This study has significant implications for classroom teaching practices and teacher professional development.

Key words: Mandarin Chinese; Botswana; non-native Chinese-speaking teachers; perceptions

1.0 Introduction

The teaching of Mandarin Chinese has been expanding globally, and Botswana is no exception (Masule & Raletsatsi, 2020). The introduction of Mandarin Chinese through the Confucius Institute in 2009 and the subsequent establishment of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Chinese Studies at the University of Botswana in 2011 signify the growing importance of Chinese language education in the country. These developments highlight Botswana's recognition of China's rising global influence and the increasing demand for Mandarin Chinese proficiency in various professional fields (Masule & Raletsatsi, 2020).

The Chinese Studies Programme at the University of Botswana employs both native and non-native Chinese-speaking instructors. Native instructors, often recruited from China, bring authentic linguistic and cultural experiences to the classroom (Feng & Zhang, 2022). However, non-native instructors, typically local Batswana who have learned Mandarin Chinese as a second language or foreign language, also play a crucial role in the program. These local instructors possess unique insights into the learning challenges faced by Batswana students and can provide culturally relevant teaching methods that resonate with their students. Despite the presence of non-native instructors in the Chinese Studies

Programme, there has been a lack of research exploring their specific advantages and disadvantages in the context of teaching Mandarin Chinese. This paper aims to fill this gap by investigating the perceptions of local, non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors regarding their roles. Through examining their experiences, the study seeks to identify the strengths they bring to the classroom, as well as the challenges they encounter. Understanding these factors is essential for developing strategies to support non-native instructors and enhance the overall effectiveness of Mandarin Chinese education in Botswana.

In the following sections, the study will review relevant literature on the effectiveness of non-native language instructors, describe the methodology used to collect and analyse data, present the results of the study, and discuss the implications of the findings for language education in Botswana and beyond. Through this comprehensive analysis, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the contributions and challenges of non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors in Botswana, offering insights that can inform educational practices and policies in similar contexts globally.

2.0 Literature review

The debate on the effectiveness of non-native versus native language instructors has been ongoing in language education research for decades. Various studies have examined the strengths and weaknesses of both groups, providing insights into their unique contributions and challenges. Generally, non-native language instructors are seen as having several benefits, such as the ability to use their first languages to explain complex cognitive concepts, foster rapport with students, and share their own language learning experiences (Calafato, 2019; Thompson & Fioramonte, 2012). Wang and Mason (2023) support this argument, observing that non-native Chinese teachers often share a common linguistic background with their students. This enables them to use the students' native language to explain complex concepts, clarify misunderstandings, and provide translations when necessary.

Medgyes (1992) highlights that non-native language teachers often have a better understanding of the learners' difficulties and can provide more relatable learning strategies. Non-native instructors have themselves gone through the process of learning the target language and therefore can empathise with the challenges faced by their students. Reynolds-Case (2012) adds that non-native instructors are often able to anticipate common pitfalls and explain concepts in ways that are more accessible to learners. This shared experience can create a supportive learning environment and foster a sense of solidarity between the teacher and students.

Non-native speaker teachers possess the unique potential to serve as exemplary role models for their students. This is primarily because these teachers have personally navigated the journey of learning an additional language, often acquiring their proficiency through formal education (Calafato, 2019; Calvet-Terré & Llurda, 2023; Thompson & Fioramonte, 2012). Their first-hand experience of mastering a new language can be highly inspirational for learners, demonstrating that achieving fluency is attainable. Moreover, these teachers can provide valuable insights and practical strategies that they have used themselves, thereby

making the learning process more relatable and effective for their students (Luo & Gajaseeni, 2018).

Conversely, native speakers are often perceived as having a more authentic accent and a deeper cultural understanding (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012). Native instructors bring an innate understanding of the language's nuances, idiomatic expressions, and cultural contexts. Their pronunciation is typically more accurate, which provides students with a model of how the language should sound. As noted by Hossain (2024), native instructors can offer rich, first-hand cultural insights that enhance students' overall understanding and appreciation of the language. Their direct experiences with the culture enable them to share authentic perspectives, traditions, customs, and societal nuances that are integral to mastering the language. This immersion into cultural context helps students grasp not only the language's literal meanings but also its subtleties, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references. Native instructors can make the language learning process more engaging and relevant by integrating real-life examples, anecdotes, and practices from their own experiences (Kim, 2020). This deepens students' cultural awareness and fosters a greater connection to the language, ultimately enhancing their overall learning experience and ability to communicate effectively in various cultural contexts.

