

# A study of attitudes towards learning Chinese as foreign language in Ghanaian universities: A comparative study of University of Ghana and University of Cape Coast

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examined attitudes of second language learners in Ghanaian universities. In recent times, due to increasing number of Chinese companies in Ghana, it has become very crucial to learn Chinese language, especially in the universities. This study targets students who are pursuing Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) in University of Ghana (UG) and University of Cape Coast (UCC). The study employed primary and secondary data to gain insight into students' attitude towards Chinese language in both UG and UCC. All students participating were giving open-ended questionnaires for the purpose of study. The study found out that there are several factors that affect the Chinese language learning such as feeling reluctant, gender, peer pressure, social class, age, anxiety, encouragement and motivation. The study recommend that local Chinese teachers needed, more scholarship should be given to Ghanaian students who have desire and interest in the learning Chinese language. Moreover, China needs to send more native Chinese speaking teachers to support local teachers of the Chinese language in both universities and organizing cultural activities quarterly to inspire and enhanced their studies.

**Keywords:** Attitudes, Chinese language, learning, students, University of Ghana, University of Cape Coast.

## INTRODUCTION

Chinese is a rewarding language to study in Ghanaian universities perceptively. In second language attainment, attitudes are very vital to the discussion pertaining to successful language studying with extensive investigation being carried out into the impact these concepts have on language learners. Recently, Ghana has become an important hub for many Chinese business, the expansion of Chinese business in Ghana have resorted to high quality level of interpreters and translates of Chinese language. However, learning Chinese as a foreign language has become the liveliest modernity language among other foreign language in the Ghanaian universities. Chinese language needs enough time to study and practice in order to grow and enhance your skills. It is argued that a

learner's success in "learning a language is exactly and directly influenced by what they think and how they evaluate the target language, the target language speakers, culture, and of course, the learning setting" (Hosseini and Pourmandnia, 2013:63). Recently, number of students enrolled to learn Chinese language in each academic year had risen dramatically in these two universities. While there are several influencing factors in language acquisition, research has also shown that attitude is one of the most important in second language gaining. Language attitudes may have an effect on language learning" (Bani-Khaled, 2014:401) where some "may have a facilitate effect" and "others can hinder" the language acquisition process (Hosseini and Pourmandnia,

2013:65). Gardner and Lambert (1972:132) argued that successfully acquiring a foreign language largely depends on the learners' perceptions of the speakers of that language and their willingness to adapt. It is therefore certain that the vital role attitudes play in language gaining cannot be disregarded when carrying out investigation in this field.

The study of language attitudes is important for sociolinguistics because it can predict a given linguistic behavior in multilingual communities like the ones obtaining in Africa (Solís Obiols, 2002, Melander, 2003, Leong, 2014). From a psychological point of view, attitude is defined as a mental state of readiness to respond to something based on past experiences and influencing behavior toward a specific object (Allport, 1953). Attitudes are to be found simply in the response people make to social situations. Language attitudes are feelings people have about their own language or the language of others. Thus, language attitudes can be positive or negative although some may even be neutral language attitudes. Language attitudes bring out judgments of the quality and prestige of languages depending on the knowledge of the social connotations the languages possess. In this case, use of some languages would end up being expressed of social preference which reflect an awareness of status and prestige accorded to the speakers of that particular language.

China has a long-recorded history which dates back to 1600BC. China-Africa relation is not limited to trade. In Ghana, there is growing interest to learn Chinese language among the citizens. There are two Confucius institutes and other Confucius classrooms in Ghana at the University of Ghana and the University of Cape Coast, for teaching and learning Chinese language and culture. With the rise of Chinese economy, many people around the world are coming to China for one thing or the other. There are many Ghanaian students and traders in China. Many Ghanaian are interested in learning Chinese language to help them communicate eloquently with Chinese language speaking nationalities, working with Chinese firms and interpreting. The study into attitudes of student learning Chinese language in the two universities will provide understanding and an in-depth knowledge to upgrade their skills in attaining a successful career in life. In conclusion, the language attitudes has been seen as the feeling people pursue about their individual difference. Thus, the study was based on the factors that affect the Chinese language learning such as feeling reluctant, gender, peer pressure, social class, age, anxiety, encouragement and motivation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Chinese language teachings in Ghana

There are few academic works on teaching and learning Chinese language in Ghana. This reason behind this

situation is quite understandable. It might be due the short time of teaching and learning Chinese language in Ghana. It actually started in 2008 when University of Ghana started Chinese major, combination and minor programs, and 2012 and 2016 when the first and second Confucius Institutes were established at the University of Ghana and the University of Cape Coast respectively.

