

Research on The Phenomenon of Demotivation of Chinese Second Language Learners-A Case Study of Chinese Learners at University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

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Short Bio of Author:

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Abstract

The existing knowledge in the Scientific research articulates the influence of numerous factors in the learning of a foreign language. In this regard, major consideration is acquired by motivation. The fundamental question of foreign language acquisition relies on the possibility of some individuals to acquire a foreign language within a shorter period of time while few others are incapable of acquiring a foreign language despite all opportunities and strategies employed in the acquisition process. There are two significant researchers who upsize this issue from the perspective of motivation and the effect of motivational differences in acquiring a foreign language. As per linguist Jakobovits, motivation is the fundamental factor that becomes a catalyst in the foreign language acquisition of students. It is obvious that, the significant phase acquired by motivation in the students' teaching – learning process of a foreign language cannot be ignored. The major objective is to find out solutions to motivate students to learn Chinese Language successfully. In order to explore on the research phenomena, the researcher has randomly selected a sample of 100 students majoring in Chinese language from university of Kelaniya. This sample is consisted off undergraduates from first, second and third academic years at the University of Kelaniya. As per major findings of the study, various reasons affect the demotivation of learning a second language by students. The lack of interest in learning, incapability to arouse curiosity in learning the target language, negative emotions have resulted in the lack of motivation of students. Moreover, the motivational factor of students is affected with the stereotypical teaching materials, the content, excessive academic workload, negative attitudes of teachers and the difficulty to find employability opportunities. In addition to that, the researcher has found out several strategies to enhance student's motivation in the acquisition and involvement of learning a foreign language. It is suggested to employ new teaching materials that cater students interest and incorporated to the current acquisition level of Chinese language of students. A strong rapport between the students and the teacher needed to be established by changing negative attitudes of teachers.

Keywords: Motivation; demotivation factors; University of Kelaniya; Teaching Chinese as a Second Language

1. Introduction

It is significant of the increase of demand in learning and teaching the Chinese language has increased gradually all over the world. This rise in significance and emphasis is influenced by the economic growth of China in the world which draws interest on Chinese language and the necessity to acquire the Chinese language to bridge the gap of language barrier. Irrespective of individuals belonging to various age levels, the interest on the acquisition of Chinese language has drastically increased. On the other hand, it is obvious that, Foreign language acquisition is a complex phenomena and a process that require constant motivation and interest in the teaching – learning process. In this regard, the scope and impact of motivation of students in the acquisition of a foreign language is significant. In order to promote cross- cultural learning, coeval Sri Lankan government established a Chinese language instruction

community in the year of 1972 with the introduction of Certificate programs in Chinese language in the university of Kelaniya. This initiative has elevated to the level of introducing Bachelor's degree programs in Chinese language to the university which is remarkable juncture in the Chinese language education in Sri Lanka.

In this regard, it is important to explore diversified reasons that had become a catalyst in creating problems in the Chinese language acquisition of students in Sri Lanka. It is obvious that, motivation plays a crucial role in the second language learning and the acquisition of a language (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Khan, 2015) and proficiency (Lamb, 2012). Furthermore, Meshkat (2011) states of the increase of demotivation among students in schools with an increasing number of learners losing their motivation to study. The decreasing level of motivation in foreign language acquisition among students makes the language learning challenging and impossible for the majority of students. It hinders the ability of students to maintain

enthusiasm and progress in the language acquisition process. Therefore, understanding strategies to effectively foster and sustain motivation among students learning Chinese is a vital area of study.

Chambers (1993) first identified the impact of demotivation in Second language acquisition (L2) learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021) and since then there was a growing interest in understanding factors and catalysts that affected the demotivation of students in language education. Several researchers have explored and found out diversified factors that influence in this regard. Predominately, psychological changes such as heightened learning anxiety (Xaypanya et al., 2017), decreased confidence (Falout & Maruyama, 2004), and negative attitudes toward the language (Kaivanpanah & Ghasemi, 2011). Moreover, several aspects related to the backdrops of learning the language such as less interactive learning materials, (Husniyah, 2019), lack of challenging tasks (Lai, 2013), and disappointing exam results (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009), have also been implicated in student demotivation. These research findings exemplify that numerous scholars have contributed in exploring diversified reasons and factors affecting the demotivation of students in the foreign language learning (FLL).

In the Sri Lankan society, the acquisition of Chinese language by undergraduates undertakes several challenges and obstacles. The linguistic and cultural variations of the native backdrop offer unique challenges. Sinhalese is the official language of Sri Lanka that has roots of Indo- European family of languages and there is a significant difference in between Sinhalese and Chinese languages in terms of structure and grammar. Sri Lankan culture is immensely influenced by the traditional Indian

culture in which the impact of Chinese culture and language on the native locale is limited.

Owing to that, Sri Lankan students encounter considerable problems and difficulties in learning Chinese including challenges with pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, Chinese characters, and cultural nuances. The incapability in resolving these identified obstacles has resulted in the demotivation of students in acquiring a foreign language. Therefore, the researcher delves into a deeper understanding and analysis of factors leading to demotivation among Chinese language learners at the University of Kelaniya. The primary objective of this study is to identify the specific factors leading to demotivation in this context and to analyse the impact of these factors in the learning experiences of Chinese language of undergraduates. Moreover, findings of this study contributes to propose strategies to enhance motivation and improve the overall learning experiences of Sri Lankan students. This research is significant as it identifies factors contributing to demotivation among Chinese language learners in Sri Lanka, enabling targeted interventions to improve student engagement and proficiency. Furthermore, it provides insights for curriculum development and contributes to the broader field of language education.