However, the effectiveness of language instruction is not solely dependent on whether the teacher is a native or non-native speaker. According to Ali et al. (2015), language instruction also involves pedagogical skills, knowledge of the students' cultural background, and the ability to adapt teaching methods to meet students' needs. They further state that, non-native instructors can leverage their bilingualism and biculturalism to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, while native instructors can focus on fostering an immersive language environment.

In the context of teaching Mandarin Chinese, studies have shown mixed results regarding the effectiveness of native versus non-native instructors. Braine (2010) argues that non-native instructors can be particularly effective in settings where students share the same first language, as they can provide explanations and support in the students' mother tongue. On the other hand, Tang (1997) emphasises the importance of native instructors in providing authentic cultural exposure and advanced language skills. Meanwhile, Wang and Mason (2023) note that while there is a substantial body of research on non-native speaker teachers in English language education, studies on non-native speaker teachers of other languages, including Mandarin Chinese, remain limited.

This research seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate on the effectiveness of non-native versus native language instructors by focusing on Mandarin Chinese instructors in Botswana. The unique educational setting of Botswana, where Mandarin Chinese is a relatively new addition to the curriculum, provides a valuable case study. This study aims to identify their perceived advantages and disadvantages and to understand how these factors impact their teaching effectiveness by examining the perceptions of local, non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors. This analysis will provide insights that can inform teacher

training programs and educational policies, in Botswana as well as in other contexts where non-native language instructors play a significant role. This study is anchored in Medgyes's native -non-native speaker teacher paradigm, which posits that teachers' linguistic biographies shape the kinds of linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical resources they bring to the classroom. Building on this paradigm, the framework conceptualises the teacher nativeness as the primary independent variable that drives two complementary but distinct capability sets (Medgyes, 1994).

3.0 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore the perceptions of local, non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors regarding the advantages and disadvantages of their role in teaching Mandarin Chinese in Botswana. Qualitative methods are particularly well-suited for this type of exploratory research as they allow for in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017).

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were eight local Mandarin Chinese instructors employed in learning institutions across Botswana. These instructors were selected based on their experience and involvement in teaching Mandarin Chinese to local students. All participants were non-native speakers of Mandarin Chinese, having learned the language as a foreign language.

3.2 Data Collection

Data was collected using questionnaires, which were designed to gather comprehensive information about the instructors' teaching experiences, perceived advantages, and disadvantages. The questionnaire included open-ended questions to allow participants to provide detailed responses. The open-ended nature of the questions encouraged instructors to elaborate on their experiences and provide insights that might not be captured through closed-ended questions.

The open-ended questions covered aspects of their teaching experiences and they are as follows:

1. What advantages do you believe you bring to the classroom as a non-native instructor?
2. What challenges or disadvantages have you encountered in your teaching?

4.0 Data analysis

The responses from the questionnaires were analysed using content analysis, a method that allows for the systematic categorisation and interpretation of qualitative data. The process began with familiarisation, where all responses were read multiple times to gain a thorough understanding of the content. This was followed by coding, during which key phrases and concepts related to the research questions were identified and labelled. The coded data was then organised into broader themes that reflected the main ideas expressed by participants, particularly the perceived advantages and disadvantages of non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors. These themes were further refined and categorised to highlight specific

advantages and disadvantages, enabling the identification of patterns and relationships that provided a coherent and comprehensive understanding of the instructors' perceptions.

5.0 Findings

The content analysis of the questionnaires revealed several themes, which are discussed below.

5.1 Advantages

5.1.1 Use of Native Language for Explanation

Some participants highlighted the advantage of using the native language, Setswana, to explain complex Mandarin Chinese concepts. The participants stated that this bilingual approach helps in making the learning process more accessible to students by providing explanations in a language they are already familiar with. They further stated that this method bridges the gap between the students' existing knowledge and the new language, facilitating a smoother and more effective learning experience. The participants also mentioned that the ability to switch between Setswana and Mandarin Chinese allows them to clarify difficult grammar points, vocabulary, and cultural nuances that might otherwise be lost in translation. One of the participants responded in the following manner: *"In some cases the use of mother tongue or official language is essential to explain grammatical points and Sino cultural concepts"*. Another participant responded: *"I am able to use our native language to better explain some words or concepts and can also devise effective means to make students comprehend since I am aware of how Batswana process and understand language and it's meanings."*