### Students attitudes towards foreign language

According to the *Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, language attitudes are the attitudes which speakers of different languages or language varieties have towards each other's languages or to their own language. Expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language may reflect impressions of linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degree of importance, elegance, social status, etc. Attitudes towards a language may also show what people feel about the speakers of that language. Attitude may have an effect on second or foreign language learning. The measurement of language attitude provides information which is useful in language teaching and language planning. How we develop attitude is stated by Brown (2000:180) thus "Attitudes, like all aspects of the development of cognition and affect in human beings, develop early in childhood and are the result of parents' and peers' attitudes, of contact with people who are 'different' in any number of ways, and of interesting affective factors in the human experience". Lambert (1981, 1990) made an important distinction between 'additive' and 'subtractive' bilingualism. In additive bilingualism, the learners feel they are adding something new to their skills and experience by learning a new language, without taking anything away from what they already know. In subtractive bilingualism on the other hand, they feel that the learning of a new language threatens what they have already gained for themselves. In summary of the view, Cook (2000:141) states "successful L<sub>2</sub> learning takes place in additive situations; learners who see the second language as diminishing themselves will not succeed". In conclusion, Brown (2000:181) says: "It seems clear that second language learners benefit from positive attitudes and that negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation and, in all likelihood, because of decreased input and interaction, to unsuccessful attainment of proficiency."

### Language attitudes

According to Bartram (2010), "attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response towards all subjects and situations with which it is related". This is a mentalist perspective on the definition of attitude. From a behaviourist perspective,

Fishbein and Ajzen (1977; 2000) see attitude as a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object. This definition implies that attitude is learned through a socialization process. Wamalwa (2013) is of the opinion that attitudes are not fixed but are constantly fluctuating and shifting according to the social environment. Fasold (1984) also holds the view that an attitude is individual, but it has origins in collective behaviour. Attitudes, according to the social psychologists, have three main components: cognitive, affective and conative/behavioural (Edwards 1994; Baker 1992; Smit 1996). The cognitive component of attitude refers to a set of beliefs about an object, affective attitude includes feelings about an object, while conative/behavioural attitude is about the way people act towards an object (Salta and Tzougraki, 2004). Attitude can be expressed towards any object where comparison with another is involved. For example, attitude can be expressed towards the use of Ghanaian language as medium of instruction against the use of English as medium of instruction and attitudes towards transitional bilingual education against monolingual education. From the various definitions cited, it is opportune to identify with that:

1. Attitudes are selectively acquired and integrated through learning and experience;
2. Attitudes are enduring dispositions indicating response consistency;
3. Attitudes can be positive or negative in their effects on a social or psychological object.

Some studies in language attitude have been strictly concentrated on language itself, but most often, the concept 'language attitudes' includes attitudes towards speakers of a particular language (Fasold 1984). The definition of language attitude is as varied as the concept of attitude itself, but there have been acceptable definitions put forward by scholars of the subject. Language attitude has been defined as the strong "positive or negative emotions experienced by people when they are faced with a choice between languages in a variety of situations or are learning a language" (Dyers, 1998). Crystal (1997: 215) defines language attitude as the "feelings people have about their own language or the language of others". These two definitions do not cover other aspects of language attitude. An earlier look by Saville-Troike (1989: 181), from an ethnographic perspective explores language attitude by concentrating on interesting areas like "questions of how culture-specific criteria for 'speaking well' function in the definition of marking social roles, how attitudes towards different languages and varieties of language reflect perceptions of people in the different social categories, and how such perceptions influence interaction within and across the boundaries of a speech community..." According to him, expressions of positive