2. Literature Review

In reviewing the available literature, it is significant that the demotivation of students in foreign language learning (FLL) is affected by external and internal factors (Figure 1). Internal factors are mainly owing to composed of learner-related factors (Falout et al., 2009), while the external factors are mainly teacher-related, environment-related, important others-related, and curriculum-related factors (Lai, 2013).

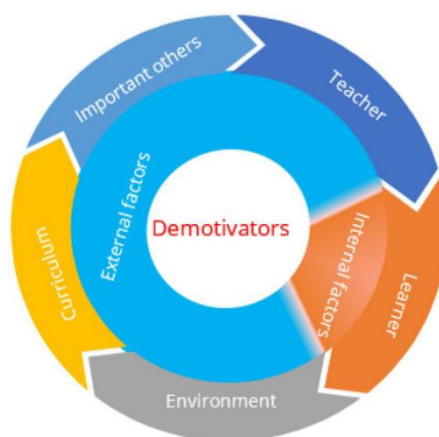


Figure 1: Demotivation Factors

2.1. Learner-related factors

According to Elahi Shirvan and Talebzadeh (2020), learner-related factors include low confidence, low interest in learning, a negative attitude towards language, and high study anxiety. These factors are associated with a decrease in learners' motivation. (Falout et al., 2009). A reduction in learners' confidence denotes a progressive loss of self-assurance that can be caused by a number of causes, especially for those who are less proficient in the language (Dörnyei, 2001). Falout and Falout (2005), for example, found that low-proficiency students frequently blamed their own demotivation on their perceived incapacity to learn English and their incapacity to control their emotions. This loop of self-blame resulted in decreased motivation and worse performance. Furthermore, the intricacy

of the English language can demotivate students, as seen by elements like the overwhelming vocabulary and tiresome grammar (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). Additionally, some students may not understand the value of learning English since they believe it to be a challenging topic that has no bearing on their future (Kaivanpanah & Ghasemi, 2011). Students who experience excessive anxiety avoid using English altogether because they tend to be worried about what other people think and fear being made fun of for their mistakes (Xaypanya et al., 2017).

2.2. Teacher-related factors

The foreign language acquisition becomes problematic owing to teacher- related factors such as the negative behavior of teachers, professional skills and teaching skills which lacks the possibility to upsize interest among students in acquiring a foreign language (Kikuchi, 2009). These identified factors can be categorised as direct and indirect factors and reasons connected to teachers (Falout & Falout, 2005). Factors directly affecting teachers can be categorised as basic teaching skills, sense of responsibility, personality, teacher- student relationship and teaching methods. Predominately, poor and less interactive teaching methods suggested by non – standard pronunciation and unclear explanations (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009) are catalysts. Moreover, language teachers who are irresponsible often deviates from encouraging students in the foreign language learning process and communicate clearly with students. The bad temper and irresponsibility of teachers have made them seems unfriendly and unreachable to students by hindering the teacher – student interaction and demotivating students (Unal & Yanpar Yelken, 2016). Furthermore, reliance on traditional teaching methods and failure to incorporate modern technology can lead to student boredom and demotivation (Song & Kim, 2017).

On the other hand, factors indirectly affecting teachers include the employment of a teacher- centered classroom in foreign language learning and the traditional methodologies employed in the teaching – learning process (Falout & Falout, 2005). In various countries, differing levels of enrollment pressure influence teaching methods. To prepare students for tests, teachers often explain everything in a lesson, leaving little room for students to demonstrate their learning, particularly in grammar classes. This lack of participation can make students feel alienated and diminish their motivation.

2.3. Curriculum-related factors

Students' motivation to study a second language is greatly influenced by curriculum-related elements. Dornyei (2014) interviewed fifty undergraduates who felt demotivated to acquire a foreign language. According to his study, diversified factors influencing the 'psychological demotivation' of students were identified and predominately identified the concern with the structure of the curriculum. Furthermore, Wayani and Sammanie (2016) explored experiences of Advanced Level students studying Chinese language as a subject and Chinese language teachers through the data collected by a questionnaire survey among both samples. As per this research, the primary demotivating factors in learning Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) included a lack of qualified teachers, inadequate teaching and learning materials, and limited access to Chinese textbooks and manuals. These findings underscore the importance of curriculum design and resource availability in maintaining student motivation in second language learning results revealed that lack of qualified teachers, inadequate teaching and learning supportive materials and limited access to Chinese text books and manuals are the main factors for demotivating in the process of teaching and learning CFL

2.4. Environment-related factors

Based on the analysis of relevant literature, there were predominant environment related factors that influence foreign language learning (FLL) of students and resulted in the demotivation of students in the language acquisition process.