5.1.2 Role Models for Students

Some participants indicated that, when students see someone from their own cultural background mastering Mandarin Chinese, it inspires them and enhances their belief in their own ability to learn the language. They also noted that this representation is crucial in language learning as it provides tangible evidence that success is attainable, which can significantly boost students' motivation and perseverance. The participants further mentioned that since they themselves have successfully learned Mandarin Chinese, this can demonstrate that mastery of the language is possible regardless of one's linguistic background. *"Being a local instructor motivates students to continue learning and improving their Chinese as they see local teachers as a living example that it is possible to be proficient in Chinese"* stated one participant.

Moreover, some of the participants also highlighted that they often share their personal learning journeys with their students, including the challenges they faced and the strategies they used to overcome them. One participant stated *"Being a successful non-native learner of Mandarin Chinese, I can share my personal language learning journey, which can be inspiring to the students. While at it I get the opportunity to provide practical tips and strategies that helped me along the way."*

5.1.3 Understanding Student Difficulties

Some participants have highlighted that they have a profound understanding of the specific challenges faced by Batswana students when learning Mandarin Chinese. They further explained that this understanding is rooted in their shared cultural and linguistic background, enabling them to develop and implement effective strategies tailored to address these difficulties. For instance, some participants shared that they often enhance the learning experience of Mandarin Chinese by incorporating culturally relevant examples and contexts. They mentioned that this approach not only aids students in understanding the language but also makes the learning process more engaging and relatable. The respondents also highlighted that, by integrating elements of local culture, such as Batswana's cultural practices or local stories, they can create analogies that help students connect Chinese customs and idiomatic expressions with their own cultural experiences. One participant stated, *"You can draw parallels between Chinese and Setswana and explain some grammatical points better."* Another participant responded: *"Since you have navigated through the learning process yourself, you may have a deeper understanding of certain grammar points and language concepts that can be challenging for native Mandarin speakers to explain."*

5.1.4 Empathy and Support

Some participants indicated their capacity to empathise with students' challenges and provide emotional support. They further stated that this empathetic approach enables them to forge personal connections with students, offering both understanding and practical advice that can greatly enrich the learning experience. Additionally, the participants mentioned that since they have learned Mandarin Chinese as a second or foreign language, they can empathise with the challenges and frustrations that students may encounter. They further explained that their shared experience creates a supportive environment where students feel understood and valued. One participant answered: *"As a non-native speaker, I have gone through the process of learning Mandarin Chinese. This gave me insights into the challenges and misconceptions that learners might face. It is easier to empathise with the students and offer strategies to overcome these challenges."*

5.2 Disadvantages

5.2.1 Accent and Pronunciation

Some participants stated that one of the primary disadvantages is the difference in accent between themselves and standard Mandarin Chinese pronunciation. They highlighted that this discrepancy can have a significant impact on students' pronunciation and listening comprehension skills. The participants also indicated that despite their proficiency in Mandarin Chinese, they may retain traces of their native accent, which can lead to deviations from standard pronunciation. They further stated that these differences can affect how students perceive and produce Mandarin Chinese sounds, potentially leading to confusion and difficulties in achieving accurate pronunciation. One participant stated: *"Mastery of pronunciation that is, Chinese pronunciation can be a challenge."* Another participant responded: *"As a non-native instructor I may have an accent that differs from the standard Mandarin pronunciation. Though this might not be a huge issue, it could potentially affect students' pronunciation in the long run if not addressed appropriately."* One of the

participants also stated: *“Students rely on us for accurate pronunciation so if they are exposed to non-standard Chinese pronunciation, it will make it harder for them to understand native speakers or to engage in effective communication with them.”*

5.2.2 Possibility of Errors

Some participants indicated that they sometimes encounter challenges and make errors, particularly with tones and writing characters in Mandarin Chinese. They also stated that these errors can lead to confusion and inaccuracies in students’ learning, affecting their overall proficiency in the language. *“Writing Chinese characters is not easy”* stated one participant. Another participant responded: *“Mandarin Chinese writing involves complex characters that require specific strokes and structures and as non-native instructors, we may occasionally make mistakes in writing or teaching these characters and this can contribute to confusion among students and lead to the development of incorrect writing habits”*. The other respondent stated: *“As a non-native, my Chinese proficiency is not at a level I would deem “ideal”, I still have a lot to learn, a local instructor can sometimes not be confident in their Chinese fluency, and that can affect the overall teaching process.”*