or negative feelings towards a language may reflect impressions of linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degree of importance, elegance, and social status. The author further state that language attitude studies could be categorized thus: (a) those that explore general attitudes toward language and language skills (b) those that explore stereotyped impressions toward language, their speakers, and their functions and (c) those that focus on applied concerns (language choice and usage, and language learning). Fasold (1987) acknowledged the deficiency in language attitude studies and recommends that language attitude can be broadened to encompass attitudes towards speakers of a particular language or dialect and attitudes toward language maintenance and planning efforts. Coronel-Molina (2009: 9) in bringing the pieces together looked at key elements in the various perspectives in defining language attitude and concluded that attitude involves both beliefs and feelings, that it theoretically should influence behaviour, and that there are a range of issues about which people have language attitudes, from opinions about one's own language, to foreign speakers of one's own language, to foreign languages to official policies regarding languages. In this study, the definition by Crystal (1997: 215) that language attitude refers to the "feelings people have about their own language or the language of others" will be used as the working model, for it fits the study since the study sought to find out language attitudes towards the study and use of Ghanaian language in Senior High Schools, drawing the data from Ghanaian students and teachers.

### **Attitudes to language in education**

The importance of language attitudes for language-in-education policies has been stressed by several researchers, like Edwards (1994), Heugh (2000), Andoh-Kumi (2001) and Sarfo (2012). There is close relationship between language attitude and education because education is generally deemed to play a crucial role in shaping language attitudes and influencing the outcomes of language maintenance and language shift processes (Baker 1992), especially for countries which have no language policy, but use that of education as the national language policy. Adegbiya (1994) points out that it is in education that the negative attitudes toward foreign languages are most glaringly displayed. This is so because most African countries do not have explicit language policies outside education. In most African post-Junior High schools, English is highly favoured. In Ghana, English which is a colonial language used in formal education is perceived as the only language worth being literate in or even the sole language worth investing in, to the detriment of local and other foreign languages. In a multilingual situation like Ghana, language attitude in education is very essential. Learners' attitudes to language

are integral part of learning and that it should be an essential component of second language learning pedagogy (Saracaloglu 2010) because language attitudes have effects on second language and foreign language learning. Siti (2008) found out that students' attitude towards a target language and its speakers correlates with their proficiency level in the language. The implication is that if students have positive attitude towards a language, they perform well in it. The effectiveness of language policies in education is determined more by the attitudes of the people towards language use than the simple demographic facts of language distribution and use (Ferguson 1996). Though finding data about language attitude is more cumbersome than finding the basic statistics of users of a language or language distribution, it is paramount for researchers to engage in this venture. It is possible that such a venture may raise political issues which threaten the successful implementation of a language survey. But as echoed by Webb (1996), it is very important for language policy makers and planners to consider people's language attitudes and preferences so that their policies can reflect the needs of the people and not the interest of any particular language. Lewis (1981:262) had earlier summed this up by saying that: no policy will succeed which does not do one of three things: conform to the expressed attitudes of those involved, persuade those who express negative attitudes about the rightness of the policy, or seek to remove the causes of the disagreement. There have been few studies of language attitude towards language use and study in Ghana, especially in education. These studies have always shown that there is negative attitude towards the use of indigenous language in education as medium of instruction and subject of study. A study conducted by Kwofie (2001) to compare University of Cape Coast students' attitudes towards English, Pidgin and Ghanaian languages found that participants have positive attitudes towards English and unfavorable (negative) attitudes towards Ghanaian languages. The findings of this study make the present study relevant because it adds to finding a solution to the larger puzzle of language attitudes towards studying foreign languages in the Ghanaian educational system. Attitudes are influential and can be transferred from one individual to another and attitudes can be learned or changed through experience. In summary, the study would help to address attitudes towards learning Chinese as foreign language in Ghanaian universities and also provide valuable understanding to researchers and academicians for future in depth research. Again, this work will add to the existing body of knowledge on the issues of learning Chinese language and to inform the Government of Ghana the need to learn Chinese language.