According to Song and Kim (2017), the classroom setting and school facilities account for the majority of the learning environment (Zhang et al., 2020). Poor school infrastructure can restrict teachers' employment of innovative teaching strategies, which lowers students' desire and interest in studying English (Ushioda, 1998). Sakai and Kikuchi (2009), for example, used a questionnaire given to 656 Japanese high school students to determine that a demotivating element was the absence of instructional materials. A shortage of media equipment in certain schools prevented teachers from using audio and video resources, while in other schools, there was no internet connectivity to access the most recent information. As a result, educators were compelled to use conventional approaches, which restricted the range of activities that could be done in the classroom and the incorporation of contemporary technology into English language instruction.

Moreover, the environment and the setting of the language classroom also contributes in the motivation of students. According to J.Li (2019) the impact of Chinese CLIL programs conducted in a British secondary school proved that the approach employed to acquire the foreign language includes exposure to natural vocabulary and a target – language speaking environment improved the academic progress and performance in the second language compared to non – CLIL programs. Yet, she identified that the success of CLIL depends on various concerns and factors such as the availability of students that articulate some students thriving and others struggling or becoming disruptive due to anxiety. As per Li (2019), the usage of bilingual scaffolding to enhance the learning experiences and support the motivation of students.

In this regard, several researches are done in the Sri Lankan context. Wayani & Sammanie (2016)'s study on demotivating factors in teaching Chinese as a foreign language of advanced level students. On the other hand, the scope of demotivation and factors enabling less interest in acquiring a foreign language among undergraduates is not conducted yet. So, this research focusses on fulfilling this gap in the filed by focusing on different reasons and factors affecting the demotivation of students and teachers in acquiring Chinese language in Sri Lanka.

3. Research Design

The theoretical background of this study is established from the available literature such as scholarly books, academic articles and internet sources. As a descriptive study, the study incorporated a random sample of 100 undergraduates majoring in Chinese language in first, second and third years at University of Kelaniya. Predominately, data was collected through a questionnaire survey. Furthermore, selected students who got lower level of results in Chinese language proficiency examinations of first, second and third years were asked to write a short essay. This essay was focused on their learning experiences, specifically highlighting issues they undergone and problems they encountered within the learning process.

3.1. Research questions

This study will address the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that demotivate undergraduate students learning Chinese at the University of Kelaniya?
2. What measures can be implemented to sustain students' interest and re-motivate them to continue their Chinese language studies?

3.2. Sample of the study

The research sample of the study is consisted of 100 undergraduates who are majoring in Chinese language at University of Kelaniya. These students represent first, second and third years of the university. The major objective in the selection of students belonging to these three levels was the requirement to capture a variety of experiences and views regarding the acquisition of Chinese language. Data collection was predominately conducted through a questionnaire survey distributed among the sample. In addition to that, two students from each year was selected depending on the low performance and low results in the language classroom and instructed them to write a short reflective essay on their experiences on the Chinese language acquisition highlighting concerns and factors affecting the demotivation of students. It is significant that these students were not utilised with any from of guidelines or limitation for the composition of the essay in which resulted in recording their authentic feedback on the teaching –learning experience and privacy of respondents were assured. In data analysis and interpretation, factors affecting learning conditions and the learning background were taken into consideration. Moreover, the curriculum, and teacher – related factors were also investigated. Following this analysis, the questionnaire was conducted.

3.4. Results

The results are presented according to the factors identified in the questionnaire and the essays are:

1. User manuals
2. Teacher strategies
3. Teacher behavior
4. Difficulty of the language itself
5. Perceived lack of benefit and employment concerns

4. Results and Discussion

The results of this study can be categorized under two sections. The questionnaire survey conducted using 100 undergraduates of university of Kelaniya in the age level 20-25 who are majoring in Chinese upsized key insights related to motivation

and experiences of acquiring a foreign language. The distribution of students in first, second and third years in the university can be identified as 48%, 33% and 19% respectively.

Different scopes of motivation levels are analyzed in the questionnaire survey that summarized different reasons that became a catalyst in selecting Chinese as a subject. The major reason in this regard is the increase of demand in the job market for Chinese language learners which has the percentage of 83% in the survey. Other types of motivations were categorized under the desire to study in China (41%), the global usage of the language (35%), its popularity and recognition in Sri Lanka (23%) and additional benefits such as the convenience in travelling and the ability to enhance cognitive abilities that stated as 12%. A small proportion which is 6% indicated the influence of family and friends. It is significant that, 78% of students were enthusiastic to acquire Chinese language while 16% of the sample had a strong interest. Moreover, 6% of the sample approached the language with an intermediate level of willingness regarding the language. Yet, with the passage of time, 66% of students experienced a decline in the level of motivation while 34% managed to maintain their enthusiasm throughout studies.

4.1. Teacher strategies and user manuals

Results of the reflective essays written by students with a lower Chinese language proficiency. These essays proved that many students expressed views on teaching strategies employed in the language classroom. Students manifested that Chinese language classrooms are interactive and enagaing in first few sessions and gradually returns back to the monotonous traditional classroom. This leads to increased pressure over time.

“At the beginning, the Chinese classes were really interesting and kept me motivated. But as the semester progressed, the classes started to feel repetitive and dull. The excitement I initially felt has faded, and now I find myself feeling more pressured and less enthusiastic about learning.”