5.2.3 Extensive Preparation Time

Some participants reported that preparing for classes takes a considerable amount of time. They explained that this extensive preparation is necessary to ensure accuracy in language instruction and to create effective teaching materials. One participant stated: *“Mandarin Chinese is a complex language with complicated grammar rules, tonal variations, and character writing systems, therefore as non-native instructors, we have to ensure that the instruction is accurate, and this means we have to review and prepare our teaching material carefully to avoid giving incorrect information and this takes time.”* Another participant stated: *“I spend a lot of time researching and ensuring that I use the correct vocabulary, grammar structures, and tones.”*

5.2.4 Limited Cultural Immersion

Some participants highlighted limited cultural immersion as one of the disadvantages of being a non-native Mandarin Chinese. They mentioned that the lack of deep-rooted cultural experience sometimes affect the depth of cultural knowledge and the range of authentic experiences they are able to share with students. The participants also stated that understanding the context in which certain cultural practices or expressions occur is crucial for effective teaching. One participant gave the following response: *“While I may understand Chinese culture, I might not be as deeply rooted in it as native speakers. This could lead to gaps in my ability to teach certain cultural aspects effectively.”* Another participant responded: *“Some Chinese cultural norms and beliefs are so far removed from our reality that explaining written texts, that is, comprehension exercises is a challenge.”* The other participant stated: *“Being a non-native instructor makes it hard sometimes to teach some concepts at a deeper level, especially the cultural aspect since local instructors are inherently not Chinese, while natives get to live and experience “being Chinese” on a daily basis and as such are able to easily explain certain things much better.”*

The findings of this study highlights the dual nature of the experiences of non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors in Botswana, illustrating both their strengths and the challenges they face. These insights provide a nuanced understanding of the role of non-native instructors in the context of language education.

6.0 Discussion

This study investigated perceptions of non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors in Botswana, highlighting both the advantages and disadvantages associated with their roles. The four main advantages of non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors perceived by local instructors in Botswana were their ability to use the native language Setswana, serving as role models for students, understanding of student learning difficulties and ability to offer empathy and support. The finding that the use of the native language, Setswana, is advantageous corroborates one of the six hypotheses suggested by Medgyes (1994). According to Medgyes, employing the learners' mother tongue in teaching a second language can significantly enhance comprehension and retention. This study confirms this hypothesis by demonstrating the practical benefits observed in Botswana.

Regarding local instructors serving as role models for students, non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors undoubtedly serve as powerful motivational figures. When students see someone from their own cultural background mastering Mandarin Chinese, it inspires them and enhances their belief in their own ability to learn the language. This representation is crucial in language learning as it provides tangible evidence that success is attainable, which can significantly boost students' motivation and perseverance. Adara (2018), states that one of the key factors influencing students' ability to learn a foreign language is motivation. This motivation encompasses a blend of efforts, desires, and attitudes aimed at achieving the goal of language learning (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998; Gardner, 2005; Loewen & Reinders, 2011). Motivation is crucial as it serves as the primary driving force in foreign language learning and helps maintain learners' interest during challenging periods (Dörnyei, 1998).

Non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors' understanding of student learning difficulties is rooted in their shared cultural and linguistic background with Batswana students, enabling them to develop and implement effective strategies tailored to these challenges. For instance, by integrating elements of local culture, such as Batswana's cultural practices or local stories, instructors can create analogies that help students connect Chinese customs and idiomatic expressions with their own cultural experiences. Richland and Simms (2015) emphasise that analogy learning is a powerful educational technique because it enables students to connect new information with their existing knowledge. In this study, local instructors leverage this approach by employing analogies that align with students' cultural background. This strategy not only enhances students' comprehension of Mandarin Chinese but also makes the learning process more accessible, meaningful, and engaging. By relating the language to familiar cultural contexts, local instructors help students build a deeper and more relatable understanding of Mandarin Chinese.