## METHODOLOGY

The study presents the research design and methodology,

the research instruments employed and the procedure for obtaining the research data for this study. Furthermore, it explains how the methodology and instruments employed in this study aided in achieving the objectives set out in section. As part of the study, 20 statement questionnaires were distributed to the participants to enquire information pertaining to the attitude, desire and feelings of students studying Chinese language at the University of Ghana and the University of Cape Coast.

## Research design

This research adopted a quantitative method through a questionnaire survey conducted among students of the University of Ghana, Legon and the University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast who are studying Chinese language. The questionnaire was adapted in order to elicit some differences in language attitudes. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part was designed to solicit information about the language background of respondents. This section also carries an additional question which aims to survey the attitude of the students. The second part of the questionnaire composed of 20 statements which are all about participants' language attitude towards Chinese language learning. The design was adopted to enable the researcher to survey a representative sample of Ghanaian university students, making an attempt to gain insights into and obtain information about the needs and feelings of Ghanaian university students towards Chinese language learning.

## Population/sample

The population of the study included students of the University of Ghana, Legon, and the University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast. The two universities were chosen because of easy access to the students and the similarities (as well as differences) in most of the programmes of the two institutions. Using stratification in multistage sampling technique (Babbie, 2005; Frankel and Wallen, 2000; Kumekpor, 2002), the study sampled three hundred and seventy-two (372) students from University of Ghana and one hundred and twenty (120) students from the University of Cape Coast to respond to a questionnaire, making a total of four hundred and ninety two students (492) respondents. First, by purposive sampling, the study focused on a total of four hundred and ninety two students (492) each from the Confucius Institute. Among the students, the researcher chose 123 students each from the various levels of students studying Chinese language at Confucius Institute of the two universities. Out of the 123 students at each level, 30 students offering Chinese were selected at each level at the University of Cape cost whiles 93 at various levels at the University of Ghana were also

selected. After that stage, all the specific samples, including those from the various levels, were randomly selected to fill the questionnaire. The stratification into levels was necessary because the specific programme of a student has a considerable influence on his/her attitude to linguistic choices. The choice of various levels of student from the two universities for the study was informed by the assumption that they could be aware of the implications of the linguistic choices they made since at the various stages they were thought to be independent minded. Thus, information gathered from such students could be authentic as it might have resulted from their own personal experiences. The comparison was necessary to ascertain into, how the learning of the Chinese language will impact the lives of the students learning. The information gathered was from the experiences that the students encountered in studying.

### Research instrument, data collection and analysis

Data were collected using a closed-ended format questionnaire adapted from Shaw (1983), with some modification to reflect the Ghanaian context. The questionnaire directly asked students for some demographic information and their feelings about some aspects of Chinese language, including: Demographic information (age, sex, level and majors) of the students, why they studied Chinese language, the people with whom they used Chinese language, what they wanted to learn and what they felt about Chinese language studies. In all, 492 of the questionnaires were retrieved out of which 120 were from UCC and 372 from UG. The data from the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively using frequencies, percentages and cross-tabulations and one-way analysis of variance by means of the computer software Statistical Product for Service Solutions (SPSS, version 20).

## RESULTS

The total of 492 students participated in both institutions of which three hundred and seventy-two (372) were students of University of Ghana and one hundred and twenty (120) were students of University of Cape Coast. They were 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students aged 19 to 27 from University of Ghana and Elementary class, Intermediate Chinese language students class aged 20 to 30 from the University of Cape Coast. The statistical analysis of the data expresses the general over view of students' attitude towards Chinese language learning in all divert ways.

Form the Table 1, it is shown that one hundred and fifty-six (156) out of three hundred and seventy-two (372) representing 42% of the participant were male students in University of Ghana and forty (40) out of one hundred and

twenty (120) representing 33% of the respondents were also male students in University of Cape coast whereas two hundred and sixteen (216) 58% out of the total number of the students representing students in University of Ghana were females whiles eighty (80) 67% out of the sum of the students represented in University of Cape Coast were also females. During the study, the researcher came across with more male and female students in University of Ghana other than male and female students in University of Cape Coast (Table 1).