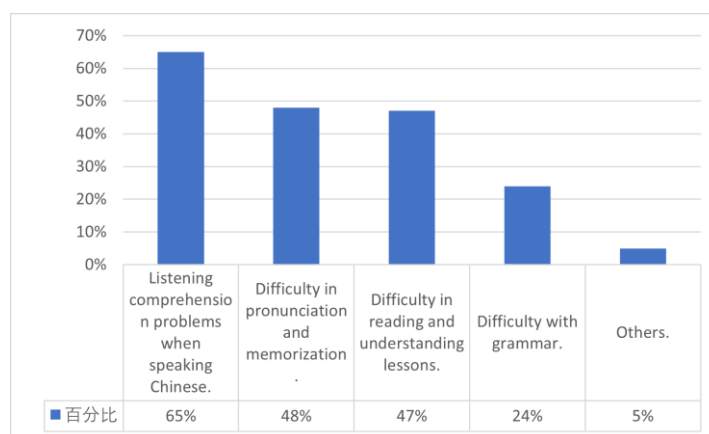


Figure 2: Problems with teaching content.

To understand the demotivation under teacher strategies, students were asked about the specific factors contributing to this issue. As depicted in the combined graph above, 65% of students cited listening comprehension problems when speaking Chinese as a major demotivating factor. Difficulty in pronunciation and memorization was reported by 48% of students, while 47% struggled with reading and understanding

lessons. Grammar difficulties affected 24% of students, and 5% reported other issues.

These findings highlight the need for more interactive and practical teaching methods, with a greater focus on listening and speaking activities, to maintain student motivation and improve learning outcomes. The decline in engagement can be attributed to the traditional teaching methods currently employed. There is

a strong need to integrate technology and modern teaching methods into language classes. Utilizing interactive tools, such as multimedia presentations, language learning apps, and online resources, can make the learning experience more dynamic and engaging. Incorporating technology could facilitate a better understanding of the material and cater to different learning styles. Embracing contemporary educational practices is likely to enhance motivation and interest in learning Chinese. In order to understand the impact of teacher strategies on the demotivation of Chinese language learners, students were inquired of specific factors contributing to this concern. As per the combined graph above, 65% of students cited problems in listening comprehension in the pragmatic usage of Chinese which is a major demotivation factor. Difficulties and problems in pronunciation of Chinese characters and memorization was identified by 48% of students while 47% struggled with reading and writing in Chinese. 24% of the student population was affected by difficulties in Grammar and 5% of students reported other issues.

According to these findings, the necessity to incorporate interactive and practical teaching methods and materials with a predominant focus to listening and speaking activities was highlighted to maintain the motivation and interest of students. As per the study, this change has the tendency to fulfill learning outcomes of language acquisition. The lack of engagement in activities employed in the Chinese language learning classroom is identified as a result if traditional teaching methods employed at the present syllabus. It is further highlighted the necessity to integrate technology and modern teaching methods into language classrooms. It is recommended to employ interactive tools such as multimedia presentations, language learning apps and online resources that has the tendency to make the teaching - learning process more interesting, dynamic and engaging. The incorporation of technology could facilitate a better understanding of materials and cater diversified learning styles of the language learner. It is significant to embrace contemporary educational practices to enhance motivation and interest of undergraduates in acquiring Chinese language proficiency.

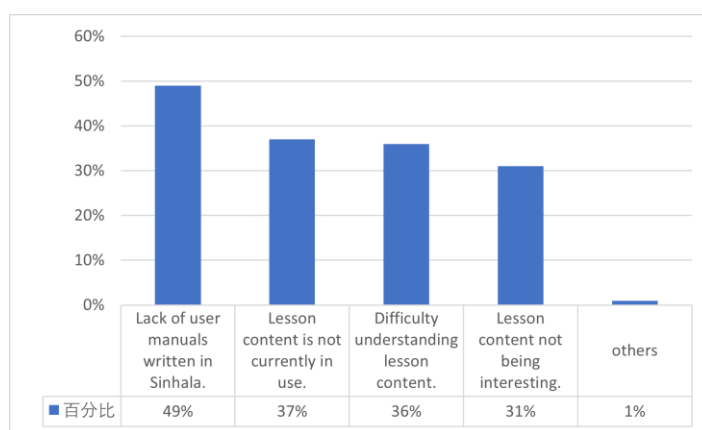


Figure 3: Issues with learning tools (user manuals)

It is obvious that, undergraduates experience a loss of motivation which leads to a decline in satisfaction and performance in the acquisition of Chinese language. As per findings of the study, there was a problem of insufficient study materials which becomes a catalyst in demotivation of students. According to Pretty (2019) and Kandambi (2018), the lack of adequate amount of course books and study materials emerged as a key factor that led to the demotivation of students. As per the student survey, problems and concerns related to teaching materials were explored and 49% of undergraduates faced difficulties owing to the lack of instructional manuals written in Sinhala. Predominately, the survey manifested that 36% of the content is currently not in use. Difficulties in understanding the lesson content was highlighted by 31% and articulated that the lesson content is less engaging and not interesting. 1% of the sample population depicted other reasons in this regard.