Empathy and support is also crucial in language learning. This empathetic approach enables local instructors to forge personal connections with students, offering both understanding and practical advice that can greatly enrich the learning experience. Gretchen and Irvine (2002) argue that empathy is an essential quality for teachers in diverse settings, highlighting its importance in effectively addressing the needs of all students. Additionally, local instructors who have themselves learned Mandarin Chinese as a second or foreign language can empathise with the challenges and frustrations that students may encounter. This shared experience creates a supportive environment where students feel understood and valued. Local instructors can offer crucial support, by recognising and addressing students' emotional and psychological barriers to learning. For instance, students might experience anxiety or frustration when struggling with difficult concepts or feeling that their progress is slow. Local instructors, drawing on their own experiences, can identify these emotional responses and provide both encouragement and practical strategies to help students overcome them. This support helps students persevere through challenging moments and also fosters a positive attitude towards learning. Makoele (2019) underscores the importance of teaching values such as respect, tolerance, care, collaboration, and especially empathy, alongside academic content, to foster a well-rounded educational experience. The four main disadvantages of non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors perceived by local instructors in Botswana were differences in accent and pronunciation from standard Mandarin Chinese, possibility of errors, extensive preparation time and limited cultural immersion.

One of the primary disadvantages noted in the study was the difference in accent between local instructors and standard Mandarin Chinese pronunciation. This discrepancy can have a significant impact on students' pronunciation and listening comprehension skills. Mandarin Chinese is a tonal language with a precise and varied phonetic system (Hao, 2012). Native speakers of Mandarin Chinese have developed a highly accurate pronunciation and tonal production through their immersion in the language from an early age. In contrast, non-native instructors, despite their proficiency in Mandarin Chinese, may retain traces of their native accent, which can lead to deviations from standard pronunciation. These differences can affect how students perceive and produce Mandarin sounds, potentially leading to confusion and difficulties in achieving accurate pronunciation.

Listening comprehension is similarly affected. Students rely on accurate pronunciation and tone to decipher spoken Mandarin. Exposure to non-standard accents may make it harder for students to understand native speakers or to engage in effective communication with them (Pan et al., 2023). This issue becomes particularly pronounced in advanced language use, where subtle differences in pronunciation can change the meaning of words and phrases. Moreover, students may find it challenging to model their own pronunciation after their instructor's accent, which could lead to inconsistencies between their speech and the standard Mandarin pronunciation they encounter in media or with native speakers (Yang, 2021). This divergence can affect their ability to communicate clearly and be understood in various contexts.

The possibility of errors also emerges as a significant disadvantage. Non-native instructors may encounter challenges and make errors, particularly with tones and writing characters in Mandarin Chinese. According to Wen (2015), these errors can lead to confusion and inaccuracies in students' learning, affecting their overall proficiency in the language. For instance, when instructors make tonal errors, students might misinterpret the intended meaning of words or phrases. If an instructor consistently mispronounces a word with the wrong tone, students may learn the incorrect pronunciation and use it in their own speech, leading to misunderstandings and communication difficulties, especially in contexts where precise tone differentiation is crucial.

Similarly, errors in writing characters can also be problematic. Mandarin Chinese writing involves complex characters that require specific strokes and structures (Teoh et al., 2022). Non-native instructors may occasionally make mistakes in writing or teaching these characters. Errors in character formation or stroke order can contribute to confusion among students and lead to the development of incorrect writing habits. As Hu (2022) states, when students are exposed to incorrect character writing, they may replicate these mistakes, resulting in a lack of proficiency in reading and writing. Accurate character writing is essential for literacy in Mandarin Chinese, and mistakes made by instructors can impede students' ability to recognize and produce characters correctly.

The significant amount of preparation time required also proves to be a challenge. This extensive preparation is necessary to ensure accuracy in language instruction and to create effective teaching materials (Munna & Kalam, 2021). The demands of preparing for Mandarin Chinese classes encompass several aspects, contributing to the significant time investment required. These aspects include ensuring accuracy in language instruction and creating effective teaching materials. Regarding the aspect of ensuring accuracy in language instruction, Mandarin Chinese is a complex language with intricate grammar rules, tonal variations, and character writing systems (Chen, 2023; Hao, 2012). Non-native instructors must ensure that their instruction is accurate and adheres to standard language norms. This involves careful review and preparation to avoid disseminating incorrect information or fostering misunderstandings. On the aspect of creating effective teaching materials, effective teaching materials are essential for engaging students and facilitating learning (Munna & Kalam. Local instructors invest considerable time in developing and customising these materials to meet the needs of their students.