Table 2 Demonstrates how the students studying Chinese language was reviewed. It was outlined that 94% of the students representing University of Ghana said the reason why they study Chinese language is that, Chinese language is interesting and it has a rich culture whiles 83% of the students representing University of Cape Coast said the reason why they study Chinese language is that Chinese language is interesting and it has a rich culture, 97% of the students representing University of Ghana also implied that another reason why they study Chinese language is that studying Chinese language will help them to know more about the history and culture of China whereas 92% of the students representing University of Cape Coast also said another reason why they study Chinese language is that studying Chinese language will develop their critical and creative thinking skills. Moreover 81% of the total number representing University of Ghana students revealed that study Chinese language is a compulsory subject for them that is the reason why they learn Chinese language, 100% of the students from University of Cape Coast attest to the fact that study Chinese language is a compulsory subject for them that is the reason why they learn Chinese language and 96% of the students representing University of Ghana said the reason why they study Chinese language is that studying Chinese language will broaden their horizon and help them fit into the global world and 99% of the students representing University of Cape Coast also said reason why they study Chinese language is that studying Chinese language will broaden their horizon and help them fit into the global world (Table 2).

### Conceptions towards the learning of Chinese language

In Table 3, it was realized that 78% of the students representing University of Ghana said the general conception of learning Chinese language is that Chinese language is unique to speak whiles 86% of the students representing University of Cape Coast said the general conception of learning Chinese language is that Chinese language is unique to speak, 96% of the students representing University of Ghana also revealed that the general conception of learning Chinese language is that Chinese language requires a lot of attention, dedication and constant practice whereas 98% of the students

**Table 1.** Gender of the students.

Gender	University of Ghana	University of Cape Coast
Males	156 (42%)	40 (33%)
Females	216(58%)	80 (67%)

Source: Field work, 2019.

**Table 2.** Reasons why the students study Chinese language.

No	Reasons	University of Ghana	University of Cape Coast
1	Chinese language is interesting and it has a rich culture	350 (94%)	100 (83%)
2	Studying Chinese language will help them know more about the history and culture of china	360 (97%)	110 (92%)
3	They study Chinese language because it is a compulsory subject for them	300 (71%)	100 (90%)
4	Studying Chinese language will broaden our horizon and help us fit into the global world	351 (93%)	109 (94%)

Source: Field work, 2019.

**Table 3.** General conception of learning Chinese language.

General conception	University of Ghana	University of Cape Coast
Chinese language is unique to speak	290 (78%)	103 (86%)
Chinese language requires a lot of attention, dedication and constant practice	358 (96%)	117 (98%)
Chinese language is most speaking language in the world	311 (84%)	97 (80%)

Source: Field work, 2019.

**Table 4.** Impact of students' attitude towards learning Chinese language.

Students' attitude	University of Ghana	University of Cape Coast
Hardworking and always excellent	368 (99%)	117 (98%)
To have interest in the language as a whole	4 (1%)	3 (2%)

Source: Field work, 2019.

representing University of Cape Coast also said the general conception of learning Chinese language is that Chinese language requires a lot of attention, dedication and constant practice and 84% of the students representing University of Ghana also revealed that the general conception of learning Chinese language was seen as the most know and vibrant language in the world, 97% of the students from University of Cape Coast implied that the general conception of the language is emphatically dealt with appropriately. This means that majority of the students representing University of Cape Coast general conception of learning Chinese language is that Chinese language is unique to speak and Chinese language requires a lot of attention, dedication and constant practice

as compare to students representing University of Ghana and majority of the students representing University of Ghana general conception of learning is that Chinese language is most speaking language in the world as compare to students in University of Cape Coast (Table 3).