The most important demotivating factor is the e lack of user manuals and defined the necessity for tailored educational resources in teaching Chinese. It is obvious that, the incapability to find instructional materials in the native language of students impacted in the acquisition and performance of student sin the target language which emphasized the necessity to have bilingual resources. Moreover, the relevance of the content and applicability of those resources to the pragmatic lives of students has the capability to increase the interest and motivation. The

incorporation of culturally relevant materials has the tendency to enhance both engagement and appreciation for the language.

In order to address issues related to the comprehension of the language, differentiated instruction and strategies to support such as scaffolding and visual aids are manifested as essential factors. The creation of a supportive learning environment encourages students to seek help, improving their overall learning experience. Moreover, the employment of diversified teaching methods such as gamification and interactive teaching – learning activities can foster active participation and it has the capability to enhance retention.

4.2. Teacher behavior

According to research by Zhang (2020) in Ireland and Altiner (2018) in Turkey, incompetent teachers are one of the main demotivating factors in second language acquisition. Ineffective teaching strategies or a lack of subject understanding are common ways that incompetence appears in this setting.

For example, a student shared their experience: *“I started to learn from a native Chinese language teacher, and she helped me improve my pronunciation and other skills. However, I found that when I pronounced words, my class teacher said my pronunciation was incorrect. In another instance, I wrote an essay, and the teacher marked some points as errors, but when I asked my native Chinese tutor, she marked them as correct. I felt frustrated.”* This inconsistency and perceived lack of

expertise from the classroom teacher led to a decline in the student's motivation and confidence.

The conduct and attitude of their teachers is another significant element that demotivates students. Many students claimed that their language instructors had a bad attitude about learning Chinese. Teachers' descriptions of Chinese as ‘one of the hardest languages in the world,’ for example, were cited by several students as causing them to be anxious and negative about the language from the start.

According to research, students who are more motivated are more successful when learning a language. However, pupils are more likely to become less motivated to learn when they feel embarrassed by the teacher or uneasy by the lecturer (Kandambi, 2018). It is vital to note that pupils valued different factors when

they believe that ‘the teacher’ is the most significant factor in their learning (Zheng,2023). Some pupils believed that teachers demonstrate partiality by giving better grades to students who did well. As a result, other students felt neglected. One student noted, *‘Teachers often focus on students who consistently perform well, and when I answered questions correctly, I did not receive the same level of appreciation as those students.’*

Students felt devalued and disappointed as a result of this. Some students also complained that some teachers misinterpreted their enquiries and were impolite. Students were reluctant to ask enquiries or seek assistance because they were afraid of being rejected or receiving unfavourable response. According to the questionnaire the data reveals several critical teacher behaviors that contribute to student demotivation in learning Chinese.

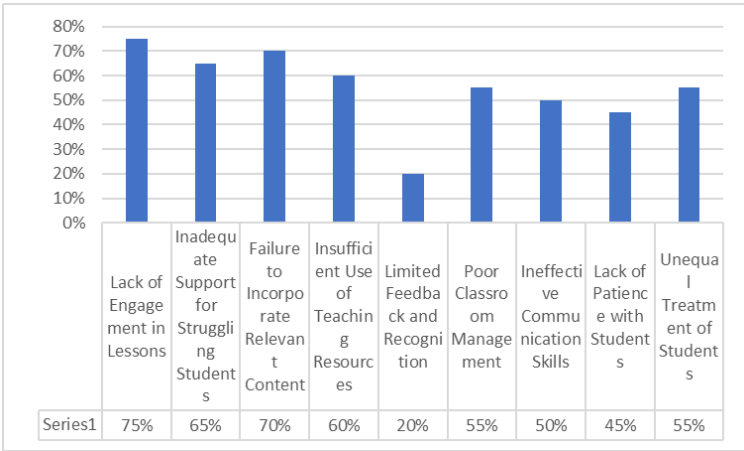


Figure 4: Teacher behavior towards demotivation.

The data collected on the behavior of teachers highlight significant issues that impacted on the motivation of students’ in the acquisition of the Chinese language. Predominately, **the lack of engagement in lessons** was identified as a major concern which had the percentage of 75%. It has become a catalyst in the lack of motivation and interest among students. Owing to the inability of language teachers to make student engagement active has made students to get the idea that those lessons are dull and irrelevant which undermines the enthusiasm and participation of students. Moreover, **the inadequate support for struggling students** has also become a major concern related to teachers with the percentage of 65%. It is significant to render sufficient individualized support for language learners. The unavailability of the individualized support impacted in inculcating feelings of isolation and frustration. This lack of support can exacerbate their difficulties and lead to decreased motivation, as students may feel they are not receiving the help they need to succeed. In addition to that, **the failure to incorporate relevant content** in lessons has affected in 70% of teachers. Lessons which deviates from relating to pragmatic instances of the background of the learner or cultural relevance make materials less interesting and irrelevant to students. Students are incapable of incorporating the knowledge of language learning and value their learning without a meaningful contextual relevance of the content. On the other hand, **the insufficient use of teaching resources** was identified as 60% in which students miss opportunities to enrich and improve the desired knowledge and proficiency in the target language. The incorporation of diverse teaching materials can enhance the learning experience by providing varied and interactive ways to understand the content.

Limited feedback and recognition were identified in 20% of teachers, indicating a lack of constructive feedback. Self, Peer and student feedback is essential to understand the progress of the teacher and students. These feedback sessions should be regular and meaningful to identify areas of improvement for the student and the learner. The unavailability of feedback sessions make students undervalued and less motivated to work hard in the learning process.