Limited cultural immersion is also one of the notable disadvantages for non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors compared to native speakers. According to Chen (2022), the lack of deep-rooted cultural experience can affect the depth of cultural knowledge and the range of authentic experiences they are able to share with students. Cultural immersion involves first hand experiences of living in or regularly interacting with a particular culture. Chacon (2022) states that native speakers naturally gain insights through daily life, social interactions, and personal experiences in their cultural environment. Non-native instructors, who have not lived in China or engaged deeply with its culture, may lack these authentic

perspectives. This can affect their capacity to communicate the nuances and everyday aspects of Chinese cultural practices.

7.0 Implications for Practice

To address these challenges and build on the strengths identified, several practices can be implemented and these include ongoing professional development, resource utilisation, support systems, cultural exchange and immersion. Regarding ongoing professional development, local non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors should engage in continuous professional development to enhance their pronunciation, understanding of Mandarin tones, and cultural knowledge (Pan et al., 2023). Workshops, language training programs, and collaboration with native speakers can provide valuable support (Stead, 2018). The utilisation of resources is also essential in improving local non-native instructors' teaching practices. According to (Tira, 2022), leveraging pre-made resources, language tools, and authentic materials can help reduce preparation time and ensure accuracy in teaching. Incorporating these resources into lessons can also provide students with diverse and accurate language exposure. Charles et al. (2022) emphasise that establishing support systems, such as mentoring programs or peer review groups, can help instructors address errors and improve their teaching practices. Collaboration with colleagues and experts can offer additional insights and solutions.

The facilitation of cultural exchange opportunities and engaging in cultural immersion activities can enrich both instructors' and students' understanding of Chinese culture. Such activities can enhance the authenticity of cultural instruction and provide practical experiences (Wang & Mason, 2023). This study reveals that although non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors in Botswana bring valuable strengths to their teaching, such as the ability to use the native language for explanations and serve as role models, they also face challenges related to pronunciation, potential errors, and cultural immersion. Addressing these challenges through targeted strategies and support can enhance the effectiveness of non-native instructors and improve the overall learning experience for students.

8.0 Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the perceptions of non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors in Botswana, emphasising both the advantages and disadvantages linked to their roles. The findings highlight the unique strengths that local instructors bring to the classroom. Their ability to use the native language, Setswana, for explanations can bridge comprehension gaps and make Mandarin Chinese more accessible to students. Additionally, local instructors serve as inspirational figures, demonstrating that mastery of Mandarin Chinese is attainable, which can significantly boost student motivation and confidence. Local instructors also understand student learning difficulties because of their profound understanding of the specific challenges faced by Botswana students when learning Mandarin Chinese. Furthermore, they are able to offer empathy and support to their students because they have also gone through the process of learning Mandarin Chinese as a second or foreign language.

However, the study also reveals several challenges that non-native instructors face. Differences in accent and pronunciation from standard Mandarin can impact students' pronunciation accuracy and listening skills. The potential for errors in tones and character writing may introduce inaccuracies into the learning process. Furthermore, the significant time required for class preparation can be burdensome for instructors, potentially affecting the quality of instruction. The limited cultural immersion of non-native instructors compared to their native counterparts also restricts the depth of cultural knowledge and experiences they can impart to students. These challenges highlight the necessity for ongoing professional development and support for non-native instructors. Training programs focused on pronunciation, tone accuracy, and effective teaching strategies can help mitigate some of these issues. Professional development should also include cultural immersion experiences, such as exchanges or study visits to China, to deepen instructors' cultural understanding and enhance their teaching. Further research is essential to explore and develop strategies to support non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors. Investigating the effectiveness of specific professional development programs, the impact of mentorship by native speakers, and the use of technology in teaching Mandarin can provide valuable insights. Additionally, comparative studies between non-native and native instructors in various contexts could offer a broader understanding of best practices in Mandarin Chinese education.

In conclusion, while non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors in Botswana face distinct challenges, their unique advantages make them valuable assets in language education. Through addressing the identified challenges via targeted professional development and support, the effectiveness of non-native instructors can be significantly enhanced. This may improve Mandarin Chinese education in Botswana and also contribute to the broader field of language education, offering insights applicable to diverse educational settings worldwide.

9.0 Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The small sample size of eight participants may not be representative of all non-native Mandarin Chinese instructors in Botswana or other contexts. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data through questionnaires may introduce bias, as participants may present themselves in a more favourable light or omit negative experiences. Future research could benefit from larger sample sizes and the inclusion of additional data collection methods, such as interviews and classroom observations, to triangulate the findings.

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