### Students attitude towards learning Chinese language

From Table 4, it was revealed that 99% of the students representing University of Ghana said the impact of students' attitude towards learning Chinese languages is hardworking and always excellent whiles 98% of the students representing University of Cape Coast said the

impact of students' attitude towards learning Chinese language is hardworking and always excellent. 85% of the students representing University of Ghana also revealed that the impact of students' attitude towards learning Chinese languages is to have interest in the language as a whole whereas 83% of the students representing University of Cape Coast also said the impact of students' attitude towards learning Chinese language is to have interest in the language as a whole. This means that majority of the students representing University of Ghana impact of students' attitude towards learning Chinese language is to have interest in the language and to have interest in the language as a whole as compare to students representing University of Cape coast (Table 4).

## DISCUSSIONS

This study sought to find out the attitudes towards the learning of Chinese as a foreign language in Ghanaian universities where University of Ghana and University of Cape Coast were chosen as case study. It was structured to understand the challenges students encounter in learning Chinese language, in addition to that, to identify the skills considered to be more important in learning Chinese language and finally to determine how to use the knowledge of Chinese language in future. Questionnaires were distributed as mode of data collection on the field whereas the analysis of the study was done qualitatively with the help of Social package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21.1.

With regards to the attitudes of students towards learning of the Chinese language, impacts of the said student's attitudes were reviewed, out of the total 492 of students, 368 University of Ghana students representing 99% confirmed hardworking and always excellent likewise 117 students from University of Cape Coast representing 98% also agreed to the same view. 4% and 2% of both University of Ghana and Cape Coast University respectively were of different opinion, to have interest in the language. Sutarso (1996:3-4) shows that over the years, different ways of understanding other cultures have been promoted, such as cross-cultural training programmes and student exchange programmes. However, a less expensive way is to study languages in one's home country. In order to ascertain student attitude towards Chinese language it was observed that students have to develop hardwork and key interest in the language under review. For example, how quickly immigrants that are new in a country learn and develop depends on their motivation (Ellis, 1994:207-210). Ellis (1997:76) claims that motivation is not something that a learner has or does not have, but rather something that varies from one moment to the next, depending on the learning context or task. Chinese language requires a lot of attention, dedication and constant practice were the major conceptions towards

the learning of Chinese language by the students in the two universities. This sends a positive signal towards the language. Saville-Troike (2006:94) claims that the question of why some learners are more successful than others leads to the examination of differences in the learners themselves, such as social factors. While learning a foreign language in schools, it should be a paramount concern to the teachers.

In understanding the challenges students encounter in learning Chinese language, significant of the students clearly said that, Chinese language characters are too difficult to write, very limited time to learn the Chinese language in school and speaking and listening is more difficult. Moreover, how fast they learn a new language depends on the individual learner's motivation (Ellis 1994:207-210). In addition, the students who chose to study any foreign language on their own turned to hold more positive attitudes than those who were forced to do so (Lin, 2013). However, to have effective learning of Chinese language, there were certain skills needed to facilitate the learning. These include but not limited to communication exchange is essential for students as well as active reading and listening were the key skills obtained from the findings. Moreover, China needs to send more native speaker teachers and at least four years staying period to support local teachers of Chinese language in both universities.

## Conclusion

From the study, it was revealed that, in both universities, students show positive attitudes towards the learning of the Chinese language. However, students also faced challenges such as feeling reluctant, gender, peer pressure, social class, age, anxiety, lack of encouragement and motivation. The level of effort that learners expend at various stages in their L2 development depends on how motivated they are to learn. The more motivated students are, the easier they will learn a new language. Furthermore, negative attitudes can impede language learning, and someone usually gets negative attitudes when they are not interested or have difficulties with the teacher. In spite of these challenges they do encounter, there are also some skills students can accommodate to enhance their studies as discussed above.

## Recommendations

Based on this study, it is recommended that more local Chinese teachers should be trained and more scholarship should be given to Ghanaian students who have desire and interest in the learning Chinese language. China needs to send more teachers and increase their time of



stay to help local teachers of the Chinese language in the two universities. Chinese embassy and the Chinese government should organize cultural activities quarterly in the universities to inspire students. China should also provide and support exchange programs between students learning Chinese language in Ghana to visit China for better experience with the language. With these recommendations problems of feeling reluctant, gender, peer pressure, social class, age, anxiety, encouragement and motivation would have been addressed.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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