Moreover, **Poor classroom management (55%) and ineffective communication skills (50%)** were identified as key considerations in Chinese language acquisition. Owing to poor management classrooms become chaotic and making it difficult for students to focus and participate. On the other hand, ineffective communication can result in misunderstandings and confusions that hinder the motivation and engagement of students in the teaching- learning process.

In addition to that, the **lack of patience with students** was identified as a key finding with a percentage of 45%. Owing to the impatience nature of teachers with students, create an anxious learning aura and demotivates students in asking for clarifications and seeking support in learning the language. As a language teacher, patience is essential that foster a supportive learning environment. Teachers should understand different proficiency levels of language learners and the necessity to help lower level of language learners with an extra support.

Finally, the survey has identified **unequal treatment of students** with a percentage of 55% of teachers. Students’ motivation and confidence can be undermined by perceived

partiality or unfair treatment. Ensuring equal opportunity for all students is essential to preserving a supportive and welcoming learning environment. A more effective learning environment for learning Chinese and increased student motivation depend on addressing five issues: engagement, support, relevance, resource utilisation, feedback, management, patience, and equal treatment.

a. Difficulty of the language itself and work load

As per the study, there were several important factors that influence the motivation and learning experiences of learning Chinese language. These reasons were identified as the difficulty in acquiring the language, continuous failure and restricted time frames. As per results of reflective essays of students, the increase of the language level impacted in the decrease of attendance in the language classroom.

The major reason in this regard was the identification of Chinese as a complex language and in the Sri Lankan context, students' ability to master skills such as reading, speaking, and understanding its unique grammar is particularly challenging. As per a comment of a student:

"Chinese is really difficult. We have to learn the characters, pronunciation, writing, and grammar. For me, pronunciation is the biggest challenge. Even though I am in my special third year, my pronunciation is still not good. When I talk with native Chinese teachers, they often can't understand what I'm saying. Another challenge is listening. I can understand what my Chinese teachers at the university say, but when I try to communicate with other native speakers, I can't understand everything. This makes me feel disappointed. I think this is because we don't have enough listening lectures. Although we have spoken lectures, I am afraid to speak with the Chinese teachers in these classes because I lack basic knowledge."

Results of the questionnaire survey indicated that students find difficulties in the intrinsic learning of Chinese language. In this regard, students manifested the complexity of Chinese characters as most challenging aspect in acquiring the language that resulted in the difficulty rating of 90%. In addition to that, the Tonal nature and Vocabulary also impacted in challenging the acquisition of the language by students which was rated in 80% followed by Grammar in 50% and pronunciation in 70%.

It is obvious that essays and questionnaires of students evidenced the increasing difficulties in acquiring the language. It is further combined with restriction of time and repeated failures that resulted in the decrease of student participation. The complexity of the language in the Sri Lankan context presents significant challenges in the acquisition specifically related to characters, pronunciation and grammatical components. Moreover, the feedback of students indicates insufficient listening practices. The lack of foundational knowledge in the language further articulates these challenges and difficulties. In order to address these issues, the necessity to incorporate more listening exercises and practice sessions to construct basic skills of the language has identified to cater expectations of students.

Moreover, the identification of the heavy workload of students is a major challenge that resulted in the demotivation of students. Many students manifested the excessive number of assignments assigned in language learning combined with the complexity of the material, leaves them feeling overwhelmed and discouraged. As per the remark of a student, *'I barely have time to complete*

all the assignments, and it feels like I am constantly behind.' Another student commented that, *'The workload is so intense that it's hard to stay motivated. I often feel like giving up.'*

In addition to that, the feeling of lack of importance related to the knowledge that students acquire has impacted in the less interest of students. Some students identified that certain subjects such as literature and history are unengaging and less important to the pragmatic lives of them. As per the commentary of a student, *'Some of the course content is so boring and doesn't help with my future career. If we could choose these subjects as our preference, it would be better.'* Another commented, *"In literature lectures, I feel all the words and grammar points are new for me. I have to spend more time to understand the lesson, and it's really hard."*

These opinions are part of a broader trend in which intense academic pressure and monotonous course material increase the difficulties of learning Chinese, particularly given its complex characters and tonal nature. A more positive learning environment could be created by reducing these problems and offering more structured support, more optional options, and a reduced workload.

4.4. Perceived lack of benefit and employment concerns

Two major demotivating reasons for Chinese language learners are perceived lack of value and employment problems. The COVID-19 pandemic has made conditions more difficult for many students in the job market, especially those who are studying Chinese. Due to the difficulties encountered by numerous Chinese businesses in Sri Lanka during the pandemic, some Chinese investors decided to depart back to their native country. As a result, many workers lost their jobs, particularly those who depended on their ability to speak Chinese.

As per a student,

"I used to believe that learning Chinese would open doors for me in the job market. However, since the pandemic, many Chinese companies have downsized, and I see my friends who studied Chinese struggling to find jobs."

The decline in tourism has also played a role, as fewer tourists have led to a decrease in demand for Chinese-speaking guides. Evidenced by a student in the survey,

'I wanted to work in tourism, but now there are so many native Chinese tour leaders guiding tours that local learners like me are being overlooked.'

Furthermore, a perceived lack of language skills and cultural awareness among local graduates has caused many Chinese companies to prioritise graduates from Chinese universities over those from Sri Lankan institutions.

A student expressed the frustration, stating,

'My cousin, who graduated with a second class upper from a prominent university with a degree in Chinese, has applied for several jobs but often hears that employers prefer candidates who studied in China because they believe those candidates have a better understanding of the language and culture.'

Additionally, the salaries for positions related to Chinese language skills have decreased relatively compared to a few years back. One student remarked,

"I thought learning Chinese would lead to a good-paying job, but now I see that translators and other language-related roles are not paying as well as they used to."

Local employees may be able to find new employment prospects as a result of BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) initiatives. However, the majority of local workers are not equipped with the skills needed to take advantage of the new employment categories. These elements make it more difficult for students to stay motivated in their Chinese studies by contributing to their increasing sense of despair.

b. Environmental Factors

According to Ushioda's (1994) analysis of 20 French university students at Trinity College Dublin, demotivation was mainly caused by outside influences. Pupils claimed that their motivation was lowered by the relaxed environment produced by native-speaking teachers, big class sizes, and offensive humour. Further undermining their enthusiasm in learning were uninteresting teaching strategies, an absence of engagement, and institutional practices that provided limited one-on-one time and inadequate opportunities for speaking practice in the target language. Based on the essays written by the students, researchers discovered that a major factor in demotivation is the classroom's size.

As per remarks of a student,

'In our class, there are 74 students pursuing a Chinese special degree. Although not all students attend lectures every day, I personally think the teacher cannot pay individual attention to each student. This is not just a subject; it is a language, and each student requires special attention from the teacher. Sometimes, the teacher even forgets our names, which makes me feel invisible and unimportant.'

In language learning situations, where individualised instruction and assistance are essential for promoting motivation and engagement, this sentiment emphasises the difficulties posed by large class numbers. Feeling ignored can cause students to lose interest in the material, which can then have an impact on their language learning and general academic performance.

5. Conclusion And Recommendations

The study analyses demotivating factors which had become a catalyst in the teaching – learning process of Chinese language by Sri Lankan undergraduates at university of Kelaniya. As per major findings of the study, the lack of user manuals, teaching strategies and interactive methods, the behavior of teachers, the inherent difficulty in acquiring a language and the lack of opportunities and benefits in the job market had resulted in demotivating students in acquiring Chinese language in Sri Lanka.

It is suggested that students are motivated and interested in the language acquisition process when their academic achievements were valued and appreciated by teachers. This has the tendency to enhance their morale and encourage them to pursue proficiency in the target language (Nkrumah, 2021).

To mitigate these demotivating factors, several recommendations are proposed:

1. Revise and Update Textbooks:

It is essential to enhance student engagement in Chinese language learning and in this regard, the study manifested the necessity to revise and update textbooks regularly which ensure the relevance and appeal of the content to the pragmatic backdrop of the learner. Senior lecturers and professors can contribute actively in developing the content which relatively tailor the acquisition level and understanding by incorporating

instruction in the native language of the learner with the Chinese language. This approach can facilitate better understanding and retention (Liu & Wang, 2017; Tomlinson, 2013). In addition to that, the integration of multimedia resources into the curriculum has the capability to enhance motivation of the learner. By incorporating audio, video, and interactive elements, educators can create a more dynamic and engaging learning environment that caters to diverse learning styles (Dörnyei, 2009). For example, including videos of native speakers and authentic contexts can help students better grasp pronunciation and cultural aspects. The employment of authentic learning materials such as Chinese films, songs and news articles has the ability to interconnect students with the pragmatic implications of the language. Moreover, this way of changing in the content and learning materials also supports students to mingle with practical ways of utilizing the language that foster greater motivation in the acquisition of the language (Nunan, 2015). Furthermore, the improvements in text books can also serve as a powerful motivational factor. By encouraging students in rendering authentic feedback on their learning objectives and preferences has the ability to get a comprehensive idea regarding the effectiveness of the teaching - learning process. This participatory approach encourages students to take ownership of their learning and can lead to increased engagement and enthusiasm (Benson, 2011).

2. Implement Innovative Teaching Strategies:

Innovative and interactive teaching techniques should be employed by teachers in Chinese language programs to improve student engagement and overcome demotivation. Gamification, collaborative projects that reflect students' interests, and the use of multimedia materials can all greatly increase motivation (Zhou, 2019; Freeman et al., 2014). By using technology, including language-learning applications, students can practise skills outside of the classroom and receive tailored feedback (Lin, 2019). Building student confidence requires fostering a collaborative and risk-taking classroom atmosphere. Group activities and peer feedback help people feel less anxious about learning a language and provide a sense of community (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Furthermore, cultural immersion activities, such as online workshops or exchanges, help students better grasp the language and its context, which encourages higher levels of participation (Kramsch, 2013).

3. Adopt Supportive Teacher Behavior:

In order to encourage students' enthusiasm in learning a language, the teacher-student interaction is essential. The desire of students to learn a foreign language can be influenced by a number of factors, including teaching methods, methods of instruction, and the attitudes of teachers towards their students (Tahwa, 2019). Furthermore, Dörnyei (1998) demonstrates out that teachers frequently don't realise the effects of their actions on their language students. Students' confidence and motivation can be increased by teachers taking a positive and encouraging stance and acknowledging and applauding their accomplishments. Students can overcome obstacles and maintain motivation with regular feedback and individualised guidance (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Furthermore, it is essential that educators continuously help their pupils develop a positive outlook. According to research, pupils can become considerably less motivated when they receive unfavourable comments and adopt critical attitudes. Negative comments and critical attitudes have been scientifically proven to severely demotivate students and hinder

their progress. On the other hand, students' intrinsic motivation and dedication to study can be strengthened in a good and encouraging atmosphere (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). In order to overcome challenges in language acquisition, students are more likely to cultivate a resilient and growth-oriented mentality when teachers place an emphasis on positive thinking (Dweck, 2006). By keeping a positive and supportive attitude, educators can promote a learning environment that encourages perseverance and enthusiasm.

4. Provide Additional Language Support:

Language laboratories, tutoring sessions and practicing opportunities that concentrate on difficult elements including characters and tones should all be offered to help students with the complexity of learning Chinese. Students can learn a language more efficiently when it is emphasised in real-world contexts (Sun, 2018; Nation, 2013). Apart from these conventional techniques, a few additional suggestions might improve students' language learning and involvement even more. Encouragement of students to connect with Chinese people in their neighbourhood or on social media can facilitate cultural exchange and conversation practice. Teachers can promote these relationships by organising language partner programs or recommending social media communities where students can communicate with native speakers. This social interaction not only improves language proficiency yet gives students a feeling of community and inspires them. Furthermore, educators need to educate pupils practical methods for enhancing their pronunciation and general language proficiency. The use of strategies like the mirror method, in which pupils practise speaking while seeing their lip motions in a mirror, can greatly improve their pronunciation (Liu, 2017). Furthermore, students could discover the learning process more accessible and motivating if individual stories and experiences are shared. By sharing examples of their own language learning experiences, educators can inspire students and offer helpful advice on how to overcome obstacles. Additionally, it is essential that educators stress that learning Chinese is a lifelong process. The value of regular practice and the time commitment needed to become proficient in the language should be explained by teachers. Students can control their expectations and maintain their commitment to their studies by realising that language acquisition is a long process.

5. Highlight Career Benefits:

Teachers should emphasise the career advantages of learning Chinese, especially given the growing economic ties between China and Sri Lanka. By hosting career fairs and inviting speakers from various industries, students can learn about the practical benefits of their language skills (Chen, 2020; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). In addition, it is crucial to convey that opportunities for Chinese learners are not restricted to Sri Lanka; because Chinese is one of the most spoken languages in the world, proficiency in the language provides opportunities for various career paths worldwide, such as employment in industries such as tourism, business, information technology, and education. In addition to Sri Lanka, Chinese students can work in nations like China, Singapore, and Malaysia that have significant Chinese-speaking populations or strong economic connections. For people who understand Chinese, fields including business, tourism, information technology, and education hold great promise. For instance, in order to capitalise on the rising number of Chinese visitors, the tourism industry is looking for individuals that can connect with Chinese tourists in

an effective manner (Kumar & Shankar, 2019). Furthermore, companies seeking to enter the Chinese market need workers who can overcome linguistic and cultural obstacles, therefore knowing Chinese is a great advantage (Wang & Hsu, 2021).

6. Implement Collaborative Learning Strategies:

In Chinese language programs, using peer teaching and small group discussions can improve student connection and create a feeling of community. According to research, students feel appreciated and encouraged during their language learning journeys when they participate in collaborative learning, which also increases engagement and offers chances for personalised feedback (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). This method works especially well for dealing with the problems caused by large class sizes, which frequently demotivate students. Reducing the total number of students in each class is one useful way for establishing a more controlled and individualised learning environment. More meaningful relationships between students and teachers are made possible by smaller class sizes, which ensure that every student gets the opportunity and assistance they require to succeed. In Chinese language programs, employing peer teaching and small group discussions can improve student connection and create a feeling of community. According to research, students feel appreciated and encouraged during their language educational experiences when they participate in collaborative learning, which also increases engagement and offers chances for personalised feedback (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). This method works especially well for dealing with the problems caused by large class sizes, which frequently demotivate students. Lower the total number of students in each class is one useful strategy for establishing a more controlled and individualised educational setting. More meaningful relationships between students and teachers are made possible by smaller class sizes, which ensure that every student gets the time and assistance they require to succeed.

Studies have shown that smaller classes contribute to improved student outcomes, including higher engagement and motivation (Gordon & diTomaso, 2016). In collaborative settings, students benefit from peer support and diverse perspectives, which enhance their understanding and retention of the language. Additionally, working in smaller, less intimidating groups encourages active participation, as students are more likely to engage in discussions and practice speaking. By implementing collaborative learning strategies, educators can help mitigate feelings of invisibility and disengagement, ultimately improving motivation and success in language acquisition.

Implementing these recommendations can create a more supportive and effective learning environment, helping students overcome challenges and achieve success in their studies. By addressing these issues, educators can foster a more positive attitude towards learning Chinese and improve the overall educational experience for Sri Lankan students.

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